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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

THE PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD WORKFORCE 1880-1914.

A Thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the degree of M.Phil.

by

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## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

| <u>Chapter</u>  | <u>Page Number</u> |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. THE DOCKYARD WORKING ENVIRONMENT   | 1                  |
| 2. THE DOCKYARD SHIPWRIGHTS, THE S.C.A. AND THE A.S.S.                                      | 62                 |
| 3. THE PETITIONS OF 1911.   | 107                |
| 4. THE ENGINEERS AND THE DOCKYARD UNREST OF 1913.   | 123                |
| 5. THE SAILMAKERS.  | 165                |
| 6. THE LABOURERS.   | 176                |
| 7. THE DOCKYARD, LEISURE, SELF-HELP AND EDUCATION.  | 197                |
| 8. CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS AND LABOUR:<br>DOCKYARDMEN AND POLITICS.                         | 235                |
| 9. CONCLUSION - DOCKYARDMEN, THE MAKING OF THE<br>WORKING CLASS AND THE LABOUR ARISTOCRACY. | 294                |

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS

HISTORY

Master of Philosophy

THE PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD WORKFORCE, 1880-1914.

by Peter William Galliver.

The Portsmouth Dockyard workforce, 1880 to 1914, represents a community of state employees in an overwhelmingly capitalist economy and society. The core of this study is an examination of the conditions of work provided by the state, via the Admiralty, in this period, and the response of the Dockyardmen to these. However, the relationship between the Dockyardmen and movements affecting the working class nationally, particularly the Trade Union movement and the emerging Labour Party, is also considered. The overall argument of this work is that 1880-1914, from the various perspectives of Admiralty-imposed employment conditions, and the workers' trade union, political and cultural responses, was a formative period in Dockyard history. Moreover, this was a period which saw a closing of the gap between Dockyardmen and the wider Labour movement.

The opening section focuses on the key features of Admiralty employment as they developed 1880-1914: the function of the establishment system, pay, demarcation, the petitioning process and management structures. The response of the workers to this, encompassing Admiralty, worker interaction, the internal dynamics of the Dockyard workforce and contacts between Dockyardmen and the wider Labour movement, is pursued through studies of trade union development amongst trades, the shipwrights, engineers and sailmakers, and the labourers. Supplementing this is a chapter on the Dockyard as a focal point for a distinctive workplace-based culture.

From this the political responses of the Dockyardmen are considered; the nature of Dockyard-based, working-class Conservatism, Liberalism and the emergence from this of independent Labour politics. Finally, there is a discussion of Dockyard findings in a national context, with particular reference to the utility of the labour aristocracy concept.



## INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the experience of the men employed in Portsmouth Dockyard from 1880 to 1914. The choice of place was dictated partly by personal connexion and interest,<sup>1</sup> but, more importantly because of the range of historical questions raised by Portsmouth Dockyard as a major industrial centre, probably the largest single industrial unit in the land during the period of this study, and its status as a state-owned, and administered, enterprise in a capitalist economy. The choice of period was decided by the welter of changes apparent in British working-class history from 1880 to the outbreak of the Great War; the extension of the trade union movement, the proliferation of the institutions of collective self-help, the emergence of a distinctive working-class-based popular leisure culture, and the creation of independent labour politics. The challenge was to see how the Dockyardmen with their virtually unique status as state industrial employees (Woolwich Arsenal workers and, in a slightly different working environment, Postmen, apart) coped with this period.

In an ideal historian's world, the pursuit of this theme would generate a comprehensive work of social history, analysing the conditions of employment offered by the Admiralty at the start of the period, subsequent alteration in these, and the response of the Dockyardmen to their working environment. From this the Dockyardmen should be set in their wider social context, with an examination being made of patterns of residence, inter-marriage and occupational mobility between generations as it affected the internal sub-divisions of the Dockyard workforce, and the interaction between Dockyard families and those of Portsmouth's Non-Dockyard working-class, and its bourgeoisie.

However, in the real world such a comprehensive study has to remain, for the time being at least, an unattainable ideal. Study of the relationship between the Dockyard community and other social groups in Portsmouth on a quantitative basis depends upon access to census enumerators' data, and the records of the Registrar General. The only Census data available relevant to the period of this study is 1881, and a single year is of limited utility without the opportunity to examine later years and the nature of changes made over time. Moreover, the Registrar General will no longer permit access to marriage, birth and death certificates en masse, so the prospect of making quantitatively-based historical-sociological studies, such as have been produced for other British industrial towns, principally concerned with the mid-nineteenth century, in a Portsmouth context is precluded.

Given this, the focus of this work has narrowed from its original aim, and has concentrated on the interaction between the Admiralty and its employees. Where the interaction between Dockyard-men and non-Dockyardmen, whether working class or middle class, has been touched on it has been on a qualitative rather than quantitative basis. The theme, and structure, of this study has been largely dictated by the available source material, principally the local press and Admiralty records; both rich, albeit inconsistently so, sources for the developing conditions of Admiralty employment imposed on the Dockyardmen and their responses, formal and informal, to these. The opening chapter deals with the Admiralty's structuring of its workforce, its management techniques, and its pay policies. Subsequent chapters cover the response of the workforce to these conditions as they

developed from 1880 to 1914. These chapters concentrate on the development and practice of trades unionism amongst the principal trades, the shipwrights and the engineering trades, with something of a coda on a minor trade, the sailmakers, occasioned by the survival of the Federation of Sailmakers records. There are also chapters on trades unionism amongst the Dockyard labourers, and on the range of issues animating the Dockyard workforce against its Admiralty employers as shown in the petitions sent to the Admiralty in 1911. This group of chapters concludes with an examination of Dockyardmen's or Dockyardmen-based, non-trade union organisations, ranging from formally organised friendly societies, and sport clubs, to less formal leisure pursuits such as gambling. The remaining chapters deal with the political responses of Dockyardmen, and the relationship between the findings here, and published work dealing with other working-class communities of the period.

### Footnotes to Introduction

1. The Galliver family has worked in Portsmouth Dockyard for four generations. The first Galliver to work in the Dockyard was my great-grandfather, William Galliver, a shipwright from Barry Dock who came to the Dockyard via Harland and Wolff Belfast. He appears in the A.S.S. Annual Report of 1900 by virtue of having taken 15 days sick leave at 12/- pw sick pay. He was a member of Portsmouth C Branch, number 18471.

### List of Abbreviations

P.P. Parliamentary Papers.

E.N. Portsmouth Evening News.

H.T. Hampshire Telegraph.

P.T. Portsmouth Times.

P.R.O. PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE.

WARWICK. MODERN STUDIES CENTRE - UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK.

WEBB. WEBB COLLECTION - L.S.E. LIBRARY.

## THE DOCKYARD WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### Chapter I

#### The Structure of the Dockyard Workforce.

The number of men employed in Portsmouth Dockyard each year is given in the Health of the Navy Reports of the Admiralty. The structure of this workforce, its breakdown by occupation, is less well documented. This occupational structure, however, can be seen for 1891 and 1900 in an Admiralty document. In 1900 the Admiral Superintendents of the Home Dockyards were required to make a return to the Controller of the Navy listing the categories, and numbers of workmen employed in their 'yards at the end of April 1891, and their proposed employment figures for 1900. Examination of this return provides a statistical background against which to set the development of Dockyardmen's attitudes, as these existed towards the Admiralty and fellow workers, and organisations.

The Dockyard workforce came under five departments, the Staff Captain's, the Chief Constructor's, the Chief Engineer's, the Storekeeper's, and the Yard Craft. Overall responsibility for the Dockyard rested with the Admiral Superintendent; the principal departments for shipbuilding and ship repairing operations were those of the Chief Constructor and the Chief Engineer. The Chief Constructor was a quasi-civilian, a member of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors whose ranks were supplied by promoted Dockyard shipwright apprentices who had risen through the Dockyard apprentice schools to  
1  
Greenwich. The Chief Engineer was a serving Naval Officer. The

dominance of the Chief Constructor's and Chief Engineer's Departments of the Dockyard workforce can be seen from the numbers borne in Portsmouth in August 1891.

2

Portsmouth Dockyard Departmental Strengths

| <u>Department</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Aug 1891<br/>Total</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Staff Captain     | 129                | 103          | 232                       |
| Chief Constructor | 1,253              | 3,437        | 4,690                     |
| Chief Engineer    | 141                | 1,450        | 1,591                     |
| Storekeeper       | 58                 | 230          | 288                       |
| Yard Craft        | 3                  | 17           | 20                        |
| Miscellaneous     | 51                 | 66           | 117                       |
| <u>Total =</u>    |                    |              | 6,938                     |

% In Chief Engineers' and  
Chief Constructors' Departments.  
= 90.5%.

The breakdown of trades and grades, and numbers employed in each category was as follows:-

Portsmouth Dockyard Workforce 1891

Chief Constructors' Department.

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Blockmills        | 14                 | 10           | 24           |
| Bricklayer        | 1                  | 2            | 3            |
| Joiner            | 145                | 166          | 311          |
| Smith             | 125                | 142          | 167          |
| Caulker           | 25                 | 5            | 30           |
| Shipwright        | 606                | 833          | 1439         |
| Skilled Labourer  | 204                | 963          | 1167         |
| Stores Labourer   | -                  | 9            | 9            |
| Ordinary Labourer | -                  | 445          | 445          |
| Messenger         | 5                  | 3            | 8            |
| Mason             | 1                  | -            | 1            |
| Locksmith         | 2                  | -            | 2            |
| Painter           | 30                 | 29           | 59           |
| Plumber           | 15                 | 11           | 26           |
| Sawmills          | 14                 | 3            | 17           |
| Shipfitter        | 80                 | 239          | 319          |
| Hammerman         | 70                 | 109          | 179          |
| Surgery Assistant | 2                  | -            | 2            |
| Wheelwright       | 4                  | 2            | 6            |
| Total=            | 1343               | 2971         | 4214         |

Chief Engineer's Department.

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Boilermaker       | 45                 | 128          | 173          |
| Brazier           |                    |              |              |
| and Coppersmith   | 20                 | 63           | 83           |
| Fitter            | 75                 | 333          | 408          |
| Founder           | 16                 | 61           | 77           |
| Patternmaker      | 10                 | 26           | 36           |
| Joiner            | -                  | -            | -            |
| Skilled Labourer  | 20                 | 480          | 500          |
| Engine Keeper     | -                  | -            | -            |
| Total=            | 186                | 1091         | 1277         |

Chief Engineer and Chief Constructor = 5491

The range of grades covered by the skilled labourer category included, Drillers, Rivet<sup>3</sup>ers, Painter's Assistants, Ironcaulkers, Boilermaker's Helpers, Stokers, Engine Drivers and Wiremen. The grade of skilled labourer had been established in 1876, and was designed to cover the aspects of iron shipbuilding which in the Dockyards were to be carried out by unapprenticed men.

The trades, those confined to apprenticed men, are indicated by the letter (A). The Dockyard authorities made a further distinction between major and minor trades, the major trades being that of shipwright and the engineering trades.<sup>4</sup>

Portsmouth Dockyard Workforce 1900

Chief Constructor's Department

| <u>Occupation</u>  | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Blockmills         | 10                 | 7            | 17           |
| Bricklayer         | 1 (A)              | 2            | 3            |
| Joiner             | 145 (A)            | 204          | 349          |
| Smith              | 125 (A)            | 140          | 265          |
| Caulkers           | 20 (A)             | 6            | 26           |
| Shipwrights        | 750 (A)            | 887          | 1637         |
| Skilled Labourers  | 204                | 972          | 1176         |
| Stores Labourers   | -                  | 7            | 7            |
| Ordinary Labourers | -                  | 489          | 489          |



| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Messengers        | -                  | 4            | 4            |
| Mason             | 1 (A)              | -            | 1            |
| Locksmith         | 2 (A)              | -            | 2            |
| Painter           | 25 (A)             | 50           | 75           |
| Plumber           | 10 (A)             | 8            | 18           |
| Sawmills          | 10                 | 11           | 21           |
| Shipfitter        | 120 (A)            | 250          | 370          |
| Hammerman         | 70                 | 206          | 276          |
| Surgery Assistant | 2                  | -            | 2            |
| Wheelwright       | 3                  | 3            | 6            |
| Total=            | 1498               | 3246         | 4744         |

Chief Engineer's Department 1900

| <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Boilermaker       | 75                 | 183          | 258          |
| Brazier           |                    |              |              |
| and Coppersmith   | 20                 | 66           | 86           |
| Fitter            | 200                | 737          | 937          |
| Founder           | 16                 | 42           | 58           |
| Pattermaker       | 10                 | 27           | 37           |
| Joiner            | 6                  | 26           | 32           |
| Skilled Labourer  | 120                | 896          | 1016         |
| Engine Keeper     | 5                  | -            | 5            |
| Total=            | 452                | 1977         | 2429         |

Chief Constructors and Chief Engineers = 7173.

From these figures the percentage contribution of the various trades and grades to the principal shipbuilding and repairing departments of the Dockyard can be represented as follows:-

Trades and Grades as a proportion of the Workforce in the Chief

5

Constructors and Chief Engineers Department, Portsmouth 1891 and 1900.

| <u>Trade/Grade</u>            | <u>Year</u> | <u>Year</u> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| <u>% Of Overall Workforce</u> | <u>1891</u> | <u>1900</u> |
| Shipwright                    | 26.2        | 22.8        |
| Joiner                        | 5.6         | 4.8         |
| Caulker                       | 3.0         | 0.3         |
| Painter                       | 1.0         | 1.0         |
| Fitter                        | 7.4         | 13.0        |
| Shipfitter                    | 5.8         | 5.1         |
| Boilermaker                   | 3.1         | 3.6         |

| <u>Trade/Grade</u><br><u>% Of Overall Workforce</u> | <u>Year</u><br><u>1891</u> | <u>Year</u><br><u>1900</u> |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Brazier, Coppersmith                                | 1.5                        | 1.2                        |
| Patternmaker  | 0.6                        | 0.5                        |
| Founder   | 1.4                        | 0.8                        |
| Smith   | 3.0                        | 3.7                        |
| Ordinary Labourer                                   | 8.1                        | 6.8                        |
| Skilled Labourer                                    | 30.3                       | 30.5                       |
| All Tradesmen                                       | 58.6                       | 56.8                       |
| Woodworking Trades (Group A)                        | 35.8                       | 28.9                       |
| Metalworking/Engineering (Group B)                  | 22.8                       | 27.9                       |

The immediate points of interest emerging from these figures concern the role played by labourers in Dockyard operations, and the shifting balance between woodworking and metalworking trades. Ordinary labourers, those engaged in fetching and carrying, occupied a small place in the workforce; the skilled labourers made up a category exclusive to the Dockyards. The skilled labourers, along with the shipwrights, represent the Admiralty's unique response to the advent of iron shipbuilding. Briefly, the new shipbuilding techniques were not allocated to new trades on the same basis as in the private trades, the role of the shipwrights was extended to include working in wood and metal, the less complex skills of iron shipbuilding were divided amongst the skilled labourers. Detailed discussion of this process is made in the section dealing specifically with the shipwrights and skilled labourers, and the development of trades unionism amongst these workers. Similarly, the decline in the percentage of shipwrights, and the increase in the percentage of fitters between 1891 and 1900 reflects the increasing concentration on iron shipbuilding, and more complex engineering in the Dockyards. By 1900 the woodcaulkers were a negligible part of the Dockyard workforce after having been a major

trade in the days of exclusively wooden shipbuilding.

Establishment, Demarcation and Pay.

Crucial to all aspects of Dockyard life, whether Admiralty working conditions or the attitudes of the men, was the Admiralty's practice of distinguishing between hired men and men employed on the establishment. The mechanics of the establishment were fairly simple. Hired men of three years continuous, and satisfactory service were eligible for establishment. Establishment was open to tradesmen and skilled labourers, and once established such workers became permanent employees of the Admiralty. As such, they were required to work wherever directed by the Admiralty; a man taken on at Portsmouth, for example, might be required to move to Chatham, but, by the same token, established men did not suffer when their 'yards were run down, or closed, as were Woolwich and Deptford in the 1850's. Besides permanency of employment, established men participated in the Admiralty's own pension scheme. Upon retirement, at the age of sixty, established men were entitled to a pension based upon all their years of established service, and half of their time as hired men. The pension was calculated by allowing one day's pay, per week, for every ten years established time.<sup>6</sup>

The established men, in effect, paid for their security and pensions by having deductions taken from their wages. Throughout the 1880 to 1914 period the Admiralty issued two pay scales, one for established and one for hired men. The rates on the established list were invariably between 1/- to 2/- per week lower than corresponding points on the hired scale. A typical example of wage scales in the Dockyard is provided by a breakdown of wages paid to shipwrights in Portsmouth in 1893. The highest paid established shipwrights earned

5/6d per day, while their counterparts on the hired list were paid <sup>7</sup> 5/8d. It was the hired men who suffered when adjustments were made in numbers to balance the Dockyards books at the end of the financial year, prior to the voting of the new Naval Estimates, and when major reductions were made in the Admiralty's workforce, as was the case in 1887 and 1905. The Admiralty's hired men were employed on similar terms to those in private industry, but even here the Admiralty introduced differences. Hired men, on discharge or retirement, were paid gratuities, or "bonuses", based on length of service.

At the start of the nineteenth century the Dockyards were almost exclusively worked by established men. The Admiralty rationale behind the establishment was that Dockyard workers had skills essential to the defence of the country and should, as much as possible, be tied to the Admiralty's service. This idea never left the Admiralty, or those interested in Navy matters, and was succinctly expressed by the Chatham M.P. Sir John Gorst, in 1883, when he reminded the House of Commons, ".... it was in the interest of the country to keep permanently a number of workmen who could not discharge themselves, and upon whom the country could depend in the event of war, or in any other sudden <sup>8</sup> emergency requiring great pressure of work in the Dockyards." By the mid-nineteenth century the attractions of a permanent Dockyard workforce, kept loyal by security and pensions, had to be balanced against notions of political economy and retrenchment. In 1847 it had become Admiralty policy, according to a circular issued to the Admiral Superintendents in control of the Home Dockyards, "to ensure the early introduction into the Government yards of the best modes of working in private <sup>9</sup> establishments." The best modes of private practice did not include

having workers whose employment was guaranteed, and from the 1850's the Admiralty began to balance its tied workforce theory with the notion that a substantial number of workers should be employed on private terms; easily dismissed when costs needed to be cut or when work was slack. In this period the Admiralty sought a balance, to keep a core of established or hired workers so that the Navy would always be kept in service, whatever the emergency, and to ensure that the workforce could respond to changes in shipbuilding and ship repairing policy. The best illustration of the development of Admiralty policy in this area is provided by a simple comparison of the overall numbers employed in the hired and established categories in 1872-3, 1879-80, and 1899-1900. In the first case the Dockyards were balanced between established and hired men, in the second, the hired men had started to outnumber the established, and by 1900 the trend to expand the Dockyards by taking on hired men resulted in the Admiralty's workforce being dominated by such men.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1872-3      | 6,410              | 6,054        |
| 1879-80     | 7,080              | 8,658        |
| 1899-1900   | 5,935              | 20,107       |

Within the overall workforce the ratio of established to hired in each trade varied. Invariably there were more hired fitters than hired shipwrights. This can be seen in the breakdown of trades employed in Portsmouth in 1890-91, and 1900.

| <u>Shipwrights</u>    |      | <u>Established</u> | <u>Hired</u> | <u>% Established</u> |
|-----------------------|------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
|                       | 1891 | 606                | 883          | 42                   |
|                       | 1900 | 750                | 887          | 46                   |
| <u>Engine Fitters</u> | 1891 | 75                 | 333          | 18                   |
|                       | 1900 | 200                | 737          | 21                   |

The disparity in establishment levels is, briefly, explained by reference to the Admiralty aim of balancing security and flexibility in its workforce. In maintaining the core of "tied" workers essential to the servicing of the Navy, shipwrights were more important than engine fitters. Admiralty shipwrights were exceptional in the late nineteenth century shipbuilding world, for they worked in wood and iron, and had become general ship constructors. In the private yards large-scale iron ship construction had been taken over by boilermakers.

In the Admiralty scheme of things, however, shipwrights made up the staple element of the workforce, and skilled, experienced shipwrights had to be retained. An experienced shipwright was a valuable asset to lose to the private yards, and shipwrights from the private yards could not immediately produce the same range and quality of work as the experienced 'yard man. This point was made by the Chief Constructor of Portsmouth in 1900, with a letter to the Admiralty advocating an increase in the <sup>11</sup> establishment of shipwrights. The work of engine fitters in the Dockyards, however, far more closely resembled that performed in the outside yards, and consequently the maximum number of fitters required was felt to be that much smaller. The engineering trades were left in a far more fluid state, with the Admiralty being able to contract or expand its hired workforce fairly easily, according to requirements.

The full extent of Admiralty policy towards establishment levels, overall and in the disparities operated between trades, particularly in regard to workmen's attitudes, and in the development of trade combinations, is best seen in detailed studies of the shipwrights and the engineering trades. The progress of the A.S.S. amongst the ship-

wrights, and the A.S.E. amongst the engine and ship-fitters shows how Dockyardmen's responses were conditioned by the distinctive features of Admiralty employment, how Dockyardmen related to the wider labour movement, as represented by the nationally organised trade unions, and how Dockyardmen responded to changes in Admiralty policy. Before pursuing these studies, however, it is useful to supplement this outline of the mechanics of the establishment system with an elaboration on the general impact of establishment; examining why the system had so powerful an influence over the men, and the extent to which establishment under-pinned other distinctive features of Admiralty employment. From the viewpoint of the established men the real value of the system lay in the guarantee of permanent employment. Pensions were the icing on the cake. There was no guarantee of reaching sixty years of age, or of drawing a pension for years after that. Moreover, a provident Dockyard tradesman, concerned for his old age, could provide as good cover for himself from the deductions taken, in effect, from his wages, by the Admiralty practice of paying established men on lower rates than corresponding hired men. The Admiralty's estimate of the take-up of pensions (unfortunately there are no surviving records of payments made under the established pension scheme) was given in reply to a Parliamentary question in 1890 by the responsible minister, Forwood, "it is estimated that only 3% of workmen employed in the Dockyards live long enough to gain their pensions at the age of sixty, and that the average length of life after that pension has been gained is but five years." <sup>12</sup> At the Royal Commission on Labour, the Portsmouth A.S.S. representative, Richard Gould, estimated, "that only 5% live to take this pension afterwards, taking

the young with the old." For those concerned with pensions there were plenty of friendly societies available in the Dockyard. The shipwrights, for example, had their own society, "The Dockyard Shipwrights, Caulkers<sup>13</sup> and Joiners Mutual Aid Society", otherwise known as "the 3d death", while Richard Gould informed the Royal Commission on Labour that unskilled workers in the Dockyard, who were not eligible for establishment, could provide themselves with comparable pensions through the "United Labourers Superannuation Society." Gould told the Commission that for 2d a week he could obtain a pension of 9/2d a week from that<sup>14</sup> society, at the age of sixty.

The value of the establishment was the continuous and permanent employment it afforded. In the private trade work was vulnerable to the trade cycle, and even in good years there were likely to be the odd breaks in the continuity of employment occasioned by the practice prevalent in private yards of employing gangs of tradesmen for specific repair jobs, or for specific sections of ship construction. The broad fluctuations in employment in the shipbuilding industry can be charted in the unemployment returns made by the principal unions to the Board of Trade. However, the prevailing atmosphere of job insecurity which existed in the major private yards, providing similar work to that offered in the Dockyards, is best illustrated by studies focusing on specific yards, and regions. In 1928 Henry A. Mess conducted a survey of Tyneside following a "Conference of Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship." To preface this survey, Mess outlined the employment conditions in the shipyards, "Employment in the shipbuilding and ship repairing industries consists for most men of a series of jobs, which may last anything from a few hours to a few



months. Usually men are engaged by the day .... In busy times the employment of many men may be continuous over weeks, and possibly over months, but for the great majority there are frequent gaps in employment. A few figures which have been supplied to us by private firms will illustrate how fluctuating is the demand for men at different yards. In 1908, a year of bad trade, there were employed at one yard on the Tyne 960 on a date in March and 1,586 men on a date in June." In the good year of 1920, "At another yard there were employed in 1920<sup>15</sup> on three separate days, 1,941; 2,406; and 2,170."

These patterns of work, and hiring practices, were well established by the time Mess was writing, and certainly operated in the 1880 to 1914 period. At the Royal Commission on labour the economist, Marshall, laid great emphasis on this in his questioning of Gould as to the value of the establishment. The atmosphere of the private yards is further illustrated by the writings of R.S. Stokes, an ex-army officer, who spent a month in the shipyards in 1946, investigating the low productivity levels to be found in the North East yards. Stokes was greatly impressed by the tendency of the men to stretch jobs out, and he attributed this to the tradition of casual labour, even for tradesmen, in the shipyards. The importance of the likely longevity of a job, was demonstrated by the case of "Willie, a 72 year old scot.... the fact that a job was likely to last for almost a year was the best possible recommendation for it!" It is this insecurity of private yard employment, and lack of continuity in employment throughout the year which makes comparison of annual incomes between Dockyardmen and private workers so difficult. The daily, or weekly wage rates are frequently available, but on the private side it is virtually

impossible to establish a consistent picture of annual earnings.

Notwithstanding this, it can be seen that the established men of the Dockyard were largely removed from the vicissitudes of the private trade and drew their wages, which may have been lower pro rata, throughout the year. There was no category of workmen properly analogous to the established men in the private yards. The nearest group to them were the "royals" of the North East. According to H. Mess, on the Tyne, "the methods of engagement at shipyards are roughly as follows. In each shipyard there are recognised places, where men of the different occupations assemble; these are known as 'markets', 'the drillers' market', 'the riveters' market', and so on. The foremen go there twice a day, at 7.30 am and 1.00 pm, to engage such men as they require. In most crafts there are 'royals', ie, men who are taken on before others when work is available. Usually the list of royals is kept in a definite order, ie, a man tenth on the list will get work before a man sixteenth on the list." Mess went on to point out that Tyne men were invariably faced with something of a dilemma. If a man was a "royal", or had the prospect of becoming one, he had to show loyalty to a given firm. This could mean passing over the chance of work in another yard when trade was picking up after a slack time so that he could be available for "his" yard. To be unavailable might mean forfeiting "royal" status, or losing precedence on the foreman's list. While Mess was able to record the existence of "royals" as a long standing Tyne tradition, he found it "impossible to estimate the relative numbers of the two kinds of men, nor are they sharply divided."

Secure as the "royals" were on the Tyne, in relation to other

workers, they do not bear direct comparison with the established men of the Dockyards. There is a world of difference between a private firm, such as Palmer's at Jarrow, showing a preference to certain workers at hiring time, and the Admiralty offering institutionalised, permanent and continuous employment. The established men had so much more to lose than the "royals" that the Admiralty's hold over them was considerably greater, their attitudes to work of a highly distinctive kind.

Established men were, effectively, tied to the Dockyards. Whatever their complaints concerning low wages, very few seem to have left the Dockyards in pursuit of the higher rates obtainable on the Northern rivers. Ideally, this point would be substantiated by a consideration of the departures, and reasons for this, from the Dockyards each year from 1880. Unfortunately, such detailed data for the comings and goings of Dockyard employment does not survive. What can be shown, however, is that from the 1880's the overall figure of established men ran at around 6,000, to 1900, and that fluctuations of a hundred or so from year to year occurred in these years when the established list was closed, indicating that the fall in numbers was  
18  
due to the "natural wastage" of death and retirement. The Portsmouth press, which was particularly sensitive to matters of Dockyard employment, invariably commenting on discharges or shortages in certain trades, does not contradict this picture. From 1880 to 1914 the Evening News, Portsmouth Times and Hampshire Telegraph did not comment on established men leaving the Dockyard service. The hired men, however, do appear to have been keen to be taken on as established. Some cases can be found of hired men preferring the higher pay rates

of the hired list to establishment, but such cases are rare. One is provided by Richard Gould in his evidence to the Royal Commission on labour, but Gould was an exceptional figure. He was a committed trade unionist, secretary of the Portsmouth A.S.S. branch, and later President of the Portsmouth Trades and Labour Council. Gould was concerned at closing the gap between the Dockyardmen and the rest of the labour movement, and, as such, was opposed to the establishment system. However, Gould conceded that when opposition to establishment had been put to the Portsmouth A.S.S. branch, which in 1891 was  
19  
composed largely of hired men, this line was rejected.

This picture of the hired men being broadly enthusiastic for the establishment system is borne out by petitions presented to the Admiralty, particularly at times when the established list was closed, and in comments appearing in the Portsmouth press. In 1899, for example, the interest of hired men in the establishment was shown by the Royal Dockyard Ship Joiners' Conference, meeting in Portsmouth as a prelude to the presentation of petitions at the annual visitations to the Dockyards by the Lords of the Admiralty, called for an increase in the establishment, and that all hired time, after fifteen years,  
20  
should count for pension.

Given the value attached to establishment, by those in possession, and hired men, it remains to examine the outlook of the established men to their fellow workers, and to the Admiralty. The effect of the established list was to further fragment the workplace relationships in the Dockyard. There was already a broad three-way division in the Dockyard workforce between skilled men, or tradesmen, semi-skilled workers (skilled labourers according to the Dockyard) and

ordinary labourers. The first two categories were further sub-divided according to trade, or, in the case of the skilled labourers, function, drilling, riveting, plating and so on. Each of these divisions created their own associations and loyalties, as can be seen from organisations formed, and the demarcation issues raised in the annual petitions. Across these divisions the establishment cut a horizontal swathe, making for great complexity in potential Dockyard loyalties. An established shipwright, in certain circumstances, could have more in common with an established fitter than his fellow hired shipwrights, with whom he would make common cause against the fitters in demarcation disputes.

The extent to which the established men did identify amongst themselves, certainly in the 1880's before the intrusion of the T.U.C.-affiliated unions into the Dockyard, can be seen in the existence of societies such as the "Established Shipwrights' Society", and the presentation of petitions from established tradesmen. In the 1880's virtually all trades submitted such petitions, and on occasion petitions were presented in Portsmouth from the established men in general. Such petitions concentrated upon the issues of exclusive interest to the established men. The perennial requests were for hired time to be counted for pension on the same basis as established, and for widows to receive the pension which it was felt their husbands had earned for them by accepting the lower established man's rate. Such petitions talked of the widow's right to the husband's "deferred wages."

There is also evidence that established men perceived themselves as not only having different interests, in some circumstances, from hired men, but that they were of a superior status. The Admiralty

would appear to have recognised this, and attempted to exploit this. According to the Portsmouth Times in 1899, "... for the first time hired and established men are to be associated in the same working parties. Roughly speaking there are 25 gangs of established and 50 gangs of hired shipwrights at Portsmouth, and as the established men claim a certain degree of superiority, the officials have been able to work upon the jealousies of the two classes to extract to the utmost the best work from each." <sup>21</sup> The new scheme was to see the two classes of tradesmen working out their jealousies in the same gang, with one third of each gang being established. The Portsmouth Times Dockyard correspondent believed that this change was to put the claims of the established men to the test, by having them working on exactly the same jobs as the hired men, so that direct comparisons could be made. This isolation of the established men from the hired men in similar trades was of fundamental importance from the viewpoint of union formation, and industrial relations in the Dockyard, for it limited the range of action possible for the hired men. Given that established men regarded themselves as superior to hired, and would not jeopardise their secure employment, or risk the investment they had made in their pensions, by open opposition to the Admiralty, then the prospects for the formation of effective combinations amongst the hired men became bleak. The existence of the establishment list effectively precluded in the Dockyards, certainly before 1910, the threat of strike action against the Admiralty. How could hired shipwrights take action against the Dockyard authorities knowing that nearly half of their trade would carry on working? Even with the engineering trades, where establishment levels were considerably lower, any action would be weakened by the

failure to carry the established men.

The potential for union formation, and aggressive action in pursuit of wage demands and demarcation disputes, however, was not limited solely by the isolation of the established men. Hired men were likely to be deterred from aggressive action against the Admiralty because they, like the established men, enjoyed a greater degree of job security than those in the private trade, and which they too were reluctant to jeopardise. The Dockyards were not wholly removed from the cyclical fluctuations in employment levels experienced in the private shipbuilding industry; there were major discharges from the Dockyards in 1886-9, and 1904-6. These periods co-incided with slumps in the private trade, but outside of these the tendency of Dockyard employment levels was to remain stable, or increase. This is simply seen in the numbers employed in Portsmouth between 1880 and 1914.

Numbers in Portsmouth Dockyard 1880-1914

22

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Numbers Employed</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Numbers Employed</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1880        | 5,892                   | 1888        | 8,847                   |
| 1           | 6,722                   | 9           | 9,427                   |
| 2           | 7,198                   | 1900        | 10,044                  |
| 3           | 7,331                   | 1           | 10,715                  |
| 4           | 7,294                   | 2           | 11,314                  |
| 5           | 7,771                   | 3           | 11,816                  |
| 6           | 7,727                   | 4           | 11,924                  |
| 7           | 7,343}                  | 5           | 11,070} slump           |
| 8           | 7,390} slump            | 6           | 10,494}                 |
| 9           | 7,024}                  | 7           | 10,601                  |
| 90          | 7,615                   | 8           | 11,595                  |
| 1           | 7,795                   | 9           | 12,190                  |
| 2           | 7,847                   | 10          | 12,896                  |
| 3           | 7,567                   | 1           | 13,505                  |
| 4           | 7,821                   | 2           | 13,604                  |
| 5           | 7,866                   | 3           | 14,736                  |
| 6           | 8,565                   | 4           | 16,692                  |
| 7           | 8,949                   |             |                         |

Outside of these two periods of substantial reduction, hired men

were seldom involuntarily discharged. Where such discharges did occur, they were frequently part of the Dockyard's "fine tuning" of its accounting system, as Dockyard managements sought to keep wages expenditure within the limit set by the year's Naval Estimates. The Portsmouth newspapers commented on this process each March when the Estimates were due for Parliamentary discussion, prior to the start of the new financial year. In 1898, for example, seventy shipwrights were placed under notice at Portsmouth, but the Dockyard correspondent of the Hampshire Telegraph commented, "... when the Estimates are passed and new work taken in hand there will doubtless be fresh entries of workmen. In these circumstances men will be loth to leave the

town..."<sup>23</sup> As the preceding table shows, the estimates did permit an increase in the workforce at Portsmouth between 1898 and 1899. The best illustration of this practice comes from a Hampshire Telegraph comment made during the major discharges of 1887, "In years past the annual discharge of workmen was simply a matter of account. There was plenty of work in hand, but, unhappily, the resources in money were permitted to become prematurely exhausted, and, rather than have recourse to a system of extraordinary subsidies, gangs of men were temporarily dismissed with a view of securing a desirable equilibrium<sup>24</sup> at the end of the financial year."

The prevailing trend in Dockyard employment, then, was for hired men to be fairly secure in their jobs, and, like the established men, be free from the seasonal fluctuations (Estimates time aside) and short-term spells of idleness characteristic of the private trade. In spite of the major reductions of 1886-9 and 1904-6, the overall impression of Dockyard towns, held by inhabitants and observers, was



one of exceptional security. The local press view was that, "It is quite true, as has often been printed out, that Portsmouth suffers less from periodical bad seasons than any other town of equal size in the kingdom."<sup>25</sup> In 1912, E.H. Kelly, in a study of Portsmouth commissioned by the Charity Organisation Society, commented that, "... the effect of trade cycles, so keenly felt elsewhere, is here scarcely noticeable."<sup>26</sup>

Given this, hired men, notwithstanding the higher pay rates available on the major shipbuilding rivers of the North were reluctant to leave the Dockyard. The indications are that there was considerable pressure to come into Dockyard employment. Ideally, lists of applicants would be used to substantiate the point, but comments made by Admiralty officials, and Portsmouth journalists, strongly suggest this was the case. The Hampshire Telegraph "Dockyard Gossip" correspondent commented in 1912, "There is always a waiting list for employment in the Royal Dockyards, and sometimes a young man has to exist on his parents for three or four years before he is allowed to wield his hammer inside the Policeman's Gate."<sup>27</sup> In the same year, Admiralty officials, considering that year's petitions from the Dockyardmen in an exercise preparatory to drawing up the official replies, commented that, "The conditions of employment (in the Dockyards) are undoubtedly superior to those prevalent in the outside commercial world. That this is the case is testified by the persistent and urgent desire of large numbers of workmen to obtain employment in a Dockyard in preference to other employment."<sup>28</sup> Similar comments can be found in the Portsmouth press<sup>29</sup> throughout the period from 1880.

The overall picture was summarised by the Portsmouth Times of 1904, when a leader stated, "There was no disguising the fact that men

in Government employment were exceedingly fortunate individuals compared with the great number of their fellow workmen.... How many anxieties of life a man in Government employment was spared if he conducted himself properly." <sup>30</sup> It was this matter of proper conduct that was at the heart of the industrial relations system operating within the Dockyard at the start of the 1880's, and which set the framework for the subsequent development of trade combinations amongst the workforce. Established men had to conduct themselves properly, and the preceding discussion shows that hired men, given the existence of the established men, and the relative security of their own position, were under considerable pressure to adopt a similar line. As a consequence traditional Admiralty methods of communication between Dockyard officials and men, based upon petitioning, survived in to the later-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Moreover, the conduct of industrial relations in the Dockyards was characterised by the passivity of the Dockyardmen. The passivity was particularly marked when contrasted <sup>31</sup> with the experience of the private shipbuilding trade in employer/employee relationships.

The mechanics of the Admiralty's communication procedures were quite straightforward. At Dockyard level, any workman with a grievance was, in the first instance, to complain to his immediate supervisor, his leading man, or, after 1891, his chargeman. Thereafter, the complaint was dealt with by that official, or passed up the management hierarchy, inspector, foreman, Chief Constructor or Chief Engineer, until a final decision was taken. If dissatisfied with his treatment the worker could ultimately petition the Admiralty. This right of petition was at the core of the system, and was enjoyed by all Dockyard-

men, individually and collectively. Each autumn the home Dockyards were toured by the Lords of the Admiralty, and at each "visitation" Dockyardmen, or their representatives were entitled to present petitions. The content of these petitions, and the development of the organisational techniques which went into their presentation, is a major topic in its own right, and will be dealt with subsequently. In this context, however, it is useful to outline the general manner in which petitions were presented, and Dockyard grievances pursued, in the 1880's and early 1890's.

By this period Dockyardmen relied on a combination of petitioning and Parliamentary pressure. At the turn of the eighteenth century strikes and riots in Portsmouth, when it was felt an official had unjustly treated a workman, or when attempts were made to remove "perks", such as the right to take chips of wood from the 'yard, were not unknown.<sup>32</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, however, with the increasing regulation of the Dockyards through the development of new management structures, and the creation of a new industrial environment in the shipbuilding world, such behaviour became unknown. By the 1880's the desire for job security was such amongst the Dockyardmen that they had eschewed direct action, and developed techniques of grievance pursuit which were more appropriate to their circumstances. Petitions were supported by bringing indirect pressure to bear on Admiralty officials through lobbying local M.P's, or any interested M.P, to ask embarrassing questions, and to mobilise press opinion which might lead the Admiralty to take action. This was explained to the Royal Commission on Labour by the Portsmouth shipwright, Richard Gould. Questioned by the Duke of Devonshire on the

means adopted by 'yardmen to pursue grievances, Gould explained that there were no strikes in the Dockyard, "You could not strike against the powerful arm of the Government. We do not wish to do that. We do it more by petition ...". When asked how petitions were backed up, Gould replied, "... we would rather move public opinion and get the question brought on in the House of Commons, or some other place of responsibility, rather than have recourse to extreme measures with the Government."<sup>33</sup>

The hallmark of this system, however, was that it was a lengthy and frequently ineffectual process. The organisation of the shipwrights against Admiralty attempts to introduce a competitive working atmosphere into the 'yards by classifying the men in a hierarchy of pay rates illustrates the working of the system. In this relatively successful case it took the shipwrights from 1887 to 1893 before the Admiralty made a substantial modification to the classification regulations, and even after this the issue persisted until the outbreak of the Great War. In this particular case, the shipwrights cause was spearheaded by a body, the Ship Constructive Association, which sought to bridge the gap between established and hired men, but in this dispute the shipwrights' lobbying was impaired by the intrusion of the established/hired divide. Before 1900, this was the case with most petitions, and at the time of the annual visitations their Lordships of the Admiralty found themselves confronted with a mass of petitions reflecting the fragmentation of the Dockyard workforce; petitions from individuals, from established men in a trade, from hired men in a trade, from all in an individual trade, from ex-apprentices, from skilled labourers, from ordinary labourers, and varieties of workmen engaged

in specific shops, or working on particular ships. Such petitions, even if backed by the local M.P's and newspapers, were relatively easily met with the traditional Admiralty response of "not acceded to." The presence of the established men, and the attractiveness of the relative security enjoyed by the hired men made it highly unlikely that the Admiralty would be confronted by a down-tools, or a substantial exodus of skilled labour to the private trade.

From this position of considerable strength with regard to its workforce, the Admiralty was able to develop pay and demarcation structures which further accentuated the interval division of the workforce, and the differentiation of Dockyard conditions from those prevailing in the private yards engaged in similar shipbuilding and repairing.

The more straightforward of the two areas of development is demarcation. By the 1880's the distribution of shipbuilding tasks amongst the Admiralty's employees was unique. The evolution and operation of Dockyard demarcation is best illustrated by detailed discussion of the shipwrights. Briefly, however, Admiralty demarcation practice in the late nineteenth century stemmed from the distinctive response made to the advent of iron shipbuilding in the 1860's, a response made possible by the relative docility of its workers. In the private shipbuilding industry the coming of iron shipbuilding saw the demise of the high wage, heavily union influenced, Thames shipbuilding operation, and the movement of the industry to Northern  
34  
rivers. By the 1880's, however, the workers of the Northern yards had begun to organise and through a series of disputes a pay and demarcation structure was created there, which saw the rise to

prominence of trades such as the boilermaker, and the appearance of new skills, whose practitioners claimed trade status, such as plating and riveting.<sup>35</sup> The Admiralty ensured a different system developed in the Dockyards. The new tasks of iron shipbuilding were given to the shipwrights, the basic ship constructors of the wooden shipbuilding era, and something of a three-tiered workforce structure was created in the Dockyards. In the centre were the shipwrights, workers in wood and iron who made up the basic trade of the Dockyard, and were responsible for structural work. Above the shipwrights were the specialist metal-working trades, boilermakers, fitters, pattern-makers and steam engine workers. These were the new trades, which were employed in the Dockyards for work too specialised to be devolved to the shipwrights. Below the shipwrights came the skilled labourers. These were the mirror image of the metal-working trades, being workers entrusted with tasks which could be mastered without apprenticeship and consequent trade status. The skilled labourers were made up of drillers, platers, riveters, hammermen; categories of workers which in private yards would claim trade status. Platers and riveters, were, for example, eligible for membership of the Boilermakers' Union.

The Admiralty was able to impose its own demarcation system because, other than complain through the petitioning system, there was little the workers adversely affected, the engineering trades and the skilled labourers, could do. The effect of this demarcation development was to create within the Dockyard highly unusual dividing lines, particularly with regard to grievances held between trades. The range of demarcation disputes engaged in by the shipwrights was exceptionally wide. A historian of the Dockyards in the 1920's, N. MacClead,

commented, "The stranger to Dockyard routine is surprised that one single craft can continue to have demarcation disputes with plumbers, with fitters, with blacksmiths, with joiners, with boilermakers, with patternmakers and with electricians. 'Its not a trade', I once heard a workman of another craft say', 'It's a disease'. And it must be confessed that the boundaries of the trade still ~~wonder~~ <sup>36</sup> from time to time." All this contrived to distance the Dockyards from the private world, creating a highly individual, inward looking community, under its own special pressures, with its own way of doing things, and having tradesmen, whose credentials could be looked upon with suspicion by outsiders.

The other issue distancing Dockyardmen from the private shipbuilding world was pay, and this was the most contentious issue in the Dockyard, as well as being the most complex. The point of view of all trades and grades in the Dockyard from 1880 to 1914, as revealed in petitions, newspaper reports and private correspondence, was that the Admiralty took advantage of its position as a uniquely powerful employer to pay under the rate for the job. While the Dockyardmen, certainly in the 1880's before Admiralty policy towards the distance it maintained from private practice began to change, lived in a markedly different working world from the men on the Northern rivers, it was to the Northern rivers, which also produced warships to Government contract, that the 'yardmen looked for wage comparisons. The Dockyardmen alleged that they were kept under the Northern rates, and that the Admiralty aggravated this by the prevention of major private firms developing in Dockyard regions. By remaining virtually the exclusive employer of industrial labour in the vicinity of the

dockyard the Admiralty could maintain control over wage rates. A clear statement of the Dockyardmen's attitude towards wage levels is provided by Richard Gould's remarks made at a shipwrights' meeting in Portsmouth in 1893. Referring to the Admiralty's insistence that Dockyard wages should match the prevailing local rates, Gould stated, "That argument was manifestly unfair, seeing that wages in these districts were kept at a low rate entirely because the Government would not allow any commercial industry or private enterprise to spring up in the neighbourhood of the Royal Dockyards. All they asked for was that the Government should pay them the same wages as were received by their fellow workmen for doing the same kind of work on the big rivers of the United Kingdom, and it was most unjust to assert that the Dockyardmen were getting fair wages simply because they were paid according to the rates paid in their particular districts."<sup>37</sup>

That the Admiralty maintained its control over local wages by preventing the development of private industry is true. The Admiralty maintained control of all of Portsmouth harbour, and the civil industrial employment in Portsmouth, throughout the period, consisted of a few small boat building yards, some engineering works, the building trade,<sup>38</sup> and, for the women, staymaking. It is also true that the Admiralty paid below the rates obtainable on the Northern Rivers. This applied to every trade in the workforce, and the disparity in shipwright rates in 1891 can be quoted as an example.



Shipwrights: Comparative Pay Scales 1891.

Royal Dockyards

| <u>Number</u> | <u>Pay</u> (per week) |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 67            | 30/-                  |
| 2,221         | 31/-                  |
| 975           | 32/-                  |
| 800           | 33/-                  |
| 300           | 34/-                  |

Private Yards

River

|               |        |        |
|---------------|--------|--------|
| Rates paid on | Thames | 42/-   |
| Government    | Mersey | 39/6d  |
| contract work | Tyne   | 36/11  |
|               | Clyde  | 34/1   |
|               | Barrow | 34/9.5 |

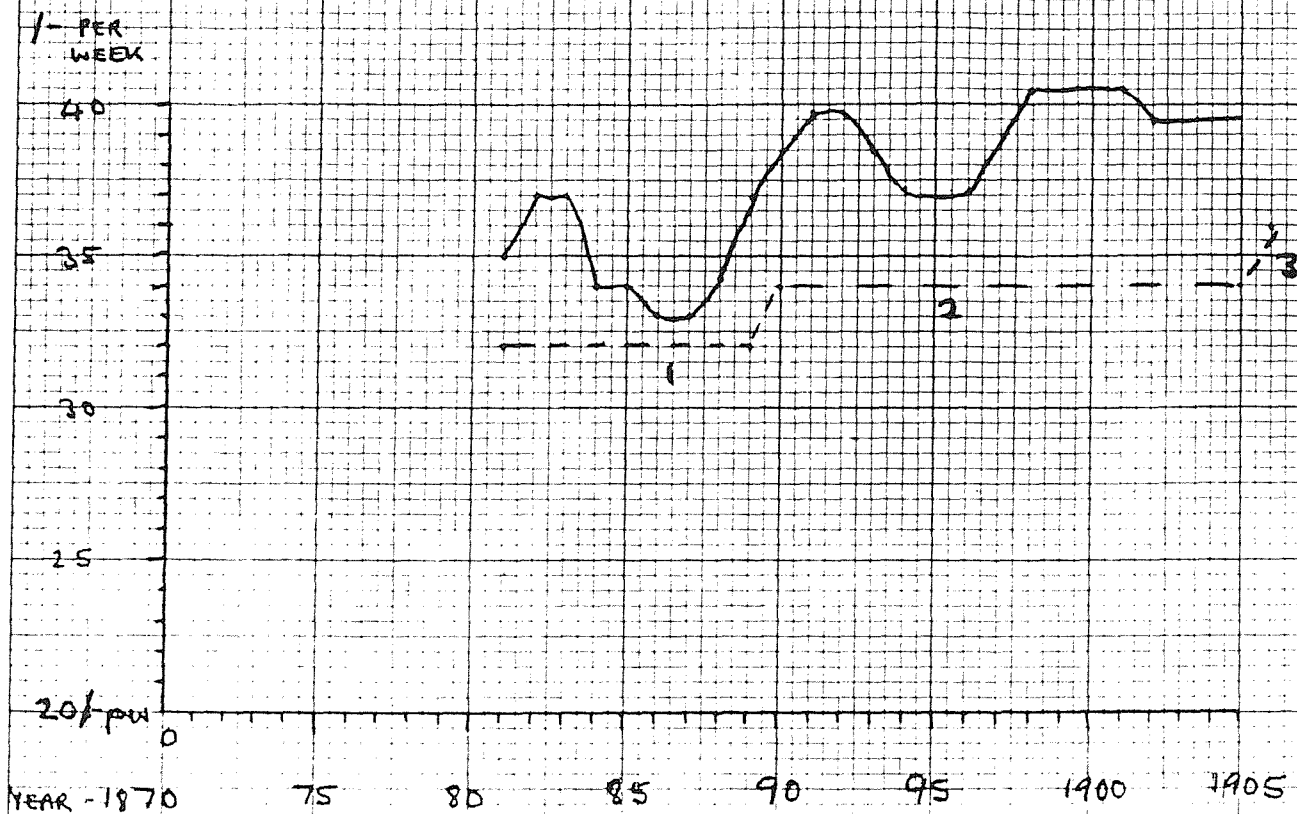
The extent to which this disparity persisted can be seen in a comparison of pay rates for shipwrights in Portsmouth, and for those on the Tyne (This comparison is made in a graph on the following page).

Showing that Dockyard wage rates were lower than those found in the private trade does not prove that Dockyardmen were substantially worse-off than their Northern counterparts. In the discussion of the relative security of even the hired men in the Dockyards it has already been suggested that this is not the case. The problem of annual incomes, and the relative purchasing power of these incomes is virtually insoluble because of the gaps in wage data on both the Dockyard and private side.

Certain factors relevant to the comparative income question, however, can be identified to provide a background to the tentative argument, that, in real terms, Dockyardmen were not substantially behind the workers of the private shipyards. With regard to the cost of living in the Dockyard town, what wages would actually buy, this question is,

# WEEKLY WAGE RATES FOR SHIPWRIGHTS -

## THE TYNE AND THE ROYAL DOCKYARDS



WEEKLY WAGE RATES OF A.S.S. MEMBERS

= ON THE TYNE (NEW WORK) -

SOURCE - D. DOUGAN - THE SHIPWRIGHTS (NEWCASTLE 1975) P. 335

= WEEKLY WAGE RATES OF HIRED SHIPWRIGHTS IN THE ROYAL DOCKYARDS

SOURCES:

1 - PORTSMOUTH TIMES DEC 20 1890

2 - THE STATISTICS OF WAGES IN THE U.K. DURING THE LAST 100 YEARS - A.L. BOWLEY AND G.H. WOOD JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY 1905 PART 15

3 - EVENING NEWS NOV. 28 1906

again, virtually unanswerable for the late nineteenth century. There are no data which enable a picture of rents and retail prices to be built up in sufficient detail for comparisons between Portsmouth and the major Northern towns to be made. For 1912, however, there is a Board of Trade report into the cost of living in the major towns and this indicates that Portsmouth, and the other Dockyard towns were broadly in line with the prices for rent, food, and clothing obtaining in the major private shipbuilding towns. The following index was obtained using rent and retail prices prevailing in the middle zone of London as the base index of 100.

40

Rent and Retail Prices Index 1912.

Sample from 93 towns surveyed.

|               |    |
|---------------|----|
| Newcastle     | 95 |
| South Shields | 92 |
| Barrow        | 93 |
| Birkenhead    | 91 |
| Glasgow       | 93 |
| Southampton   | 93 |
| Portsmouth    | 92 |
| Chatham       | 92 |
| Plymouth      | 95 |

From this perspective, therefore, the Dockyardmen, with their lower pay rates were living in towns, in 1912, where the cost of living was broadly comparable to the North, but this returns discussion to the point that Dockyard wage rates were paid throughout the year, and catastrophic periods aside, Dockyardmen were in continuous employment. Moreover, Dockyard wage rates did not fluctuate. The graph comparing Dockyard and Tyne shipwrights' wage rates shows that the Tyne men experienced cuts in rates. The Dockyard rate, however, was fixed, being adjusted only upwards when the Admiralty calculated that the disparity in rates might be sufficient to lure

hired men away from the yards, or make it difficult to attract new hired men in times of expansion. While the Admiralty was always keen to keep its wage bill to a minimum, this consideration that the Dockyards had always to be adequately manned made it unlikely that Dockyardmen were significantly worse-off than private shipyard workers. Certainly the impression created by the Portsmouth press, and other local observers, in this period is that the Dockyardmen, tradesmen in particular, constituted a prosperous working-class community. A good example of such an impression is provided by the reminiscences of the Rev. R.R. Dolling, who compared the Poplar district with the Portsmouth he had known in the 1880's to 1890's. Writing of Portsmouth he said, "There my parish touched the great Government Dockyard, with its vast army of well-paid and always employed artisans, tending to create a high conception of energetic workmen..."<sup>41</sup>

What is significant with regard to the wage rate issue, however, is that Dockyardmen perceived themselves as being unjustly treated by the Admiralty, and that this was seen as another example of the Admiralty taking full advantage of the Dockyardmen's inability to resist through the means adopted in the private yards. Underpinning all such Dockyard grievances, however, and the special characteristics of Dockyard employment which distanced Dockyardmen from the rest of the workers in the private trade, was the Admiralty's capacity to provide exceptional security for its workers, institutionalised in the establishment system, but extended to a considerable degree to the hired men. The extent to which this was at the root of the Dockyard grievances, and introversion, was clearly recognised by contemporaries. The Portsmouth Liberal M.P, John Baker, in reflecting on Dockyard

grievances during the opening of the Southern Liberal Club in 1893, commented that "... should bonuses and pension be abolished the Government would, as employers, keep themselves in the front rank with regard to the treatment of workmen and pay them as much as their labour would bring on the Clyde, the Mersey and in the other great private shipbuilding establishments." <sup>42</sup> The mechanism by which this would be achieved was suggested by the "Lights on Labour" correspondent of the Portsmouth Evening News in 1906, "Supposing for a moment that the hired and established system at Portsmouth were swept away, all the best workmen would eventually go to the private yards, where higher wages are paid, and the thousands remaining would come out on strike for the full private yard rate, and get it. In the meantime the Dockyard work would be utterly disorganised..." <sup>43</sup>

Study of development in attitude and the formation of unions in the Dockyard from 1880 to 1914 shows that the foregoing perceptions were essentially accurate. Establishment, and the ramifications of this, did keep the Dockyard and Dockyard men different. This was at its most marked in the early 1880's, but whenever the Admiralty lessened the significance of the establishment, and reduced the security afforded by Dockyard employment to the hired men, Dockyard behaviour can be seen shifting towards that common in the private yards.

#### Management: The Development of the Structure.

The development of the Dockyard's management structure in the nineteenth century, broadly, went through three phases. The start of the century saw a pattern of management which was inherited from the

seventeenth century. From 1652 until 1822 the hierarchy of the Dockyard was Quarterman (a promoted shipwright, salaried from 1801, in charge of a gang of 20 shipwrights and responsible for the supervision and annual shoaling of his men) Foreman, Assistant Master Shipwright and Master Shipwright. The second phase of management development began in 1822 with the replacement of the Quarterman with the new grade of leading man, an unsalaried post but one carrying an additional 2/6d per week in wages, and the reduction of the gang size to ten. In 1833 a new tier of management was added with the introduction of Inspectors, salaried men in an intermediate position between the leading men and the foremen. This second phase was a rather unsettled period, with the Admiralty undecided as to the merits of the Inspector grade. In 1859 Admiral Smart's Committee on Dockyard Management recommended that the Inspectors might be dispensed with, and this was implemented in 1870. In 1883, however, Lord Brassey's Committee felt that the leading man was the dispensable official, and in 1884 the grade of Inspector was re-introduced. The third phase of management development started in 1891 with the introduction of the Chargeman as gang supervisor, the Chargeman being a promoted but unsalaried craftsman. In 1898 the grade of leading man was abolished, and coming into the twentieth century the management structure, which was to persist in the Dockyard until the post Second World War period, was established, with its basis being the hierarchy of Chargeman, Inspector, Foreman, Constructor and Chief Constructor.

By the twentieth century, however, the management structure outlined above had been complicated by the development in the mid-nineteenth century of an Engineering Department in the Dockyard,

the introduction of a new grade in 1887 of the Recorder of Work,<sup>45</sup>  
and of changes in title accorded to the principal officials. The  
Engineering operations in the Dockyard had developed under the direct  
control of the Navy with the Chief Constructor's position being  
matched by that of a Chief Engineer, a serving Naval Officer, but with  
the management team below this level being civilian and parallel to  
that involved in ship construction.<sup>46</sup> Recorders, allocated on the  
basis of one to every four gangs, had been introduced to more  
effectively monitor piecework schemes in the aftermath of the rundown  
of 1887. The changing nomenclature of the principal officers was largely  
the product of the increasing professionalisation of Naval  
architecture within the Admiralty during the nineteenth century. The  
creation of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors, and the opening of  
the Royal School of Naval Architecture and Marine Engineering at  
South Kensington in 1864, resulted in the transformation of the  
Assistant Master Shipwright grade into that of Constructor. In 1875  
the Master Shipwright became entitled the Chief Constructor, and in  
1905 the Chief Constructor became the Manager of the Constructive  
Department.<sup>47</sup>

The factors which dominated Admiralty thinking in the development  
of its end-of-century management structure were, broadly, threefold.  
The nineteenth century Admiralty was concerned with the elimination  
of political influence from the Dockyards, the creation of an upper  
management competent in financial management and the technical aspects  
of shipbuilding and ship repairing, and, thirdly, the establishment of  
middle and lower management capable of disciplining the workforce.

In the mid-century attention was focused upon political patronage

in the Dockyards, the scandal attending the Derby administration's attempt to re-introduce political appointments into the Dockyards occasioning the creation of an examination-based promotion ladder<sup>48</sup> within the Dockyards. The assimilation of liberal thought into the practice of Government had seen Russell's Government transfer the making of Dockyard appointments from the political patronage of the Navy Secretary to the professionally appointed Surveyor of the Navy. This decision had been reversed by the Derby administration, and the appointment of a Master Smith in Portsmouth had been made on political grounds, challenged by the Liberals and, subsequently reversed. Appointments in the Dockyards reverted to the Surveyor of the Navy in 1853, and the Admiralty position with regard to future appointments was made clear, "Their Lordships will not entertain any general charges of indifference to expense on the part of officers, or of inertness on that of the men, and they are equally unwilling to dwell upon representations made to them of the effect of political feeling in some of the yards, though they can conceive of nothing more dangerous to their discipline if true, or more detrimental to the public interest... Their object being to introduce a system that may inspire every man with the belief that his conduct will be known and appreciated by his superiors, and that, however humble his position<sup>49</sup> originally, his future fate depends upon his own exertions."

To create a system in which political influence would be genuinely unthinkable, the Admiralty established a rigid entry and promotion process. Entry to apprenticeships was to be consequent upon physical examination and the passing of examinations in literacy and numeracy. Each January the Admiral Superintendent was to submit



to the Admiralty Board, on the basis of reports from the Master Shipwright and his Assistant in conjunction with examination results, a list of candidates for apprenticeship on a ratio of 2:1 of boys to available places. For promotions the Admiralty laid down similar procedures for the drawing up of lists of candidates, the ultimate decision resting with the Admiralty Board in London. In the promotion to Leading Man for every vacancy the Master Shipwright was to submit three names to the Admiral Superintendent; these names resulting from an examination taken in the presence of the Master Shipwright in which the candidates for promotion would have to demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of their trade, their ability to write a legible hand, their capacity in arithmetic to the level of vulgar and decimal fractions, and their mastery of the details of forming and combining different parts of a ship together with methods of trimming and fastening. From the three names submitted to the Admiral Superintendent, he was to eliminate one and send the remaining two to the Admiralty for final decision. A similar process applied in the promotion from Leading Man to Inspector, with the addition of the monthly reports compiled by Foremen being submitted to the Admiralty for candidates emerging from the internal examination process. In the internal examination before the Master Shipwright candidates for Inspectorships would have to demonstrate an ability to write "well", to take their arithmetic beyond fractions to the measurement of plane surfaces and cubes, and to show a knowledge of accounting together with an understanding of the laying-off of ships on the mold loft floor. The purpose of the system was to ensure that, "whether men find their way into the Dockyards as apprentices or by Board order, it is

their Lordships' determine that once there, they should learn to look  
50  
to themselves alone for promotion."

These Admiralty regulations concerning entry and promotion were designed to eliminate the practices recounted to the Select Committee which inquired into the making of Dockyard appointments in the wake of the Cotsell-Wells case. John Beer, a Devonport Solicitor and sometime Tory election agent for the town, provided the Select Committee with a description of political jobbery in the Dockyard environment. He alleged that Whig domination in Government from 1830 to 1841 had produced a majority of Whig inspectors, leading men and foremen. Moreover, Admiralty regulations concerning retirement were flouted for political purposes with over-age men being kept on. Beer went on to say that as a Tory, "No sooner does a change of Government take place than I have constant application from parties who wish to get into the Dockyard. I may say that not infrequently these applications are accompanied by an indication; for instance, if it was a shipwright, it was understood that the price was £20,  
51  
which I might have had." Given our knowledge of the unreformed political system, and the operation of late-eighteenth-century Dockyards, Beer's picture of Dockyard practice does not seem implausible. However, by the 1880's the liberal reforms of the mid-century do appear to have taken effect. Allegations of political corruption in the matter of Dockyard entry, or Dockyard promotions are conspicuous by their absence in Parliament and the local Dockyard town press. Given the alacrity with which impropriety in the Dockyards was seized on by interested M.P's, it seems unlikely that scandals would not have surfaced if the Admiralty reforms had been ineffective.

The issue of improper political influence in the Dockyards remained a live one, however, as can be seen from the comments of C.M. McHardy, the Director of Naval Stores, to Admiral Graham's Committee on Dockyard Management of 1886. McHardy felt that, "Another great evil is the political influence brought to bear on questions concerning Dockyardmen; all persons in Government employment should be<sup>52</sup> disenfranchised." The political influence decried here, however, was a different evil from that identified in the mid-century. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the development of Dockyard trade unionism shows, Dockyardmen looked to politicians not for places, but for assistance in their grievances against Admiralty policy or the action of Admiralty officials.

The regulations of 1853 which took Dockyard promotions out of the political sphere remained the basis of subsequent Admiralty procedure. The major modification to the examination-based system came in 1891 with the introduction of the Chargeman grade, a grade which in 1898 replaced that of Leading Man as gang supervisor. While entry to Dockyard apprenticeships was by competitive examination, and examination was retained for the rank of inspector and above, Chargemen were appointed on the basis of reports and interviews. The Admiralty's reasons for this departure were twofold. Initially the introduction of the Chargeman grade, via internal assessment, was justified by the flexibility this system gave. Chargemen were appointed locally and<sup>53</sup> could be reduced to trade status at the discretion of local management. In 1914 a second aspect of the Admiralty's rationale in the appointment process for Chargemen was revealed in response to a petition from Dockyard ex-apprentices. This petition wanted Chargemen appointed by

competitive examination, a procedure which might be expected to favour the ex-apprentice, who would have gained entry into the Dockyard through written examination, and who would have spent the initial part of his apprenticeship in the Dockyard School. From such a background success in a written examination might be anticipated. The Admiralty, however, refused this petition on the grounds that the current system gave an opportunity to the "first class workman who had received little  
54  
formal education."

Consideration of the emergence of the Charginan grade, and the Admiralty's justification of this development, involves an understanding of the changing pressures on the Admiralty with regard to the management of these Dockyards in the later-nineteenth century. While the early-Victorian period saw the elimination of political jobbery from the Dockyards as a major issue, in the 1880's politicians and consequently Admiralty officials, became more concerned with the rising cost of Naval expenditure, a rising cost occasioned by technical breakthroughs in Naval Architecture and increased international Naval rivalry. In this period the Admiralty was under pressure to cut costs through the improvement of the technical experience of its upper management, through the creation of more accurate accounting procedures and by the better disciplining of its workforce.

In a study of the social history of the Portsmouth Dockyard workforce from 1880 to 1914 the Admiralty's solutions to its problems of expertise in Naval Architecture and accurate accounting is not of central importance. Briefly, however, the Admiralty's difficulties in accurately costing the work performed in its Dockyards, measuring the efficiency of Dockyard against Dockyard and the efficiency of

Dockyards against private shipbuilding yards were not solved. The research of W. Ashworth indicates that the scale of its enterprise, lack of comparable private operations and political considerations

combined to thwart the ambitions of Navy

55

administrators in the field of accountancy. In the development of shipbuilding expertise the key feature of the nineteenth century was the professionalisation of the managing craftsmen in the Dockyards, the transition from Master Shipwright to member of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors. At the start of the nineteenth century the planning and execution of ship refits and shipbuilding was the responsibility of the Foreman of Shipwrights and the Master Shipwright, promoted craftsmen. The revolution in shipbuilding technology associated firstly with the advent of iron shipbuilding in the 1850's, and then the superseding of iron by steel, increased the technical demands made upon upper management, and it was against this background that the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors emerged.

Broadly, the nineteenth century saw the introduction of separate concepts of trade and profession within the management hierarchy of the Dockyards. For the trade the promotion ladder, scaled by competence in what the Admiralty termed "practical" rather than "educational" abilities, was through gang supervisor, whether called Leading Man or, 56 later, Chargeman, to Inspector to Foreman. While the Foreman was principally concerned with the organisation of refits and buildings and not directly involved in a supervisory capacity, this trade hierarchy was essentially that of promoted craftsmen; men who were still recognisably members of their trade, living in the same districts

as the other Dockyard tradesmen. The upper management of the Dockyards, the Assistant Constructors and Constructors, those ultimately responsible for the design and refitting of ships, was the professionalised section; promotion at this level being principally determined by educational qualifications, achieved in the Dockyard Schools and then at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. The link between the trade and the profession, however, in the Dockyard hierarchy was not entirely broken. As N. Macleod in a 1925 history of Dockyard officialdom commented, "entrance to the trade commanded the right of way to the profession.... A Shipwright apprentice may rise by one (ladder of promotion) to be Senior Foreman of the Yard, or by the other to be Manager of the Constructive Department, or fill some even higher post at the Admiralty." This system produced the principal Naval Architects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, men like Sir William White, Sir Philip Watts (the designer of the Dreadnought) and Sir Thomas Mitchell (Dreadnought's builder), all of whom were ex-Dockyard apprentices.

The Admiralty's method of recruiting its professional top level designers and managers is of interest from several historical perspectives. In the development of the professions in the nineteenth century, for example, the continuity achieved by the Admiralty with its pre-industrial revolution traditions, while adapting to the demands of technological advance, is remarkable. In the view of Macleod the Admiralty system was unique, "In architecture it is long since the professional man has ousted the Master Carpenter or the Master Mason, but any shipwright apprentice may rise to the head of the profession of Naval Architecture." Moreover, the Admiralty persisted with this

system throughout the Dockyard's history. At the time of Portsmouth Dockyard's closure in 1985 the Dockyard Manager was a promoted shipwright apprentice. From the social perspective also, this system's existence is of interest. That a successful entrant in the Dockyard apprenticeship examination might emulate the career of Sir William White was a consideration for the Dockyard families of Portsmouth. However, the tangible effect of this system was on a handful of individuals. For the everyday life of the Dockyard, the enforcement of work discipline, the allocation of work and the administration of payment schemes, it was the management structure concerned with the supervision of gangs, the trade side of management, which was of greater importance.

From 1880 Admiralty policy towards the supervision of its workforce went through two phases. The first was associated with Admiral Graham's Committee on Dockyard Management when the shortcomings of supervision by promoted craftsmen were highlighted and methods of circumventing such difficulties through self-discipline-inducing payment schemes were suggested. The second phase of development came in the 1896-1898 period when the deficiencies of approaches based upon the recommendations of the Graham Committee became apparent, and attention was returned to the gang supervisor as the key element in the achievement of satisfactory work from the men.

The Graham Committee took evidence covering the whole range of Dockyard management problems from the inaccuracy of accounting procedures to the indolence of the workforce. In this latter respect, the Committee received opinions such as that of Commodore R.O. Fitzroy who stated, "My general opinion as to the supervision of labour in our

Dockyards is that it is very indifferent, occasioned by a want of trustworthy leading hands and a dread of making themselves unpopular with the men on the part of many officials of the yard." <sup>58</sup> The Committee largely took this point, saying in its report, "We esteem it of the first importance that large bodies of workmen, employed on board ship, should be under the constant supervision of an officer. By the present arrangement the inspectors, who are simply leading men on salary, are intimately associated with the workmen of their gangs, whom they select at the periodical shoaling, and circumstances have come to our notice which convince us that supervision has been in no way improved." <sup>59</sup>

To tackle this perceived problem of over-familiarity with the workforce leading to leniency on the part of those responsible for gang supervision the Graham Committee received advice that supervision should be the province of a different class of Admiralty official. Rear Admiral F.A. Herbert, the Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard, stressed the importance of having a Naval Officer of high rank ultimately in control of discipline in the Dockyard and complained that too few disciplinary cases were brought to his attention by the civilian supervisors. He said that, "I am sure that the inspectors cannot be doing their duty.... We want a higher class of men brought in and not to select men from the same class as those they supervise. From the Foreman downwards, the men are all taken from the same class and, living together in the way that they do, pressure can be brought upon them so that they dare not report." This advice, however, was not taken up by the Graham Committee, or by subsequent Admiralty action. The reasons for the rejection of this option were not spelled out in



the Committee's Report, or in subsequent Admiralty documents, but it is possible to work out a rationale for the Admiralty's response. The introduction of non-working-class gang supervisors would have created cost and practicability problems. Professional supervisors would require commensurate salaries and security, raising the prospect of increasing financial commitments to an Admiralty which was sensitive to expense. More importantly, the ability of such supervisors to effectively control the men was questionable. Supervisors would have to be conversant with the craft skills of the men in their charge to adequately assess the quality, and quantity, of work on offer. Moreover, within Herbert's own evidence to the Graham Committee there were indications that craftsmen would not value direction from inspectors and foremen outside of their own trades, and that these supervisors were reluctant to interfere with other trades.

The Graham Committee's solution to the overseeing problem was the introduction, or re-introduction given the earlier use of tonnage schemes, of payment incentive schemes for craftsmen to match the piecework normal amongst the unskilled workforce. Work discipline was to be tightened by the classification of tradesmen in four grades, and progress through the grades would be dependent upon satisfactory commitment to work. Such classification schemes were introduced in the Dockyard, but these were not successful in creating within the Dockyards the competitive atmosphere which the Admiralty believed was the norm in commercial yards. The classification schemes met with sustained opposition from the Dockyard craftsmen, an opposition spearheaded by the shipwrights, the trade principally affected, and by 1893 the classification scheme of payment had been substantially modified.

The abandonment of classification as a main element in the Admiralty's efficiency strategy returned attention to the quality of its supervisory staff, and the creation of a management structure which would enhance the effectiveness of these. The Admiralty wanted supervisors, at gang level, competent to control the craftsmen in the gangs, and yet not overly lenient to their erstwhile workmates or complacent in the security of their promoted position. The Admiralty's solution to this problem was the creation of the Chargemen category, first developed on a temporary basis in Chatham in 1891. The attraction of the Chargeman post for the Admiralty was the vulnerability of the Chargeman. Chargemen were selected by local management, not appointed by the Admiralty as the result of examination procedures. Chargemen, therefore, could be broken at the discretion of the local management, whether for inadequately discharging their duties, or as part of a contraction in the workforce. Above the Chargeman, the Inspectors could now be appointed to supervise several gangs, and account for the disciplinary aspect of the workforce's performance on any given refit or building project, with the foreman being freed to concentrate on the more technical side of the operation. The rationale behind this development was outlined in an Admiralty document of 1898, which was drawn up on the basis of the Admiralty Dockyard Branch's summary of developments in management to 1898, and which contained the proposals for a new management structure, involving the elimination of the Leading Man grade and the permanent establishment of Chargeman within the system, 62 for approval by the Treasury.

In 1898 the Admiral Superintendents of Chatham and Portsmouth

reported that the creation of Chargeman of Shipwrights, paid on the same rate as shipwrights but with a charge allowance of 1/- per day, instead of Inspectors and Leading Men at the head of gangs had been successful from the perspectives of costs and efficiency. It was felt that the Chargeman was, "... a first step towards trying to replace salaried Inspectors by more cheaply paid Chargemen who would be chargeable at discretion." Moreover, if Chargemen became the gang supervisors the remaining Inspectors could be confined to the supervision of Chargemen, not the direct control of men. The resulting management hierarchy saw the gang come under the supervision of someone who remained essentially a workman, while the Inspector was placed in something of a limbo between tradesmen and quasi-professional status. This can be seen from the payments for Inspectors and Chargemen in 1898. Inspectors were salaried, with a pay scale of £100 to £150 pa, rising by annual increments of £5. Inspectors enjoyed 6 days paid leave, 1 month's sick leave on full pay and a further month's sick leave on 2/3 pay. Inspectors had separate messing accommodation, did not receive overtime pay, did not share in piecework schemes and did not muster by tickets. Chargemen, however, were paid their trade's day pay, plus the 1/- allowance, were paid overtime on the full rate, did not do piecework but were given a 1/- per day allowance if 20 of their gang were on piecework, messed with the men they supervised, and had to muster by ticket, although Chargemen were allowed to pick up their muster tickets from a separate board.

The Admiralty was not entirely happy with this Chargeman, Inspector, Foreman hierarchy. Doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of allowing Chargemen to be paid for overtime when they could be in a

position to decide the allocation of such work, but this structure became the basis of Dockyard management to the Great War, and beyond. In the emergence of this structure important changes had been effected in the Dockyard's working atmosphere. Coming into the nineteenth century the shipwrights, the staple of the Dockyard's workforce, had enjoyed considerable autonomy over their own working lives, being able to decide the composition of their gangs at the annual re-organisation of the Dockyard known as shoaling. Their workplace autonomy closely resembled that possessed by the shipwrights of the Thames in the heyday of wooden shipbuilding, as described by S. Pollard. Moreover, the Dockyardmen of this early period were markedly volatile in their behaviour, as shown by the researches<sup>63</sup> of Wilson, Knight and Morris, frequently striking against wage reductions, or in cases where fellow workers had received what was seen as unfair treatment. By 1880 while much of the terminology and forms of Dockyard life were the same as they had been for centuries the working atmosphere had been transformed. The composition of the workforce had been re-organised with the development of iron, and then steel shipbuilding. The nature of the shipwrights' job changed, and a variety of new trades and grades appeared in the Dockyard. Under the developing management structure much of the old workplace autonomy was lost as Dockyardmen, whether craftsmen or labourers became more closely supervised. Shoaling became the means for management to re-organise the gangs for its own purposes. The shoaling of the gangs was at the discretion of the Inspectors and Leading Men in 1890,<sup>64</sup> Inspectors and Chargemen by 1914.

Management in Practice: Dockyard Work Discipline.

It is easy to catalogue the disciplinary code which the Admiralty expected its officers to implement. By 1912 the basic Dockyard regulations, and punishments for breaches of them, as revealed in a memorandum from the Admiral Superintendent at Portsmouth to the Manager of the Constructive Department, were:

| <u>Offence</u>                                | <u>Punishment</u>                        |
|---|--|
| Having matches                                | Suspension for two days                  |
| Smoking and having matches                    | Suspension from two to six days          |
| Idling  | Suspension from one to two days          |
| Betting                                       | Suspension for one month<br>or discharge |
| Losing Time                                   | Suspension for one month<br>or discharge |
| Incorrect statement of<br>work performed      | Suspension for one month<br>or discharge |
| Unlawful possession of<br>Government property | Discharge                                |
| Absent from work                              | Suspension for two days                  |

The punishments for the first three offences were to be increased in severity, at the discretion of the management, with repetition.

However, it is more difficult to access the frequency with which the Dockyard regulations were infringed, and the spirit in which the regulations were enforced, and received by Dockyardmen, whether officers or men. Study of three areas of Dockyard work discipline, idling, the taking of Government property and the recording of work, indicates that Dockyardmen had different perceptions of what constituted proper behaviour at their place of work than their employers at the Admiralty.

With regard to idling, whatever the Admiralty did from 1880 in the introduction of payment incentive schemes or in the organisation of supervisory staff, the conviction of senior Naval figures, and observers of the Navy scene, whether politicians or journalists, that

Dockyardmen did not work hard enough remained virtually unshaken. Some Admiralty officials took the view, expressed to Admiral Graham's Committee on Dockyard Management, of F.K. Barnes, the Surveyor of Dockyards from 1872 to 1885, when questioned on the seriousness of idling in the Dockyards, "I should like to know where idling does not go on ... I have seen idling in private establishments and I have seen idling in Dockyards and I think that idling is about the same in both places, that is my opinion. There is no doubt that the quality is peculiar to all workmen." <sup>66</sup> More typical, however, were the views of Rear Admiral Herbert, the Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth in 1885, who was convinced that Dockyardmen were exceptionally idle, and <sup>67</sup> that their supervisors tolerated this. Views similar to Herbert's surface in the Portsmouth Press throughout the 1880 to 1914 period, ranging from the Portsmouth Times' picking up of a Daily Graphic story in which it was alleged that Dockyardmen engaged in organised work avoidance, with members of gangs being detailed to keep look-out for supervisors, a duty referred to as 'Keeping Crow', while the rest of <sup>68</sup> the gang idled, to local Unionist M.P's commenting on the inefficiency of Dockyard work, and when challenged for calling Dockyardmen lazy, not denying the charge but claiming that they put <sup>69</sup> the Navy interest before that of the Dockyard.

Clearly the degree of idling in the Dockyard, and the comparative levels of effort in Dockyards and private yards cannot be quantified. What can be said is that, as insistently as some Naval officers and observers of Naval matters alleged that Dockyardmen were indolent, Dockyardmen denied charges of inadequate effort. The Dockyardmen presented a case against the Admiralty that involved a resentment of

the service-style discipline which the Naval officers at the top of the Dockyard and Admiralty hierarchy expected of a civilian workforce. As the Plymouth M.P, Duke, said on behalf of his constituents in the Commons' debate on the Naval Estimates of 1905, "Tens of thousands of workmen, many highly skilled, were expected to behave as if they were members of a disciplined service."<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Dockyardmen felt that the Admiralty was able to extract exceptional effort, and compromises on demarcation practice amongst trades, from its workforce through the manipulation of Dockyardmen's fears and aspirations in connection with the establishment system. The "Lights on Labour" correspondent of the Evening News, in a discussion of the speed with which the Dreadnought had been built, denied the charges made by commercial shipbuilders that this had been achieved by skimping the work. His view was, "The real secret of the Portsmouth speed, however, was that under the Dockyard system of employment pressure can be brought to bear on the worker who is fearful of losing his bonus or his pension if he objects,<sup>71</sup> while up North similar pressure would at once precipitate a strike."

It is in this area of resentments felt generally in the Dockyard workforce towards the Admiralty's employment practice that some idea of a distinctive attitude towards effort by Dockyardmen might be formed. The views of an Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth, R.F.A. Henderson, given to a Smoking Concert for Dockyard officers, attended by some two hundred, held in the Dockyard on the occasion of his retirement are of interest in this connection. Henderson gave a talk on the comparative problems of management in the Royal Dockyards and in the major private yards. He felt that, "most of the private yards were better placed in the country for economic construction and

work, both as regards labour and material than were the Royal Dockyards."

Three factors were held to account for this; Dockyard work was liable to the frequent disruption of emergency work, the individual Dockyards had to wait for the approval of a central authority in the purchasing of new machinery, and, lastly, the standards of discipline in the Dockyards were inferior. Henderson felt that idleness was a major problem in the Dockyards, but his analysis of this problem was more sophisticated than that of other critics of the Dockyardmen. Idleness in the Dockyards was, "Of two sorts. The first was a general disposition on the part of the men to do only what they considered sufficient for the wages paid.... The other kind of idleness was a comparatively small matter."<sup>71</sup>

If there was any legitimacy in the Admiralty claims that slacking was a problem in the Dockyard then this issue of matching effort to pay identified by Henderson was at its heart, not "Keeping Crow", or exploiting the lack of commercial pressures. Clearly, all workmen have a sense of justice about pay and tend to relate commitment to remuneration, but, in the Dockyard, workers, particularly the tradesmen, were acutely aware of the shortfall between their wages and their own estimation of their work. As can be seen in petitions presented to the Admiralty, opinions voiced in union meetings and depositions before Royal Commissioners, Dockyardmen took as their point of reference the major shipyards of the Northern rivers, considering themselves equal in skill and engaged in comparable work to the men there. From this perspective, Dockyardmen considered they were not paid sufficient wages, and this grievance could be intensified in times of full employment in the shipbuilding industry, when the compensations of



Dockyard security were less apparent. It is in these circumstances that the generality of Dockyard workers, especially craftsmen, might pose the management particular problems in the matters of effort and attitude.

The discrepancy which could exist between a Dockyardman's notion of what constituted a fair day's effort for his pay, and the Admiralty's, was matched by a similar disagreement as to what constituted theft of the Admiralty's property. The Admiralty's position on the matter was quite straightforward, the materials in the Dockyard, the tools supplied by the Dockyard and the equipment on ships were all its property and any removal of these from the Dockyard for sale or personal use was a theft. The Dockyardmen's perception of theft was not quite so clear cut. There was a long tradition within the Dockyard that waste material could legitimately be taken from the Dockyard for personal use. In the eighteenth century this practice had been sanctioned by the Admiralty, with men being allowed to take home short lengths of wood as "chips." In the face of the men's resistance, the Admiralty had ended this concession in 1801, giving the men a daily allowance of 2d instead of chips.<sup>72</sup> Alongside the tradition of taking materials home for personal use, there was the practice of taking material from the Dockyard, particularly metal, for sale. The research of R.J.B. Knight and D. Wilson has shown that in the turn of the eighteenth century, the pilfering of materials from the Dockyard played a substantial role in the economy of the Dockyard workforce. There existing in Portsmouth a network of receivers, mostly publicans, who organised the shifting of metals from the Dockyard to London for illicit sale there. The Dockyard

community did not regard such exploitation of its workplace as particularly immoral; pilfering from the Dockyard being seen as something akin to smuggling or poaching in other communities.

By the period of this study, while the evidence for the analysis of Dockyard-based crime is not particularly rich, with much of the Metropolitan Police's (the force responsible for Dockyard security) records being closed, it would seem that the tradition of seeing nothing wrong in taking waste materials from the Dockyard had actively survived. This is nicely illustrated by a Portsmouth Magistrates' Court case of 1911, which was of sufficient concern to the Admiralty to be the occasion of an Admiralty Order, and for its details to be logged in the Admiralty's records. In 1911, a Portsmouth rive<sup>ter</sup>, Edward Bartlett, was arrested for taking out of the Dockyard an oilskin coat of Navy issue, which he had taken from the ship he was working, HMS Bellerophon. Bartlett's defence, supported by his supervisor, a Chargeman of Shipwrights, was that it was common practice for Dockyardmen to take clothing or gear from ships which had been discarded by sailors. He had no intention of stealing from the Admiralty, or knowledge that he was committing an offence by taking the oilskin. The Portsmouth Magistrates accepted this defence, and Bartlett was acquitted. The Admiralty's response was to issue a General Order forbidding all taking of articles from ships, and to have notices to this effect posted throughout the home Dockyards.<sup>74</sup>

While the Admiralty's position with regard to the taking of equipment from the Dockyard, waste or not, may have been made clear by the Bartlett case, and the subsequent notices may have deterred emulation of Bartlett, it is hard to imagine that the Dockyard

attitude towards the morality of such "pilfering" was much affected. In this context it is interesting to note the resentment of Dockyardmen to the Metropolitan Police's right of search on the Dockyard Gates. Personal searches were likely to reveal small items being taken out of the Yard for personal use and to have this regarded as criminal, to be treated as a criminal suspect as a consequence, was regarded by Dockyardmen as an attack on their dignity. This point was taken up on behalf of the Dockyard shipwrights in the Commons by John Jenkins, who from 1906 to 1910 was the A.S.S.-sponsored Labour M.P. for Chatham. In his maiden speech in the Commons, Jenkins argued, "As a workman in the Dockyard himself, he felt degraded when on going out of the Yard, a policeman accosted him and he had to be searched. There was no private yard in the country which would place a workman in such an undignified position."

It seems likely that the attitudes towards the taking of waste materials from the Dockyard were extended by the men to include the taking by individuals of small amounts of unused material for personal use, or for the raising of a few shillings to supplement wages. The indications are that such pilfering from the Dockyard was quite common. The court cases appearing in the local press must represent only the tip of the iceberg in Dockyard pilfering yet such cases are frequently found. For example, on one day in 1913, three Dockyard labourers were convicted in the Magistrates' Court of petty thefts. One, G. Smith of Gladstone St. Landport, was fined £2 with 8/6d costs after having been arrested for ~~heaving~~ metal over the Dockyard wall and then attempting to pick it up. Although Smith's defence was that he knew nothing about the metal but was searching for his cap which had

blown over the wall was supported by fellow labourers, the evidence of the arresting policeman was accepted. The other two men, labourers in the Rigging Loft, were arrested at the Main Gate, attempting to take from the Dockyard 10/- worth of engine fittings and 2/10d worth of copper pipe and fishing line. Both were bound over in the sum of £10

76

for twelve months. A 1914 case indicates that Dockyardmen were not averse to treating Dockyard tools as their own, and making a few pennies from this. Two drillers employed by Vickers Bros, working in the Dockyard as contractors, were fined £2 each for having Admiralty tools in their possession. Dockyard-issue drills were found in their boxes. The defence of the men was that they had been supplied these drills by Dockyardmen, "Sometimes they would give a Dockyardman 4d for the loan of a drill. That was necessary, because, being on piecework, they had to get their work done quickly."

77

With regard to large-scale organised crime in the Dockyards for commercial purposes, the evidence does not permit much to be said on its quality, quantity, or the way in which it was perceived by the generality of Dockyardmen. What can be said is that such crime, as would be expected, was not unknown in the home Dockyards. In Chatham in 1907 there was a case involving the theft of £100's worth of metal, which resulted in the imprisonment of five men employed in the Dockyard, including two policemen. Even if undetected, it is hard to imagine that Portsmouth did not experience similar crime. Thefts from the Dockyard, and Harbour on a large scale were also carried out by Non-Dockyardmen. In 1913 a gang from the Rudmore district was convicted of theft from ships at anchor in the Harbour, producing a house full of Admiralty stores in Rudmore, after having been apprehended

78

running a boat to the ships at anchor in the Harbour. Although the prosecuting counsel at the trial of the Rudmore men, three of whom were imprisoned, claimed that, "Many people were inclined to think that it was no crime to take the goods of the Government", it is unlikely that Dockyardmen, in general, saw large-scale theft from the Dockyards as fitting into the same moral category as the taking by an individual of an odd length of pipe. The Rudmore men were apprehended after Dockyardmen had seen them operating from their boat and had  
79  
alerted the police.

The accurate recording of work is the third area in which a general divergence of view between Dockyardmen and the Admiralty can be seen in issues of propriety and honesty. The Admiralty wanted strictly kept records of work for its own accounting purposes, and to operate the piecework schemes which were the basis of the payment of skilled labourers. Recorders of Work had been introduced into the Dockyard on the basis of one to every four gangs to achieve this in  
80  
1887. However, there are indications that the recording of work was not invariably carried out as the Admiralty intended. Supervisors and recorders could arrange the recording of work for their own purposes, either as a means of disciplining the men under them, or presenting an appearance of efficiency in the carrying out of jobs to the men above them in the management hierarchy. Equally, the men on piecework could arrange their work record, with the tacit agreement of the recorders and chargemen, not so much to cheat the Admiralty as to bring wages into line with their conception of a fair return for the work performed. The extent of this modifying of work records by officers and men in the Dockyard cannot be gauged from the evidence available, but letters

and reports in the Portsmouth newspapers, especially in connection with the furore created by the dismissal from the Dockyard of four union officials in 1898, refer to the existence of such practices. A letter from T.J. Saunders of Littlehampton, who had previously worked in the Dockyard as a skilled labourer for eight years, sent to the Portsmouth Times in 1890, argued that the recording of work was largely under the control of the Recorder, Leading Man and Inspector. Saunders claimed that, "Naturally a Leading Man could give in what work he liked to the Recorder, he could put down a man as being on day work when in reality he was on piecework." Saunders went on to allege that this misrecording of work was commonplace, and used to reward favourites or 'balance the books', claiming that, "I have been working on a machine, with two mates with me, myself being in charge, yet we have all been charged to entirely different jobs."<sup>81</sup>

Support for Saunders' view of Dockyard practice appeared in 1898 during the series of meetings held by Dockyardmen in the wake of dismissal by the Admiralty of the Secretary of the Portsmouth Trades and Labour Council, a Dockyard shipwright, Richard Gould, and the leaders of the Labourers' Unions in the Dockyard, A.G. Gourd, G.H. Knott and T. Sparshatt, following their organisation of a protest meeting, outside of Dockyard hours, at the level of wages paid to skilled and ordinary labourers. None of the men was actually dismissed for organising the meeting, but for breaches of Admiralty regulations. All were accused of making improper approaches to Parliament and in Sparshatt's case this was aggravated by the falsifying of piecework figures. Sparshatt was charged with, and did not deny, charging for<sup>82</sup> 16 rivets which he had not drilled. Sparshatt's defence, however,

was that he had been engaged on awkward but necessary work which made it impossible to make the piecework scheme pay; consequently he had charged what he regarded as a fair volume of work. Sparshatt's case was supported by his fellow workers, and the practice was claimed by A.G. Gourd at a meeting of Dockyardmen to be widespread.

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## Chapter II

### Dockyard Shipwrights: The S.C.A. and the A.S.S.

The Ship Constructive Association was formed in Portsmouth in July 1883. According to one of the speakers at its inaugural meeting, a Mr. Crocker, "the chief object of the Association is to assist in making its members worthy of the professional and social position<sup>1</sup> which they claim for themselves." The professional position which was claimed was the dominant role the shipwrights had in ship construction in the Dockyards. The Dockyard shipwrights were acutely aware that there was no directly comparable group of workers to themselves in the private trade and they lay great stress on calling themselves ship constructors rather than shipwrights. A. Anderson, the national treasurer of the S.C.A, and the principal figure in the Portsmouth section, made this clear in his evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour, some ten years after the S.C.A's formation, "We are employed at the present time upon working in iron, steel, in fact, every conceivable thing in the building of the hull and the fitting of a man of war. This work is done outside the Dockyard by numerous bodies of men known by entirely different names, but it is executed in the Dockyard by what are termed shipwrights only ... We do not object to the name of shipwright, but at the same time we consider that we have a right to consideration for the work we do,<sup>2</sup> rather than be considered shipwrights pure and simple."

The problem for the Dockyard shipwrights, however, was that while they were the staple trade in the Admiralty workforce they had an uneasy relationship with the other trades and grades in the Dockyard. The other trades were continually sniping at the range of

work allocated to shipwrights, and in an industry of ever-developing technology the shipwrights had to guard what they already held as well as ensuring they had their share of the new techniques. The hostility towards the shipwrights from other trades is well illustrated by the range of petitions throughout the 1880 to 1914 period which complain of shipwrights taking work which should properly be allocated to other trades.<sup>3</sup> Complete records of all petitions received by the Admiralty do not survive so it is impossible to quantify the extent of the grievances generated by demarcation practices operating in favour of the shipwrights. From the samples which do survive, however, either in the Public Record Office or those mentioned by the Portsmouth press the complaint against the shipwrights emerges as a constant feature. A typical example of these petitions is the 1893 complaint, answered in 1894, by the shipfitters that shipwrights were employed on work which was properly theirs in the Shipfitting Shop. In this instance the Admiralty sided with the shipfitters and the offending shipwrights were withdrawn.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, however, shipwrights did not lose demarcation disputes. A more typical response to a petition is provided by this exchange quoted in the Portsmouth Times of 1899. In the previous year the fitters had presented petitions complaining of shipwrights taking their work, the shipwrights retaliated and the comment made when the petitions were answered was, "it having been rumoured that the Admiralty had under consideration the subject of making changes as between engineers and shipwrights in the Royal Dockyards by reason of the alleged overlapping of the trades, the latter class recently asked their Lordships not to sanction any alteration of shipwrights'

work in the construction of war vessels. Their reply made known on Saturday, is that their Lordships do not contemplate making any such change." <sup>5</sup> This example is taken well after the S.C.A's formation but it illustrates the atmosphere in which demarcation disputes were invariably conducted, and settled, in the Dockyard throughout the period under study. The successful defence of their position in the struggle for jobs in the Dockyard by the shipwrights, introduces a second constant feature of the relationship between the shipwrights and the other trades; the allegation that shipwrights were invariably favoured in any demarcation dispute because of the trades hold over the management positions within the Dockyard.

The management structure in the Dockyard from 1880 to 1914 was essentially as follows: tradesmen worked in gangs of about twenty-five to thirty, the gangs were headed by chargemen; working tradesmen but paid a supervisory allowance. Four of five gangs would be under the charge of an inspector. In charge of three or four inspectors were the foremen, and the foremen came under the heads of departments, the Chief Constructor and the Chief Engineer. The Chief Engineer was invariably a Naval Officer, the Chief Constructor a civilian, a member of the Royal Corps of Naval Constructors. With regard to the shipwrights, however, the salient fact is that most supervisory positions were taken by shipwrights. The Royal Corps of Naval Constructors recruited from the shipwright apprentices taken on at the Dockyard Schools. For the other trades it was common for shipwrights to act as foremen. In 1908, for example, the Portsmouth sailmakers <sup>6</sup> complained that their inspector was a shipwright. Shipwrights were in charge of all semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the Dockyard.

With regard to demarcation, it was felt by other 'Yard workers that this shipwright presence in officialdom, particularly where cases were referred to the higher levels of the hierarchy for adjudication, gave the shipwrights an unfair edge.

There is plenty of evidence to substantiate this point. In the collection of trade union correspondence compiled by the Webbs for their work on the Trade Unions there is much material which relates to Portsmouth, and the other Dockyards, for the late 1880's and 1890's. An open letter from the Dockyard fitters, sent to all M.P's, well illustrates the hostility felt by this trade towards the shipwrights over demarcation issues. The fitters complained that they should have all jobs concerning valves, pumps, gun-mountings and water-tight doors; instead shipwrights were allowed to perform such work. The fitters claimed they were excluded, "by shipwrights, backed up by the officials, the majority, if not the whole, belong to the shipwright interest."<sup>7</sup> The same grievance was held by the carpenters<sup>8</sup> as the Portsmouth Times reported in 1895. The shipwrights themselves acknowledged this problem. In his correspondence with the Webbs, the Portsmouth A.S.S. secretary, Richard Gould explained the problem of the dispute concerning water-tight doors from the shipwrights' perspective. Working on such doors had originally been shipwrights' work in the Dockyard, the fitters had been allowed to undertake some water-tight door work in slack times (a classic example of the Admiralty being flexible in its use of labour, including tradesmen) and the fitters were attempting to put this on a permanent, and exclusive, basis. The work had been returned to the shipwrights by the decision of the Chief Constructor in Portsmouth, and when the fitters had continued

to petition against this, the Admiralty had suggested an arbitration board consisting of the Chief Constructor and two independent assessors. The shipwrights had been happy with this arrangement, but the fitters had protested, claiming the Chief Constructor would be biased in the shipwrights' favour, and unduly influential.<sup>9</sup>

The atmosphere of demarcation disputes in which the Dockyard shipwrights lived made it likely that they would continue to protect their interests. The timing of the formation of the S.C.A. was determined by the increasing pressure, and pressure from a new source, which the shipwrights came under at the start of the 1880's. Paradoxically, the impetus for trade combination amongst the Dockyard shipwrights was inspired by the intervention of national trade unions in Dockyard affairs. By the 1880's there were a handful of trade unionists in Parliament, and these trade unionists were prepared to speak out against the unusual demarcation practices in the Dockyard. By doing this they were intervening in the forum most crucial to Dockyardmen, and they were bound to make comments which the shipwrights would interpret as inimical to their interests; if Dockyard practice were brought into line with conditions obtaining in the private trade then shipwrights would lose out on a wide range of jobs. The attack upon demarcation practices in the Dockyard was launched by Henry Broadhurst in 1881 when he complained about shipwrights being used to fit engines. In 1883 he returned to this issue. He claimed that his earlier notion had been met by the appointment of an engineer to the Admiralty Board to better represent the engineering interest, but "he very much feared that, as usual, the Admiralty had absorbed that engineer and he had done nothing in the way of reform."



Broadhurst sought to remedy this, and complained, "he thought he had satisfactorily proved that it was next to impossible for shipwrights or workers in wood to engage in the fitting of delicate and complicated machinery; but the Admiralty had answered his notion by increasing the number of shipwrights engaged in the various Dockyards." <sup>10</sup>

In direct response to these attacks shipwrights in Portsmouth decided to defend themselves by banding together to ensure that their interests were protected. Through combination the shipwrights could exert the maximum lobbying pressure on the M.P's of the Dockyard towns, and make sure that their voice was heard in Parliament. The importance of this need to have a Parliamentary defence was openly expressed at the S.C.A's formation. The Portsmouth meeting which instituted the S.C.A. was chaired by W.B. Robinson, a former Chief Constructor at Portsmouth. In his opening speech he commented, "They were told that necessity had no law. Well their association was born of necessity, and the questions raised in Parliament when the late Navy Estimates were under consideration by Mr. Broadhurst, and also on former occasions by the same gentleman, were sufficient reason, if any were needed, for the formation of their Association." <sup>11</sup>

This mobilisation of support for the shipwrights' interests remained at the core of the S.C.A's activities throughout its life. Annual conferences were held where delegates from all Dockyards exchanged information and formulated the petition to be presented at the annual visitation. Once the petition was drawn up its contents were made known to all M.P's, but most importantly the Dockyard M.P's, and their support enlisted. Invariably the S.C.A. was successful in this enterprise. There are no examples to be found in the Portsmouth

press, which was keenly interested in such matters, of the local M.P's, or M.P's from the other towns refusing to adopt the S.C.A. line on a question, at least in principle. The Portsmouth Liberal M.P's, Baker and Clough, for example, supported the S.C.A. campaign against the Admiralty's use of classification, an attempt to increase efficiency in the Dockyard by paying tradesmen at various rates. This could cut across party lines as demonstrated by the Tory, Gorst, taking a similar line to Baker and Clough on behalf of his Chatham constituents. In 1893 the Liberal Government claimed to have abolished classification; the S.C.A. disagreed arguing some elements of the old scheme persisted, and Baker and Clough were left in the difficult position of having to defend their Government while still siding with the S.C.A. This is the nearest example of any divergence between local M.P's and the S.C.A, but still shows the importance of the S.C.A. as a lobby.<sup>12</sup> For the most part, however, the S.C.A. was pleased with the reaction of local M.P's to its lobbying. In 1886, for example, when Admiral Graham's Committee was critically examining Dockyard efficiency, the Devonport delegate, Burner, was able to remark at the S.C.A's third annual conference, "Referring to the Report on Dockyard Management he observed that he was pleased to find so many had spoken on their behalf when the question was brought before the House of Commons."<sup>13</sup>

That the local M.P's should be so amenable to the requests of the S.C.A. is hardly surprising. While the M.P's, and prospective M.P's, had to be sensitive to the Dockyard interest as a whole, and could not afford to deeply offend any section of Dockyard opinion, the shipwrights did represent the largest single unit within the Dockyard workforce, certainly amongst the Dockyard voters. In the

case of Portsmouth and its Liberal M.P's from 1880 to 1886 and 1892 to 1900, there was even more reason to take notice of what the shipwrights were saying. At the basis of working-class Liberalism in Portsmouth was the Trades and Labour Council, and this body was based upon the Dockyard trades, the shipwrights in particular. In Portsmouth shipwrights such as Stephen Boss, a founder member of the S.C.A. and latterly an A.S.S. official, C.W. Vine, T. Kersey and R. Gould were key figures in the Liberal Party, appearing as Liberal candidates on the School Board and Board of Guardians. Fitters from the Dockyard, such as W.J. Willis, were also involved in Portsmouth Liberalism, but it is easy enough to see that in their dealings with the Dockyardmen, in spite of the internal divisions between the Dockyard tradesmen, men like Clough, Baker and Bramsdon would be careful to appear, at least, as acting in the shipwrights' interests.

Closely associated with political lobbying was the S.C.A.'s role of monitoring developments in the shipbuilding industry to ensure that the trade maintained its hold over ship construction. At the S.C.A.'s foundation, Stephen Boss had pointed out that the association should keep a keen eye on any changes in shipbuilding techniques, "so that they might be able to meet the emergency and prove themselves as they had done in the past."

The S.C.A. can be seen to have implemented this policy by organising regular lectures on shipbuilding; a typical example being provided by W.J. Fitze, R.C.N.C, lecturing on "the use of armour in the Royal Navy" to the Portsmouth S.C.A. men in 1886.

In this way the shipwrights were well-briefed when it came to arguing with the Admiralty over any new work allocation, or attempting to refute allegations made by the engineers and their representatives.

The importance which the shipwrights attached to being well-informed, and having the ability to win most arguments over their capacity to perform most aspects of ship construction is further indicated by a petition of 1905 when the shipwrights, successfully, petitioned the Admiralty that they should be allowed to present their case before  
17  
any changes in work allocation were made. By 1905 the S.C.A. was a spent force, only two years away from its amalgamation with the A.S.S, but it seems reasonable to credit the S.C.A. for initiating this educational aspect of shipwright union activity.

This approach by the shipwrights to demarcation issues was particularly suited to the unusual conditions obtaining within Admiralty employment. This same point of suitability to Dockyard conditions is apparent when the membership of the S.C.A. is examined. The S.C.A. consciously set out to recruit across the range of Dockyard shipwrights, to overcome all the potential splits within their trade's ranks and to ensure that the S.C.A. could effectively present itself as the voice of the entire shipwright interest. To do this the S.C.A. had to accommodate the established men, and those shipwrights holding supervisory positions. By embracing all types of shipwright the S.C.A. could expect to create the maximum impression on the higher Admiralty officials, who were always eager to dismiss the grievance of organisations as unrepresentative, and the local M.P's, who were so important to the Dockyard communications system.

The established shipwrights, in common with all the established tradesmen, were notoriously difficult to involve in combinations. The established men with their security of employment, and the investment they had made in their pensions were effectively committed

to accepting whatever conditions were established by the Admiralty, and certainly had much to lose by joining any organisation likely to incur disciplinary action from the Admiralty as a result of its activities. This was one of the major factors in inhibiting recruitment into the national shipbuilding trade unions, as the writer of the Naval Notes commented in 1886 in reply to a magazine article claiming that Dockyardmen were idle because of the influence of unions, "the writer of the article in question should also have been aware of the fact that when men are put upon the Dockyard establishment they as a rule leave their societies.<sup>18</sup> To overcome this problem the S.C.A. placed emphasis on the fact that it was not a trade union, and could not be expected to indulge in the dangerously militant action associated with the national trade unions. It concentrated upon working to the shipwrights' best advantage the existing petitioning system. This point was taken by the Portsmouth man, H.T. Earle, the S.C.A.'s, national secretary, at the time of the fourth annual conference, "He alluded to the mistaken notion as to the Association being only a trade union, remarking that if this were so many who now gave the Association valued support would have withdrawn from it. The duty of the Association was to first of all break down old prejudices which even now held with some persons outside the service; to afford mutual help; to promote professional intercourse and individual culture and to show to all men that in the varied and important works they had to perform, the shipwrights of the Royal Dockyards stood without parallel in any service."<sup>19</sup>

Such language was hardly likely to frighten the established men away. Moreover, from the outset the S.C.A. sought to involve the

Dockyard hierarchy in its activities. The inaugural meeting was chaired by a former Chief Constructor of Portsmouth, the first president of the S.C.A. Batt, was also a constructor. The S.C.A. was also supported by chargemen, inspectors and foremen. In 1886 one of the Portsmouth delegates to the S.C.A. conference, was an inspector.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it was claimed the majority of Portsmouth officers were S.C.A. men. Operating from such a basis the S.C.A. was initially successful, as can be seen from an examination of its membership figures. Treatment of S.C.A. membership figures is not entirely straightforward. Membership of the Association is easy enough to ascertain from Board of Trade returns, which can be checked against the S.C.A.'s own claimed strength in press reports with the figures invariably tallying, but it is not possible to determine the continuous percentage of shipwrights in the S.C.A. from 1883 to 1907. Admiralty records, whether at the P.R.O. or in published Parliamentary Papers do not give a continuous breakdown of Dockyard workforces by trade. There are, however, occasional returns surviving which makes a useful analysis of the strength of support for the S.C.A. possible.<sup>21</sup> At its peak membership the S.C.A. was 4,000 strong in 1886. There is no figure available for the number of shipwrights employed in this year. In 1891, however, such a return is available, there were 4,165 shipwrights (1,980 hired and 2,185 established). It seems reasonable to assume that in 1886 there were a few more shipwrights than this in the Dockyards for between 1886 and 1891, the Dockyard workforce had fallen from 24,689 to 22,985.<sup>22</sup> The 1886 membership figure, therefore, indicates virtually all shipwrights were in the S.C.A. By 1891 this membership had declined to 2,400, still over half.

From 1891 the S.C.A. went into steady decline, its place as the principal shipwrights' organisation being taken by the national shipbuilding union, the A.S.S. The decline of the S.C.A. being matched step for step by the rise of the A.S.S.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>S.C.A.</u> | <u>A.S.S.</u> (Dockyard members) <sup>23</sup> |
|-------------|---------------|--|
| 1892        | 2,400         | 917  |
| 1900        | 1,338         | 2,238  |
| 1901        | 1,518         | 2,305  |
| 1902        | 1,610         | 2,325  |
| 1903        | 1,459         | missing  |
| 1904        | 1,110         | 2,384  |
| 1906        | 724           | 2,351  |
| 1907        | 540           | 2,510  |
| 1908        | Dissolved     |  |

The major question which emerges from these figures is why, after so successful a start, with the S.C.A. seemingly so well adapted to the special requirements of the Dockyard shipwrights, did it go into decline, and why was its place taken by the A.S.S.?

The A.S.S. was founded the year before the S.C.A. and was based upon the Northern shipbuilding rivers. Its founder, Alexander Wilkie, was a Dundee man, and its early bases were the Clyde and the Tyne. It is easy enough to see why the A.S.S. should have had little scope, or inclination, to recruit in the Royal Dockyards. The discussion of the S.C.A's formation has already indicated how little the Dockyardmen ostensibly had to gain from A.S.S. membership, with their peculiar system of demarcation, the presence of the established men, varying<sup>24</sup> between 40% and 50% of the shipwright workforce from the data available, and the distinctive system of industrial relations. From the union side there was much to make the Dockyard shipwrights appear poor union material. While the Dockyard shipwrights had been successful in assimilating the new techniques of iron shipbuilding this very

success meant they inhabited a different world from the "normal" A.S.S. member, the woodworking shipwright. Coupled with this the Dockyard shipwright, successful in some respects, in others represented the 'dishonourable' element of the trade. The Dockyard, therefore, presented a picture of shipwrights engaging in a range of demarcation disputes outside the normal experience of A.S.S. officials. The A.S.S. man would be accustomed to haggling with boilermakers, sometimes, but mostly with joiners over jobs. In the Dockyard, as Richard Gould pointed out in his correspondence with the Webbs the fitters versus<sup>25</sup> shipwrights match was an unusual contest. Dockyard shipwrights were also prepared to work under the rate. Any analysis of Dockyard wages and union approved rates shows that the Dockyardmen were invariably working for at least 2/- a week under the rate on the major rivers. In 1893, for example, giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour, R. Gould quoted the following comparative pay statistics:

In June 1891 - 67 Admiralty shipwrights had earned 30/- pw,  
2,221 - 31/-, 976 - 32/-, 800 - 33/-, 300 - 34/-. Private  
yards performing work on Government contracts paid, on the Thames  
42/- pw, the Mersey 39/6d, the Tyne 36/11d, the Clyde 34/1d and<sup>26</sup>  
Barrow 34/9.5d.

Aggravating this working below the rate, was the tendency of Dockyard shipwrights to engage in labourers' work when ordered to do so by officials, and the suspicion that Dockyard shipwrights were not always properly apprenticed men. This allegation occurs with several trades in the 'Yard, the sailmakers' trade union records provide a<sup>27</sup>  
good illustration of this, and while it is impossible to prove that



the Admiralty employed unindentured men on a major scale, the suspicion was always there, particularly amongst non-Dockyardmen. The members of the S.C.A. were also aware of this problem. In 1886 the Pembroke branch reported to the S.C.A. annual conference that, "the Pembroke Association had done its utmost to prevent illegal entries into the Dockyards, and the Chief Constructor at that Yard gave them facilities to raise bona fide objections, which in a large number of cases were sustained.<sup>28</sup> The issue was still causing trouble in 1912, and it would seem from the following exchange between the Admiralty Superintendent in Portsmouth that it was the local Dockyards which took the initiative in preferring trade tests to proven indentures for entry as Dockyard tradesman, "Complaints have been made that workmen are sometimes entered in His Majesty's Dockyards as mechanics who have not served any regular apprenticeship to a trade or received any equivalent training; I am to request that you will cause the attention of responsible officers to be drawn to the terms of Article 288 of the Home Dockyard Regulations in regard to the necessity for intending entrants as mechanics to produce indentures or equivalent trade certificates."<sup>29</sup>

In such an atmosphere it might be supposed that the trade unions would write the Dockyardmen off as a bad job. This, however, was not the case, and it remains to examine how the A.S.S. came to have a foothold in the Dockyard by the end of the 1880's, why the union was keen on expanding in the Dockyards, and how this expansion was accomplished? Starting with the A.S.S. foothold in the Dockyards it would seem that the union's membership in the 'Yards derived from two sources, those hired shipwrights who had joined the A.S.S. before

entering the Dockyard and who maintained their membership, and those Dockyardmen who joined the union out of conviction, belief in the principles of trade unionism, irrespective of the peculiarities created by Admiralty employment conditions.

It would be interesting to know what proportion of A.S.S. members were hired, what proportion established, but, as with so much of the trade union history of the Dockyard, the data are not there in the available sources. The surviving A.S.S. reports do not make any distinction between Dockyard members, so in the substantiation of the preceding points there has to be a reliance upon impressionistic material. From such sources it is clear that most early A.S.S. members in the Dockyard were hired men; this is a point made by Gould to the Royal Commission on Labour, <sup>30</sup> and a rationale for hired men maintaining union membership can easily be worked out. A man who had been an A.S.S. member prior to entering the Dockyard would already have paid into

the unions' friendly society schemes, providing for tools, death, medical and pension insurance. To drop union membership upon entering the Dockyard would mean that these contributions were lost. Moreover, such insurance provision could still be useful to the hired Dockyard tradesmen. If a man were not taken on the establishment, then he would have to make his own provision for retirement, and, while Dockyard employment was relatively secure, major discharges, as the events of 1886-7 showed, were not unknown. In the case of discharge, union membership could be a considerable asset. The union provided some unemployment insurance, and, perhaps more importantly, information as to the location of other work, coupled with travel assistance for those seeking work. The annual reports of the A.S.S. show a major

proportion of the union's activity was concerned with the provision<sup>31</sup> of information about job availability. The possibility of Dockyard discharges, and the fears aroused by this, was something which the proponents of trade union membership in Portsmouth made great play on. In the 1900's the Liberal newspaper, the Portsmouth Evening News, ran a column, "Lights on Labour", which was a platform for trade union news and views. The column was part of the Liberals' attempt to stress that they were the true Labour representatives in the town, and the material contained within it provides many useful insights into the arguments used amongst the Dockyard workforce. In this column there was a reference to the need for hired men to maintain union membership. The example used was of a fitter and the A.S.E, but it seems reasonable to infer that the homily would have been intended for all tradesmen, The salutary message concerned a man, "who had been a member of the A.S.E. but in an evil moment, thinking, as many others had done, that he was employed for life, he allowed his union subscription to lapse ... Then he is discharged and finds he has been utterly wasting his time, for he is now too old to rejoin the A.S.E. and likewise considered too old to be engaged in another Government Yard if a vacancy happened to fall<sup>32</sup> his way."

The "conviction" members of the A.S.S, A.S.E, and the other national craft unions came from those Dockyard artisans who in the 1880's were responsible for the formation of the Portsmouth Trades and Labour Council and the Portsmouth Working Men's Liberal Union. While the majority of Portsmouth's tradesmen confined themselves to activities of immediate practical benefit, and which were particularly

well-suited to the conditions prevalent in the Dockyard, Co-operative Societies, Friendly Societies and leisure organisations such as the Dockyard Excursion Committee, the artisan community of Portsmouth was always likely to produce individuals who would take an interest in the wider social and political questions of the day. For such interested artisans there was a variety of means of acquiring information about such questions. For the most part, however, information for the political self-education of workers came from radical sources; in Portsmouth the local Liberal press and the lectures organised by radicals such as F.J. Proctor, a schoolmaster, and the Christian Socialists, Father Dolling (Anglican) and the Rev. C. Joseph (Baptist). Out of this political environment emerged a group of Portsmouth artisans, mainly Dockyardmen, and, reflecting the distribution of trades within the Dockyard, shipwrights, who shared the common progressive views of the 1880's, that trade unionism was the principal vehicle for the amelioration of working-class problems, and that it was the duty of working men to join their unions, coupled with a participation in politics. In Portsmouth these men were principally the shipwrights, R. Gould, S. Boss, J. McGuigan, C. Vine and R. Kersey, and the fitters, C. Gray and W.J. Willis. They were the stalwarts of the early Portsmouth Trades Council, the Dockyard Trades Council and the W.M.L.U. A similar development can be seen in Devonport. In the correspondence between the Webbs and the Devonport S.C.A. men it emerges that the A.S.S. branch in Plymouth was set up by S.C.A. men, worried that the Dockyard shipwrights might become estranged from the wider shipwrighting community, and the wider trade union movement.

The final factor in drawing Dockyardmen into the national craft

unions was a more sophisticated appraisal of the relationship between the activities of the trade unions and the interests of Dockyardmen. Men such as Gould in Portsmouth were aware that while Dockyard working conditions were distinctive, Dockyardmen did not live in a complete vacuum. On one level this led Dockyardmen into a participation in wider working-class activities, on another level, as the Evening News "Lights on Labour" correspondent pointed out, what happened in the wider world affected Dockyardmen; referring to this issue he rebuked, "the majority who say a trade union is no good to Dockyardmen except as a friendly society. Directly, that is so, but indirectly it is of tremendous advantage .... in the important matter of wages what ground would the local Dockyardmen have for agitating if it were not for the higher rates which the union men won for themselves on the Wear and  
34  
on the Clyde."

Outlining the rationale for hired men staying in, or joining, the A.S.S. in the 1880's, at a time when the S.C.A. seemed particularly well suited to meeting the collective requirements of Dockyard shipwrights, explains why there should always have been some trade union presence amongst the shipwrights. The key to the development of the A.S.S. from having more than a presence to overtaking the S.C.A. lies in the attitude of the A.S.S. leadership towards the Dockyards, and changing conditions within the Dockyards in the 1890's.

In spite of the foreign terrain created by Admiralty conditions all the major shipbuilding unions attempted to establish themselves in the Dockyards. The A.S.S. interest is the easiest to understand. Whatever the unusual circumstances of Dockyard employment the A.S.S. could not afford to write the Dockyardmen off as the "dishonourable"

element of the trade; the Dockyardmen represented far too much of an important area of recruitment for that. Woodworking shipwrights were under pressure in the private shipbuilding industry, but the overall expansion of the Admiralty workforce, in spite of "hiccups" in 1886-7 and 1904-5, meant that the numbers of Dockyard shipwrights expanded throughout the period, and came to occupy an increasing percentage of the shipwright population. By 1911, according to the census, Admiralty employees represented 13.4% of all shipbuilding workers; for the shipwrights the Admiralty workforce contained 28.2%<sup>35</sup> of the trade. The union could hardly afford to ignore over a fifth of the shipwrights in the country, and the extension of the union within the Dockyard sector would have strengthened the actuarial base of the union's insurance activities.

Coupled with this, demarcation practice within the Dockyard was also important. It would seem from Wilkie's correspondence with Admiralty authorities that the union perceived that what went on in the Dockyards, with wage rates and job allocations, was influential in the private trade. In 1895 while complaining about Dockyard wage rates, and defending the shipwrights from claims made by the Dockyard fitters, via the A.S.E, Wilkie raised this point, which was acknowledged by the Navy Minister, Lord Spencer, who in his reply stated "the Admiralty was aware that any change would affect shipwrights<sup>36</sup> in private yards as well as those in the Dockyards." It would seem that arrangements in the Dockyards were capable of being quoted as precedent in private yards and, as such, all the trades, not just the shipwrights, would be interested in what went on there. Even the laxity of Admiralty officials in admitting tradesmen without originally

checking they were time-served men was of importance, for once having worked in the Dockyard a man's claim to trade status would be strengthened. It would be helpful to have direct evidence from

contemporary union leaders to substantiate this point, but it seems reasonable to present this as an important factor in determining the trade union involvement in the Dockyards. Different as the Dockyards were from normal practice, it was in the interest of the national trade union leaders to build up memberships within the Dockyards, and intervene in Dockyard affairs with the object of making Dockyard practice conform to the conditions broadly obtaining in the rest of the shipbuilding industry.

Associated with this point is the extent to which the leaders of the major unions were interested in the Dockyards precisely because the Government was the employer there. By the end of the 1880's the leaders of the amalgamated craft unions were to a considerable extent becoming national figures, union leaders were M.P's, Ministers listened to them with respect, they gave authoritative evidence to Government inquiries and Royal Commissions, and as such it was in some respects natural that union leaders should monitor the Government's own performance as an employer. From the 1890's trade union leaders, particularly the trade unionist M.P's can be found echoing the point long made by the Conservative and Liberal M.P's of the Dockyard towns that the Government should be a "model employer," and for them the model was one which recognised the trade unions, paid trade union rates and broadly conformed to private industrial relations systems. To maintain this position the trade unions had to have substantial memberships in the Dockyards.

The enthusiasm of the A.S.S. to recruit Dockyard members can be seen in the 1880's. In 1887 Wilkie toured the Dockyards, starting from Pembroke and working eastwards to Portsmouth, to help the handful of A.S.S. men then in the Dockyards to build up branches.<sup>38</sup> In 1895 the A.S.S. annual report again saw Wilkie address himself to the problem of Dockyard recruitment, and resolutions were passed stressing the need for the union to increase its Parliamentary representation, an issue of considerable importance to Dockyardmen, and to establish committees in the Dockyard towns to oversee recruitment drives.<sup>39</sup> Throughout this period Wilkie can be seen visiting Portsmouth, and the other 'Yards, and taking up Dockyard issues with the Admiralty via the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. The leaders of the other craft unions, notably the A.S.E, can be seen taking a similar line with their trades. The A.S.E. moreover, was involved in Dockyard issues before the A.S.S. When the A.S.S. was still in the process of formation the A.S.E. was pushing the interests of the Dockyard fitters, in spite of its relatively small membership amongst them, through the activities of Henry Broadhurst in the House of Commons.<sup>40</sup>

Given the willingness of the trade unions to become involved in Dockyard issues, in the face of the difficulties for such unions inherent in Dockyard circumstances, the response of the Dockyardmen has to be examined. Briefly, the A.S.S. was able to supplant the S.C.A. in the Dockyards because of its leadership's consistent policy of undermining the exclusively Dockyard organisation, and the opportunities afforded to the union by the campaigns in the Dockyards against Admiralty pay structures, and shortcomings in the S.C.A's own set-up. By the 1900's the A.S.S. had demonstrated that it could match



the services provided by the S.C.A, and in some areas exceeded them. For Dockyardmen who wished to join a union, therefore, the A.S.S. seemed a more attractive proposition than the S.C.A. In 1907 the rump of the S.C.A. was assimilated into the A.S.S, and Wilkie's organisation now called itself the Society of Shipwrights and Ship Constructors.

Crucial to the A.S.S's progress was the dispute within the Dockyards over classification. This grievance, felt by all tradesmen but challenged principally by the shipwrights, gave the union a chance to preach the merits of combination to an audience sympathetically disposed to the message because of its sense of grievance, and to intrude into the S.C.A. presence to demonstrate that the union could help Dockyardmen as effectively as their own organisation. The background to the classification dispute was the Admiralty's attempt to solve its perennial problem of introducing a competitive edge into a Dockyard working atmosphere which was largely removed from the rigours induced by operating in the competitive shipbuilding market. If private yards could not make a profit they went out of business. This fact underpinned the disciplinary systems in private yards, ensuring that supervisors took their positions seriously and that the men, more or less responded accordingly. The Dockyards, however, could not fail. In some respects this worked to the Admiralty's advantage, as the Dockyardmen's awareness of the futility of strike action showed, but from the perspective of efficiency and discipline it could work to the Admiralty's disadvantage. While the Navy Board could devise disciplinary codes and hierarchies of supervisors, it found it very difficult to deal with the attitude with which work was conducted; supervisors and men knew that there was no

real competitive pressure on their work, and that provided the work was completed soundly the Dockyards would carry on. A good example of this approach is provided by the comments of Chatham's Sir John Gorst in the House of Commons. Gorst was speaking to the point that the Admiralty should be a model employer, but his comments were founded on this attitude of the 'Yard being free from the "normal" competitive rigours, "It did not matter how much the work done in H.M. Dockyards cost, (Cries of oh! oh!). What he meant was that the Government was not bound to keep down the cost of shipbuilding to a certain sum; they had only to see that the work was well done. Therefore, it did not become a great country like this to sweat its employees or to treat them with indifference." <sup>41</sup> The same point was made by Sir John Baker, then Alderman Baker, nearly nine years before in Portsmouth speaking to the newly formed Dock Labourers' Union, "It was the duty of every Government to see that its administration ... should humanise the men that came under its control, for they ought to set an example to the great companies and great capitalists of the Empire (Applause). Companies were bound to do their utmost to submit a successful balance sheet, but who expected a balance sheet from a Government Dockyard?" <sup>42</sup>

The Admiralty's awareness of this persistent belief amongst Dockyardmen, reflected in the speeches made by the politicians of the Dockyard towns, is best demonstrated by the Graham Committee of 1885. Admiral Graham was empowered by Parliament to investigate the management of the home Dockyards, and the burden of evidence from Dockyard officials was that Dockyard's were less efficient than they ought to be, and that the roots of this were inadequate supervision, and, compounding this, an insufficiently competitive working atmosphere. Supervisors were

criticised for being too familiar with the men, and too susceptible  
43  
to pressure by the men. Moreover, those supervisors who were  
conscientious were hampered by the paucity of rewards and sanctions  
at their disposal. Examples of the evidence presented to the Committee  
are provided by the written submission of H.D. Grant, the Admiral  
Superintendent of Devonport, "... I am not satisfied that there is a  
proper amount of work obtained from the men; this could only be  
checked by independent measurement of the work, as if they were on  
task and job, and necessitate a disciplinary treatment of the men  
44  
which does obtain in private yards..." Commodore R.O.B. Fitzroy  
stated, "My general opinion as to the supervision of labour in our  
Dockyards is that it is very indifferent, a want of trustworthy  
leading hands and a dread of making themselves unpopular with the men  
45  
on the part of many officials of the yard."

Graham's Committee accepted these criticisms and in their  
recommendations, which dealt with means of improving the quality of  
supervision in the 'Yards, they concentrated upon classification of  
the key to the problem. Within the 'Yards there should be pay scales  
for each trade, with workers having the prospect of promotion or  
demotion according to their efforts; "We are of the opinion that  
classification, carrying with it different rates of pay, could be  
carried out with considerable advantage to the service; it would,  
without doubt, create a spirit of emulation, especially if the men are  
made to distinctly understand that their retention in a higher class  
will depend upon their continued exertions and good conduct." 46  
The  
Committee's report was implemented and classification introduced into  
Dockyards for the tradesmen. The spirit of emulation was kept alive

amongst the unskilled and the skilled labourers by the retention of piecework for most tasks. Piecework for tradesmen was not unknown, but the attempt to encourage efficiency amongst tradesmen by the system of tonnage and poundage, paying men for the weight of material worked into the hull, had been the earlier generation of Naval administrators' attempt at solving the competition problem in the Dockyards. By the 1890's few jobs still worked on tonnage for the tradesmen.

The introduction of classification following the Graham Committee explains why Dockyard pay scales were so complex. When Gould gave his evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour his comparative statistics on Dockyard shipwright's pay rates gave five points on the scale, ranging from 30/- to 34/- per week.<sup>47</sup> Classification was bitterly resented by the Dockyard shipwrights, and the other trades. The objection operated on two levels, initially, the shipwrights were opposed to classification as a species of pieceworking, an attempt to induce excessive competition and "sweating" into the trade. They raised the standard trade objection that the work of apprenticed men was of a skilled nature, broadly comparable levels of ability were attained by all properly apprenticed men, and the trade, therefore, was not susceptible to such divisive practices. Secondly, the shipwrights argued, on slightly shifted ground, that if classification were imposed then in its operation it would be both unjust and ineffective through the influence of the Dockyard officers. The classification system would not be a structure for the promotion of merit but provide a framework for favouritism. These points were made by the shipwrights at every opportunity; in protest meetings, addresses to the Admiralty

via sympathetic M.P's, and in the evidence given to the Royal Commission on Labour. The best illustration of the initial grievance against classification is provided by the evidence of the Pembroke shipwright, C.S. Caird, an S.C.A. man, to the Royal Commission on Labour, "The best men are not put into the first class? The men think not. In fact, shipwrights generally recognise broadly an equality in the efficiency of workmen. One may be a little better than his fellow at one particular class of work, but the other might excel at something else, and so on, so that taken on the whole, the men are, roundly speaking equal." <sup>48</sup> The favouritism objection, which frequently occurred in the claims of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers against their piecework systems, was expressed by the Portsmouth A.S.S. man Kersey at a joint S.C.A./A.S.S. protest meeting at Portsmouth in 1893, "The officers would have their favourites and if there was any difference in the qualifications of the workmen it would ~~not be~~ <sup>49</sup> the best man who would obtain the highest figure under the pernicious system."

The arguments over classification persisted up to the outbreak of the Great War, tending by then to be submerged by rows over demarcation and the general level of Dockyard pay. The agitation over the issue peaked from 1891 until 1893, when the original Conservative-imposed scheme was substantially modified by the Liberal Government, who claimed to have abolished classification. The five point scales were replaced with a standard rate for hired and established shipwrights, a probationary rate for new entrants (to last a year) and allowances for special work, such as gummouting. The S.C.A. and A.S.S. still denounced this as classification, insisting that all shipwrights, should be paid at the maximum hired and established rates

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under the old scheme. From the perspective of ~~examining~~ the growth of the A.S.S. within the Dockyard, however, the prime importance of the classification dispute is the opportunity it provided for the union to establish itself as a potent force in Dockyard affairs. The initiative in challenging classification was taken by the S.C.A. In 1891, at the height of the campaign the S.C.A. had nearly 3,000 members of the 4,500 shipwright workforce, the A.S.S. around 640. At the start of the dispute the A.S.S. was very much the junior partner, but Wilkie lent his support to the anti-classification campaign, speaking in Portsmouth, and the major Dockyard towns. In this campaign the S.C.A. leadership, many of whom were members of, or sympathetic to, the union were prepared to accept this help. In the course of the campaign the union men were given the chance to press the case for union membership amongst the shipwrights. The benefits to the union from these circumstances can be seen in the union's recruitment figures in the Dockyards. By 1892 the union's membership was 900 plus, a nearly 50% increase in a few months.

The operation of this process can be seen in the newspaper reports of a mass S.C.A./A.S.S. meeting held in Portsmouth in 1893 to protest against the inadequacy of the Liberals' revision of the system. The platform for the meeting contained the local S.C.A. leadership, but the chair was taken by the A.S.S. man, Kersey, and the principal speaker was the A.S.S. secretary, R. Gould. Later that year the A.S.S. backed up its progress in the Dockyards with a Dockyard branches convention, held in Portsmouth, and well covered in the local Liberal press. The meeting was attended by the national secretary, Wilkie, and by George Howell, M.P. The convention provided an opportunity,

at a favourable time because of the classification issue, to push the union message. The main conference of the convention at the Fuller's Hall was chaired by the Rev. R.R. Dolling, who was able to supplement the line taken in his Sunday lectures to working men, by reminding the shipwrights of Portsmouth, "a better condition of things had been gradually brought about and he rejoiced to know that the day was coming when those who worked would be perfectly equal, at any rate, with those who employed them (Applause). This was entirely due to organisation (hear hear)." Wilkie was able to take up this theme, "He urged Dockyard shipwrights to put their shoulders to the wheel and help forward the society, pointing out that even from a Christian standpoint it was the duty of every man, whether hired or established, to do what he could towards ameliorating the conditions of his less fortunate brother."<sup>56</sup>

Such comments presented the case for union membership at its highest level, combination was something of a moral duty and must be as wide as possible. All shipwrights should combine for the mutual improvement of their working conditions, and this combination could be extended to action with other trades to elevate the conditions of the whole working class. This is the ideal which motivated the A.S.S. leaders, such as Gould and Kersey, who were union men at an early stage, and involved in radical politics. More importantly, for the purposes of wider recruitment to the union, however, events such as the Dockyard branches convention gave Wilkie the chance to show that the union could also be of practical and immediate benefit to the Dockyardman. As such the union need not be confined to a handful of idealists. Wilkie was able to show that he understood the distinctive

character of Admiralty working conditions and that the union could usefully operate in such conditions. In his speech he recognised that the Admiralty could not be coerced as a private employer might be, and that the key to success with the Admiralty was political pressure, "... if it became necessary they would strike through the ballot box."<sup>57</sup>

The presence of Howell on the platform was important in this respect. Through the Parliamentary representation being achieved by the trade union movement the Dockyardmen, and shipwrights in particular, were presented with a potentially valuable additional Parliamentary representation to supplement the activities of local M.P's. Wilkie himself did not become an M.P. until 1906, but before this the union made sure that it had special links with trade union M.P's, and these links were used to the advantage of Dockyardmen. The Stepney M.P,<sup>58</sup> Steadman, although a building worker, was the son of a shipwright,

frequently presented the shipwrights' case in Parliament, and took part in deputations to the Admiralty. In 1899, at the time of the Naval Estimates<sup>1</sup> passage through Parliament, the A.S.S. called its usual meeting in Portsmouth, addressed by Wilkie and Steadman. In the course of this meeting Steadman stressed the union's perception of the way in which Dockyard grievances were pursued. He "maintained that the workmen in the Government employ were better off than private men, for<sup>59</sup> they had a better chance of political redress."

The other area in which the union could offer practical assistance to Dockyardmen was through friendly society activities. This was stressed by Wilkie in his address to the 1893 convention. He outlined the range of insurance benefits provided by the union and emphasized the size of the union's membership, some 14,000, and the strength of



its actuarial basis with £30,000 being on deposit in the bank.

1893 was in many ways a crucial year in the history of the relationship between the S.C.A. and the A.S.S. The former organisation still had a strong presence in the Dockyards but its leaders were acutely aware, as their correspondence with the Webbs shows, that the association was contracting, becoming an exclusive organisation of established men, and that the future lay with the A.S.S. According to Alexander Anderson the S.C.A. had in 1893, 550 Portsmouth members, 61 650 Devonport, 400 Chatham and 300 Pembroke members. Anderson attributed this decline in S.C.A. membership from the days when it had 3,500+ members to the growth of the A.S.S. The reason for this development, according to Anderson and other S.C.A. leaders providing the Webbs with information, was the aggressive policy adopted by the union towards the association, coupled with the union's ability to exploit its advantage in friendly society benefits. The S.C.A. men persisted in their belief that the union and the association should peacefully co-exist. In an ideal world the Dockyard shipwrights would belong to the A.S.S. to show solidarity with fellow tradesmen, take an interest in the wider affairs of the shipbuilding world and the trade union movement, but would leave his immediate welfare in the Dockyards to the S.C.A, with its unique insight into the conditions of Dockyard employment. The willingness of S.C.A. men to keep dual membership is indicated by Anderson's comment that some men in Portsmouth kept up membership of both unions, and the presence of C.S. Caird, described as an S.C.A. official during the Royal Commission on Labour, at the Dockyard branches convention of the A.S.S. held in Portsmouth in 62 1893.

The dual membership sought by the S.C.A. leaders proved impossible, principally because of the attitude of the A.S.S. national leadership. Pursuing this issue through the correspondence of S.C.A. men is likely to present the A.S.S. in an aggressive light, unfortunately there is no correspondence on the union side to match the S.C.A. material, but it does seem that the S.C.A. picture of the relationship between themselves and the union is at least plausible. The policy differences between the S.C.A. and A.S.S., where Dockyard pay and conditions were concerned, do not seem to have been serious. With regard to classification for example the A.S.S. was insistent on a single rate for all shipwrights, the S.C.A., more familiar with Admiralty practice, was prepared to tolerate the distinction between hired and established men. The real stumbling block between the two was who would actually represent the Dockyard shipwrights. The A.S.S. insisted on involving its own national leadership, which automatically meant that non-Dockyardmen would be involved in the process, while the S.C.A. stuck to its line that only Dockyardmen could effectively represent their interests.

While the friction between the S.C.A. and A.S.S. affected all the Dockyards, the main battleground between the two would appear to have been Devonport. The Webbs' Devonport correspondent, Welsford, pointed out that it had been S.C.A. men who formed the first A.S.S. branch in Devonport in 1888-9, but by 1893 the two had come into conflict over the formulation of that year's petition. It was this dispute which triggered the A.S.S. Dockyard branches' convention in Portsmouth. The A.S.S. men in Devonport suggested that following the growth of the union in the Dockyards the union should have a greater

say in the representation of the Admiralty shipwrights. The A.S.S. men suggested a joint A.S.S./S.C.A. national conference to draw up the annual petition. The S.C.A. was initially agreeable to this but negotiations broke down when the A.S.S. insisted on sending Wilkie plus, at least, one other Executive Committee member of the union as delegates. The S.C.A. would not accept this; in Welsford's words, "such outsiders were not competent to understand and decide the grievances affecting Dockyard shipwrights."<sup>63</sup> The A.S.S. therefore, held its own conference in Portsmouth, and, for the first time since the formation of the S.C.A., two petitions claiming to represent all Admiralty shipwrights were presented. This continued to be the pattern with shipwright petitions until the remnant of the S.C.A.'s merger with the A.S.S. in 1907. There were occasional attempts at overcoming this problem of two petitions, which did little to help the shipwrights in dealing with the Admiralty, but these came to nothing. There was such an attempt in 1899, reported in the Portsmouth Times,<sup>64</sup> which foundered over the same issue of representation, and in the opinion of the Times journalist, because neither side was by this time prepared to allow the other any credit for intervention on behalf of the Dockyard shipwrights. The differences between the petitions continued to be slight, the emphasis of each reflecting the different bases of membership. Both generally asked for more pay and condemned any elements of classification. The A.S.S. petitions tended to stress the claims of the hired men, who constituted the bulk of its membership to higher bonuses on retirement, ultimately on pensions for all, while the S.C.A. petitions, more moderate in tone, concentrated on the grievances of established men, the proportion of

wages sacrificed for the pension and so on.

The significance of the 1893 dispute, which resulted in split petitions, however, extended beyond this apparent weakening of shipwrights' solidarity in the eyes of the Admiralty. The aftermath of the dispute saw that the process of drift from the S.C.A. to the A.S.S., and that of new recruitment to trade organisation, would accelerate and operate in the favour of the A.S.S. According to Welsford during the 1893 conference dispute many S.C.A. men who held A.S.S. membership resigned from the union.<sup>65</sup> At the end of 1893 the A.S.S. offered to admit the S.C.A. men en bloc, This was refused but many S.C.A. men did rejoin the A.S.S. at an entrance fee of 25/-. In 1894 the A.S.S. and S.C.A. were in conflict again, this time over an S.C.A. decision to petition the Admiralty to have the name of shipwright altered to ship constructor. The A.S.S. was not prepared to support the S.C.A. in this, the change of name re-inforcing the separate indentivity of the Admiralty men within the shipbuilding world. After this dispute, which did not see the S.C.A. succeed in getting the proposed name change, relations between the two worsened. In Devonport the A.S.S. branch passed a resolution forbidding membership of the S.C.A. As a result of this 45 established men were expelled from the A.S.S., losing their 25/- entrance payments and at least 15 months' union subscriptions. Welsford commented that, "feeling<sup>66</sup> about this affair was and still is very bitter."

Matters were not pushed so far in Portsmouth, but Anderson's correspondence with the Webbs shows he was well aware of what went on in Devonport, and such an awareness was likely to be common in the Dockyard. The Dockyard Excursion Committee organised regular trips

to Devonport, and the exchange between the two yards was sufficient to sustain a Devonian Association amongst the Portsmouth men. The incident demonstrated that with its friendly society benefits the A.S.S. had a powerful weapon with which to ensure loyalty, and this was a vital factor to its success in the Dockyards. To properly understand the factors which determined the success of the A.S.S. in Portsmouth, however, it is useful to outline the circumstances which would have confronted a Dockyard shipwright of the 1890's and 1900's.

A Dockyard shipwright, particularly a hired man, would probably look to some form of combination to protect his interests. The scale of the Dockyard made it difficult to survive as an outright individualist and while the Dockyard may not have been an environment which produced unions on the Northern model as Anderson remarked, "for the last forty years or more it is asserted that practically every section of the Dockyard employees has had some kind of combination."<sup>67</sup> These early combinations were ad hoc bodies, specifically concerned with the drawing up of petitions, mainly for trades within a shop, or whole trades in a Yard. For the shipwrights the logical progression of such combinations was the S.C.A. but by the 1890's the A.S.S. must have appeared an attractive alternative to the S.C.A. While the S.C.A. might have been particularly well attuned to the subtleties of Dockyard employment conditions, reflecting the hierarchy within the trade and appreciating the nuances of Admiralty dialogue, the A.S.S. had shown its ability to cope with the Dockyard environment. Moreover, in the basics of Dockyard industrial relations the A.S.S. enjoyed advantages over the S.C.A. The only effective weapon the 'Yard men had against the Admiralty was political, particularly Parliamentary

pressure, and the resources of the A.S.S. surpassed those of the S.C.A. The S.C.A. was effective in lobbying local M.P's, the A.S.S. could match this and call upon the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C, together with sympathetic M.P's.

Leaving the representation of grievances aside, the A.S.S. out-scored the S.C.A. in the provision of friendly society benefits. The value of collective self-help to tradesmen of this period is well demonstrated by the range of such societies formed. At its inception the S.C.A. made no real attempt to involve itself in such activities. It was to concentrate on industrial relations while its members looked to the co-operative and the other societies for their protection against the accidents of life. The Portsmouth and Chatham branches of the S.C.A. formed short-lived 1d per week sick and accident clubs, while the Devonport men had a 4d a week club of 100-150 members between 1883 and 1889. When the A.S.S. branch was established in Devonport, however, the S.C.A. club closed down, and men relied upon the A.S.S. provisions. <sup>68</sup> The A.S.S. subscription policy, and range of insurance benefits, was well suited to the requirements of Dockyardmen. This can be seen from the details in its annual reports. Dockyardmen had only to pay for the benefits they were likely to need; they could opt out of strike and unemployment benefit. Most followed this course, as is shown by an analysis of subscriptions to the union. There were six categories of subscription: (1) Full benefit 1/- p.w. (2) Trade, Low Friendly, unemployment 9d p.w. (3) Trade, High Friendly 9d p.w. (4) Trade, Low Friendly 6d p.w. (5) Trade 3d p.w. (6) Apprentice 3d p.w.

A breakdown of contributions for 1904 shows the preference for

Dockyardmen for category (3) when compared to men from branches in  
69  
private shipbuilding.

| Branch       | % of membership in | (1)  | (2) | (3)  | (4) | (5)  | (6) |
|--------------|--------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|
| Portsmouth A |                    | 19.0 | 0   | 77.0 | 1.0 | 1.0  |     |
| Devonport A  |                    | 18.0 | 0   | 70.5 | 5.6 | -    |     |
| Chatham A    |                    | 23.3 | 0   | 70.0 | 5.8 | -    |     |
| Govan        |                    | 69.5 | 2.0 | 7.5  | 5.4 | 15.0 |     |
| Barrow       |                    | 74.1 | 1.5 | 3.2  | 3.7 | 16.2 |     |

The table indicates that Dockyard shipwrights were able to use the A.S.S. as a useful friendly society, and representative body. The S.C.A. was unable to match this, and once a shipwright had joined the A.S.S. and started to pay his subscriptions he had an incentive to maintain his membership. According to the Webbs the S.C.A. leadership identified this in 1894 as a potent factor in the shift in support from their organisation, "Welsford now much regrets that no successful attempt was made to add friendly benefits to the S.C.A. early in its career. Had such been the case it would have been now a powerful and wealthy organisation. As it is, however, it has but little hold on its members and the A.S.S. with such friendly benefits attracts them away from the S.C.A."

External factors also helped the drift to the A.S.S. When the S.C.A. was formed its leaders went to great lengths to stress it was not a trade union. In doing this they were reflecting the suspicion that Admiralty officials discriminated against trade unionists, and showing an awareness that trade unions were not respectable. By the 1890's this position was changing. On a national level trade union leaders had achieved something of a respectable position. Whatever the private feelings of members of the middle and upper classes trade union leaders were now treated as responsible figures, several were

in Parliament and in 1886 Broadhurst had achieved ministerial rank. In Portsmouth this progress was reflected at a local level. Under the auspices of the local Liberal Association trade union activists had been elected to the Board of Guardians and the School Board. The Dockyard shipwrights, and A.S.S. officials, Richard Gould and Stephen Boss, were members of the Board of Guardians in 1898. On the School Board were the Dockyard shipwright, Vine, and the fitter,<sup>70</sup> Willis, both of whom were prominent in their trade unions. The dismissal of Gould and the leaders of the labourers' unions in 1898 for organising a protest meeting against the low level of labourers' wages, and breaching the Admiralty rules concerning direct representations by 'Yardmen to Parliament, showed that the Admiralty<sup>71</sup> was still capable of acting against high-profile trade unionists. However, the 1898 incident does seem to be something of a last throw for the Admiralty's traditional attitude. Thereafter, Dockyard unionists continued to take a prominent part in Trade Council affairs, and local politics, without suffering from an Admiralty backlash. By the 1900's Dockyard unionists, and prominent labour figures, such as Willis and Naysmith of the A.S.E. were holding positions as chargemen<sup>72</sup> in the Dockyard. Given this, it does seem fair to surmise that a Dockyard shipwright of the late 1890's and early 1900's, if wishing to join a trade organisation, would regard the A.S.S, with its record of involvement in Dockyard issues and the public attention concentrated on trade unions, as the more effective choice. By 1900, one of the few years when a breakdown of the Portsmouth Dockyard workforce by trade is available, it appears that some 68% of Dockyard shipwrights were members of the A.S.S. This can be seen from the following table:



Portsmouth Shipwrights and A.S.S. Membership 1900

|  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| (1) <u>Total of Shipwrights in</u><br><u>Chief Constructor's Dept.</u> | 1637                           |
|  | (Established 750<br>Hired 887) |
| (2) <u>A.S.S. Membership.</u>  | 1126<br>(5 branches)           |

$$\% \text{ A.S.S. Membership} = 68.7$$

sources (1) Shipwright numbers - ADM 116 900A

(2) A.S.S. Membership - A.S.S. 19th Annual Report 1900.

The final factor in this picture is Dockyard policy. From the start the S.C.A. had prided itself on being an organisation which established men could join, and the A.S.S. had looked for its members amongst the hired men. When the transition from S.C.A. to A.S.S. started to take place it was the established men who stayed with the S.C.A. In the 1900's the increase in the Dockyard workforce was<sup>73</sup> essentially made up of hired men. In this way, therefore, the Admiralty was moving closer to the circumstances of private yards, and increasing the scope for A.S.S. growth in the Dockyards. In this context it is interesting to examine the comments of the S.C.A. men who in 1894 could see the way things were going in the Dockyards. In his letter to the Webbs, Anderson, an established man, asserted, "that by its interference the trade union had made conditions in the Dockyard very much worse in many respects ..... all the concessions made to the trade union have been accompanied by a steady tightening of the conditions of work. Formerly the Government was the most lenient of employers. The men were allowed all sorts of little privileges, as, for instance, three minutes after bell-ringing at morning and at

meal times and if on dirty work to leave off ten minutes earlier to get washed up etc." These practices were now stopped, and, "the conditions come every day more to resemble those prevailing in the commercial yards."<sup>74</sup>

Anderson, and Welsford, felt such a development was detrimental to the Admiralty shipwrights' interest. Two examples were cited to support the changes already outlined by Anderson. Firstly, in demarcation disputes there was some danger. If demarcation disputes were confined to the Dockyards than the shipwrights stood to do well; cases settled on Dockyard custom and precedent would invariably go in the shipwrights' favour. Once the major unions were brought in, and disputes were influenced by A.S.S. and A.S.E. officials, then appeals might be based on commercial precedent where the shipwrights did not enjoy such a strong position. Secondly, relations between shipwrights "on their tools" and supervisors were impaired by the presence of the A.S.S. The S.C.A. embraced all shipwrights, the supervisors were involved in it, and Anderson felt that problems were approached from a common perspective. The Dockyard officials, however, were suspicious of the A.S.S, and were automatically wary of any issues raised by it. When Welsford resigned from the A.S.S. during the 1893 arguments one of the factors influencing his decision was that Dockyard officials had been less open with him since he had combined S.C.A. with A.S.S.<sup>75</sup> membership.

In spite of these criticisms by the S.C.A. men it was the A.S.S. which became the major representative organisation of the Admiralty shipwrights. That the trade union was able to achieve this position is indicative that while men such as Anderson may have regretted it

the gap between the Dockyard and the private yards was narrowing.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

1. Hampshire Telegraph July 28th 1883.
2. Parliamentary Papers 1893-4 vol. XXXII 24,235
3. See also - N. MacCleod "The Shipwrights of the Royal Dockyards"  
Mariners Mirror vol. XI No3 July 1925.
4. H.T. April 7th 1894.
5. Portsmouth Times July 15th 1899.
6. Sailmakers' Records Warwick collection MSS 87/3/5/16.  
letter March 27th 1908. Hawkins to Hicks.
7. Webb Collection B. LXXXIV letter 4.
8. P.T. May 4th 1895.
9. Webb Collection A. XXXII.
10. Hansard July 16 1883 1528-1651.
11. H.T. July 28th 1883.
12. H.T. September 9th 1893.
13. H.T. August 21st 1886.
14. See chapters on the Dockyardmen and Portsmouth politics.
15. H.T. July 28th 1883.
16. H.T. January 30th 1886.
17. P.T. July 15th 1899.
18. H.T. February 6th 1886.
19. H.T. September 17th 1887.
20. H.T. August 21st 1886.
21. H.T. August 21st 1886.
22. P.P. 1891 LII.
23. Compiled from A.S.S. Annual Reports and Board of Trade Returns  
(for the S.C.A).
24. P.P. 1891 LII.  
P.R.O. ADM 116 900A Case 3002.  
Return from Chief Constructor and Chief Engineer.

25. Webb Collection A. vol. XXXII  
Correspondence with R. Gould.
26. P.P. 1893-4 vol. XXXII. Royal Commission on Labour  
Minutes of Evidence Q. 21,690. Evidence of R. Gould
27. See chapter on the Sailmakers. (Note 12)  
Warwick 87/3/2/30.
28. H.T. January 30th 1886.
29. P.R.O. ADM 179 66 vol. 2  
letter dated 9th Oct 1912 - Admiralty to Admiral Superintendent,  
Portsmouth.
30. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Royal Commission on Labour  
Minutes of Evidence Q. 21,690-967. Evidence of R. Gould.
31. A.S.S. Annual Reports 1891-1907.
32. E.N. May 3rd 1905.
33. Webb. A. vol. Correspondence with T. Welsford.
34. E.N. May 3rd 1905.
35. 1911 Census Table 20.
36. Cited in - D. Dougan The Shipwrights p.88.
37. See, for an example, J. Baker reported in P.T. Feb 1st 1890.
38. Dougan op.cit., p.43.
39. A.S.S. Annual Report 1895 p.5.
40. For an example see Hansard July 16th 1883, 1528-1651.
41. H.T. March 11th 1899.
42. P.T. February 1st 1890.
43. P.P. 1886 XIII 139. COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON DOCKYARD MANAGEMENT  
REPORT
44. P.P. 1886 XIII 139 p.19. "
45. P.P. 1886 XIII 139 p.20. "
46. P.P. 1886 XIII 139 p.18. "
47. P.P. 1893-4 vol. XXXII Evidence of R. Gould ROYAL COMMISSION ON  
Q. 21,690. LABOUR
48. P.P. 1893-4 vol. XXXII Evidence of C.S. Caird. MINUTES OF  
Q. 24,402 EVIDENCE.

49. H.T. September 9th 1893.
50. H.T. October 14th 1893.
51. A.S.S. Annual Reports 1891-2 for A.S.S. Membership.  
P.P. 1900 LXXXIII col.422 p.124. Board of Trade Returns  
for S.C.A. Membership 1891-2.  
1891 Census - for Shipwright members in the Dockyards.
52. H.T. September 9th 1893.
53. Webb. A. XXXII letters of Anderson and Welsford.
54. A.S.S. Annual Report 1892.
55. H.T. September 9th 1893.
56. H.T. October 14th 1893.
57. H.T. October 14th 1893.
58. P.T. March 11th 1899.
59. P.T. March 11th 1899.
60. H.T. October 14th 1893.
61. Webb. A. XXXII Anderson Correspondence.
62. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Caird evidence.
63. Webb. A. XXXII Welsford Correspondence.
64. P.T. September 2nd 1899.
65. Webb. A. XXXII Welsford Correspondence.
66. Webb. A. XXXII Welsford Correspondence.
67. Webb. A. XXXII Anderson Correspondence.
68. Webb. A. XXXII Welsford Correspondence.
69. A.S.S. Annual Report 1904.
70. P.T. January 1st 1898 - List of Board of Guardians  
and School Board.  
Boss, Vine and Gould appear in the A.S.S. Reports of 1891-1907.
71. See chapters on Unskilled trade unionism and Portsmouth Liberalism.
72. E.N. May 14th 1908.
73. See chapter on the A.S.E. and the 1913 overtime ban.

- 74. Webb. A X X X 11 Anderson Correspondence.
- 75. Webb. A X X X 11 Welsford Correspondence.





### Chapter III

#### The Petitions of 1911

Not all of the petitions submitted by Dockyardmen to the Admiralty between 1880 and 1914 are available. The content of the major petitions, those submitted by the major trades and the skilled and unskilled labourers, can, however, usually be found from local press reports, and for some years Admiralty records do contain the men's petitions. The absence of a continuous run of petitions, however, is not overwhelmingly damaging to a study of Dockyard grievances, and attitudes towards management, for one of the keynotes of Dockyard history is continuity. The hold which the Admiralty exerted over the men through the security of Dockyard employment made for a very slow pace of change in the Dockyard, and the normal pattern of events, as revealed in contemporary comment and in the surviving petitions, was for the same complaints to be raised each year, by the same categories of workmen, and the Admiralty to respond with the traditional "not acceded to," or to make some small concession. The attitude of the Portsmouth press towards the petitioning process indicates the regularity with which complaints were made and rejected. In 1893, the Hampshire Telegraph report on that year's presentation of petitions was that, "Many of the grievances brought under the notice of Sir Ughtred (Kay - Shuttleworth) are of very old standing, some<sup>1</sup> have existed for the past half century or even longer." Similarly, the Evening News "Lights on Labour" correspondent commented that the petitions of 1907 were made up, for the most part, of "old stagers"<sup>2</sup> that have been submitted over and over again."

The "old stagers" were the principal grievances of the major

categories of Dockyard workmen. The established men continually complained that more of their hired time should count for pensions, and that widows should receive pensions. The hired craftsmen in general complained of the disparity between Dockyard pay rates and those available on the principal shipbuilding rivers for comparable work, and complained against Admiralty attempts to introduce a competitive atmosphere into the Dockyard through classification, piecework, or similar incentive schemes. Particular crafts were concerned with demarcation issues; fitters, boilermakers, and joiners invariably having some grievance relating to jobs allocated to shipwrights. Amongst the skilled and ordinary labourers complaints were confined to pay, status and the operation of piecework, while completing the range of perennial Dockyard petitions were those grievances held by groups concerned with privileges accorded to them within the Dockyard scheme of things, notably the supervisors and the ex-apprentices.

The best illustration of this range of issues raised in the annual petitions is provided by a detailed consideration of the 1911<sup>3</sup> petitions. The initial advantage in concentrating on the petitions of this year is that these petitions survive in the Admiralty records, are given the usual coverage by the Portsmouth newspapers, and, in the P.R.O, are accompanied by the Admiralty's draft replies. Moreover, 1911 is a particularly interesting year in Dockyard history. Superficially, it is a typical petitioning year, with, from all Dockyards, 121 petitions being submitted from 77 individuals and classes of workmen. Most of these petitions were rejected, the replies issued in July, 1912, giving pay increases to shipwrights and painters

(in both cases less than was asked for) and a promise to leather hose makers that, while pay rates would not be generally increased, local officers could propose men for payment at special rates. <sup>4</sup> Beneath the surface, however, the petitions reveal important developments within the Dockyard, notably the growing influence of the T.U.C.-affiliated craft unions within the Dockyards since the 1890's, and the grievances raised in the 1911 petitions, which were largely ignored in 1912, provide "straws in the wind", for the major upheavals, at least in Dockyard terms, of 1913, with the overtime ban, and threatened strike by the engineering trades and the shipwrights.

The 1911 petitions can be broken down under the following headings:

|   | Categories of Petitioners | Number          |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Individual Petitions  | 17                        | 17              |
| Collective Petitions  |                           |                 |
| (a) Craftsmen<br>(Shipwrights, Fitters,<br>Boilermakers etc.)   | 12                        | 27              |
| (b) Labourers<br>(Skilled and Ordinary,<br>+ Yard Craftsmen and other<br>Unskilled Admiralty employees) | 45                        | 71              |
| (c) Other<br>(Ex-Apprentices-<br>Supervisory Grades)  | 3                         | 6               |
|   | <hr/> 77 <hr/>            | <hr/> 121 <hr/> |

The petitions of 1911 are typical in the quality of petitions received, from individuals and the various trade groupings within the Dockyards, but by this time the number of petitions received had fallen. In the 1890's all the Dockyards sent in around 200 petitions,

with the major yards, mostly duplicating each other with the principal trade petitions, sending in around 60 each. The Hampshire Telegraph<sup>6</sup> of 1893,<sup>7</sup> and the Portsmouth Times of 1897, reported 200 petitions being received by the Admiralty in these years. The lower figure of 1911 appears to have persisted in the immediate pre-war years; in 1914 120 petitions were submitted to the then Navy Minister,<sup>8</sup> MacNamara. The decline in the number of petitions was occasioned by the trade unions organising single petitions from all Dockyards. The S.C.A. had initiated this development in 1883 and by 1912 the Government Labourers' Union was sending in a single set of petitions<sup>9</sup> for labourers in all Dockyards.

The individual petitions which were submitted in 1911 provide a nice illustration of the tenacity with which tradition survived in the Dockyard world. The complaints raised by individuals in the first part of the present century bear a close similarity to the type of complaint around which the system originated in the seventeenth century, with individuals complaining of unjust treatment by local officials. For example, H. Welch, a Portsmouth joiner, petitioned that he should be allowed extra pay for the cutting out of carpets, (he was refused on the grounds that the carpet cutting allowance was available only to sailmakers). Also in these petitions, C.S. Caird, a chargeman of shipwrights at Pembroke, an erstwhile leading light in the S.C.A. and who had appeared before the Royal Commission on Labour, requested he be allowed to voluntarily discharge himself, and retain his pension.

Notwithstanding the survival of the individual petition, the real interest is in the collective petitions of the principal trades and

grades of the Dockyard workforce. These petitions show the methods used by Dockyardmen to raise grievances, the nature of these, and give insight into wider attitudes. Perhaps the best way of approaching these petitions is to outline the requests made by the principal trades and grades, the shipwrights, engineering trades, boilermakers, and labourers, concentrating initially on the issues of specific interest to these groupings, and then to consider the general themes detectable in the petitions.

The petitions from the shipwrights were drafted by the A.S.S. (there were no other shipwright petitions in 1911) and stood in the name of shipwrights at all home Dockyards. There were three principal requests; a general pay increase, an increase in allowance for foreign service, and an alteration in the calculation of pensions. This last point was of direct interest only to the established men and indicates that shipwright petitions by 1911 made no differentiation between established and hired men, the interests of both being looked after by the A.S.S. The second and third requests were that the established men wanted all leave time to be counted in the calculation of pensions (at the time the Admiralty ignored two days a year), while the second petition requested that the foreign service allowance be increased to 22/- per week. The major request, however, was that shipwrights should be paid a uniform rate, and one comparable to that on offer in the Northern Yards; this would mean a basic rate of 38/- per week instead of the existing levels of 35/6d for the majority of hired men, 34/- for the established. To support their case the shipwrights included in their petition a list of wage rates for new and repair work in comparable ports (Thames, Mersey, Tyne, Clyde, Barrow, Hartlepool,



Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Belfast and the two local ports of Southampton and Cowes).

This wages request appears in virtually all shipwrights' petitions, whether A.S.S. or S.C.A. in origin, and in the 1890's had invariably appeared in tandem with a fulmination against the iniquities of the classification system whereby shipwrights were paid on a five point scale as part of an incentive scheme. This latter issue had effectively been conceded by the Admiralty by 1900, but the persistence of the dispute over pay rates provides insight to Admiralty and Dockyard attitudes. The Admiralty case, throughout the 1880-1914 period, was that shipwright wages were comparable to prevailing local rates, and given the greater security of Dockyard employment were effectively superior. The craftsmen's case was that local rates did not matter (the Admiralty had a point in this respect, for on the A.S.S.'s own admission the rates in Cowes were 35/- p.w, in Southampton 37/6d) for the Admiralty distorted local wage rates through denying access to rival shipbuilding and repairing concerns, and that the scales and quality of Dockyard work could not be compared with local boat building but only with the work of the warship yards in the North (in Barrow the rate was 39/6d, on the Tyne, 40/6d). It seems likely that the Admiralty appraisal of the relative value of wage rates was closer to the mark for the Dockyard was seldom reported as being short of recruits amongst the trades, and, for the most part, the annual pay comparability request was made more in hope than expectation. However, this point clearly rankled with the shipwrights, and other craftsmen, and does indicate the self-evaluation of the Dockyardmen, regarding themselves and their work more highly than the

small craft work undertaken in neighbouring boatyards such as Camper and Nicholson's at Gosport.

The petitions submitted by the engineering trades are more varied, and complex, than those of the shipwrights. The engineering trades were covered by two nationally organised craft unions, the A.S.E., and the S.E.M.S. The A.S.E. was the principal union of the ship and engine fitters, with the S.E.M.S. taking some of those concerned more exclusively with engine work. The petitions presented on behalf of the engineering trades, however, were organised by the A.S.E. These differ from the shipwrights in that a distinction was made between the requests of the established and hired men, and, while major points stood in the name of all the 'Yards, others were attributed to the 'Yard of origin. The principal request of the established men was that all hired time served before establishment should be counted for pension calculation (in 1911 only one half of hired time was counted). Thereafter, the established men wanted the disparity between hired and established rates refunded to established men kept on after the retirement age of sixty (these men were paid at their old established rate but any time served after 60 did not improve their pensions).

The hired men wanted an end to classification, preferably by its replacement with a single rate, or by a guarantee that progress from minimum to maximum rates would be by annual increments, and an increase in the maximum starting rate for fitters to 38/- p.w. Subsidiary to this were requests that special payments be made for working in oil tanks, that overtime rates be improved, that special rates for steam and gun trials be improved, that "dirty money" of 6d p.w. be provided instead of overalls, and that disabled men,

injured in Admiralty service, capable of being taken back into the Dockyard, should be established. These submissions made by the engineering trades are in several respects similar to those of the shipwrights, for the most part fitting into the "old stager" category. The S.C.A, and latterly the A.S.S, had raised the "all hired time to count for pensions" claim, and the request for an increase in basic rates was standard practice in craftsmen's and labourers' petitions. Unlike the shipwrights, however, the engineers were still subject to, and resentful of, classification-based incentive schemes. The remainder of the complaints raised by the engineers are fairly common Dockyard issues, relating to special payments for difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs. Of these the points relating to overalls and "dirty money" provide the most interesting sidelights into Dockyard attitudes, with the men clearly preferring cash to comfort. By 1911 the Admiralty provided overalls yet the men preferred a money payment instead; moreover, the Admiralty was unwilling to allow the claim for dirty money to be paid to those working in oil tanks precisely because overalls were provided.

Closely related to the engineering tradesmen were the boiler-makers. The boilermakers, like the shipwrights and fitters, submitted a union-organised all 'Yards petition. Following the other trades the boilermakers requested higher basic rates, and extra pay for dirty work (they were refused on the same grounds as the fitters, overalls were provided). The special interest of the boilermakers was in demarcation; in the Dockyards they were used for specialised metal work whereas outside they had become the staple tradesmen of iron shipbuilding, and there was an unsuccessful request for the



establishment of a permanent demarcation committee.

The petitions submitted by the unskilled Dockyard workers are in several respects more complicated than those coming from the craftsmen. The majority of petitions were received from unskilled workers, reflecting to a considerable extent the backwardness of organisation amongst such workers. Unskilled workers' petitions still came in significant numbers from individual gangs and shops. For example, the crews of several tugs submitted petitions, as did the Haslar Hospital attendants and the Portsmouth Hammermen. There was, however, a set of petitions of behalf of all labourers, skilled and ordinary, emanating from the G.L.U, and these show some of the concerns of at least the unionised men in these categories. The labourers submitted an eighteen-point petition which can broadly be broken down under five headings: Pay, Status, piecework regulations, Special Payments and Job protection. The pay and special payments sections provide a clear overlap, in type if not detail, with the requests of the craftsmen, the pay claims (24/- p.w. minimum for ordinary labourers, 26/- for skilled), the extension of allowances for "dangerous and disagreeable work", payments for crane drivers maintaining their machines out of hours, and the extension of allowances to all machine operators assisting men on piecework (in 1911 only drivers enjoyed this benefit).

The other categories, however, were more specific to the labourers, particularly status. Status was clearly of importance within the Dockyard, the skilled labourers taking the higher rates of pay, and the 1911 petitions include a request for the re-grading of crane drivers' attendants as skilled labourers. The status accorded to labourers, however, also affected the prospects of work inside the

Dockyard. Several of the tasks performed by skilled labourers in the Dockyards, such as plating and rivetting, had claims to trade status outside the 'Yard. Moreover, many of the skilled labourers, such as shipwrights' drillers worked closely with the skilled men and could effectively perform their colleagues' roles. In the 1911 petitions this resulted in a request being made that certificates of service, when issued on discharge, "should state the class of work on which employed, and omit the term skilled labourer."

Piecework was of particular importance to the ordinary and skilled labourers. It was not exclusively so, for earlier in the century attempts had been made to inculcate a competitive spirit amongst craftsmen through the "tonnage and poundage" systems, but by the 1900's while some specialised jobs, particularly in the engineering shops, were on piecework, it was usual for craftsmen to be paid on day rates. For skilled labourers particularly drillers, riveters, platers and machinists where work was fairly easily recorded, piecework was the norm. The requests made with regard to piecework in 1911 were essentially concerned with limiting the discretion of local Dockyard management over the fixing of rates and operation of piecework schemes. It was asked that boards, comprising officials and men, should be established to regulate piecework rates, and that local discretion in the determination of piecework scales be ended.

Neither of these requests was successful, but the background to the appearance of these points in the 1911 petitions does indicate that, notwithstanding the tenuous hold of the G.L.U. and G.W.F. in the Dockyards, piecework regulation, along these lines, was a generally approved view. In the 1890's it was frequently alleged that piecework

schemes were inequitable and incomprehensible. The mystery which shrouded the operation of the scales allowed favouritism and victimisation by chargemen and foremen, while pieceworkers were frequently compelled to enter false claims if they were to make the system work "fairly", in their terms. A good example of the response provoked by the piecework systems in the Dockyard is provided by a letter from an ex-Dockyard skilled labourer, Thomas Saunders, at the time of the D.L.U. branch's formation in 1890. Saunders recounted that in his six and a half years in No.3 ship shop he had fallen foul of the system, "My fault while I was there was speaking up for my rights and wishing to be paid for the work I was employed on, and, in consequence I, in common with others who were of the same mind as myself, had to suffer for it, as any man in the Yard who appeals to an authority higher than the leading man under whom he is employed is a marked man; he had just as well put his head in the fire. I have been working a machine, with two mates with me, myself being in charge, yet we have all been charged to entirely different jobs." <sup>10</sup> There was a major crisis over piecework in 1898 when an unprecedented mass meeting of skilled and ordinary labourers was called outside the Unicorn Gate on a Saturday afternoon, and this resulted in the dismissal of the trade unionists, the shipwrights' President of the Trades Council included, responsible for its organisation. Interestingly, in this context, the four dismissed men were not dismissed for union activities, but for disciplinary breaches which included improper approaches to M.P's, and in the case of skilled labourers the incorrect submission of piecework, further indicating the extent to which, at local level, piecework had ceased to be

operated by the book, by supervisors or men.

The last category of the labourers' petitions, "job protection", was essentially concerned with inroads into labourers' jobs being made by the Navy. There was always a temptation for the fetching and carrying jobs to be given to sailors and it was frequently complained by the Dockyard ordinary labourers. In 1911, the request was that Naval ratings would not undertake jobs formerly performed by civilians. Outside of these categories, the labourers also requested the replacement of gratuities for hired men with a pension scheme and the stopping of the regular searching of men entering the Naval Ordnance Department.

The most obvious common point to emerge from this outline of major collective petitions submitted in 1911 is the dissatisfaction with basic pay rates. Alongside this, however, there is also a persistent agitation against the elements of insecurity and competition injected into Dockyard life by the Admiralty in an attempt to emulate the working atmosphere of the commercial yards. The points raised in the petitions, and the comments made by the Admiralty officials drafting the replies, make an interesting dialogue on this question of the security and predictability of Dockyard working life. With regard to the establishment, the institution which provided ultimate job security, the boilermakers requested that a "more equitable method of selecting men for establishment be adopted." Establishment was not automatic but dependent on vacancies in the established list, and the recommendation of the local Dockyard authorities. The boilermakers wanted an automatic, and predictable, process of establishment, but the official comment was that no system could be "based on seniority

without regard to relative work", and that establishment was to remain a prize for the efficient worker. Similarly, with the engineering trades' protests against classification schemes and the request for pay increases by seniority, the Admiralty response was, "regular periodical increments are not allowed for workmen whose pay is assessed within the scales according to ability and worth."

Clearly, within the Dockyard the men operated within the Admiralty framework, competing for the higher grades if tradesmen, working, given the vagaries of the system, according to the piecework books. The annual petitions, however, gave the men the opportunity to state their ideal case and as such the resentment of Admiralty practice in its incentive schemes, and in the range of areas discussed above is clear. The next stage of the question is to examine the reasons for the willingness of the Dockyardmen to confine opposition to Dockyard working conditions to this level of resentment, and to put in the annual petitions with little hope of favourable response. One part of the answer is that supplied by the Dockyardmen themselves, that the Admiralty was so powerful an employer that it could only be complained against. Against this, however, must be set the Admiralty's own case, that its conditions of work were, for the most part, superior to those offered in the private trade.

The most succinct summary of the Admiralty's perception of employment conditions in the Dockyards, and the potential responses of the men, is provided by the "General Remarks" of the Dockyard Branch officials responsible for briefing the Lords of the Admiralty on the 1911 petitions. In this preface it was stated that, "The conditions of employment (in the Dockyards) are undoubtedly superior

to those prevalent in the outside commercial world. That this is the case is testified by the persistent and urgent desire of large numbers of workmen to obtain employment in a Dockyard in preference to other employment." The factors which made Dockyard employment preferable were then listed:

- 1) "The relative sense of security and settlement which is conferred by all regular employment 'under Government'."
- 2) The comparative constancy of employment.
- 3) The prospect of establishment with permanency of employment and ultimate pension.
- 4) A gratuity on discharge if not established.
- 5) Security against vindictive or capricious dismissal or punishment.
- 6) Immunity from distress through strikes and lock-outs.
- 7) The absence of incentives to the straining of workmen for profit.
- 8) Holidays without loss of pay.
- 9) A working week of forty-eight hours.

Finally, wages were discussed and the argument here was, "Unlike wages in the great shipbuilding centres, wages in the Dockyard progress only in one direction, viz, upwards; consequently comparison with 'outside' rates are well established."

The conclusion drawn from these considerations was that, "Notwithstanding the petitions which are regularly presented on behalf of practically all classes of employees, it is believed that the Dockyard workmen generally do not labour under any special sense of grievance, and so long as the conditions and rates of pay are maintained on a general level of superiority, it would appear that all reasonable claims as to wages can be met by a continuation of the process of gradual adjustments of rates between the several

classes of employees." However, within two years events in the Dockyard were to show that the Admiralty was coming very close to misjudging the mood of its workers, certainly those in its engineering trades.

Footnotes to Chapter III

1. H.T. January 14th 1893.
2. E.N. January 11th 1907.
3. P.R.O. ADM 116 1136 vol. 1.
4. H.T. July 26th 1912.
5. P.R.O. ADM 116 1136 vol. 1.
6. H.T. January 14th 1893.
7. P.T. October 30th 1897.
8. H.T. July 3rd 1914.
9. H.T. August 2nd 1912.
10. P.T. February 1st 1890.



Chapter IV

The Engineers and the Dockyard Unrest of 1913

The initial growth of the A.S.S. amongst the Dockyard shipwrights shows an outside union adapting to the peculiar characteristics of Admiralty employment. By the 1900's, however, the prospects for nationally organised trade unions gaining membership in the Dockyards, and promoting attitudes derived from the commercial shipbuilding world, were enhanced by Admiralty policy. In this period the Admiralty itself diminished the influence of the establishment system.

The Admiralty did not go to the extreme of ending the establishment system, but by the twentieth century, the Admiralty was content with, in all yards, a core of around 6,000 established craftsmen. The subsequent development of the Dockyards was largely based around hired men. This can best be seen in a simple consideration of the employment figures. Individual Dockyard workforce breakdowns, giving the numbers employed in each trade and whether as hired or established men are not available in continuous series for the 1880 to 1914 period, but the annual Naval Estimates give the overall totals of hired and established men budgeted for, and these can be used to indicate the broad development of Admiralty policy.

3

Percentage of Established Men in Admiralty Employment.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>% Established</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>% Established</u> |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1881-2      | 43.0                 | 1901        | 22.7                 |
| 3           | 40.7                 | 2           | 21.3                 |
| 4           | 37.5                 | 3           | 21.3                 |
| 5           | 36.9                 | 4           | 19.3                 |
| 6           | 36.0                 | 5           | 21.7                 |
| 7           | 33.8                 | 6           | 23.8                 |
| 8           | 34.4                 | 7           | 28.6                 |
| 9           | 33.25                | 8           | 27.9                 |
| 90          | 30.8                 | 9           | 23.15                |
| 1           | 28.1                 | 1910        | 20.9                 |
| 2           | 30.0                 | 11          | 18.25                |
| 3           | 29.4                 | 12          | 19.0                 |
| 4           | 29.1                 | 13          | 20.78                |
| 5           | 31.5                 | 14          | 29.7                 |
| 6           | 31.1                 |             |                      |
| 7           | 29.8                 |             |                      |
| 8           | 27.7                 |             |                      |
| 9           | 25.3                 |             |                      |
| 1900        | 22.8                 |             |                      |

The Admiralty can be seen expanding the Dockyards through the taking on of more hired men, the percentage of established men

reviving during the years of reduction, 1905-8. The establishment list itself was closed by the Admiralty from 1906 until 1910.

In this rundown of the establishment ratios from the virtually 50:50 position of the mid-nineteenth century, the Admiralty's response to the establishment can be seen as a mirror image of the men's. For the men establishment meant security; on the debit side, however, were the Admiralty's relatively low wages and peculiar demarcation practices. Before considering the Admiralty's rationale for the rundown of established ratios it is useful to further examine the men's response. In this attitudes were complex. The most straightforward were those of the established men themselves, who were removed from the vicissitudes of shipyard employment by the system, and whose acceptance of Admiralty procedures was re-inforced by the investment they had made, in effect, by accepting a lower pay rate in return for a retirement pension. Equally, the leaders of the hired men, those who emerged as trade union leaders, were fairly clear-cut in their approach to the establishment and its corollary of pensions, bonuses and gratuities. Their preference was for the system outlined in Baker's and the "Lights on Labour" correspondent's comments, a system of pay and work practice established on the same basis as in the private trade. This can be clearly seen in the Portsmouth A.S.S. leader, Richard Gould's, comments to the Royal Commission on Labour. Replying to questioning by the Duke of Devonshire, Gould argued, "We believe<sup>4</sup> establishment has a tendency to keep us down to low wages." Earlier Gould had conducted the following exchange with the economist, Marshall, "Is not the advantage of having a fixed certain work day by day, provided you do not misconduct yourself, very great?"

Yes, it is to a certain extent , but the average rate of wages that is paid in private firms would almost allow a man to have twelve months holiday in every five years, and then be equal, which is a consideration.<sup>5</sup>"

Alongside, and to some extent, against the views of a committed trade unionist like Gould, however, the views of the more commonplace hired men have also to be considered. To elicit such views is difficult for the "ordinary" hired craftsmen does not appear before Royal Commissions, and seldom even in the local paper. The indications are, however, that the hired craftsmen of the 1890's at least, were broadly prepared to back the status quo in the Dockyard, wanting the establishment to be retained and to keep the gratuities and bonuses for hired men. Gould had to admit to Devonshire that while he was not in favour of the establishment, his A.S.S. branch, when a vote had been taken on the issue, had supported the system.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in 1899, the Royal Dockyard Ship Joiners' at their Portsmouth conference, called to prepare petitions to be presented at the Dockyards' annual visitation by the Lords of the Admiralty, had called for an increase in the establishment, and that all hired time, after fifteen years,<sup>7</sup> should count for pension purposes. The signs are, therefore, that hired men, including those in trade unions, while they resented the pay rates enforced by the Admiralty on the back of the establishment system, were prepared to see the security afforded by the system as being an over-riding attraction. Ideally, the men wanted the accustomed security of Dockyard employment with the wage rates of the Northern shipbuilding firms.

Conversely, the Admiralty wanted the lever which the establishment

gave them over its workforce in matters of pay, and organisation, combined with the efficiency induced by the insecurity generated by competition in the commercial yards.

The cost of maintaining established workers, however, was that the Admiralty was committed to the expense of providing employment for thousands of men and that these men could become complacent given their protected position within the labour market. The extent to which this was a real fear for the ministers and officials of the late-Victorian Admiralty can be seen in the Graham Committee of 1886, and the ensuing wrangles between Admiralty and craftsmen, largely focused on the shipwrights, over classification-based incentive schemes. For the Admiralty the establishment was something of a necessary evil, and a major policy aim was to pare the establishment down to the minimum consonant with maintaining the traditional amenable response of the Dockyard workforce to pay and conditions. This underlay the Admiralty practice of maintaining different ratios of established to hired men in various trades. There were more established shipwrights than established engine fitters. This can be seen from a comparison of men employed in Portsmouth in 1891 and 1900.<sup>9</sup>

As a letter from the Chief Constructor to the Admiralty in 1900 requesting that more shipwrights be taken onto the establishment explained, shipwrights accustomed to the Admiralty practice of working in wood and metal were not easy to obtain from commercial yards, and those men experienced in Dockyard methods were worth retaining.<sup>10</sup> Engine fitters were more easily interchangeable between commercial and Admiralty yards, and a greater reliance could be placed on hired men. It seems reasonable to assume that this stress on minimising long-term commitments to workers, and wanting an optimum flexibility in the Dockyard workforce informed the Admiralty decision to conduct the twentieth-century expansion, and occasional contraction, of its workforce, through hired men.

The consequence of this policy was to move towards the comparability of Dockyard and commercial conditions, much as would have been approved by Gould and similar Dockyard trade unionists, and to lay the foundations of the trade union activity which peaked with the A.S.E.-led unrest of 1913. The best commentary on what was happening in the Dockyards generally, and Portsmouth in particular, as a result of the Admiralty's establishment policy is provided by the leader columns of the Portsmouth press. From 1906 to 1913 the

Portsmouth press, both Conservative and Liberal, voiced protests against the closing of the establishment list and spelled out the likely consequences of this. The Portsmouth Times in an editorial of 1910 sought to gain some party advantage by pointing out that the establishment list had been closed by the Liberal Government and playing on the general Dockyard interest in the security afforded by establishment, and which affected all Dockyardmen to some extent. The Portsmouth Times commented, "... great injustice has been inflicted on large numbers of men who have been deprived of the reward to which<sup>11</sup> they were entitled by long service..." In this the Portsmouth Times was echoing points made earlier by the Liberal Evening News and the Hampshire Telegraph, nicely illustrating the extent to which "the Dockyard interest" could cut across party political allegiances. In 1907 the Evening News complained of the closure of the established list, and explained the implications of this for the development of labour relations in the Dockyard. It was argued that the established men provided, "... a body of mechanics, not merely reliable but who can be entrusted with confidential work and who are not likely to be influenced by trade union disputes. All these requisites are to be found in the men on the established list and, therefore, to abolish<sup>12</sup> the system would be a most dangerous step to take."

In some respects, the Liberal newspapers were more concerned with giving cautionary advice than the Portsmouth Times. In 1909 the Hampshire Telegraph was dismayed by the Naval Estimates, commenting that, "There seems to be an intention of gradually allowing the<sup>13</sup> established list to die out." All newspapers were relieved to see the list re-opened in 1910, with the Hampshire Telegraph, as soon as

the re-opening of the list was mooted, being quick to make the connection between an enlarged establishment and industrial quiet. The Telegraph commented, "... the growing unrest among the working classes, largely fostered by trade unions, is believed to have had a strong effect in persuading their Lordships to restore a system in the Royal Dockyards which would make them independent of any possible labour dispute."<sup>14</sup> By 1912, however, the "Dockyard Gossip" column of the Telegraph was again complaining that the ratio of established to hired men was slipping and that, in the case of corrective measures being taken, "... the money would be well spent if it gave additional<sup>15</sup> assurance that the Dockyards would not be affected by strikes."

The overtime ban, and threatened strike, organised by the A.S.E. in the Dockyards in the spring of 1913, and backed up by the A.S.S. and G.L.U, largely vindicated the line taken by the press on the Admiralty's policy towards the establishment. In the midst of the trouble the Hampshire Telegraph was unable to resist pointing this out, with the editorial comment, "To have preserved contentment among the men and to have ensured a strong body of skilled workmen always available and who would not be affected by labour disputes quite one half of the total should have been placed on the (established) list... As it is, with only 6,000 men available, the Admiralty are practically in the hands of the 27,000 non-established men and of the Trade Unions<sup>16</sup> by which the great majority are influenced." A similar line was taken by the Portsmouth Times with its comment, "Now they are face to face with trouble with the Dockyard workmen, the Government will perhaps realise the folly of which they have been guilty in allowing the establishment to dwindle." The Times recommended that the



establishment should be nearer 17,000 than 5,000 in a national workforce of some 33,000. Moreover, the Liberal Government had played into the hands of the enemies of the traditional Dockyard system, "The trade union organisations have for years been scheming to abolish the system of pensions and bonuses for those in Government employ, and Radical Candidates for Dockyard constituencies have encouraged them in this demand."<sup>17</sup>

The extent to which the run down of establishment ratios had encouraged hired men to adopt a more militant attitude towards the Admiralty, and to become more open to the arguments of Dockyard trade unionists seeking to implement national trade union methods in the Dockyards, can be glimpsed in letters received by the Evening News just before the trade union action of 1913. In a letter from "A Dockyardman", the list of complaints against low Admiralty wages and demarcation practices was made and direct action on trade union lines suggested as the remedy. The prospect of such action being impaired by the enforced loyalty of the established men towards the Admiralty was recognised, but in the circumstances of 1912, this was not seen as an insuperable problem, "I am aware that Yardmen stand at a disadvantage with outside men owing to the terms of their employment. The established men form an obstacle to any aggressive actions, but it is not too great to overcome."<sup>18</sup>

The background to the unrest of 1913, however, was not exclusively determined by the relative run-down of the establishment. Associated with this factor, and, from the Admiralty's perspective, aggravating the position, was a broader change in the relationship between Dockyard and commercial shipyard working conditions. Hired men in the

Dockyard were not simply dissuaded from trade union membership, or militant dealings with the Admiralty, purely through the anticipation of established men breaking any action. The Dockyard working environment also exercised a positive influence over the hired men, for hired men shared in some degree the security and benefits of sick pay and accident compensation for its workers in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the hired men, while vulnerable to major reductions, as seen in 1887 and 1907, were largely immune from the vicissitudes of the private trade. By 1912, however, this position of comparative advantage for the Dockyard worker was being undermined. The traditional argument that the lower wages, and irksome features of Admiralty employment practice, were made tolerable by the exceptional degree of Dockyard employment continuity was undermined by the increasing availability of work in the high wage Northern yards. The arms race preceding the Great War was ensuring that plenty of work was available in the commercial yards, largely through Government contract. The declining unemployment figures reported to the Board of Trade by the principal shipbuilding and engineering unions illustrate the availability of work on the major shipbuilding rivers.

19

Unemployment, Shipbuilding and Engineering  
(As reported by the principal trade unions)

| <u>Year</u> | % of members unemployed |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 1911        | 4                       |
| 1912        | 3.5                     |
| 1913        | 3                       |
| 1914        | 4                       |

In such circumstances the prospect of dismissal from a Dockyard for union militancy, while still daunting, would not be so dire as in

earlier years. Moreover, the superiority of the Dockyard position was also being eroded by an extension of security to all industrial workers by the state. The Workmen's Compensation Act matched the sick pay schemes operated by the Admiralty, and by 1912 industrial workers had benefitted from the Liberals' Pension Act of 1908 and the National Insurance Act of 1911. In this light, the 'perks' of Dockyard employment could seem dearly paid for by lower wages. This point was made by the Dockyard Ex-Apprentices' Association in its Annual Report of 1910 when the availability of state pensions was commented upon.  
20

These changes in the Dockyard environment, the decline of the establishment, and the 'catching-up' of outside workers provide the backdrop against which the development of individual trade unions and inter-union co-operation, culminating in the events of 1913, can be examined in detail.

In the 1900's the trade union leaders in the Dockyard were moving towards the left of the political and trade union spectrum. In this period it is difficult to disentangle political from industrial ideas and attitudes current amongst union activists. The men who led the Dockyard trade unions were the men around whom the Portsmouth Labour Party was formed and the development of labour politics in Portsmouth is a major study in its own right. From the perspective of the interaction between the Dockyard workforce and the Admiralty after 1900, however, the increasing militancy of the union leadership has to be outlined, for it was this group which was responsible for capitalising on the altered circumstances in the Dockyard, based on the rundown of establishment ratios, through the organisation of the

agitation of 1913. In 1913, the A.S.E.-inspired overtime ban saw Dockyard workers emulating the methods, and attitudes of outside workers more closely than in any earlier period.

The first point to note in this context was that Dockyard trade unionism did not exist in a vacuum. The Dockyards were open to outside ideas. Partly this was due to conscious educational efforts on the part of middle and upper class radicals and reformers. From the time of Father Dolling and the Rev. Charles Joseph in the 1880's a feature of Portsmouth life was the lecture, or conference, organised for working men by clergymen taken with social reform. Dolling and Joseph<sup>21</sup> were taken out of Portsmouth politics by the mid-1890's, but their work was carried on, notably by the Rev. C. Garbett when one of Cosmo Gordon Lang's curates at St. Mary's from 1906. The detailed analysis of the type of talk given in these men's conferences is better dealt with in the study of working-class politics in the town, but these conferences also served to acquaint Dockyardmen, who were<sup>22</sup> the mainstays of the audience, with the latest trade union ideas. For the socially-aware clergymen of Portsmouth greater political involvement, and the spread of trade unionism, were the two fundamental aspects of the means by which the quality of working-class life could be improved.

Alongside the educational forum being provided by the churches was the movement of men into the Dockyard. Outside of the core of established craftsmen the Dockyard was staffed by hired men, most of whom had been apprenticed outside of the Dockyard. The majority of Dockyard craftsmen had experience of working outside of the Admiralty environment and would have been acquainted with the attitudes, and

methods, of mainstream trade unionism; a trade unionism based on collective bargaining unhindered by establishment, pensions, bonuses, the might of the Admiralty as an employer, and the allurements of relative security in Dockyard work. By the turn of the century many of the men prominent within the Dockyard trade unions can be seen as having a background of leadership in commercial shipyard trade unionism. These men were influential in injecting a greater militancy into Dockyard trade unionism, largely through the assimilation of "outside" union tactics, and in creating a Labour Party within Portsmouth. The most prominent political figure in this context was the shipwright, J.M. MacTavish, who had worked in the shipyards of his native Scotland and on the Mersey, before coming to Portsmouth. MacTavish was a member of the Portsmouth Dockyard A.S.S., although not a union officer. His principal involvements were in the I.L.P. and W.E.A. In 1913 he was adopted as the town's Parliamentary Labour Candidate, having in 1908 become its first Labour Councillor.<sup>23</sup> Although primarily a political figure, MacTavish was prominent in the industrial unrest of 1913. More important from the trade union perspective, however, was the A.S.E. official David Naysmith. Naysmith had been President of the Barrow and District A.S.E. and had come to Portsmouth in the aftermath of the Engineer's lock-out of 1897-8,<sup>24</sup> when he had been blacked-listed by Vickers. Naysmith appeared on<sup>25</sup> the executive of the Portsmouth Trades and Labour Council in 1899, and his impact on the A.S.E. in the Dockyard was such that by 1901 he was the union's District Secretary. In that year he was presented with a testimonial from A.S.E. men working for contractors in the Dockyard for his efforts on their behalf, and in the course of the

presentation, made at a smoking concert held in the Star Hotel, Lake Road, it was pointed out by Black, the Southern District Organiser of the A.S.E. that, "Since he (Naysmith) had come to Portsmouth the strength of the branch had been increased by 300 members and now numbered over 1,000, and thus Portsmouth had been made one of the most important of the Society's districts."<sup>26</sup>

At the same time that Naysmith made his entrance into Portsmouth, another A.S.E. man, Henry Hall, was retiring from the Dockyard, and in some respects the exchange of Naysmith for Hall was an encapsulation of the wider change which Dockyard trade unionism was experiencing. Hall was one of the old school of Dockyard unionists. He had been concerned with combination in the Dockyard, but combination which focused upon the particular features of the Portsmouth environment. His promotion of his craft's interests, and his involvement in wider issues affecting the welfare of the worker in his industrial setting was sharply divorced from his political allegiance, which in Hall's case was Unionist.<sup>27</sup> The Evening News report on Hall's retirement neatly summed up the range of Hall's activities. A presentation was made in the Number Two Shipfitters Department, "... Consisting of a pretty silver cruet stand, masonic locket and a pair of eye-glasses to Mr. Harry Hall, on his retirement after 46 years service. Mr. G.E. Fisher, leading man of fitters made the presentation .... he (Mr. Hall) rejoiced to say that the greatest testimonial that could obtain was the good fellowship of all his fellow workers ... Mr. Hall is well known in various departments of public life in the town. Formerly he was a Volunteer, being one of the first men in Portsmouth to join the movement in 1859. He has been an active Freemason and

Oddfellow and has twice passed through the chair of his lodge in the latter order. He was one of the founders of the Portsmouth Trades Council, has had the post of Chairman of the Committee of the Hospital Saturday Fund and in politics, and in matters of benevolence, he has, from time to time, taken a prominent part."

28

After Hall the leadership of the Dockyard unions and the conduct of the Trades Council increasingly moved away from such earlier responses to industrial and political issues. The tone was now set by MacTavish and Naysmith. Most conspicuously, this affected the politics of the trade union movement in Portsmouth. In the 1900's there is no obvious support for the Unionists amongst trade union leaders, as defined by membership of the Trades and Labour Council. There was a survival of the Trade Union/Liberal nexus, notably amongst the shipwrights with A.S.S. officials like Stephen Boss maintaining his Liberal allegiance, and shipwrights like J. McGuigan and E. Trodd fighting a rearguard action for Radicalism against Socialism by advocating Henry George's Single Tax at municipal elections. For the most part, however, the Trades Council, led by the Dockyard trade unionists was moving towards independent Labour politics, with men like the Dockyard fitter, and A.S.E. official, W.J. Willis, abandoning their Liberalism. Willis had been a Liberal School Board candidate, yet in 1913 was prepared to endorse MacTavish's Labour candidature on behalf of the Trades Council. Similarly, the President of the Trades Council, G.W. Porter, a Dockyard sailmaker, was a Labour activist. For this generation of trade union leader the shift towards Labour politics was intertwined with an increasing militancy in dealings with the Admiralty as an employer.

29

The issues which the trade union leaders in the Dockyard focused on were pay and petitioning. The campaign to raise Dockyard wage levels to those of the major Northern commercial shipyards, the invariable point of reference for Dockyardmen in pay comparisons, was of long standing, and straightforward. By 1913 this longstanding pay grievance was given a twist by the publication of cost of living figures by the Government.<sup>30</sup> The Dockyardmen could now re-inforce their claims for a pay rise by using the Government's own statistics to argue that in real terms Dockyard wages were losing their value. At the start of 1913 the M.P's of the Dockyard towns, organised into the Dockyard Parliamentary Committee, had presented the case for a general round of pay increases to the Admiralty. The Conservative M.P. for Portsmouth, Lord Charles Beresford, was keen to point out to the Navy Minister, MacNamara, that "They (the Dockyardmen) have only received 2/- extra pay in the last twenty years, in which time the cost of living has risen by 20%."<sup>31</sup> This claim was something of an exaggeration for Board of Trade figures showed that retail prices had increased in Portsmouth by 7% between 1905 and 1915, and a combined rent and retail price index also showed a 7% increase. These increases put Portsmouth into the lower rank of the 93 towns analysed for price increases by the Board of Trade. The Board's figures, however, fuelled Dockyard claims that wages were falling behind prices in their regions, and added to the argument for making comparison between Portsmouth and the major commercial shipbuilding rivers.<sup>32</sup>



Alongside the pay issue, however, the trade union activists were particularly concerned with the petitioning process, for many of the most objectionable features of Admiralty employment were tied-up in this system. Traditional Admiralty procedure was that any man, or group, employed in the Dockyard could take a grievance unsettled by local management straight to the Admiralty by petitioning the Lords of the Admiralty during their annual visitations of the home Dockyards, invariably held during the spring. The trade union objection to this system was twofold. Initially, it was argued that petitioning was servile and ineffective. Secondly, and more importantly, the petitioning process stood in the way of the trade unionists' aim for the Dockyards, an industrial relations machinery in which the T.U.C. affiliated trade unions were the sole representatives of the various crafts and classes of workmen.

Under the traditional system any individual, or group, could break the collective front which the trade unions sought to organise and present. The arguments underlying this position can be seen in the 1890's, in the Richard Gould era of Dockyard trade unionism, but by the 1910's these arguments can be seen being presented with renewed vigour, and effect, based on a growing union membership, coupled with an increasingly militant mood, within

the Dockyards.

The trade union case against the petitioning system can be seen quite clearly in the formation of the Dockyard Trades Council in 1890. The Portsmouth Dockyard Trades Council, the forerunner of similar bodies at Devonport and Chatham, was formed in May 1890.<sup>33</sup> Its first President was C.W. Vine of the A.S.S, but it was also supported by the S.C.A, and, alongside the shipwrights, the major Dockyard trades were represented. The first resolution passed by the Council was proposed by the S.C.A. man, Anderson, and focused on the traditional Dockyard theme of pay comparability with the large private firms, together with a denial of the allegation that Dockyardmen were idle by the security of their employment. The second resolution was proposed by the A.S.E. representative, W.J. Willis, who attacked the petitioning system and argued for a standing Committee to hear Dockyard grievances as presented by the men's representatives, "He showed that this was a departure from the ordinary method of presenting petitions. Whoever had attended with a deputation that waited on the Lords of the Admiralty at their annual inspection would remember the courtesy with which they were received and which led them to believe that their petitions would be granted, but unfortunately they never heard anything more about it." Reform of the grievance-raising procedure was also of concern to shipwright trade unionists. In 1893 the Portsmouth A.S.S. President,<sup>34</sup> R. Street, successfully introduced a motion at a joint meeting of the A.S.S. and S.C.A, called primarily over the classification issue, demanding the establishment of arbitration boards to replace<sup>35</sup> petitioning.

Little headway was made by the trade unions in the 1890's or

1900's, but in the changing Dockyard climate of the 1910's, with the rundown of the establishment and the increasing availability of work outside the Dockyards, a return was made to the offensive on this issue by the Dockyard trade unionists. The Dockyard Trade Councils of Chatham and Devonport had not survived the early 1890's, while the Portsmouth body became subsumed within the wider Portsmouth Trades and Labour Council.<sup>36</sup> In 1911, however, the idea behind the Dockyard Trades Council was revived with the formation of the Dockyard Grievances Committee by the town's Trade Council. The Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth was informed by letter from the Trades Council's President, G.W. Porter, of the Dockyard Grievance Committee's formation. It was argued that, "The Dockyard Grievance Committee is representative of the organised workmen in the Dockyard. The Portsmouth Trades Council has 39 branches affiliated to it, 26 of which have members who are employed in the Dockyard." The intention of the Committee was to adjust local grievances without having recourse to the Admiralty, but, beyond that, "An effort will be made in the direction of presenting a General Petition to the Lords of the Admiralty, embodying, the grievances general to all workmen in the Dockyard, leaving the several trades to deal with their own differences."<sup>37</sup>

The Admiralty response to the Dockyard Grievance Committee's formation was to re-iterate the established policy of according no official recognition of trade unions, but accepting any representation of workmen through official channels. The Admiralty line in 1911, as shown by the internal discussion of that year's petitions, was that the trade unionists in the Dockyard had little scope for destroying the traditional passivity of the workforce while, "it is believed that

the Dockyard workmen generally do not labour under any special sense of grievance." The events of 1913, however, were to demonstrate that, in the light of the altering circumstances within the Dockyard, this was something of an over-sanguine view.

38

At the start of 1913 the trade-off which Dockyardmen made between security and low wages appeared to them in its least favourable light. The undermining of the exceptional nature of Dockyard security through the curtailment of the establishment system was accentuated by the growing demand for labour throughout the shipbuilding industry. By 1913 the labour market was moving very much in the men's favour, and Portsmouth men were kept aware of this by Dockyard employment policy, and local newspaper comments. The Hampshire Telegraph, in its review of 1912, stated, "The Dockyard, our main centre of employment has employed more men than ever before and is now experimenting with day and night shifts that bode well for a plethora of employment in the coming years." By the end of January the Telegraph was reporting systematic overtime working in the Dockyard, and by February was recording, that in spite of recent entries and the "very rare" step of allowing men to stay on beyond the age of sixty, there were serious shortages of shipwrights. In such an atmosphere it seems reasonable to see Dockyardmen adopting a more aggressive attitude towards the Admiralty, regarding direct action as less of a risk than formerly, and a more attractive policy than the traditional approach of petition, Parliamentary lobby and toleration of disappointment.

40

Coupled with these changing material circumstances in the Dockyard was the influence of the syndicalist movement and the unrest prevalent in Britain's basic industries in this period. The committed

trade unionists in the Dockyard were keenly aware of developments being made in the wider labour movement and can be seen introducing "outside" ideas and tactics into the Dockyard context. At the start of the year Dockyardmen can be seen assimilating the language, and more aggressive approach, of contemporary trades unionism. This is well-illustrated by the original formulation of the engine and ship fitter's grievances by the A.S.E. at the start of 1913. The basic aim of the fitters was to achieve a pay rise, with the long standing claim of being paid under the rate available for similar work on the Northern rivers being supplemented with the more recent argument that wages had fallen behind the cost of living. Associated with this pay issue was a complaint against the inequality of opportunities open to shipwright and engineering apprentices; fitters were not eligible for scholarships to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, and the consequent promotions open in the Dockyard hierarchy.<sup>41</sup> These claims were very much "Dockyard" claims, reflecting well-established grievances and inter-trade animosities. The pursuit of these claims was also founded on traditional methods. The claims were to be formally presented in a petition during the April visitation of the Dockyards by the Lords of the Admiralty, and, in the meantime, the issue was to be publicised in Parliament. The aid of the Dockyard Parliamentary Committee (an organisation of the Dockyard town M.P's established in 1910 to more effectively and formally represent the Dockyard interest)<sup>42</sup> was successfully enlisted, producing a series of hostile questions for the Navy Minister, MacNamara, from Portsmouth's Lord Charles Beresford.<sup>43</sup>

In 1913, however, these traditional claims and methods were re-inforced by a new use of more aggressive language in the drafting

of the A.S.E. petition, and more militant proposals in the event of the petition receiving the traditional "not acceded to" in reply from the Admiralty. The content of the A.S.E's 1913 petition, and the discussions which produced it, has to be gleaned from newspaper coverage, but the Hampshire Telegraph picked up the new militancy in union attitudes at the start of 1913, by reporting that the A.S.E. men in the Dockyards, in preliminary meetings for the drafting of the year's petition were talking of "drastic steps to enforce our demands,"<sup>44</sup> and commenting that such language was "unnecessarily aggressive."

The link between syndicalism and national trade union militancy amongst trade unionists in Portsmouth was next, and more directly, seen in a meeting held in the Town Hall in the first week of February, 1913. At this meeting Tom Mann was invited to address Portsmouth working men on "Labour In Control." This meeting provides insight to the attitude of the Dockyard trade union leadership, to the extent to which they were prepared to assimilate syndicalist ideas and to the arguments being placed before the ordinary Dockyard tradesmen and labourers. Tom Mann's appearance in Portsmouth was organised by the Dockyard trade union leaders. The meeting was called by the Trades and Labour Council, whose executive was dominated by the Dockyardmen. Chairman of the meeting was the Trades and Labour Council's secretary, the Dockyard sailmaker, G.W. Porter. The only non-Dockyardman on the platform supporting Mann was the A.S.R.S. man, Pile. The principal speakers in support of Mann were the Dockyard fitter, D. Naysmith of the A.S.E, the ex-shipwright, J. MacTavish, and the patternmaker<sup>45</sup> Muir Allan. All combined their trade union activities with involvement in Portsmouth's Labour Politics, MacTavish, Pile and

Muir Allan were Labour Councillors, Naysmith a Council candidate and Porter was soon to be elected President of the town's L.R.C. with<sup>46</sup> MacTavish as its candidate.

The difference in line between these Dockyard Trade Union and Labour Leaders and Mann during the meeting nicely illustrates the use made by the Portsmouth men of 'outside' ideas. Mann's speech, as reported by the Portsmouth newspapers, was very much concerned with the theory of syndicalism. In the phrase of the Hampshire Telegraph, the theme was, "Dockyard Workers - Their ideal at Portsmouth - Mr. Tom Mann on Labour in Control." In his speech Mann elaborated on his vision of workers' control of industry, "He did not mean control in the sense of being enable to obtain an increase of pay, but that entire control of industries which would make it unnecessary for anyone<sup>47</sup> to be above them, boss them or even advise them." This speech was reported as being well-received by the audience, and the motion which it supported was carried unanimously. The motion, however, did not specifically call for workers' control of industry through direct industrial action. The motion, while couched in terms familiar in the syndicalist movement, was concerned with the improvement of trade union organisation to make more effective the pursuit of specific Dockyard grievances. Proposed by Naysmith, and seconded by Muir Allan, was the motion that, "this meeting of trade unionists is of the opinion that the time has arrived for closer unity in the ranks of the workers."<sup>48</sup> This was followed by a call on the Executive Councils of the various bodies represented in the Town Hall audience to forward negotiations for the establishment of an amalgamation of all ship-building and engineering unions.

The disparity between Mann's line and the Dockyardmen's is best seen in the contribution of MacTavish. MacTavish openly referred to the difference between his socialism and Mann's syndicalism. Rather than syndicalism, MacTavish believed in, "collective bargaining and political action." Concentrating on the issue of Dockyard wages, MacTavish argued that, "with organisation, at a time of boom in the shipbuilding trade, they could have prevented an extra 24 shipwrights<sup>49</sup> being taken on without an increase in pay rates to outside levels." The Portsmouth trade union leaders, including MacTavish, the most politically involved, and commonly regarded as the town's most extreme socialist, had not adopted new radical political perspectives in the syndicalist period. The focus was still firmly fixed on established trade union issues and methods; primarily, the improvements of pay levels, to be achieved through wider unionisation. Politically the trade union men in Portsmouth were more concerned with selling the message of working men to represent working men, principally to achieve better conditions within the existing industrial system, than<sup>50</sup> syndicalism.



The contribution of the wave of strikes in 1912-13, and syndicalism, in Portsmouth was to engender an atmosphere of enthusiasm for trade union issues, and to provide rhetoric through which to articulate industrial grievances. In Portsmouth the trade union leadership, in this way, was being provided with ammunition to encourage traditionally passive workers to break the trammels of the petitioning process, and to exploit their improved position in the labour market, by adopting the collective bargaining tactics practised in private shipbuilding.

The success of the Dockyard trade union leaders in encouraging Dockyardmen towards more direct action against the Admiralty can be seen in the aftermath of the Town Hall meeting. The Conservative press in Portsmouth was inclined to play down the impact of Mann's appearance in the town. It was reported that the meeting engendered little  
<sup>51</sup>  
 enthusiasm,

This judgement of the meeting's impact, however, was not borne out by subsequent events. The meeting itself had filled the Town Hall, according to the Hampshire Telegraph, which held over two thousand,

and in the following weeks the level of Dockyard agitation increased. The lead in this was taken by the engineering trades, represented by the A.S.E, the Steam Engine Makers' Society and the Pattermakers' Society. In the last week of February these unions called a meeting to discuss the Town Hall meeting, and to consider a resolution passed at Chatham concerning the grievances of the engineering trades. The Chatham resolution covered these principal points; the demand for a 6/6d per week pay increase, the preparation of a memorial detailing this claim and which was to be publicised at all yards, and the demand for a conference of wages between the Admiralty, the Treasury and trade union representatives. The Portsmouth men then supported the Chatham resolution and passed their own motion that, "if a favourable reply (to the wage claim and conference) is not granted by March we ask our respective Executive Councils to arrange a conference of representatives from all Dockyards with a view to arranging a general line of action to enforce our demands."<sup>52</sup>

The engineers' meeting, held at the Albert Hall, a much smaller venue than the Town Hall, clearly attracted a smaller audience than the main meeting. This was remarked by the Hampshire Telegraph reporter covering the event, but it was also reported that the sense of grievance displayed at the meeting was "real and shared by more than those who turned up." The strength of feeling revealed at the engineers' meeting, and the resolutions coming from it, were regarded by the Hampshire Telegraph as exceptional. The comment on the pay claims and call for an all-yard conference was that, "No such ultimatum as this has ever been received by the Admiralty."<sup>53</sup>

A letter published by the Evening News from an A.S.E. activist,

A.G. Slaughter, in the aftermath of this engineering trades' meeting well illustrates this unprecedented mood of militancy. In Slaughter's letter the most significant feature is not the substance of complaint, but the language used. Slaughter's objective was threefold, to support the 6/6d per week pay claim, based on the cost of living argument, to attack the petitioning system as a means of redress, and to dispell the notion of the comparative advantage of Dockyard employment. In his attack on the petitioning system Slaughter argued, "It is now the opinion of the majority of Dockyard workers - of whom the above named societies (the A.S.E, S.E.M.S. and P.S.) have taken the initiative - that the system of petitioning the Lords of the Admiralty for improvements to be affected in their lot is undignified, besides being futile. The style of application is slavish in the extreme, the form of petition requiring the workmen to acknowledge themselves as 'the humble servants' of 'My Lords' - an emotion which<sup>54</sup> they are far from feeling in these days of democratic control."

This sentiment by a trade unionist towards petitioning was not particularly novel. The Trades Council had consistently argued against petitioning from the 1890's, and, privately, Dockyard trade unionists had been equally contemptuous of the system. In 1907, for example, the Portsmouth Sailmakers' Society Secretary had written to the Hull headquarters of the Federation of Sailmakers, "Well we have just been before My Lords, but what a farce, in fact it is enough to make me<sup>55</sup> ill..." In 1913, however, such views were being expressed openly in the pages of the Evening News. Similarly, Slaughter felt able to employ contemporary socialist rhetoric in his strictures against other aspects of Dockyard life. In his attack on the "wide-spread opinion

existing among the outside public that the lot of the Dockyard worker is better than that of his workmates who are privately employed," Slaughter argued, "if he (the Dockyardman) wears the same clothes as heretofore, eats the same food and lives in the same house, he must go without some of his few pleasures, and this he is loathe to do, especially when he sees the luxury and extravagance of the employing classes increasing year by year... He is taking heart more and more and endeavouring to assert his right to a more equable distribution of the wealth which he helps to create."<sup>56</sup>

The leadership of the Dockyard militancy of 1913, as reflected in Slaughter's letter, by the engineering trades union, particularly the A.S.E. is clear. More problematic is the motivation for this exceptional degree of militancy amongst these trades. Little direct evidence emerges from the newspaper sources, but it is possible to rationalise the engineering trades' motivation. Coupled with the general tradesmen's complaints in the Dockyard of low pay in comparison to similar work in outside yards, and the inadequacies of the petitioning process, the engineering trades had particular grievances which created this exceptional militancy. Foremost of these was their relationship within the Dockyard's structure, with the shipwrights. The engineering trades, particularly the engine and ship fitters, were frequently at odds with the shipwrights over demarcation, and unsuccessfully so. In 1883, for example, the fitters in the Dockyard had looked to the A.S.E. to use its influence in Parliament to protect against Admiralty demarcation practice.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, as the initial complaint of the A.S.E. voiced at the start of 1913 shows, the engineers saw themselves as discriminated against, in favour of the shipwrights, within the

Dockyard's management and promotion structure. Their complaint was that engineering trade apprentices did not have the same promotion prospects as shipwright apprentices.<sup>58</sup>

These long standing grievances were aggravated by dissatisfaction with pay levels, and methods of pay calculation. The engineering trades were still subject to classification, an issue which had been effectively resolved for the shipwrights in 1893. Moreover, the engineering trades had not shared the pay advances made by other trades and grades in the first decade of the twentieth century; in 1906 the basic rates for ordinary labourers, skilled labourers and shipwrights had improved by 1/- per week, in 1908 the joiners had gained this additional 1/- and in 1909 the riggers.<sup>59</sup>

These factors, operating within the context of a strong union membership amongst the engineering trades, particularly amongst the fitters and the A.S.E, where in 1900, the latest date for a correlation of Admiralty records on trades employed in Portsmouth with union records, there was 71% A.S.E. membership in the Dockyard, and in a section of the workforce dominated by hired men, 79% in 1900, help explain why there was a hard edge to engineering tradesmen's attitudes.<sup>60</sup> It is from this perspective of general Dockyard discontent, with particular grievances felt by the engineers, that the escalation of Dockyard militancy in the spring of 1913 can be examined.

The escalation of the unrest in the Dockyard, from the formulation of the engineering trades' pay claim to the spreading of an overtime ban by these trades through the major home Dockyards can be easily followed in the Portsmouth press. The resolution of the A.S.E, and fellow unions, to go beyond the established petitioning process quickly

made an impact in the local press with a series of articles being run in all papers discussing the likely prospects for the Dockyard. The Unionist Portsmouth Times in its Leader and Navy columns argued against the union line, telling Dockyardmen that they would be best advised to stick to traditional methods and rely on the Parliamentary influence of the town's Unionist M.P's, Beresford and Falle. The A.S.E, and other unions were castigated for introducing alien practices into the Dockyard, and the Liberal Government blamed for making all this possible by allowing the rundown of the establishment. 61

The Liberal newspapers echoed the Portsmouth Times' appraisal of the result of allowing the influence of establishment to decline, and while for the most part the Hampshire Telegraph and Evening News were sympathetic to the Dockyardmen's case, the Hampshire Telegraph was prepared to run an article by F.T. Jane, the town's self-proclaimed Navy candidate in the 1906 elections, attacking the A.S.E. proposals as being the work of Northern agitators and advocating that any strike action be defeated by offering establishment to all those who would take strikers' places. 62 Irrespective of newspaper comment, and advice, however, the A.S.E, S.E.M.S. and the Patternmakers' Society were successful in leading the engineering tradesmen into direct action against the Admiralty in support of the 1913 petition.

The initial action against the Admiralty was taken, under A.S.E. leadership, at Devonport. In the second week of March a meeting of the engineering trades was called at Devonport and it was agreed to direct district committees to prepare ballot papers asking if men were in favour of "united action with the men of similar trades in other yards, with a view to the cessation of work should the Admiralty continue to

ignore or refuse to accede to the request of 6/6d increase per week in pay." Even before the formal presentation of this demand in the petition submitted to the Admiralty during the annual visitation, due in the first week of April, the Devonport men decided to back-up their claim, and demonstrate their commitment, by banning overtime working. This overtime ban was followed up by the engineering trades at Chatham in the same week.

The response to the Devonport and Chatham engineering trades' overtime ban was not one of immediate emulation in Portsmouth. The Portsmouth men took no action until the April visit of MacNamara to the Dockyard for the annual interviews with the men's representatives and the formal submission of petitions. In the meantime, the Dockyard trade union leadership sought to publicise the engineering trades' action in the other yards, and to rally support for the 6/6d pay demand on as broad a front as possible. The Trades and Labour Council organised a Town Hall meeting, addressed as principal speaker by George Barnes M.P, of the A.S.E, but open to all Dockyardmen. The platform supporting Barnes was made up of the leading figures in Portsmouth Trades Unionism and Labour politics, R.G. Harris, J. MacTavish, S. Pile, A.G. Gourd, W. Porter and W. Willis. The resolutions passed by the meeting, and introduced by MacTavish, who earlier in the week had been formally endorsed as Portsmouth L.R.C. candidate, were:

1. To demand the 6/6d cost of living increase for all Dockyardmen.
2. To call for a meeting between Dockyardmen trade union representatives, the Treasury and the Admiralty.

3. In the event of the first two claims being refused, to call for a further mass meeting to decide further action.

The Town Hall was full for this meeting, and the audience heard from MacTavish and Barnes the full range of arguments against the futility, and servility of petitioning and the deficiencies of the Admiralty's wage structure. <sup>64</sup> The Evening News comment on this meeting was, "The

significance of this great meeting will certainly not be ignored by the Admiralty. It is the first time on record that Dockyardmen have openly assembled in their hundreds to express their views on matters of chief concern, and the spirit displayed sufficiently indicates that <sup>65</sup> they will not be put off with promises."

By the time of the April interviews at the Dockyard, however, the Admiralty, in the person of MacNamara, showed no sign of being moved by what was happening in the Dockyards. The men's deputation at Portsmouth, headed by MacTavish and Porter, was informed that the pay request would be considered in the course of the usual petitioning procedure and that there was no intention of holding a conference, with Treasury and Trade Union participation, to examine the whole question of Dockyard pay. Immediately after this interview the A.S.E, the Steam Engine Makers' Society and the Patternmakers' Society, held <sup>66</sup> meetings and voted to join the overtime ban. This overtime ban, according to the Portsmouth newspapers, would appear to have been generally supported and effective. The Hampshire Telegraph stated that between 1,600 and 1,700 men were employed in the engineering trades in the Dockyard and that all of these were involved in the operation of the ban. At this time the A.S.E. alone had approximately <sup>67</sup> 1,000 members in Portsmouth, and in the first meeting called by the



A.S.E, and the two smaller unions, after the ban it was reported that the ban, which extended to chargemen, was being supported, including non-unionists.<sup>68</sup>

The reaction of other Dockyard workers was less direct. Most agitated in the wake of the engineering trades' action were the labourers, skilled and ordinary, attached to the Government Labourers' Union, led by the veteran Dockyard activist A.G. Gourd. The 700 men in the G.L.U. were reported by the Hampshire Telegraph as threatening to refuse to work with non-union men.<sup>69</sup> The shipwrights held more of a watching brief. The A.S.S. petition for the year had included the 6/6d pay claim, but the shipwrights did not join the overtime ban. The leadership of the shipwrights' union, however, was prepared to support the organisation of an all-Dockyards trade union conference to discuss the reaction to the possible rejection of the pay claim by the Admiralty.<sup>70</sup>

While the atmosphere in Portsmouth during April 1913 was muted in comparison to other industrial regions experiencing disputes, in Portsmouth terms, such a position was without parallel since the more riotous times at the end of the eighteenth century. The crisis in industrial relations was sufficient to worry the Liberal Association into pressing the Government for a speedy, and favourable resolution of the Dockyardmen's grievances, to prevent further harm to party prospects in the town,<sup>71</sup> and George Barnes, speaking at a Dockyard rally in Devonport, but reported in the Portsmouth newspapers was able to say "that he was glad to see Dockyardmen more in tune with the general labour movement. Previously they had held aloof because of their privileges, but now they saw that they more than paid for these with

72  
their low wages." The resolution of the overtime ban and period of agitation in the Dockyards, however, came quite quickly with the announcement by the Admiralty of a series of wage increases at the start of May. These increases were as follows: for shipwrights the hired weekly wage was raised from 36/- to 38/- per week minimum, for established shipwrights the increase was from 34/6d to 36/-. In the engineering trades the minimum hired rate was raised from 36/- to 38/-, the established rate from 34/- to 36/-. Joiners were given an increase from 34/6d to 36/-, hired, and from 33/- to 34/6d, established. Riggers were given an increase from 29/6d to 30/6d, hired, 28/- to 29/-, established. Ordinary labourers were advanced from 22/- to 23/- while 73 skilled labourers were given a minimum rate of 24/-. These increases, while some way short of the 6/6d demanded, were sufficient to blunt the enthusiasm for further action in the Dockyard, and to enable the Portsmouth Times to report, "The threatened strike of the engineers in the Royal Dockyards has practically 'fizzed out' .... It is thought that at present no benefit could be obtained by pursuing the 74 agitation."

This outcome had not been wholly unexpected in Portsmouth. When the agitation was building up, and news of the overtime ban in Devonport was reported in Portsmouth with headlines such as "Dockyard 75 Crisis" and "Threatened Dockyard Strike," the columnist of the "Dockyard Gossip" section of the Hampshire Telegraph had been sufficiently collected, and familiar with his subject, to comment that a strike in the Dockyard was unlikely. The most likely outcome was the awarding of a pay increase some way below the 6/6d demanded, and the subsequent strengthening of the establishment to lessen the

76  
potential for any repetition of the trades' union behaviour. The resolution of the 1913 troubles in this way, however, provides a good point at which to examine the progress of trades unionism within the Dockyard from the 1890's.

In one respect, the resolution of the 1913 agitation emphasized the importance of continuity in Dockyard history. The willingness of the engineering tradesmen to follow the militant lead given by the trade union leadership, in the face of the Admiralty's pay concessions, was short-lived, and the front presented by the trade unions' leadership towards the Admiralty broke shortly after this with the re-emergence of traditional inter-trade rivalries. Divisions within the trade union leadership in Portsmouth were quickly revealed by a Hampshire Telegraph exercise in which the principals in the recent action were asked for their opinion of the Admiralty's pay increases and the likely outcome of this. The A.S.E. line, as revealed by an unnamed Dockyard fitter, and T.K. Justice, the District Secretary of the A.S.E, was that, "The increases have been given to the shipwrights and the labourers and the engineering trades have got absolutely nothing out of it." 77 The major objection of the engineers being that their trades were still subject to classification schemes, and that the highest rate for fitters had not been altered. The Trades and Labour Council, represented by its secretary, the Dockyard sailmaker, Porter, accepted that direct action was no longer tenable, but hoped to maintain the campaign for the full 6/6d through the meeting of the already-proposed all-Dockyard union conference. The shipwrights, represented by MacTavish, were prepared to support the Trades Council line, but moves in this direction were thwarted by the unwillingness of the engineering trades to co-operate

with the other craft unions. By May 23rd the Hampshire Telegraph reported that the A.S.E. at Devonport, preferring to confine future action to the A.S.E, would not support a general conference in Portsmouth, and in September <sup>78</sup> the 1913 the A.S.E. held its own series of conferences in the Yard towns to publicise its demand for the additional 4/6d from its original claim, six days paid holiday and <sup>79</sup> equality between Admiralty and Shipbuilders' Federation pay rates.

Rivalries engendered by the Admiralty's distinctive demarcation system, therefore, helped dissipate the militancy within the Dockyard trades unions encouraged at the start of 1913. Moreover, in the next year the Admiralty took steps to re-assert its influence over its workforce through the establishment system. The establishment lists were increased, with the greatest increase being in those trades which had caused the trouble in 1913. In 1914 the following increases in the establishment were announced:

The establishment list (for all Dockyards) which in 1913 had stood at 6,417, was to be increased to 8,485. The establishment of labourers was to increase from 815 to 1,654, of shipwrights from 1,756 to 2,189, of engine fitters from 589 to 983 and of ship and electrical fitters from 370 to 532. This increased the overall percentage of established men in the Dockyards from 17.2% in 1913 to 22.9% in 1914. The shipwright establishment was increased by 24.6%, the engine fitters <sup>80</sup> established list by 66.8%.

The conditions which had determined the passivity of Dockyard workers, and the limited scope for nationally organised craft unions in the Dockyards, in the 1880's, however, could not be wholly recreated by the Admiralty in 1914. The nationally organised craft unions had

developed in the Dockyard, and while individualism and localised combinations for petitioning purposes persisted, the major categories of Dockyard workmen, particularly the tradesmen, were substantially organised by, and represented by, the national unions; the fitters by the A.S.E, the shipwrights by the Ship Constructors' and Shipwrights' Association. The leadership of these unions was sufficiently in touch with the wider trade union movement to introduce all aspects of trade union, and Labour political, thought into the Dockyard, so that, while the Dockyard maintained its distinctive character as a workplace, there was a synthesis of internal and external factors in union development. The Admiralty's recognition of the change that had been wrought within the organisation of Dockyardmen from the late nineteenth century was seen in the recasting of the petitioning system in the autumn of 1913.

The petitioning system had long been opposed by the trade unionists of the Dockyard; they objected to the servility of its form, and wished to replace it with Conciliation Boards,<sup>81</sup> similar to those established in private industry, in which the trade unions would be accepted as the representatives of the men. The unrest of 1913 finally persuaded the Admiralty that petitioning was outmoded, and that the major trades were now organised, through the trade unions, on an all-Yard basis. In October 1913 the Admiralty announced a new petitioning system. The annual visitations and interviews would still take place, but these were to be for individual and local grievances. Those issues affecting whole trades or classes of workmen, were now to be discussed at a London Conference. The Conference was to be made up of deputations from the major trades and grades from all Dockyards in the following way:

| <u>Dockyard</u> | <u>Shipwright</u> | <u>Labourers</u> | <u>Boilermakers</u> | <u>Engineers</u> |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Portsmouth      | 3                 | 4                | 2                   | 3                |
| Chatham         | 2                 | 4                | 2                   | 3                |
| Devonport       | 3                 | 4                | 2                   | 3                |
| Sheerness       | 1                 | 2                | 1                   | 1                |
| Pembroke        | 1                 | 2                | 1                   | 1                |
| Haulbowline     | 1                 | 1                | 1                   | 1                |

The workmen were to nominate their representatives, and up to one half of the deputation could be made of non-Dockyardmen. While no formal status was given to trade union officials, in practice it was recognised that this scheme would enable the nationally-organised unions to meet with the Admiralty on the major pay, demarcation and hours issues.

Footnotes to Chapter IV

1. H.T. September 2 1893.
2. E.N. September 5 1906.
3. P.P. Health of the Navy Reports - 1901 LXXIII  
cd 495, 1902 XCVII cd 1124, 1903 LXVII cd 1755  
1905 LXXVI cd 2491, 1907 LXXX cd 3690 1908 XCVIII  
cd 4413 1910 CX cd 5041, cd 5458, 1912-13 CVII cd 6228,  
1914 LXXX cd 7131, 1914-16 LXI cd 7733.
4. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Royal Commission on Labour  
Minutes of Evidence Q. 21904.
5. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Q. 21851.
6. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Q. 21906.
7. H.T. September 9 1899.
8. Hansard July 16 1883 1607.
9. P.R.O. ADM 116 900A.
10. In above file - letter dated 5th April 1900.
11. P.T. February 26 1910.
12. E.N. January 4 1907.
13. H.T. March 20 1909.
14. H.T. February 12 1910.  
P.T. June 11 1910.
15. H.T. April 26 1912.
16. H.T. March 7 1913.
17. P.T. March 1 1913.
18. E.N. July 30 1912.
19. P.P. 1912-13 CVII - Abstract of Labour Statistics - p.8.  
P.P. 1914 LXXX - Abstract of Labour Statistics - p.2.
20. P.T. February 5 1910.
21. P. Galliver, "The Christian Clergyman's Place in Politics -  
A study of the Winchester College Mission to Portsmouth under  
the Rev. R.R. Dolling 1885-1896." Unpublished M.A. dissertation,  
Lancaster 1977 p59-72.  
Details of Dolling's departure.

22. Galliver op.cit., p45-59.
23. E. Mooney, "J.M. MacTavish - The Man and His Ideas"  
Liverpool 1979 p7-10.
24. E.N. October 31 1907.
25. H.T. December 2 1899.
26. E.N. May 14 1901.
27. P.T. January 1 1898 - Supported by the paper for the  
School Board.
28. E.N. January 2 1899.
29. H.T. March 21 1913.
30. P.P. 1913 LXVI Board of Trade Enquiry cd 6955.
31. H.T. January 3 1913.
32. P.P. 1913 LXVI cd 6955 Working Class Rents and Prices.  
General Report p.XVI.
33. P.T. May 10 1890.
34. Identified in A.S.S. Annual Report 1892.
35. H.T. September 9 1893.
36. Webb Collection A vol. 32 letter from Portsmouth Royal  
Dockyard Trades and Labour Council, May 1890.
37. P.R.O. ADM 116 1129A letter 30.8.1911.
38. P.R.O. ADM 116 1136 vol. 1 Abstract of petitions.
39. H.T. January 3 1913.
40. H.T. February 7 1913.
41. H.T. January 3 1913.
42. P.T. June 18 1910.
43. H.T. March 21 1913.
44. H.T. January 17 1913.
45. H.T. February 14 1913.
46. H.T. March 7 1913.



47. H.T. February 14 1913.
48. H.T. February 14 1913.
49. H.T. February 14 1913.
50. H.T. April 4 1913.
51. P.T. February 15 1913.
52. H.T. February 28 1913.
53. H.T. February 28 1913.
54. E.N. February 26 1913.
55. Warwick University - Sailmakers' Records Letter 24 June 1907.  
Hawkins to Hicks MSS 87/3/3/26.
56. E.N. February 26 1913.
57. Hansard July 16 1883 1606.
58. H.T. January 3 1913.
59. H.T. May 9 1913.
60. P.R.O. ADM 116 900A  
E.N. July 26 1900.
61. P.T. March 13 1913.
62. H.T. March 14 1913.
63. H.T. March 14 1913.
64. H.T. March 14 1913.
65. E.N. March 18 1913.
66. H.T. April 18 1913.
67. Figure claimed in EN May 3 1905.
68. H.T. April 25 1913.
69. H.T. February 14 1913.
70. H.T. April 18 1913.
71. H.T. May 9 1913.
72. H.T. May 2 1913.

73. H.T. May 9 1913.
74. P.T. May 3 1913.
75. H.T. March 14 1913.
76. H.T. March 21 1913.
77. H.T. May 16 1913.
78. H.T. May 23 1913.
79. H.T. September 19 1913.
80. H.T. March 20 1914.
81. CONCILIATION ACT 1896, see E.H. Hunt, British Labour History  
1981 p.326.
82. P.R.O. ADM 116 1216 Marshall letters of 11.6.13 and  
20.6.13 outlining the proposed changes.  
Details of Conference also given in H.T. October 3 1913.

## Chapter V

### The Sailmakers

The sailmakers in Portsmouth Dockyard provide a case study of considerable interest to the growth of trade unionism in the Dockyard. The sailmakers were a small section of the Dockyard's army of craftsmen, in the 1890's and 1900's around 60 to 75, and during the wartime<sup>1</sup> peak around 120. The records of the sailmakers, however, are better than any of the major unions. For the A.S.S. and A.S.E. only the annual reports, then in incomplete series, survive for 1880-1914

to supplement what can be gleaned of union activities from the Portsmouth press. The Portsmouth branch of the Federation of Sailmakers, however, has material in the collection of ~~union~~ records held at the University of Warwick. With the sailmakers it is possible to examine in greater detail the points which arise from a general consideration of Dockyard unionism. In particular the sailmakers' records can be used to illustrate points already raised in connection with the "big battalions" of the shipwrights and engineering trades. This is the case with relations between Dockyardmen and workers in private yards, trade union leaders and Dockyardmen, and Dockyardmen and the Labour Party.

The background to the involvement of the Dockyard sailmakers and the Federation of Sailmakers is that the 'Yardmen had their own local society, certainly in 1891 when the Webbs were collecting material, on the lines of the S.C.A. The Federation developed in the 1890's, principally around the Humber and the Clyde, and from the late 1890's began to incorporate the local societies. The history of the Federation is well outlined in an M.A. dissertation presented at the University of

2

Warwick by M.G. Hirsch, but in this little is said of the role of Dockyardmen within the organisation. What is well explained, however, is the declining position of sailmaking as a trade in the shipbuilding world. The sailmakers' craft skills were being progressively undermined by the application of machine sewing to their craft. In many ways the relationship between Dockyard sailmakers and their peers in the commercial trade mirrors that of the shipwrights. The Dockyards represent an area in which the sailmakers were, for the most part, holding onto their position. The scale of Dockyard work, and the traditionalism of the Navy ensured that there was always scope for the skills of the sailmaker. Certainly, once Portsmouth joined the Federation in 1908, the Dockyard branches, particularly Portsmouth, are the only ones which significantly improved their membership, and by 1914 it is arguable that the Dockyardmen were starting to dominate the Federation, at least from the perspective of putting up resolutions at the bi-annual conferences.

The comparative health of the trade in the Dockyards must help explain the efforts made by the leaders of the Federation at the end of the 1890's to recruit the Dockyardmen into the organisation. The then secretary of the Federation, Frayn, seems to have taken the initiative, through the Grimsby branch, in involving the Federation in the issues confronting Dockyardmen. In 1897 the Dockyardmen's working conditions were first made known to the Federation by W. Cains, a Portsmouth man, who is described in the Federation's annual reports as

3

a Dockyard representative, although the organised sailmakers of Portsmouth were still outside of the Federation. Cains outlined the principal grievances felt by Dockyard sailmakers against the Admiralty;

the classification issue had affected sailmakers as well as shipwrights but had been largely settled by 1896. In 1897 the main issue was the introduction of sailors into the sail lofts. The Admiralty had adopted the practice of designating sailors as "sailmakers' assistants" setting them to work with civilian sailmakers in the sail loft, and then using them as sailmakers in the service. The fear was that these men would eventually be introduced into the sail lofts as competent sailmakers, and the trade thereby diluted. The dilution of the trade in a major sailmaking area was bound to be of concern to the leadership of the Federation, and the case was taken up by Frayn in 1898. In that year the Grimsby Trades and Labour Council produced a circular, stating the Dockyard sailmakers' case, which was sent to all other Trades Councils, together with an exhortation to the councils to enlist the support of their local M.P's.<sup>4</sup>

The action of the Federation is an excellent example of the process by which national trade union organisations came to have a relevance to the collective action of Dockyardmen. The enlistment of Parliamentary support was crucial to Dockyardmen. This point was made by the shipwright, Richard Gould, who appeared as the A.S.S. representative at Portsmouth before the Royal Commission on Labour; when asked how Dockyardmen would cope with an "intolerable grievance," Gould replied that the men would not strike, "we would rather move public opinion and get the question brought on in the House of Commons, or some other place of responsibility, rather than have recourse to extreme measures with the Government."<sup>5</sup> The example of actions such as the Federation's in support of a Dockyard case, therefore, could only lend weight to the arguments of those union activists within the

Dockyard who sought to involve Dockyardmen in the wider Labour movement. Re-inforcement for the arguments of the Portsmouth trade unionists keen to integrate their union with the wider trade union and labour movement was provided by the willingness of Labour M.P's to act on Dockyardmen's behalf. In 1906, for example, the Labour M.P. for Chatham, Jenkins, raised a range of Dockyard grievances relating to pay and conditions in the Commons. In the ensuing debate the M.P. for Sunderland, Summerbell, specifically protested at the poor rates of pay offered to the sailmakers in Portsmouth Dockyard.<sup>6</sup> The pattern between 1898 and the adherence of the Portsmouth sailmakers' society to the Federation in 1908 is of Portsmouth society leaders sympathetic to the Federation maintaining a correspondence with the leaders of the Federation, and building up the ammunition with which to convince their fellows of the benefits of membership in the wider organisation.

Besides helping the Dockyardmen by circularising Trades Councils and attempting to enlist Parliamentary support, the Federation assisted the Dockyard sailmakers on a more mundane basis through the supply of information necessary to the presentation of petitions to the Admiralty. A favourite tactic of Dockyardmen in the presentation of petitions concerning pay rates was to draw comparison with outside rates, particularly those paid by firms working on Government contracts; the argument being that this work was essentially the same as that performed in the Dockyards and should be paid for at the same rate. The Federation was a valuable source for such comparative information. There are several illustrations of this exchange of information in the correspondence between the Federation's secretary and the leaders of the sailmakers' society in Portsmouth. In 1903, for example, the

Portsmouth man, W. Cains, was able to write to the Federation Secretary, "We very much appreciate the knowledge thus come to our hand, it will help us in the future and enable us to make accurate quotations when we present our annual petitions to the Admiralty."<sup>7</sup>

Once inside the Federation this exchange of information was increased and the Dockyardmen tried to make the Federation better suited to their particular methods of raising issues with the Admiralty. Parliamentary influence was of prime importance to the Dockyardmen, and within the Federation they can be seen trying to improve the Federation's access to Parliamentary voices; principally through the affiliation of the Federation to the Labour Party. From the start the Portsmouth branch of the Federation pushed for Labour Party affiliation. Resolutions to this effect were put to the national conference by the Portsmouth men in 1908 and 1912.<sup>8</sup> On both occasions the Dockyardmen were not supported by a majority of the other branches, the majority line being that the Federation should stay out of politics. The motives of the Dockyardmen are of considerable interest. There is clearly an element of personal commitment to the ideals of the Labour Party involved in this. The sailmakers in Portsmouth produced some of the leading figures in the labour movement in Portsmouth, from 1907 the sailmaker, G.W. Porter, was President of the Trades and Labour Council, and active in the support of the Labour Representation League, a largely Trades-Council-dominated body, in the town. In such a small community as the sailmakers, Porter and other union and labour activists can be expected to have had considerable influence. However, the sailmakers commitment to the Labour Party went beyond an idealistic commitment pushed by a few dominant personalities. The arguments used

by the Labour Party protagonists from Portsmouth, principally A. Hawkins and A. Collins, were based upon the Labour Party having a material relevance to the Dockyardmen; through the Labour Party the voice of the Dockyardmen could be heard in Parliament. This is the point which consistently comes up in connection with the Dockyardmen, the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, and is well expressed in the Portsmouth contributions to the Federation's debates on Labour Party affiliation. In 1908, for example, A.W. Hawkins' address to the conference, in moving the resolution for Labour Party affiliation, stated, "the time has come when we should have direct representation in Parliament," and "... explained the benefits that may be derived when the estimates of the Admiralty are prepared if we have direct Labour representation, and that unless we have such we shall suffer." 9 In 1912, on the same notion, A.C. Collins of Portsmouth pointed out, "the time was fast approaching when disputes would be settled in the House of Commons. We have many grievances and by affiliation to the Labour Party we should have somewhere to appeal direct..." 10

The last comment contains an interesting line of argument in that it predicts that other workers will shortly find themselves in a position similar to Dockyardmen, dependent upon Parliamentary intervention. It helps illustrate the extent to which Government involvement in industrial disputes was increasing, and being perceived as such by workers. With regard to the Dockyard, however, the line taken by the Portsmouth sailmakers indicates the complexity of the relationship between Dockyardmen and Labour politics. It is possible to rationalise a whole range of factors working against the growth of Labour politics amongst the Dockyard workforce, the fragmentation of



class consciousness produced by the hierarchical organisation of the workforce by trade and grade, the influence towards conservatism and deference inculcated by the atmosphere of service discipline in which the men worked, a similar "patriotic" approach engendered by proximity to the Navy, and a suspicion of the pacifist and "anti-imperialist" tendencies of elements within the Labour Party which might be seen as striking against Dockyardmen's material interests. When the development of the Labour Party in the Town, and specifically amongst Dockyardmen, comes to be considered, however, against these factors must be set the positive appeal of the Labour Party shown by the Sailmakers' Union correspondence. It is this potential of the trade union movement and Labour Party for intervention in the area which really mattered in Dockyardmen's affairs, Parliament, which is at the base of the growth of both movements in the Dockyard and in town.

The reaction of the Portsmouth, and by this time the other, Dockyard branches to the demise of the Federation re-inforces this point. By 1914 Portsmouth was the second largest single branch in the Federation and Dockyardmen made up just over a fifth of the Federation's membership.<sup>11</sup> The war greatly reduced the level of active participation in the union within the Dockyards, and effectively killed it off in the private trade. While the quantity of sailmaking increased during the war, the dilution of trades pushed by the Government with the 1916 Act, effectively saw the demise of sailmaking as a trade, sailmaking being taken over by machinists. In this environment the Dockyard branches were the first to push for the Federation's absorption into a more effective organisation, one which could command effective

political representation. This can be seen in the Portsmouth and Devonport branches early affiliation to the Workers Union and attempts to have the sailmakers accepted by either the A.S.E. or the Shipwrights' Union. As a letter from the Devonport branch secretary remarked in 1917, "The Federation is not strong enough, it has no representation and no money." Eventually the sailmakers were accepted by the Shipwrights' Union.<sup>12</sup>

Besides this central question of unionisation and political influence the records of the sailmakers throw light on a variety of subsidiary questions. The attitude of commercial workers to Dockyardmen is revealed in a couple of exchanges in the Federation's correspondence. In 1898 when the Federation's Leadership were quite keen on recruiting the Dockyard societies, and bringing the Dockyardmen into the fold by pushing their grievances against the Admiralty it would seem this line did not enjoy the universal support of the Federation's membership. In connection with the A.S.E's progress in the Dockyards, and the early suspicion of Dockyard demarcation practices by the craftsmen operating in private yards it can be seen that Dockyardmen were sometimes regarded as the "suspect" end of the trade. The response of the Hull branch of the Federation to its executive's efforts on behalf of the Dockyard sailmakers nicely illustrates this attitude. In 1898 the secretary of the Hull branch wrote of the Grimsby initiative on the Dockyardmen's grievances, "Our members do not look upon this movement with any great favour. There is a feeling that the object is not to benefit sailmakers who have served an apprenticeship of seven years so much as it is to assist men who have picked up on the trade."<sup>13</sup> To support this the Hull secretary cited the case of a Hull man who

had gone to Chatham two years earlier and had been entered on the basis of an aptitude test without any enquiries as to where he had served his time. Whatever the misgivings of rank and file unionists, however, the peculiarities of the Admiralty's entry procedures did not effect the attitude of the union's leaders to the Dockyards. As with the A.S.E. contact with Dockyardmen was seen as a better method to bring 'Yardmen into line than indifference.

The Federation's records also reveal a certain degree of antipathy between Dockyardmen and private workers: this time nearer at home in Gosport. There is an intriguing letter from the Portsmouth secretary, Hawkins, to the Federation's secretary of 1908 in which information is supplied regarding conditions at Nicholson's Yard at Gosport, an outline of the main sailmakers problems there (principally that riggers were being used to produce steam pipe jackets) and the comment that Hawkins had been apprenticed at Nicholson's, "I assure you when I was there they had not much love for Dockyardmen and I would rather they made known their grievances to you themselves."<sup>14</sup>

Hawkins was concerned that any Dockyard involvement in Gosport affairs, if known by the Gosport men, would cause offence. Exactly why relations between Portsmouth and Gosportsailmakers should have been poor cannot be shown, but the indications are that the Portsmouth men were felt to be self-centred, pursuing their own interests at the expense of non-Dockyard workers. In 1901 the Evening News' coverage of the Trades and Labour Council at Portsmouth shows a dispute between the Portsmouth and Gosport sailmakers; the Gosport men alleging that sailmakers from the Dockyard had been lent to a private firm, Lapthorn and Ratsey's, to complete a Government contract, at the expense of local

men. The Portsmouth men denied this, saying no-one was available to complete this rush job, which was the exclusive concern of the Dockyardmen. This was accepted at the Trades Council, the clinching argument being, "the speaker added that the Council need have little sympathy with the Gosport people for they persistently refused to become trade unionists,"<sup>15</sup> but letters to the contrary continued to appear in the local press from Gosport.<sup>16</sup> These allegations of self-interested behaviour by 'Yardmen do not appear to be unique to sailmakers. The evidence is scanty, but there are enough remarks in the press to indicate that there was at least latent friction between the Dockyardmen and other workers in the locality. During the Dockyard discharges of 1886-1887, for example, Alderman Baker was heckled during a mass meeting by someone asking why he did not show equal concern for all the unemployed in the town.<sup>17</sup> At a similar meeting in 1887 F.J. Proctor denied that "the interests of other working men were never taken in hand as those of the Dockyardmen were."<sup>18</sup> Hostility towards Dockyardmen also surfaced in the Trades Council, with the allegation being made that Dockyardmen had worked, after Dockyard hours, on building sites while the building trades were on strike in 1896.<sup>19</sup>

#### Membership of the Federation of Sailmakers

Source: Annual Reports

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Total Membership</u> | <u>Portsmouth</u> | <u>All Yards</u> | <u>% of all Members</u> |
|-------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1897        | 806                     |                   |                  |                         |
| 1902        | 677                     |                   |                  |                         |
| 1908        | 510                     | 46                |                  |                         |
| 1910        | 438                     | 52                |                  |                         |
| 1912        | 497                     | 78                | 94               | 19%                     |
| 1914        | 816                     | 78                | 167              | 20.5%                   |
| 1918        | 751                     | 104               | 209              | 28%                     |

Notes (Sailmakers)

1. Modern Studies Centre, University of Warwick - Federation of Sailmakers Annual Reports - 1897, 1908, 1912, 1914, 1918.
2. M.G. Hirsch THE FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND N. IRELAND 1889-1922. UNPUBLISHED M.A. DISSERTATION, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK 1976.
3. WARWICK. FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORT 1897.
4. WARWICK. FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORT 1897.
5. P.P. 1893-4 XXXII ROYAL COMMISSION ON LABOUR MINUTES OF EVIDENCE  
Q. 21960. EVIDENCE OF R. COULD.
6. P.T. March 3 1906.
7. WARWICK FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS' RECORDS. 87/3/3/2
8. WARWICK FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORTS 1908-12.
9. WARWICK FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORT 1908.
10. WARWICK FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORT 1912.
11. WARWICK. FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS ANNUAL REPORT 1914.
12. WARWICK. FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS' RECORDS 87/3/13/3
13. WARWICK. FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS' RECORDS 87/3/2/30
14. WARWICK FEDERATION OF SAILMAKERS' RECORDS 87/3/6/9
15. E.N. September 7 1906.
16. E.N. September 11 1906.
17. H.T. December 18 1886.
18. H.T. September 17 1887.
19. P.T. June 6 1896.

Chapter VI

The Labourers

Labourers: Pay:

The skilled labourers of the Royal Dockyards were men employed in specialised skills, but who had not necessarily served an apprenticeship. The skills of the skilled labourers were essentially those of iron shipbuilding, riveting, ironcaulking, hand-drilling, together with acting as assistants to the apprenticed tradesmen (electrical fitters in the 1900's were assisted by wiremen, for example). Associated with the skilled labourers, but recorded by the Admiralty under specific headings were grades such as hammerman and engine keeper. Such grades were effectively the same as skilled labourers, being reserved for unapprenticed men, and paid on similar rates. The skilled labourers were far more important, numerically, than the ordinary labourers in the Dockyard; in 1891 30.3% of the workforce in the principal departments of Portsmouth Dockyard was made up of skilled labourers, the ordinary labourers, the fetchers and carriers, providing 8.1%. In 1900, the proportions were 30.5% skilled labourers, 3.8% ordinary labourers. Although sub-divided into various tasks, the skilled labourers represented the largest single category of the Dockyard workforce, the next largest, the shipwrights, making up 26.2% of Portsmouth's workforce in 1891, 22.8% in 1900, and, together with the shipwrights, the skilled labourers were the most distinctive feature<sup>1</sup> of the Dockyard workforce in comparison with the private trade. The Admiralty had responded to the advent of iron shipbuilding with the extension of tasks allotted to shipwrights, reserving the more specialised metalworking and engineering jobs for boilermakers,

fitters, smiths and patternmakers. The skilled Labourers represent the lower end of the same process, with some specialisations being taken out of the realm of craft working and being allocated to labourers trained in the single aspect of shipbuilding, riveting, ironcaulking, drilling and the like. It was through the development of the skilled Labourer category and the shipwright craft that the Admiralty was able to achieve an exceptional degree of flexibility in its workforce, and produce complaints of unfair competition from private shipbuilding firms seeking Admiralty contracts.

The intermediate position occupied by the skilled Labourers within the Admiralty's wages structure can be seen from a survey of the principal wages movements between 1893 and 1914. The skilled Labourers worked with pay ranges, their rates being determined by classification and piecework schemes.

Dockyard Pay Increases 1890-1911, Labourers and Shipwrights

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Occupation</u>           | <u>Weekly Pay Rate</u>    |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2           |                             |                           |
| 1893        | Ordinary Labourer           | 19/-                      |
|             | Skilled Labourer (Day Rate) | 21/- to 27/-              |
|             | Shipwright                  | (Hired) 33/- (Est) 31/6d  |
| 3           |                             |                           |
| 1906        | Ordinary Labourer           | 21/-                      |
|             | Skilled Labourer            | (Hired) 22/- to 28/-      |
|             |                             | (Est) 22/- to 26/6d       |
|             | Shipwright                  | (Hired) 35/6 (Est) 34/-   |
| 4           |                             |                           |
| 1912        | Ordinary Labourer           | 22/-                      |
|             | Skilled Labourer (D.R.)     | Minimum increased to 23/- |
|             | Shipwright                  | (Hired) 36/- (Est) 34/6   |
| 5           |                             |                           |
| 1913        | Ordinary Labourer           | 23/-                      |
|             | Skilled Labourer (D.R.)     | 24/- to 28/-              |
|             | Shipwright                  | (Hired) 38/- (Est) 36/-   |

Labourers: Grievances - Status and Piecework

Skilled labourers were recruited from the ranks of ordinary labourers, or came into the Dockyard already possessed of the skill necessary for employment as a rivet<sup>er</sup>, caulker, driller or hammerman. The source material does not exist to determine quantitatively the sources of Dockyard recruitment. In 1914, in response to a Deputation from the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C, the secretary to the Admiralty, MacNamara, stated that 70% of skilled Labourers had<sup>6</sup> originally entered the Dockyards as ordinary labourers. This percentage sounds plausible, for boys of 14 could enter the Dockyard as Yard boys, and as such they would be included in the ranks of ordinary labourers, and while Yard boys could acquire the skills requisite for elevation to skilled labourer after the age of 21. Alongside promoted ordinary labourers, however, it would seem that there were men from the private shipbuilding trade, some of whom had served craft apprenticeships. Admiral Herbert a previous Admiral Superintendent of Portsmouth Dockyard, during his evidence to the Graham Committee, said, "A great number of labourers who come in are men who have learnt their trade, but they cannot get into the Yard any other way, and then afterwards they are employed as skilled Labourers."<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the background of the skilled labourers, however, a consistent complaint was that these men were denied the trade status, and consequent pay levels, which would be theirs in the private shipbuilding yards. This grievance was aired by skilled labourers, or on their behalf throughout the 1880 to 1914 period. In 1897, for example, the hand-drillers of Portsmouth sent a deputation to the town's senior M.P, Sir John Baker, requesting him to present their



grievances to the Admiralty, which Baker did. The hand-drillers' grievances were that their pay was below that obtainable in comparable private yards, that the piecework system was unfair in its operation, and that they objected to their designation as skilled Labourers. The drillers wished to be re-categorised as a trade,<sup>8</sup> and in this context they objected to their additional payment for working in the dangerous environment of double-bottomed hulls being less than that paid to mechanics. In 1914, the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. in a deputation to the Admiralty on behalf of all skilled Labourers voiced the same range of complaints, including the demand that skilled Labourers should be paid and classified as tradesmen, and be treated as they would be in the private trade,<sup>9</sup> including the provision of apprenticeships.

The voice of a skilled Labourer on this issue surfaced in the Evening News in 1912. The background to this letter is of interest for a correspondent signing himself as "A Dockyardman" had written in complaining of a recent rise for labourers in the Dockyard, and that this was narrowing the differential between labourers and craftsmen to the consequent demeaning of the letter. This provoked a response from "Another Dockyardman," who argued, "Perhaps he does not know that some skilled Labourers are doing, and have been doing to my knowledge for the past twenty five years, work of a more skillful nature than that performed by some of the minor tradesmen, and which, if performed in a private firm would be recognised by their employers and by their Trade Unions as a minor trade and treated accordingly."<sup>10</sup> In this question, therefore, there is the combination of economic considerations with notions of workplace status. For skilled Labourers the acquisition

of trade status would involve more money, but it would also involve a recognition of their value as skilled workers. The other side of this coin was the resentment of skilled Labourers at their categorisation with the ordinary labourers. Skilled Labourer was not a permanent position and men in this category, at the Dockyard's discretion, could be switched back to ordinary labourer status, and paid accordingly. This was a principal cause of complaint at the time of a Dock Labourers Union branch amongst the Skilled Labourers of Portsmouth Dockyard in the aftermath of the London Dock Strike.<sup>11</sup>

Just as this issue of status remained at the heart of skilled Labourers' grievances, however, so was the Admiralty's response constant. The Admiralty line, from the 1890's until the outbreak of the Great War, was that the skilled Labourer category benefitted the Dockyard through the flexibility it created, and the workman through the greater security of work which it afforded. In 1897 in reply to a Trade Union deputation Goschen argued, in reply to the contention that skilled Labourers were in practice working as mechanics, that, "It should be borne in mind that the men were in continuous employment and that a certain amount of interchange of work was necessary in order to avert the necessity of discharging men after certain work had been completed."<sup>12</sup> Goschen argued that skilled Labourers were freed from the need to compete in the riveters' markets found in the North East, and a similar line was taken by MacNamara in response to the T.U.C. deputation of 1914. MacNamara justified the retention of the Skilled Labourer category on the grounds that Dockyard work, with its shipbuilding and repairing operations being combined in the same location on unparalleled scale, was so complex as to require Skilled

Labourers, and to invalidate comparisons with the private trade. Moreover, it was argued that if Skilled Labourers were made craftsmen, as rivet<sup>13</sup>ers, platers, drillers and the like, then discharges would be more frequent, and promotion prospects for ordinary Labourers would disappear.

The other perennial problem for Skilled Labourers was piecework. Skilled Labourers could be paid on day work, and the standard wage rates refer to the levels of pay available for day work. However, particularly with shipbuilding, piecework schemes, whether based on tonnage schemes or prices per task, were widely used. The Skilled Labourers shared the craftsman's dislike of piecework as a means of sweating, but more immediate, and perhaps important, was the day to day implementation of piecework schemes, with the men complaining that piecework was unfairly administered, and that prices made a fair wage impossible. It is against this background of grievance, the long term resentment of the Skilled Labourers' status, and the daily irritation of piecework, that the development of trade unionism amongst the Skilled Labourers has to be examined. Trade unionism amongst the Portsmouth labourers, ordinary and Skilled, was not strong, especially before 1910, but such unionisation as there was was based on these issues.

#### The Labourers and Trade Union Development

The weakness of Trade Unionism amongst the labourers of Portsmouth Dockyard from 1880 to 1914 can be clearly seen in the Board of Trade's reports on Trade Union membership. The various categories of Skilled labourer did make attempts to form unions, but these were invariably

short lived. The Portsmouth Hand-Drillers formed a society in 1891, but this had collapsed by 1899. The Ironcaulkers ran a society from 1892 to 1896. The most successful of the labourers' unions was the Government Labourers' Union, founded in 1894, which recruited amongst all ordinary and Skilled labourers, and which had a continuous membership until the Great War. The G.L.U. for most of its history, however, was a small group of committed trade unionists amongst a mass of unorganised workers. The G.L.U's real breakthrough as a union came with the National Insurance Legislation of 1911, when its membership increased from 426 to 1025 in a three year period. The increase was attributed by the Union's Leadership during its 1913 A.G.M. as being largely the result of the National Insurance Act, but even with a thousand plus members it is probable that the G.L.U. represented only between 20-25% of the labourers, Skilled and ordinary, in Portsmouth.<sup>14</sup> The numerical weakness of trades unionism amongst the Dockyard's labourers can be seen in the following table:

Unskilled Trade Unions, Portsmouth Dockyard, 1890-1914.

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Society and Membership.</u>  |                     |               |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
|             | <u>Portsmouth Hand-Drillers</u> | <u>Ironcaulkers</u> | <u>G.L.U.</u> |
| 1892        | 165                             | 24                  |               |
| 1893        | 172                             | 31                  |               |
| 1894        | 179                             | 35                  | 84            |
| 1895        | 165                             | 36                  | 100           |
| 1896        | 180                             | -                   | 118           |
| 1897        | 120                             |                     | 180           |
| 1898        | 65                              |                     | 130           |
| 1899        | Dissolved 20                    |                     | 115           |
| 1900        |                                 |                     | 140           |
| 1901        |                                 |                     | 154           |
| 1902        |                                 |                     | 180           |
| 1903        |                                 |                     | 183           |
| 1904        |                                 |                     | 195           |
| 1905        |                                 |                     | 200           |
| 1906        |                                 |                     | 212           |
| 1907        |                                 |                     | 250           |

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Society and Membership.</u>  |                     |               |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
|             | <u>Portsmouth Hand-Drillers</u> | <u>Ironcaulkers</u> | <u>G.L.U.</u> |
| 1908        |                                 |                     | 250           |
| 1909        |                                 |                     | 260           |
| 1910        |                                 |                     | 270           |
| 1911        |                                 |                     | 426           |
| 1912        |                                 |                     | 919           |
| 1913        |                                 |                     | 1025          |
| 1914        |                                 |                     |               |

The relationship between union membership and potential area of recruitment cannot be comprehensively examined, but the following figures indicate the low level of union membership.

16

Labourers and Union Membership, 1880-1914.

1891

|   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| All labourers in Chief Engineers' and Chief Constructor's Dept. | = | 2405 |
| Hand-Drillers Membership  | = | 165  |
| G.L.U. Branch (1894)  | = | 84   |

1900

|                                      |   |      |
|--------------------------------------|---|------|
| All labourers in C.E. and C.D. Depts | = | 3359 |
| G.L.U. Branch                        | = | 140  |

Assuming ordinary and Skilled Labourers, based on figures available for 1891 and 1900, made up 33% of the Dockyard workforce, the following table is possible :

17

| <u>Portsmouth Workforce</u> | <u>Assumed Labourers (33%)</u> | <u>G.L.U. Membership</u> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1910      12,896            | 4,298                          | 270                      |
| 1911      13,505            | 4,501                          | 426                      |
| 1912      13,604            | 4,534                          | 919                      |
| 1913      14,736            | 4,912                          | 1,025                    |

Even in their strongest period, therefore, it seems that Labourers' trade unionism was considerably below the strength found in the crafts. In 1900, for example, the A.S.S. probably had 68% membership amongst the shipwrights of Portsmouth Dockyard.

18

That the Dockyard labourers did not provide fertile ground for

Trade union development is not surprising. The Dockyard labourers were affected by the factors militating against organisation by the unskilled throughout British industry; they did not have the protection of apprenticeship, and the low level of wages worked against the founding of unions on a friendly society basis. Moreover, Dockyard labourers were additionally weakened in the formation of combinations to pursue grievances with the Admiralty through peculiar features of Admiralty employment. The influence of the establishment was felt by the Skilled Labourers, and this was re-inforced by the presence of Army and Navy Pensioners amongst the labouring workforce. Service Pensioners, particularly those employed as ordinary Labourers, did not feel the low level of Dockyard wages as keenly as the men wholly dependent on this source of income, and it seems fair to surmise that pensioners, conditioned by service discipline, would be unlikely to engage in activities seeming to challenge the Admiralty. The exact numbers of pensioners employed in the labouring categories is unavailable, but impressions in the newspapers indicate that the pensioners' influence on labourers' conditions of work was appreciable. Clem Edwards, leading a London deputation of the Dock Labourers' Union during the formation of a short-lived Portsmouth branch, in 1890, referred to this when, "He pointed out that the employment of pensioners tended to lower wages,"<sup>19</sup> and the Portsmouth Times, in 1904, argued that there was always a plentiful supply of ex-service labour in Portsmouth provided by pensioners, "who seem naturally to gravitate to centres with which they are familiar rather than seek more fruitful fields of labour."<sup>20</sup>

Besides factors within the Dockyard working against the

development of unions amongst the labourers, there was an absence of outside influence in this area. In this respect, there was a contrast between the experience of craftsmen in union development and the labourers. For the craftsmen there was invariably a nationally organised trade union seeking membership within the Dockyards, providing practical help in the preparation and presentation of petitions, and encouraging the principles of trades unionism amongst Dockyardmen. The developing relationship between the A.S.S., under Alexander Wilkie, and the Dockyard shipwrights illustrates this type of external encouragement to trades unionism in the Dockyard. There is no real parallel with this in the case of the labourers. There was the attempt to extend the D.L.U. to the Dockyard in the wake of the successful London Strike, and there was an initial burst of enthusiasm for the D.L.U. in Portsmouth encouraged by the town's local Liberal Party. In February of 1890, a mass meeting was held at Fuller's Hall, followed by a procession. The meeting was chaired by the Rev. Charles Joseph, a Baptist minister and prominent figure in Portsmouth Radicalism, and the platform made up of Clem Edwards and G. McCarthy, from the London-based National Executive, supported by prominent Portsmouth Liberals, Sprow (the Portsmouth Secretary of the D.L.U. and a member of the W.M.L.U.), Councillors Crossland, Couzens, Kimber and Ald. Baker (later the town's Liberal M.P.) and H. Blessley (a leading figure of the W.M.L.U.) The meeting received a letter of support from the town's ex-Liberal M.P, Vanderbyl, and heard Joseph, Edwards, W. Willis (on behalf of the Trades Council; Willis was a Dockyard millwright and A.S.E. official), and Ald. Baker stress the importance of combination, and list the grievances of the Yard

labourers; low pay, the denial of trade status, and the unfair operation of piecework schemes. It was reported that 500 had joined the D.L.U. as a result of this meeting, but the D.L.U. in Portsmouth was not sustained.<sup>21</sup> In 1894 the Government Labourer's Union, with an initial membership of 84<sup>22</sup> replaced the D.L.U.

The Dockyard labourers did not achieve a link with a nationally organised union, on a lasting basis until 1914, when the Boilermakers' and Ironshipbuilders' Society, which had previously excluded Dockyard-men because they were unapprenticed, agreed to accept skilled labourers employed as riveters and ironcaulkers. In his report of this development the "Dockyard Gossip" correspondent of the Hampshire Times commented that, "The real reason for this action taken by the Boilermakers' Society is understood to be to induce the Admiralty to fall into line with the large private firms in this respect, and to classify men doing riveting and caulking as mechanics instead of labourers and to pay them a higher weekly wage."<sup>23</sup> It was not until the end of the period under study, therefore, that the skilled labourers achieved the same type of link with a nationally organised union which had existed for the principal crafts, the shipwrights and the engineering trades, from the 1880's.

Perhaps the most important factor in inhibiting the development of unions amongst the labourers, however, was the antipathy of the Admiralty to combination in this category of its workforce. Intimidation is a complex matter in Dockyard history. It was argued by craft union leaders, particularly the shipwright R. Gould, in correspondence with the Webbs, and before the Royal Commission on Labour, that, while direct Admiralty punishment of trade unionists was



not practised, it was common knowledge that trade unionism was  
disapproved.<sup>24</sup> In 1894 two prominent Trades Council members, and  
members of the W.M.L.U, W.J. Willis and C.W. Vine, the former a  
Dockyard engineer, the latter a shipwright, resigned from official  
posts on the Trades Council, and the Hampshire Telegraph alleged that  
this was because of Dockyard pressure.<sup>25</sup> In 1908 McKenna, the  
Secretary of the Admiralty, denied in the House of Commons, that trade  
unionists stood a greater chance of discharge during reductions.<sup>26</sup>  
Against this, however, Admiralty intimidation of craft trade unions  
does not appear to have been practised in such a way as to prevent  
craft unionism, or the development of political involvement by craft  
unionists. W.J. Willis re-appeared on the Trades Council, and his  
career would not appear to have unduly suffered because of his union  
and political involvements. Willis finished his time in the Dockyard  
as a chargeman of fitters. The same applies to other prominent craft  
unionists. In the 1900's the activities of the Trades Council, the  
Labour Representation Committee and the W.M.L.U. were well-publicised  
yet the principal figures of these organisations, frequently Dockyardmen,  
do not appear to have suffered. Besides Willis, David Naysmith, an  
A.S.E. official and stalwart of the Labour Party was a Dockyard  
chargeman, as was J.H. McGuigan, an A.S.S. representative on the  
Trades Council and prominent figure in Radical, Liberal politics.<sup>27</sup>

While the Admiralty may not have been keen on craft unionism  
amongst its employees in the 1890's or 1900's there does not appear to  
have been a sustained campaign to break, or inhibit such unionism.  
This was not the case with the labourers. In 1898 the Admiralty made  
an example of men attempting to organise the skilled labourers. In

the absense of Admiralty records, either at the Public Record Office or in Goschen's, the First Lord's, private papers, the Admiralty's position can only be rationalised;<sup>28</sup> and it seems arguable, at least, that the Admiralty while having to accept craft unionism as a fact of life, was not prepared to willingly see it spread to the crucial Skilled Labourers section. The Skilled Labourer by being so far removed from the demarcation practice, and pay levels, produced by the inter-action of unions and employers in the private trade provided the Admiralty with an exceptionally cheap, and flexible, workforce, and it seems unlikely that the Admiralty would tolerate any development which might jeopardise this position.

An examination of the circumstances in which four men were dismissed from Portsmouth for attempting to organise a campaign on behalf of the Skilled Labourers illustrates the vulnerability of such workers to Admiralty intimidation, and, in the course of ensuing protests, the attitudes amongst Dockyardmen to fair play in the working environment of the Dockyard. The chronological development of the episode was that on Saturday January 22nd, 1898, after work, an afternoon meeting was held outside of the Unicorn Gate for Skilled Labourers to discuss the operation of piecework in the Dockyard. The meeting was arranged by the Trades and Labour Council, and was chaired by the President of the Trades Council, Richard Gould, of the A.S.S, a Dockyard shipwright. Supporting Gould were G.H. Knott, Vice-President of the Boilermakers' Society, representing the trade which worked most closely with the riveters and drillers who were principally concerned with the business of the meeting, T. Sparshatt, the Riveters' Association President, and A.G. Gourd, Secretary of the Hand-Drillers.

The general concern of the meeting was the lack of publicity given to piecework rates, and their calculation. It was argued that it was impossible to accurately predict piecework earnings, and that weekly returns from piecework were frequently inexplicably, and unjustly, low. The issue had been brought to a head by eight men, working on H.M.S. Bellona, whose weekly return from their piecwork had averaged out at 8/- per man. The meeting was told by Gould that, "The proper principle of piecework was that a certain price was paid for certain work upon which both parties agreed, but in the case of the rivet <sup>ers</sup> one side fixed the price and the men had to accept it or walk out of the gate." Gourd supported Gould's opening address by proposing a resolution complaining of the treatment of Skilled Labourers in Portsmouth Dockyard, and calling for an independent inquiry into their conditions of work. In the course of his address Gourd argued, "They had to work hard all week under conditions so tyrannical that they would not be tolerated for twenty-four hours in a private firm." <sup>29</sup> The meeting gave unanimous support to Gourd's resolution. The Admiralty response to this meeting was to dismiss Gourd, Gould, Sparshatt and Knott.

The trade union leaders were discharged "for conduct prejudicial to public service" according to Goschen in a reply to Portsmouth M.P, Sir John Baker. The Admiralty case, was that the meeting contravened Admiralty regulations by making a direct appeal for Admiralty action on behalf of Dockyardmen instead of going through the petitioning process. Moreover, Sparshatt was accused of falsifying piecework returns. In a further letter to Baker, Goschen's Private Secretary, W. Graham Greene, re-iterated the prejudicial conduct charge, explained the matter of piecework irregularities and concluded, "From this reply

you will perceive that the action of the Admiralty was not directed against the four men as trade union leaders, but because they were men who headed an improper agitation directed against legitimate functions<sup>30</sup> of the Admiralty in the administration of Her Majesty's Dockyard."

The Admiralty line, however, was not accepted in the town, or in the Labour movement, and a storm of protest at the dismissal of men for trade union activity was aroused. Within Portsmouth the Trades and Labour Council, backed by the local Liberal Party, M.P's included, organised protest meetings and Parliamentary deputations. The case was taken up by the T.U.C. at its Bristol Conference, and pursued by the Parliamentary Committee, with Sam Woods M.P. challenging Goschen<sup>31</sup> on the matter in Parliament. The protests, however, were unavailing. Gould received some compensation. He resigned from the Board of Guardians, to which he had been elected with Liberal support, and was<sup>32</sup> appointed Relieving Officer by the Board in May of 1898, much to the chagrin of the Local Government Board, whose Baldwin Fleming commented, "The office he (Gould) seeks is that of Relieving Officer and I fear he will obtain it. He has, so far as I am aware, no knowledge nor

experience of the work, and if he be appointed it will be a 'job' pure and simple to provide him with an income in lieu of what he has lost<sup>33</sup> by his discharge from the Dockyard." Gould's new income of £130 p.a. was considerably more than he had earned in the Dockyard, but the trade union movement amongst the skilled labourers, which Gould had tried to encourage on behalf of the Trades and Labour Council did not fare so well. The Hand-Drillers' Society collapsed after these discharges,<sup>34</sup> and the G.L.U. slumped from 180 members in 1897 to 115 by 1899.

Until 1910-12, unionism amongst the labourers was confined to the

handful of enthusiasts in the G.L.U, with the articulation, and presentation, of labourers' grievances being confined to ad hoc organisation, of an ephemeral kind, by labourers themselves prior to petitioning during the Annual Visitations, and the Trades Council and the local M.P's acting on the labourers' behalf. After the show of strength in 1898, there was some softening in the Admiralty line with Gourd being allowed back into the Dockyard as a Skilled Labourer in 1904, from which position he acted as Secretary of the Government  
35  
Labourer's Union.

In the course of the 1898 dismissals row in Portsmouth considerable light was shed on Dockyard work practices, and Dockyard attitudes, especially amongst the skilled Labourers. The whole question of piecework involved notions of what was honesty at work from the men's perspective. The key point in this is that no-one at shopfloor level, management or men, would appear to have adhered to the letter of the piecework law book. In 1890 an ex-Dockyard Skilled Labourer, Thomas Saunders, wrote to the Portsmouth Times recounting his experience of work in No. 3 Ship Shop, where, he alleged, the Inspector of Shipwrights and Leading Man of Fitters under whom he worked, recorded work to suit their own purposes, either to reward favourites or, more usually, to present an appearance, on paper, of efficiency. Saunders stated that pressure was put on the Leading Man to keep the costs of work down, and book balancing could entail there being little relation between the work a man performed and what he was recorded as having performed. Saunders claimed that in 1887 he had worked on the building of the Trafalgar, which was a piecework job, while being paid on day-work after having been charged with

working on the steering-chain of the Temeraire, which at the time was  
undergoing refit.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps too much should not be accepted from a  
single letter, but this type of practice seems highly plausible, and  
ties in with the impression created by other comments surfacing in  
the newspapers as to the operation of piecework; the demand that  
piece rates should be publicised, for example, occurs in several  
petitions to the Admiralty.<sup>37</sup>

The attitude, and usage, of the men towards piecework was  
hinted at by A.G. Gourd during the original meeting of 1898, and  
more fully revealed by Sparshatt's reaction to his dismissal. At the  
Unicorn Gate meeting Gourd said that, "... with the conditions under  
which the men were employed on piecework in Portsmouth it was  
impossible for them to honestly earn a fair day's wage." What Gourd  
was referring to by this was at least partially shown by Sparshatt's  
dismissal. The additional Admiralty charge against Sparshatt was  
that he had admitted in a diatribe against the piecework system that  
he had claimed, and been paid, for 16 rivets which he had not drilled.  
Sparshatt's defence against this was presented to a protest meeting  
called by the Trades Council at the Plough and Barleycorn in Lake Road.  
By this time the dismissals case had been aggravated by the discharge  
of another driller, Moore, for challenging a comment in the Times  
that Dockyardmen, if they worked hard, could earn 15/- in three days  
on the Bellona. Moore had attempted to counter this by checking  
exactly what was being earned on the Bellona and was dismissed  
"for intimidation, conduct prejudicial to the service, counting  
another man's work, and leaving the ship in a slovenly manner." At  
this meeting, however, Sparshatt admitted the 16 undrilled rivets,

but claimed his action was legitimate and common place. Sparshatt explained that he had been at work on one of the Canopus's barbettes, when he had been sent to another barrette to drive in one rivet. This rivet, apparently, was holding up other work, and its treatment, after Sparshatt had moved his gear from one end of the ship to the other, had taken an hour, "... in these circumstances he considered that pay for 16 rivets was only fair remuneration, seeing that he was on piecework." <sup>38</sup>

The Hampshire Telegraph report recorded support being given to Sparshatt as, "Mr. Gourd and other speakers then declared that the system of charging for work twice over was common in all the Dockyards and that officials in Portsmouth Dockyard knowingly allowed it to go on in order to keep up the men's pay. The question was subsequently put to the meeting as to whether this was so and a loud shout of 'It's quite true' was the response." <sup>39</sup>

The piecework issue, however, was not settled by the events of 1898. A modification of the system was made in 1899, with the Admiralty producing a new, and more specific list of tasks, each with its own rate. The new price lists were to be displayed near workplaces, and the discretionary power of foremen to put men on piecework was curtailed; any work not on the price list would have to be carried <sup>40</sup>

as day work. The Portsmouth Times believed, "In fact the agitation which has been going on for years has been successful, and the piecework system is now fair to both Government and workmen instead of being woefully one-sided. The men who were dismissed at Portsmouth for protesting against the old system have been justified, and although they suffered they have left behind a substantial <sup>41</sup> inheritance." However, complaints about piecework remained at the

centre of Skilled Labourers' grievances with complaints about local management's operation of piecework featuring in the 1911 petitions presented by Skilled Labourers, and in 1912 the Government Workers' Federation demanded a Piecework Prices Board composed of equal numbers of officials and elected representatives of the men, something similar<sup>42</sup> to the ideal outlined by Gould in 1898.



Footnotes to Chapter VI

1. P.R.O. ADM 116 900A Case 3002 Report 26 July 1900.
2. H.T. September 2 1893.
3. E.N. November 8 1906.
4. H.T. July 26 1912.
5. H.T. May 2 1913.
6. H.T. February 13 1914.
7. P.P. 1886 XIII 139 Committee on Dockyard Management. Minutes of Evidence Q. 1614.
8. P.T. February 6 1897.
9. H.T. February 13 1914.
10. E.N. August 2 1912.
11. P.T. February 1 1890.
12. P.T. January 23 1897.
13. H.T. February 13 1914.
14. H.T. February 4 1913.
15. P.P. 1900 LXXXIII cd 422 6th Annual Abstract of Labour Statistics p.124.  
P.P. 1912-13 XLVII cd 6109 p.110.  
E.N. August 16 1912.  
H.T. February 14 1913.
16. P.R.O. ADM 116 900A Case 3002.
17. P.P. 1910 cd 5041 CX Health of Navy Returns.  
P.P. 1912-13 cd 6228 CVIII Health of Navy Returns.  
P.P. 1914 cd 7131 LXXX Health of Navy Returns.
18. See Shipwright Chapter 2.
19. P.T. January 11 1890.
20. P.T. April 23 1904.
21. P.T. February 1 1890.
22. See Table covered by note 15.
23. H.T. July 3 1914.

24. Webb Collection. Coll.E. A vol 32. Letter from R. Gould.  
Also - Evidence of R. Gould to the Royal Commission on Labour.  
P.P. 1893-4 XXXII Minutes of Evidence - Line 21, 756.
25. H.T. June 16 1894.
26. Hansard 15 October 1908 454.
27. Details of Naysmith in H.T. December 19 1913 -  
Chairman of 2nd Annual Chargeman's dinner.  
Details of Willis H.T. October 10 1913 -  
Retirement presentation.  
Details of McGuigan H.T. September 6 1912 - Report of  
his promotion.
28. Correspondence with the Keeper of Records of the P.R.O. did  
not reveal Goschen's Papers. There is nothing relating to  
the 1898 dismissals in the Goschen papers kept at the  
Bodleian Library, Oxford.
29. H.T. January 29 1898.
30. H.T. February 5 1898.
31. H.T. February 5 1898.  
H.T. February 12 1898.
32. H.T. February 1898.
33. P.R.O. MH 12 10961 Letter May 17 1898.
34. See Table covered by note 15.
35. E.N. 4 December 1936.
36. P.T. February 3 1890.
37. See Chapter on the 1911 petitions.
38. H.T. February 5 1898.
39. H.T. February 5 1898.
40. H.T. June 24 1899.
41. P.T. July 8 1899.
42. P.R.O. ADM 116 1136 vol I.

## Chapter VII

### The Dockyard, Leisure, Self-Help and Education.

Much of this study is concerned with the conditions of work imposed by the Admiralty on its Portsmouth workforce, and the response of the various trades and grades in the Dockyard to these conditions, particularly through the development of trade unions. However, to focus exclusively upon the nature of trade union attitudes and methods of operation within the Dockyard would give only a partial view of the social history of Portsmouth Dockyard in the 1880 to 1914 period. The Dockyard workplace was also a centre for the development of institutions ranging beyond trade union concerns. The Dockyard was the home of clubs and friendly societies independent of the trade unions, and was the base for, some at least, of the leisure activities pursued by Dockyardmen and their families. An examination of the organisations developed in this context helps reveal the wider nature of the Dockyard way of life, or culture, affecting all Dockyardmen whatever their trade or grade, and to illustrate the manner in which the Dockyard was a focal point for Dockyardmen's lives inside and outside of its gates.

The Dockyard Excursion Committee is an illustration of a leisure organisation developed by Dockyardmen which came to play a significant role in the lives of Dockyard families in the pre-Great War period. The creation and growth of the Dockyard Excursion Committee has to be studied through the pages of the Portsmouth Press in the absence of any internal records. Consequently, and unhappily, the full range of questions which might be asked concerning the Committee, the identities of its founders, their occupations within

the Dockyard, their addresses and their links with other Dockyard organisations, cannot be answered. The Press gives only a cursory history of the Excursion Committee and concentrates on the destination, and support for, the excursions organised. However, something of the Excursion Committee's nature and impact can be garnered from this.

The Excursion Committee was established in 1882 by a group of Dockyardmen who wished to attend an Exhibition in London and who found that the railway company would provide them with a concessionary fare if a party of travellers could be organised.<sup>1</sup> From this ad hoc basis the practice of hiring trains at a discount became institutionalised by the permanent establishment of the Committee.

By 1893 the Committee was providing excursions for considerable numbers. When the Dockyard was closed for its annual inspection the Hampshire Telegraph reported that, "special trains were run conveying about 1,000 passengers to the West of England, a similar number to London and some 750 to Windsor, Southampton etc."<sup>2</sup> On the same occasion in 1896 the Portsmouth Times was able to report, and offer the opinion, that, "It is expected that three to four thousand people will avail themselves of the opportunities offered by the Excursion Committee. It is not a little curious that Portsmouth is the only great yard that possesses a Committee capable of organising such easy and extensive holiday trips."<sup>3</sup> By 1897 the Committee had expanded the range of its operations beyond the organisation of day trips and was offering cheap travel to Newcastle, Hull and Sheffield, presumably the home towns of many Dockyardmen.<sup>4</sup> In the Excursion Committee Dockyardmen demonstrated their capacity to found and sustain a large-scale operation capable of providing a service for all of their

fellows, and one which must have contributed to a sense of Dockyard community.

The Dockyard Excursion Committee is something of a classic case of working-class self-help, owing nothing to official initiative or support. The history of sporting organisations based within the Dockyard, however, is more complex, with in the 1880's the Admiralty being involved in the organisation of rowing regattas within the Dockyard. Until 1887 the Dockyard Regatta was a feature of Dockyard life, held under the auspices of Admiralty officials within the Dockyard during one weekend in the year, the weekends varying between spring and autumn. The regattas were contested by boats crewed from the various sections of the Dockyard workforce, and the Portsmouth - based ships' companies. In 1883, for example the Regatta's six-oared service galley race was won by the Skilled Labourers, with the Shipwrights second, HMS Osbourne third, HMS Jumna fourth and the Sawyers fifth. In the twelve-oar service cutters race the Shipwrights were victorious, with naval crews occupying second to fourth placings and the Skilled Labourers fifth. The four-oared galleys race saw another win for the Shipwrights, Yard Craftsmen second, Drillers third, the Gloucester Regiment fourth, the Joiners sixth and the Shipwright Apprentices seventh.<sup>5</sup> The Regattas were major events in the Dockyard calendar, the Hampshire Telegraph reporting that in 1886 there were 1,254 entrants and that, "The Regatta was thoroughly appreciated by the Yard workmen, about 7,000 in number, sailors and soldiers with their wives and families, who were provided with a pleasant day's<sup>6</sup> enjoyment, probably the only one for a large number of them."

Besides providing a "pleasant day's enjoyment" the Dockyard

Regattas can also be seen as officially-fostered showpieces in which loyalties to workmates could be expressed in the selection, preparation and support of the crews representing the various trades and grades of the Dockyard workforce, yet all within the context of overall Dockyard identification. The importance of the regatta as a celebration of the Dockyard way of life was indicated by its cancellation in 1887. 1887 was a year of major reduction in the Dockyard workforce, the numbers employed being cut from 7,727 to 7,343, the largest percentage fall in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In these circumstances it was not felt appropriate to hold the regatta,<sup>7</sup> although some Dockyard crews did appear in the Southsea Regatta of 1887; one race, the four-oared galleys contest, being reserved for Dockyard crews (the winners of which are not recorded for the race ended in dispute and the Hampshire Telegraph was able to report only that the Regatta Committee<sup>8</sup> would produce a result after deliberations in the Bush Hotel).

After the Regattas the connection between the Admiralty hierarchy and Dockyardmen in the organisation of sporting events, particularly those designed to be Dockyard showpieces became less direct. From the 1890's clubs dealing with a variety of sports were initiated by Dockyardmen alone, and inter-Dockyard competitions and annual sports days were organised independently of Dockyard facilities. However, links with Dockyard officialdom were maintained by the willingness of Dockyard sports clubs to obtain recognition and approval from their superiors. This can be seen in an examination of the athletics clubs formed within the Dockyard from the 1890's.

The absence of club records and comprehensive press coverage of Dockyard sports makes an exact chronology of the appearance of Dockyard

teams and a detailed analysis of membership impossible. However, the intermittent press reports show that by 1907 the athletics clubs organised by men in the Gunmounting Shop, the men in the Electrical Engineering Manager's Department, and the Factory were well enough established to institute a Dockyard Athletics Competition at Alexandra Park, a council-owned recreation ground in the North West corner of Portsea Island.<sup>9</sup> By 1913 the original Dockyard Sports Day was supplemented by a second meeting at Alexandra Park organised by the newly formed Portsmouth Royal Dockyard Athletic Club, which encompassed teams from a wider range of Dockyard groups, including Gunmounting, E.E.M. and the Factory. During the Club's meeting of 1913, for example, the one mile relay race was won by the E.E.M, with the Shipwrights second and the Boilermakers third. In the Tug of War, the Metropolitan Police (the Dockyard Police) defeated the E.E.M.<sup>10</sup> In the development of these athletic clubs, and events, official sanction was sought by the workmen organisers. The prizes at the meeting contested by Gunmounting, the E.E.M. and the Factory in 1914 were presented by Mrs. Neale, a Constructor's wife.<sup>11</sup> When the Portsmouth Royal Dockyard Athletic Club was formed, the Hampshire Telegraph reported that the Admiral Superintendent was invited to become its President, and the Principal Dockyard Officers (presumably the Departmental Managers) its Vice-Presidents, and that these invitations were accepted.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, at a concert given by the Dockyard Athletic Club at the King's Theatre, Southsea, in 1914 the Naval Commander-in-Chief in Portsmouth, and the principal officers of the Dockyard were recorded as present at,<sup>13</sup> "an entertainment given entirely by Dockyardmen and friends." The involvement of Dockyard notables in the Athletic Club, however, does

not appear to have extended beyond that as guests of honour. It is nearly impossible to identify those who were the mainstays of the Club, or to match identities with Dockyard occupation, but the indications are, as might be expected, that Dockyard tradesmen ran the Club. In the list of stewards for the Athletic Club's Alexandra Park meeting of 1913, Messrs. Strong, Spicer, Seckings, Lyne, Kersey, Henly, and Percy, the name Kersey is perhaps identifiable. T. Kersey was a Dockyard Shipwright, an A.S.S. official and an activist in the  
14  
Liberal Party.

The importance of the invitation of Constructors' wives to present prizes at meetings, and having the Admiral Superintendent as president of the Dockyard Athletic Club lies in the insight which this gives to Dockyardmen's attitudes. The leisure activity of athletics was based upon the workplace, and this identification with the workplace extended to the feeling that it was proper to have Dockyard officials as figureheads; a reflection of the Dockyard hierarchy in essentially out-of-'Yard activities. This suggests a quite complex relationship between the men and the management hierarchy, in some respects mirroring the complexity of relationships between the various trades and grades in the manual workforce. On a day-to-day basis, the Dockyard contained a variety of animosities and grievances between management and men, and between groups of men. The management, as implementor of Admiralty policy, was criticised over wage rates, the operation of pension schemes, piecework and demarcation decisions. Equally, demarcation disputes characterised the relationships between the various trades. However, over-riding all of this could be an identification with the Dockyard, encompassing an acceptance of Yard



structures. In this respect 1913 is an interesting year; a year in which the Admiral Superintendent could be installed as President of the Dockyard Athletic Club, and a year in which resentment over pay rates could spill over into the most militant action taken by the Dockyardmen for a generation, the engineers' overtime ban and threatened strike.

Discussion of the origins of athletic clubs in the Dockyard opens up another area of complexity in social relationships within the workforce, the importance of the workshop, as well as the trade or grade, as a focus for loyalty. The emergence of the Factory, the Electrical Manager's Department and the Gunmounting Shop as centres for the formation of sports clubs indicates this. These were enclosed working areas, employing hundreds of men, and were predominantly worked by one trade, shipfitters in Gunmounting, electrical fitters under the E.E.M. and engine fitters in the Factory, but not exclusively so, with skilled labourers working alongside the tradesmen in all areas. In such workshops it must have been easier to organise, whether for sports club, friendly society or trade union purposes, in sheltered, albeit noisy, conditions where men were concentrated, certainly easier than organising the scattered gangs who worked on the ships afloat and whose focal point was the box shed. The physical layout of the Dockyard's workplaces, therefore, helped create another thread of loyalty, at least potential, in the already complex web of Dockyard relationships, and the sporting strength of units such as the Factory helped reflect this.

Points have been made here in the context of the Dockyard's Athletics Clubs, and the indications are that a similar development

was made in association football and cricket. By the Great War there were football and cricket clubs representing the major Dockyard trades, notably those based on the shops. In 1913 a Dockyard Football League<sup>15</sup> was mooted, and this league survives today as a Sunday League. The Dockyard League has outlived the Dockyard itself, and the teams drawn from the Naval Base (which replaced the Dockyard in 1985) are few, but interestingly Gunmounting, E.E.M. and the Painting Department survive. Football, however, provides an opportunity to examine a further aspect of the Dockyardman's tendency to extend workplace loyalties, to groups and to the Yard itself, into leisure activities. The support given to professional football in Portsmouth indicates that there was an identifiable, and self-conscious, element of Dockyard support in the crowds watching the 1898-formed Portsmouth F.C.

Football as a spectator sport in Portsmouth had initially centred on the town's premier service team, the Royal Artillery, formed in 1894, which reached the final of the English Amateur Cup in 1896, and which competed in the Southern League, alongside professional clubs, from the 1897-8 season. The development of the Royal Artillery, however, was curtailed by a professionalism scandal which caused the club to be expelled from the Amateur Cup in 1899, and which led to the Club's folding in the same year. Shortly before the demise of the Royal Artillery, however, local businessmen, headed by John Brickwood the town's leading brewer, had held public meetings to test the notion of a professional club in Portsmouth, and in 1898 this club was<sup>16</sup> formed with Brickwood as its Chairman. The Club's first match in 1898 was against the team of the fellow Dockyard town, Chatham United, and from 1899 Portsmouth F.C. competed in the Southern League,

Football League admission being gained, in company with the rest of the Southern League division I, in 1920.

It is predictable that Dockyardmen would be a staple element of the Club's support, which in the Club's first season saw 161,000 watch its home games,<sup>17</sup> but the extent to which the local press identifies the Dockyardmen within Portsmouth's support as something of a distinct group is interesting. The clannishness of Dockyardmen at football matches is revealed in the earliest example of violence associated with Portsmouth reported in the local newspapers. In 1899 Portsmouth was engaged in an F.A. Cup tie, the qualifying competition final round, against the Bristol side, Bedminster. The Dockyard Excursion Committee organised a cheap train from Portsmouth to Bristol, where the match was played, which carried 500. The match was won 2-1 by Portsmouth, and the Hampshire Telegraph report concluded, "At the conclusion of the match some boilermakers from Portsmouth Dockyard, who had been waving their banner and cheering vociferously during the game were set upon by some of the Bristol supporters."<sup>18</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note that the terracing at the junction of the North Stand and the Milton End at the Portsmouth ground, Fratton Park, is still referred to as "The Boilermakers' Hump." Quite why the boilermakers rather than any other trade should have been so attached to the club, or so markedly colonised a section of the ground, however, remains obscure. In the taking of a prime site the shipwrights might seem more likely candidates given their record in Dockyard demarcation disputes.

In an examination of the wider social aspects of Dockyard life, particularly those appertaining to leisure pursuits, gambling is also

worthy of consideration. From the pages of the Portsmouth newspapers, especially from 1899 onwards, the picture emerges, both from the opinions of journalists and the occasional reporting of court cases, of betting being a prominent feature of Portsmouth working-class life, and notably so amongst Dockyardmen. In 1899, for example, the Evening News reported police action against three shops taking bets, two newsagent's and a barber's, in which a total of 397 betting slips<sup>19</sup> were recovered. This action was associated with the arrest of fourteen men for "running" bets to the shops. In 1900 working-class betting provided the topic for an article in the Hampshire Telegraph, and the opinion, "Wagering upon horses, once confined entirely to the monied class, has now to a considerable extent, lost its favour with them, but the working class section of the community has of late years taken up the amusement strongly. It is from the working-class backers that the bookmakers obtain their greatest profits, and that the profession of 'laying them' is a profitable one cannot be<sup>20</sup> doubted." This article went on to sketch the mechanics of working-class betting in Portsmouth, informing readers that bookmakers operated within premises, particularly public houses, or operated on the streets through runners, the favourite rendezvous for bookmakers, runners and clients being the Speedwell Hotel, a temperance hotel. A second Telegraph article in 1900 elaborated on gambling in the town, pointing out that police action against business premises harbouring bookmakers had forced more street betting, and making a connection between the Dockyard and gambling. The article claimed, "It may not be generally known that the borough is divided between the twenty five bookmakers who are carrying on operations in the town, so that each bookmaker

has his own district and his own circle of clients ... and the town is very thoroughly worked by the bookmakers' runners. The great bulk<sup>21</sup> of their business is transacted during the Dockyard dinner hour."

Thereafter betting stories continue to appear in the newspapers, relating to Portsmouth and the other Dockyard towns, indicating the persistence of the activity, and giving further insights to its operation. In Chatham 20 Dockyardmen were fined £1 after being convicted of betting in the Shipwrights' Arms during the Dockyard dinner hour. They were detected by a policeman from a district outside the Dockyard area infiltrating the Shipwrights' Arms disguised as an engine driver.<sup>22</sup> In 1905 the Chatham police obtained a conviction against a bookmaker who was an ex-Dockyardman, discharged for betting in the Dockyard.<sup>23</sup> In Devonport in 1904 the Admiral Superintendent, Henderson, alarmed at the spread of betting in his 'Yard issued orders against gambling on Dockyard premises and a labourer of nineteen years service was discharged for bookmaking.<sup>24</sup> In 1907, in Portsmouth, the vicar of Portsea, Canon B. Wilson, in an address on "Citizenship" given in the Town Hall commented that, "He was told that the number of 'bookies' in the Dockyard was becoming quite a serious thing, and that there were employed in the Yard a number of boys who were used as the bookmakers' agents."<sup>25</sup> Evidence that the Dockyard was worked by internal bookmakers, to supplement those taking bets on the streets in the dinner hour, was further provided by subsequent police actions. In 1913 a labourer was prosecuted for taking settled bets into the Dockyard through the Unicorn Gate, and in the course of the case the police claimed that Dockyard betting was on the increase.<sup>26</sup> In 1914, bookmaking, and moneylending, within the Dockyard was expressly

forbidden by new Admiralty regulations.

Having cited some of the press-culled impressionistic evidence that betting was indulged in by Dockyardmen inside and outside of the Dockyard gates raises further questions. Ideally, information would be available to gauge the extent and sociology of Dockyard betting; the occupational background of bookmakers, runners and their clientele. Deficiencies in source material, however, preclude comprehensive answers to such problems. With regard to the extent of betting in the Dockyard, the numbers involved and the size of sums wagered, quantitative assessments cannot be made. In the opinion of the Boilermakers' Union leader, Robert Knight, himself an ex-Dockyardman, betting, while on the increase, until 1900 was not widespread in the Dockyards. Giving evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee on Gambling in 1900, Knight argued, "I have had large experience of the working classes. My strong conviction, the result of close observation, and evidence drawn from all sources, is that not 15% of the workmen in the United Kingdom are in the habit of betting. In the Government Dockyards - and I worked in the Devonport Yard for fifteen years - the railway shops and the large engineering establishments, the percentage does not exceed 5%. If we take the towns in the North, the percentage is greater." Knight went on to associate betting particularly with miners and to conclude, "Betting generally is largely on the increase; especially this is noticeable amongst young men and women."

Knight's figures are impossible to verify, as was pointed out by Viscount Peel's questioning of Knight in the House of Lords Committee's proceedings, but the chances are that Knight was understating the

base from which betting was to grow in 1900. Knight was the epitome of the respectable working man, whose career had been substantially dedicated to stressing the responsible character of artisans in general, boilermakers in particular. Knight was at pains to explain to the Committee how dim a view his union took of betting, "We are continually speaking to our people and pointing out to them the evil of betting ... so much is the intelligent portion of our people opposed to betting that they will never appoint a betting man to a position of trust."<sup>30</sup> Knight went on to quote from John Burns' article in the Railway Servants' Review entitled "Brains Better than Bets," that betting, "is the enemy to progress and in common with the drinking habit, is responsible for a great deal of the degradation and misery that surrounds us."<sup>31</sup> Knight blamed the spread of betting amongst the younger generation on the failure of the University Extension Movement, particularly in the North, to become sufficiently popular. Given these views of Knight it is unlikely that he would exaggerate the extent of betting amongst men in essentially trade dominated workplaces, such as the Dockyards, and rather likely that he would concentrate on the betting of miners and the unskilled. Moreover, the Trade Union propaganda referred to by Knight against betting, a propaganda which grew in the years leading to the Great War, re-inforces the view that betting was a significant factor in the leisure pursuits throughout the working class, shipbuilding tradesmen included, and it is in this context that impressions of the strength of betting in Portsmouth Dockyard must be formed.

Unfortunately, discussion of the sociology of Dockyard betting must also be confined to this impressionistic realm. The occupational

group which does surface on the bookmaking side of the gambling world is the labourers. In the cases reported in the Portsmouth press it was a labourer dismissed from Devonport for bookmaking in 1904, a labourer arrested in Portsmouth in 1913. Other Dockyard trades are not specifically mentioned. While the evidence on which to construct hypotheses is of necessity slim it seems reasonable to speculate, at least, that in the Dockyard context, on the bookmaking side, labourers were involved, particularly as runners. The bookmakers themselves, whom the police were virtually unable to bring to court, might well have come from the ranks of the tradesmen (There is a 1905 case in Portsmouth of a boilermaker taking bets) where it should have been easier to acquire the starting capital for the business.<sup>32</sup>

The thinness of the Portsmouth Dockyard gambling evidence does not shed much light on the wider study of gambling within the early-twentieth-century working-classes, and cannot add much to R. McKibbins' work on the topic.<sup>33</sup> McKibbin has shown why horse race betting grew in popularity amongst the British working-classes, largely because the appearance of starting prices in the national and local press made honest street gambling practicable. Moreover, the attraction of street betting lay in its having an economic rationale within the context of working-class experience. For the most part the sums bet, frequently in multiple bets, were affordable, and offered the prospects of wins which while they could not transform could enhance lifestyles, helping family economics out of tight corners, or providing a little luxury.<sup>34</sup> Re-inforcing this was the intellectual pleasure derived from the study of form, an intellectual exercise of considerable sophistication.<sup>35</sup> However, the evidence emanating from Portsmouth



does suggest that McKibbin's views on the role of gambling in class relationships, particularly in the development of Labour political allegiance, might be modified. It was argued by contemporary critics of gambling in the Labour movement that gambling united the working-class and the monied horse-owning fraternity in a common interest, thereby, re-inforcing the deference of workers to their social superiors. Gambling was also criticised for inculcating the ethics and attitudes of capitalism within the working class, the parallel between betting on horse races, and speculating on the Stock Exchange being drawn.<sup>36</sup> McKibbin, however, largely rejects such analysis, arguing that, "a man who backed only the King's, Lord Derby's, or Lord Rosebery's mounts may have perhaps been re-inforcing his inferior position in the social hierarchy, but he was also on to a good thing," and concluding that, "in itself betting did nothing to preserve or<sup>37</sup> undermine the social system."

Against this, however, it might be argued that betting, in combination with other aspects of working-class culture, did play a role in the psychology of working-class Conservatism. The real charge of Labour, and Liberal, politicians against gambling was that it helped provide a way of accepting the established order; working men who could get by economically, and who could find pleasures in gambling, drink, football and the music hall, could well accept the system. This argument can be seen in Ramsay MacDonald's views on gambling with comments such as, "Men who are too weary to think, too overworked to attend political meetings or to take positions of responsibility in their trade unions, can nevertheless speak authoritatively about the pedigree of an obscure horse and the record of a second rate

38  
footballer," and "To hope, for instance, that a Labour Party can be built up in a population quivering from an indulgence in games of hazard is folly. Such a population cannot be organised for sustained political effort, cannot be dependend upon for legal support to its political champions, cannot respond to appeals to its rational imagination. Its hazards absorb so much of its leisure; they lead it away from thoughts of social righteousness, they destroy in it the sense of social service, they create in it a state of mind which believes in fate, luck, the irrational, the erratic; they dazzle its eyes with flashing hopes; they make it in other words absolutely incapable of taking an interest in the methods and aims of reforming

39  
politics." In a similar way, J.A. Hobson saw gambling as an alternative to politics for working men, "It is hard to refuse sympathy to the factory hand ... who occasionally puts his shilling on a horse, going through his weary day's work with the zest of expectancy and hope afforded by his speculation. It gives him a topic of conversation in the intervals of his work, and is for him a sort of politics in leisure hours: into his dull life it introduces an  
40  
element of romance."

In themselves, the comments of MacDonald and Hobson are revealing as to the role of gambling in hampering Labour Party growth, and sustaining a form of politics favourable to the Conservative Party, for this analysis seems highly plausible. However, these comments also serve to focus attention on a second aspect of gambling's influence, the creation of a divide in attitude between labour leaders and the potential led. This is a point acknowledged by McKibbin in his comment that dislike of betting was, "another way in which they

(labour leaders) were divorced from the everyday existence of the class<sup>41</sup> they wished to lead," but not pursued. However, evidence from Portsmouth indicates that the Puritanism of the left in regard to gambling, whether this Puritanism emanated from calculations similar to MacDonald's, or from Protestant, particularly Non-Conformist, morality, created an issue which could be exploited by Conservatives.

The Conservative Party in Portsmouth at the start of the twentieth century shared a sympathy for the right of working men to

have a bet which was absent from the views of their Liberal opponents. In 1900 two Liberal Councillors, Murtough and Couzens, attempted to convince the Council of the need for a bye-law introducing a £5 fine for street betting. This move was successfully opposed by Conservative Councillors. Councillor Amatt "Considered this bye-law an interference with the masses while the classes were allowed to go free," while Councillor Edwards argued for a legalisation of street betting with bookmakers being licensed under police supervision.<sup>42</sup> The Conservative argument that working men should be allowed to bet, just as the better-off were legally entitled to bet through being able to afford bets placed on course via telegrams, is interesting in that it matches the Conservative defence of the public house, and beer shop, against the attacks of the Temperance movement. In 1894, for example, when the Social Purity League, led by the town's most active Radical clergymen, Father Dolling and Charles Joseph, had campaigned against the number of licensed premises in Portsmouth, the Conservative Mayor, Emanuel, had defended Portsmouth's pub in virtually the same language as Amatt had used in defence of the bookmakers, saying, "The 'upper ten' could afford to belong to clubs where there was never

any interference; then why should not the working man have his glass<sup>44</sup> of beer and enjoy it in a licensed house if he so desired." Equally, Conservative J.P's appear to have been scrupulous in enforcing the Law against gambling, particularly where this worked to the bookmakers' advantage. The principal method employed by the Police against bookmaking from premises was infiltration, as can be seen from the<sup>45</sup> Chatham case of 1899, yet in 1914 the Portsmouth bench, headed by the Conservative T. King, dismissed a case brought in similar circumstances against the landlord of the Sun Inn and criticised the<sup>46</sup> police for inciting crime. Against this background the Conservative propagandists in Portsmouth were happy to use gambling in the making of points against their opponents. The Portsmouth Times, for example, contrasting "the average Labour M.P", who was, "a fanatical Puritan"<sup>47</sup> with the working man "who likes to have a bob on his fancy."

While the evidence relating to gambling within the Portsmouth Dockyard, and the town generally, may not be abundant, there is sufficient to identify betting as a feature of Dockyard life, and to indicate that the Dockyard experience was in line with that of the other shipbuilding, and large-scale industrial, centres of the period. Moreover, the Dockyard and Portsmouth evidence provides the opportunity to widen the discussion of the role of working-class leisure pursuits in the operation of political allegiances.

### Collective Self-Help

Just as Dockyardmen turned to their workplace in the establishment of sports clubs so they did in the creation of friendly societies, and other forms of organisation providing collective self-help. The

economic and social importance of the friendly societies in essentially artisan communities is well-known, and has been highlighted by studies such as those of R. Gray in Edinburgh, and G. Crossick in Kentish London. In the Dockyard context the scope for the development of collective self-help institutions was considerable. Dockyardmen, although living under the threat of major reductions in manpower at the time of the Naval Estimates, a threat which was realised in 1887 and 1905, were for the most part in exceptionally secure employment. Such security, albeit on lower wages than obtainable in the major private shipyards, did give the regularity of income which was so important to the long-term success of friendly societies. Moreover, friendly societies could help Dockyardmen at either end of the economic spectrum, in good times and bad. Most important was the prospect of help in bad times, and insurance against threats to being able to cope in the maintenance of an acceptable living standard. This meant insurance against sickness, the costs of funerals and making some provision for old age. However, at the other end of the spectrum, small weekly payments could help provide for life's luxuries, particularly presents at Christmas, and clubs for such purposes were common in Portsmouth.

In the provision of insurance for themselves and their families, however, Dockyardmen had a variety of organisations which were not specifically Dockyard-orientated open to them. The nationally organised Friendly Societies were all strong in Portsmouth. The range of Societies operating in Portsmouth by the 1880's can be seen from the roll call at the Friendly Societies' Service in Portsmouth Parish Church in 1887.

The Friendly Societies Church Gathering 1887.

47

St. Thomas's - Portsmouth Parish Church.

Chairman - J.G. Guyatt (Foresters)

Treasurer - J.R. Chaplen

Committee - Mann, Ellender, H.G. Knight, J.R. Crawford, H. Hall,  
H. Foley, W. Crowther, G.A. Chaplen.

400 present.

Societies.

- 1) St. Thomas's Amicable Society
- 2) Dockyard Medical
- 3) Buffaloes
- 4) Good Templar
- 5) Foresters
- 6) Oddfellows - Kent Unity
- 7) United Superannuation
- 8) Oddfellows - Manchester Unity
- 9) Sons of England Insurance
- 10) Union Burial Fund
- 11) Union Insurance
- 12) Druids
- 13) Beneficial
- 14) Hearts of Oak
- 15) Sons of Temperance
- 16) Rechabites
- 17) Benevolent Brothers
- 18) Friends in Need
- 19) Fareham Trinity Benevolent Society

Sermon by Rev. Grant - Vicar of Portsmouth - Followed by a collection  
for the Eye and Ear Hospital.

Some idea of the strength of the major societies can be gathered  
from the experience of the Oddfellows, the Foresters and the  
Rechabites. By 1913 the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows had 14,000  
members in Portsmouth,<sup>48</sup> and in 1895 this had included the self-  
proclaimed, "largest branch lodge in the world,"<sup>49</sup> in the 2,000 strong  
Loyal, Providential and Humane Lodge. The Kent Unity had 1,372  
members in 9 lodges by 1899.<sup>50</sup> The Foresters could not match the  
strength of the Oddfellows, but by 1899 had 4,460 adult members and

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1,800 juveniles, while the Temperance-based Rechabites had 1,600  
52 53  
members in 1899, and 1,900, organised in 28 tents, by 1910 (this  
after the creation of a separate Southampton branch - in 1897 the  
Portsmouth district, including Southampton had 2,105 members).  
Reliance on newspaper reports for evidence concerning the friendly  
societies does not permit a breakdown of membership by occupational  
group, but in a town where 53% of male industrial workers were  
Dockyardmen in 1891, 59% in 1901 and 56% in 1911, it must be  
54  
expected that Dockyard membership in these societies was substantial.

Alongside societies such as the Oddfellows, however, were  
organisations which were specifically set-up by, and for, Dockyardmen.  
These Dockyard-based societies can broadly be placed into three  
categories, the large scale societies, with low weekly payments  
recruiting members throughout the Dockyard workforce; the narrowly  
based societies, those confined to single trades, or groups of trades  
and which reflected status, and economic divisions within the Dockyard  
through their higher subscriptions, and thirdly, the almost informal  
gift clubs, organised on a gang or workshop basis. The large scale  
societies in the Dockyard were the Dockyard Medical Benefit Society,  
and the Dockyard Burial Fund Society, otherwise known as "The Penny  
Death". According to the Portsmouth Times the Burial Fund Society  
had its origins in the closure of the Dockyard at Deptford. Men from  
55  
Deptford transferred to Portsmouth in 1868 brought with them their  
own burial, and medical insurance society, and this became the  
foundation of the society which by 1899 had 4,661 adult members and  
1,141 juveniles. The Burial Society had by 1899 stock worth £23,598  
56  
17/3d, an annual income of £4,850 6/3d and claims amounting to £4,285.

57

In 1899 the Dockyard employed 9,427 men, whether adult members of the Burial Fund Society were Dockyardmen alone, or their wives as well is unclear. However, it seems safe to assume that at least 2,000 Dockyardmen (21%) were members, possibly the full 4,661 (49%). The Dockyard Medical Benefit Society had a membership on a similar scale to the burial clubs. In 1886 the Medical Benefit Society had 4,000 members, and its doctor in the South Landport Branch had resigned because he felt his district should be divided to enable its

58

doctor to cope. Re-inforcing the Medical Benefit Society, collections were regularly held within the Dockyard, organised by the men to support the town's Royal Hospital, to which patients of the Medical Benefit Society could be sent for treatment. The voluntary nature of the Dockyardmen's support for the Royal Hospital, and their determination to keep collections under their own control was shown in 1885, when, in the face of opposition from the men, led by the shipwrights and the millwrights, a scheme introduced by the Admiral Superintendent to compulsorily levy the men was dropped.

59

More narrowly based than the Burial and Medical Benefit Clubs were the Portsmouth Dockyard United Insurance Benefit Society, and the Portsmouth Dockyard Shipwrights', Caulkers' and Joiners' Mutual Aid Society, or "The Threepenny Death." The United Insurance Benefit Society dated back to 1824 and had in 1899 only 77 members. The Shipwrights', Caulkers' and Joiners' Mutual Aid Society was reported by the Portsmouth Times to be older than the 1d per week Burial Club (the exact date of formation was not given) and was restricted to the trades in its title charging higher weekly payments and giving correspondingly higher benefits. By 1898 its membership stood at

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648. Similar to these societies, but whose membership figures were not given in the newspapers, were the Infectious Diseases Club, and the Jury Gift Club. This latter society was formed by Shipwrights and existed to cover men who might be called for jury service, and who would, in consequence, not be paid by the Dockyard during their absence. If none of its members were called for jury service the club's pool of money was divided amongst its members at Christmas. The Jury Club occupied something of a mid-way position between formally organised Dockyard friendly societies, with their impressive titles, elected officers, Annual General Meetings reported by the newspapers and audited accounts, and the final category of Dockyard self-help organisations, the informal gift clubs. In its article discussing the range of voluntary bodies in the Dockyard the Portsmouth Times referred to the multitude of clubs, based on gangs and shops, taking in small weekly sums and paying out at certain times of the year, notably Christmas.<sup>63</sup> Such clubs could also be used as a means of obtaining short term credit, by borrowing from the club against payments already made.

The great difficulty, and disappointment, in all this discussion of Dockyardmen and their friendly societies, and related organisations, is the sparsity of source material, a sparsity which does not enable the breakdown of societies by occupational groups, or the establishment of long term patterns of clubs' and societies' fortunes. However, the likelihood must be, given the wages of tradesmen and the continuity of employment enjoyed by all of the established tradesmen and most of the hired tradesmen, that these men provided the bulk of club and society membership; although an attempt by labourers to engage in

similar activity can be found. In 1886, a Royal Dockyard Superannuation Fund was started. Its intention was to provide pensions for labourers; a man of 35 paying 2d per week would at 60 receive 7/4d per week.<sup>64</sup>

The same difficulty applies to study of the Co-operative movement and its relationship to the Dockyard. The Portsmouth Co-operative, the Portsea Island Mutual Co-operative Society (P.I.M.C.O.) will not admit to keeping any records which would detail membership, and activities,<sup>65</sup> before the Great War. However, the activities of P.I.M.C.O. were occasionally reported at length in the local newspapers and it is possible to form some idea of the society. The P.I.M.C.O. was formed<sup>66</sup> in 1873 and by 1900 had a membership of 4,090, running a network of retail shops in the town centred on the main store in Fratton Road. The preponderance of Dockyardmen in this membership was at least hinted at during the opening of the main Fratton Road store and associated buildings, a substantial undertaking with £4,400 being spent on the store, £2,900 on a bakery and £1,550 on stables, in 1887. An evening meeting was held at the Albert Hall, Fratton Road, attended by some 2,000, to celebrate the stores' opening. One of the speakers at this meeting was Mr. B. Jones, Manager of the C.W.S, and the emphasis placed on Dockyard matters, linking the Dockyard with the principles of Co-operation, in his address points out the nature of the P.I.M.C.O's membership, Jones said, "He need scarcely point out to them - most of whom were engaged in the Dockyard - that they were employed in a great Co-operative establishment. In his opinion, and probably in theirs, there were some men who were getting too much and some who were getting too little (hear, hear) but if they and the whole of their fellow men were to take action throughout the country

on Co-operative principles they could prove that business might be conducted in an equitable manner which everyone deserved. They would not then see the work from their Dockyards sent to private employers<sup>67</sup> to swell their pockets at the expense of the nation (Applause)."

These comments were topical, for between 1886 and 1887 the Dockyard had experienced a major rundown with its workforce being cut from 7,727 to 7,343,<sup>68</sup> and the topicality of Jones' remarks gives a further clue to the identity of the Co-operators from the Dockyard, for it would seem that while they were resentful towards the reductions few of them were directly affected. Mr. Elsey, P.I.M.C.O's Secretary had earlier remarked, "they had done their best to promote Co-operation in the borough, and though some gentlemen he knew rejoiced at the discharge from the Dockyard of two of their members, they had, by the very assistance rendered by the Society, been able to seek work elsewhere." As might be expected, therefore, the P.I.M.C.O. seem to have been essentially an organisation of the established men, and long serving hired men. The Co-op's pricing policy bore this out, with another official, Mr. Knell, reminding Portsmouth Co-operators that their stores would not undersell the local shopkeepers.<sup>69</sup>

#### The Dockyard and Education

In the wider Dockyard world education was of considerable importance. Given the mid-nineteenth century attempts by the Admiralty to curb political jobbery in the Dockyards much of the Dockyard entry and promotion procedures became based on educational qualification, tested by competitive examination, and consequently the acquisition of formal education became an important factor for Dockyardmen and

their families, or for families with aspirations towards a Dockyard career for their sons. This is a point made by Sir James Matthews, who worked in the Dockyard before the Great War, completing his apprenticeship as a shipwright in 1909, and then working as an acting draughtsman, in an unpublished memoir of his life in Portsmouth and involvement in the Labour Party. Writing of the educational background of Dockyardmen, Sir James Matthews said, "What needs to be remembered is that a great proportion of the craftsmen had been Dockyard apprentices and having sat a stiff civil service examination at the age of 14 to get this status many had further Dockyard School and Technical College training. The competition for Dockyard entry raised the general standard of Portsmouth education. The "Dockyard Class" at the Higher Grade School in the pre-exam year was a first-class cramming operation, as was the similar class at a large private school, but it had real value in general."<sup>70</sup> Sir James himself was the product of this environment; the son of a builder's foreman, Sir James had achieved his shipwright apprenticeship from Portsmouth Higher Grade School in 1901 at the age of fourteen.<sup>71</sup>

Dockyard records do not allow a quantification of the proportion of ex-Dockyard apprentices on the Dockyard payroll mentioned by Sir James, but evidence relating to the schools of Portsmouth supports his contention as to the importance of the Dockyard examination in the town. Many private schools existed in the town which specialised in the Dockyard examination, the largest being owned by the Oliver family, and some of the Church Schools extended their age range to cope with Dockyard classes. St. Luke's Church of England School, for example, maintained a Dockyard class. In 1901 it had 24 boys in such

a class.<sup>72</sup> After the 1902 Education Act St. Luke's expanded, and by 1905 it was running two classes for 13-14 year olds, there was a Dockyard Division Class with 32 boys and a Commercial Division Class with 22.<sup>73</sup> The school which dominated the Dockyard examination, however, was Sir James Matthews' old school, the Higher Grade School, which later became the Portsmouth Secondary School, then the Southern Grammar School. The Higher Grade School was established by the Portsmouth School Board in 1883, and quickly achieved the leading position in the Dockyard entrance examination. By 1898 the school entered 96 boys for the examination, 49 were successful and the School had 7 boys in the first ten. In 1899 it had 70 places out of 92 entered, in 1900 93 out of 96 and in 1901, the year of Sir James Matthew's entry, 119 out of 132 boys were successful in passing with 20 boys being placed in the top 30.<sup>74</sup>

To gauge some idea of the Higher Grade School's success in the Dockyard examination the operation of the process has to be understood. The Dockyard examination until 1905 was set by the Admiralty, but was then administered by the Civil Service Commission, when the papers to be taken, and the weighting given to these, were Arithmetic 350 marks, English 400, Geometry and Algebra 300, Elementary Science 300, Drawing 150.<sup>75</sup> The Admiralty examination involved papers in Arithmetic, Orthography, Handwriting, Grammar, English Composition, Geography and Algebra.<sup>76</sup> Any number of boys could take the examination, and there was a fixed pass mark, but the number of boys offered apprenticeships depended upon the requirements of each Dockyard in each trade. The boys were ranked in order of marks and starting at the top the boys were given a choice of trade until all of the Dockyard's requirements

had been met. The examination results were usually published in the local newspapers, and an example of the system in operation is provided by the examination of 1894. In that year 73 boys were allowed to be entered as apprentices in Portsmouth, the first 35 were allowed to become shipwrights, or fitters, what were called major trades in the Dockyard, and the rest had to opt for minor trades such as joiner or blacksmith.<sup>77</sup> This pattern of the boys at the top of the list opting for the major trades persisted throughout the period. The cleverest boys invariably opted to become shipwrights, for while on the Dockyard pay scales engineering craftsmen could earn more than shipwrights, for the ambitious boy in the Dockyard becoming a shipwright offered the chance of a transfer to Greenwich and study for the R.C.N.C, or within the Dockyard a better chance of becoming a supervisor. Also, shipwright apprentices were more plentiful given the importance of this trade in the Admiralty scheme of things. In 1900, for example, of the 170 entered at Portsmouth there were 60 shipwrights, 10 shipfitters, 30 engine fitters, 30 boilermakers, 2 coppersmiths, 2 founders, 3 joiners, 2 patternmakers, 1 sailmaker, 3 smiths, 2 blockmakers, and, for the last 30 boys on the pass list<sup>78</sup> places as Naval Shipwrights.

The pull which the Dockyard examination had on families in Portsmouth, and the standards which were reached in the Higher Grade School, and the other schools preparing boys for the examination, can be seen in the numbers entering for the examination, and reaching its pass standard. In 1905, for example, 400 boys applied for 97<sup>79</sup> places and 308 qualified. In 1910 there were 369 candidates for<sup>80</sup> 93 vacancies, and in 1914 there were 408 boys applying for 183 places

with 334 reaching the pass mark.<sup>81</sup> The pass mark for the examination was not always given in the newspapers, but, in the Admiralty's last year of running the examination, in 1905, out of a maximum mark of 1,200 the pass mark was 421. In 1905 the examination was headed by a mark of 1,074.<sup>82</sup> This helps put the Higher Grade School's results in perspective, for not all of its boys passing the examination were offered apprenticeships. However, in 1914, when 129 of the school's 132 candidates reached the pass standard, 95 of the Secondary School's<sup>83</sup> boys, as the school was then known, were in the first 205 places, places which carried 183 Dockyard apprenticeships in a variety of trades, and 22 places as Naval shipwright apprentices. For those boys not offered Dockyard apprenticeships Dockyard entry could still be achieved as a Yard Boy, with the prospect of achieving one of the Skilled Labourers' jobs, such as drilling or riveting, by the age of 21.<sup>84</sup>

The influence of the Dockyard examination on Portsmouth families and the town's schools is shown by the debates held over the Higher Grade School's future, as well as by listing entries and pass levels in the examination. From its foundation the school had been attacked by the owners of private schools catering for the Dockyard examination, by denominational schools, by those who believed that the Portsmouth Grammar School was the place for secondary education in town, and from Councillors concerned at the school's cost to ratepayers.<sup>85</sup> By 1897, however, the principal argument concerning the school was the extent to which it should be expanded to provide a full secondary education; even in 1897 there were fears that the school was too heavily influenced by the Dockyard examination. At a Town Hall

Conference called by the School Board in 1897 it was pointed out that few boys stayed in the school after the holding of the Dockyard examination, and in 1898 an attempt was made to rectify this with the establishment of scholarships for three year courses, running from 12 to 15, covering a wider curriculum than that demanded by the Dockyard examination.<sup>86</sup> However, the Dockyard class continued to be the most popular, and when the re-organisation of the school was forced by the Education Act of 1902, the school re-emerging on August 1st 1904 as the Portsmouth Council Secondary School under a new headmaster, Dr. G.J. Parks, the Dockyard examination continued to shape the school's character. In the opinion of the school's historian, A.C. Hitchins, "if the regulations for secondary schools had been faithfully followed the Higher Grade School should have completely changed its character when it became the Secondary School. In fact, local conditions successfully retained the original character and purpose of the school for many years in spite of the prodding of inspectors.<sup>87</sup> The Dockyard work continued."

The deficiencies of school and Dockyard records do not permit a detailed analysis of the family backgrounds of the boys entering the Higher Grade School to take the examination, or the backgrounds of the whole range of boys attempting entry to Dockyard apprenticeships. However, some insight is provided in this area by a correspondence in the Evening News in 1905 between John Pile, a prominent socialist and trade unionist in the town, and the Secondary School authorities. Pile complained that the school's fees of £3 p.a. made the school a tradesman's (in the sense of shopkeepers and small businessmen) school and not a working man's school. The school, supported by the



Evening News, replied to this by giving a breakdown of the occupations of fathers whose sons had been admitted to the school in September 1904. 240 boys were stated to have been admitted, but the occupational breakdown covers only 189. However, this breakdown does give some idea of the character of the Secondary School. The figures were grouped by the Evening News under the heading of working men's sons and tradesmen's sons.

Occupation of Fathers of Boys entering Portsmouth Secondary School  
September, 1904

| <u>Tradesmen</u>   | <u>Workers</u>   |
|--------------------|--|
| 2 Independent      | 27 Shipwrights   |
| 4 Engineers        | 20 Fitters   |
| 3 Builders         | 17 Naval Pensioners                                      |
| 5 Warrant Officers | 16 Carpenters and Joiners                                |
| 20 Tradesmen       | 15 Writers and Clerks                                    |
| 9 Teachers         | 11 Engine Room Artificers                                |
|                    | 11 Labourers   |
|                    | 10 Seamen  |
|                    | 6 Draughtsmen  |
|                    | 7 Tailors  |
|                    | 1 Stoker, Policeman, Smith<br>Agent, Sailmaker, Plumber. |
| <hr/> 43 <hr/>     | <hr/> 146 <hr/>  |

Total 189

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| % Non-Working Class (Evening News Categorisation)   | = 22.75 |
| % Working Class (Evening News Categorisation)   | = 77.25 |
| % Skilled Manual (Shipwrights, Fitter, Joiner, ERA,<br>Tailor, Smith, PC, Sailmaker, Plumber) | = 44.9  |

Pile's reply to the Evening News' figures was that these, "showed conclusively that the scholars were almost entirely the sons of the best class of artisans," and that a labourer earning 18/- to 20/- per week could not afford the school's fees. Pile's evaluation of the position was perhaps a little too sweeping, for eleven labourers

at least were prepared to, and able to, find the money to send their boys to the school. However, the key point was that the Secondary School, and it seems reasonable to assume the other schools in the Dockyard entrance examination market, were essentially the schools of the skilled craftsmen, and lower-middle class. Where such schools made a distinctive contribution to Portsmouth's skilled working men was that they underpinned a stress on education, and raised the level of education, within that section of the working class. While the Secondary, and related schools, and the Dockyard entrance examination could provide an escape route from the working class, as happened in the case of the Secondary School's new Headmaster of 1904, Dr. G.J. Parks a Portsmouth man who had been a Dockyard apprentice, at 20 had transferred to the Admiralty Experimental Station at Haslar, at 22 had taken first place in the Civil Service examination for an appointment as Master of the Dockyard School and who had acquired the degrees of BSC and DSC while teaching apprentices there for twelve years, it is probable that the boys who prepared for the Dockyard examination from 12 to 14 came from a skilled manual background and stayed in that environment.

The level of formal education possessed by many Dockyard craftsmen, and the general interest in education amongst the craftsmen, at least, stemming from this, must help to explain a feature of Portsmouth working-class life felt by contemporaries to be particular to Portsmouth, the popularity of lectures on social, economic and political topics. The willingness of Dockyardmen to attend lectures was remarked upon in different periods by two rather different Anglican Clergymen. The Christian Socialist, the Rev. R.R. Dolling, who from 1887 until 1896

was in charge of the Winchester College Mission at St. Agatha's, Landport, ran a series of lectures entitled "Addresses for Men Only," on Sunday afternoons which tackled social and political questions. These lectures were invariably well attended, and as the Hampshire Telegraph remarked, "The audience was chiefly composed of the artisan<sup>91</sup> class." Dolling felt that the Dockyardmen were an interested and challenging audience.

A similar view was taken by a future Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, who from 1896 to 1900 was Vicar of St. Mary's, the parish church of Portsea Island. While Lang was not as politically radical as Dolling, and was not as involved as Dolling was in party politics, taking a leading role in<sup>93</sup> Portsmouth's Liberal Association, Lang was concerned with the social problems affecting the working class, and built upon the tradition of lectures for working men started by Dolling at St. Agatha's. At the St. Mary's Institute, built by Lang, lectures were given on politics, economics and social problems, by Lang, invited speakers or his curates. These lectures, as Dolling's had been, were well attended. According to Lang's biographer, G.J. Lockhart, "Doctors,

Lawyers, Sailors and Dockyard workers would turn up from every quarter of Portsmouth, the average figure of attendance being around 300."

While Lang himself was not particularly enamoured of Portmuthians, saying in a letter to a friend in Leeds, "They are not to me an easy or congenial folk, I miss the freedom and frankness of the North," he, like Dolling, was impressed with the willingness of the men to take an interest in new ideas, "Afterwards Lang used to say that while he had been in many churches in many places, he had never known such an opportunity for the preacher as was offered by the congregation at Portsea." <sup>94</sup> It was against this background that Dockyardmen, and other Portsmouth workers, acquired, and acted upon, their political views.

Footnotes to Chapter VII

1. P.T. December 5 1886.
2. H.T. August 26 1893.
3. P.T. May 16 1896.
4. P.T. August 7 1897.
5. H.T. July 14 1883.
6. H.T. January 2 1886.
7. H.T. October 15 1887.
8. H.T. October 1 1887.
9. H.T. July 13 1914. Mention of 7th Annual Sports Day.
10. H.T. September 5 1913.
11. H.T. July 3 1914.
12. H.T. September 5 1913.
13. H.T. June 5 1914.
14. A.S.S. Annual Report 1899. See Also Chapter on Liberal Politics.
15. H.T. September 5 1913.
16. M. Neason, M. Cooper and D. Robinson. Pompey - The History of Portsmouth F.C. Horndean 1984. p.8-9.
17. Neason, Cooper and Robinson op,cit p.11.
18. H.T. December 16 1899.
19. E.N. April 27 1899.
20. H.T. January 20 1900.
21. H.T. August 11 1900.
22. H.T. August 26 1899.
23. H.T. June 24 1905.
24. J. Hawke - 'The Extent of Gambling.' In GAMBLING and BETTING - A National Evil - Ed. S. Rowntree, London 1905 p.39.
25. E.N. November 7 1907.

26. H.T. May 16 1913.
27. H.T. July 3 1914.
28. P.P. 1901 (370) V. House of Lords Select Committee on Gambling. Minutes of Evidence. Question 3636.
29. P.P. 1901 (370) V. Q. 3695.
30. P.P. 1901 (370) V. Q. 3654.  
For Knight's career see D. Cumming - A History of the Boilermakers' Union, London 1904.
31. P.P. 1901 (370) V. Q. 3669.
32. H.T. January 21 1905.
33. R. McKibbin, "Working Class Gambling in Britain", Past and Present. February 1979.
34. McKibbin op.cit., p.164.
35. McKibbin op.cit., p.168.
36. Ramsay MacDonald, "Gambling and Citizenship", in Gambling and Betting a National Evil Ed. S. Rowntree, London 1905 p.117.
37. McKibbin op.cit., p.175-176.
38. MacDonald op.cit., p.126.
39. MacDonald op.cit., p.127.
40. J.A. Hobson in Rowntree op.cit., p.13.
41. McKibbin op.cit., p.176.
42. H.T. August 11 1900.
43. P.W. Galliver, "The Christian Clergyman's Place in Politics" Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Lancaster 1977 p.37-45.
44. H.T. February 24 1894.
45. H.T. August 26 1899.
46. H.T. August 3 1914 - See Chapter on Working Class Conservatism for a development of this point.
47. H.T. August 6 1887 - Range of Societies indicated by roll call at church service.
48. P.T. March 16 1913.

49. P.T. January 19 1895.
50. H.T. April 1 1899.
51. H.T. February 3 1900.
52. H.T. March 11 1899.
53. P.T. April 16 1910.
54. R.C. Riley, The Industries of Portsmouth in the Nineteenth Century . Portsmouth Paper No 25, 1976 p.9.
55. P.T. December 5 1896.
56. E.N. January 14 1899.
57. P.P. 1901 LXXIII cd 495. Health of the Navy Returns.
58. H.T. May 22 1886.
59. H.T. March 28 1885.
60. H.T. March 18 1899.
61. P.T. December 5 1896.
62. H.T. March 18 1899.
63. P.T. December 5 1896.
64. H.T. October 9 1886.
65. Correspondence with P.I.M.C.O. August 19 1978.
66. P.P. 1901 XXXIV cd 698. Board of Trade Report.
67. H.T. November 5 1887.
68. P.P. 1908 LXV cd 296. Health of the Navy Returns.
69. H.T. November 5 1887.
70. Manuscript in the possession of Sir James Matthews,  
Ethelburga Road, Southampton.
71. Based on a minuted interview with Sir James Matthews, 31.10.79.
72. Portsmouth Record Office. St. Luke's Journal, No 2 vol.8.  
March 1901.
73. Portsmouth Record Office. St. Luke's School Log. July 1905.

74. A.C. Hitchins - Portsmouth Southern Grammar School for Boys.  
Southsea 1954 p.35.
75. E.N. September 23 1905.
76. H.T. January 16 1894.
77. H.T. January 16 1894.
78. H.T. March 24 1900.
79. E.N. July 4 1905.
80. H.T. August 12 1910.
81. H.T. July 10 1914.
82. E.N. July 4 1905.
83. Hitchins op.cit., p.36.
84. H.T. July 10 1914.
85. Hitchins op.cit., p.20.
86. Hitchins op.cit., p.38.
87. Hitchins op.cit., p.46.
88. E.N. October 16 1905.
89. E.N. October 31 1905.
90. Hitchins op.cit., p.49.
91. H.T. February 11 1893.
92. C.E. Osborne, The life of Father Dolling ,  
1903 p.318.
93. Galliver op.cit., p.45-49.
94. G.J. Lockhart, The life of Cosmo Gordon Lang ,  
1949 p.321.



Chapter VIII

CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS AND LABOUR; DOCKYARDMEN AND POLITICS.  
Dockyardmen and Conservatism.

It is difficult to see that Conservatism amongst Dockyard workers in the nineteenth century was founded upon a simple economic imperative, of the Conservatives standing for higher Naval spending than the Liberals and, consequently, higher levels of Dockyard employment. Such an argument has been used to explain the dominance of Conservatives in Chatham from 1874 to 1906, when the Chatham seat was held by Sir John Gorst until 1892, L.V. Loyd from 1892 to 1895 and H.D. Davies from 1895 to 1906, when the seat was lost to the Labour candidate, H.J. Jenkins, a shipwright. A study of Chatham has argued that "... this performance is therefore at variance with what would normally be expected," and its author, M. Waters, has explained this electoral deviance by saying, "the oral testimony states without<sup>1</sup> hesitation that this was a bread and butter matter." This approach to the politics of a Dockyard town poses several problems. Initially, it does not follow that Dockyardmen should naturally be Liberal and that Conservative strength in a Dockyard town is something of a deviation. Studies of Lancashire towns in the 1880-1890 period show the strength of Conservatism ~~for~~ primarily cultural reasons amongst<sup>2</sup> working men, while Liberalism amongst Dockyardmen, particularly the craftsmen was strong in Portsmouth. While Chatham was returning its string of Conservative M.P's, Portsmouth and Devonport returned several Liberal M.P's, and, in the Portsmouth case, this was attributed by Liberal candidates to the strength of the Dockyard/Liberal nexus. There does not, then, appear to be a norm of political behaviour for Dockyardmen from which to deviate. Secondly, the usefulness of

oral evidence for electoral behaviour before 1910 must be of limited value, unless exceptionally elderly subjects with highly retentive memories are used.

The evidence from Portsmouth, based on contemporary press coverage, suggests that before 1910 there is little indicating that Dockyardmen would be forced into Conservative allegiance as a "bread and butter" issue. The Conservative/Liberal divide amongst working men existed, but was based on cultural and psychological factors, patriotism, religion, deference and use of leisure found in other industrial communities. The economic factor really comes into play in the 1900's with the increasing influence of the left in Liberal politics and the emergence of independent Labour politics with socialist/pacifist associations. The argument that voting Conservative was a bread and butter issue could then be used to re-inforce, and perhaps extend, the long-standing features of Conservatism amongst Dockyard, and other, workers.

Both Liberal and Conservative parties in Portsmouth claimed to be Navy and Dockyard parties. The key point with regard to the "bread and butter" argument is that in the 1880's and 1890's the local Liberals, on balance, had less reason to be embarrassed by the actions of Governments drawn from their party than the local Conservatives. Both Liberal and Conservative Governments initiated reductions in the Dockyard workforce, but Conservative Governments were responsible for the more traumatic periods of rundown in the Dockyards, from 1886-9 and from 1905 to 1906. The record of fluctuations in the Dockyard workforce from 1880 to 1914 shows that the Liberals had an edge over Conservative Governments in their employment records.

3

Employment in Portsmouth Dockyard 1880-1914

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Party of Govt</u> | <u>Av. No. Employed</u> | <u>% Change</u> |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1880        | L                    | 5,892                   | + 5.2           |
| 1           | L                    | 6,722                   | + 14.0          |
| 2           | L                    | 7,198                   | + 7.0           |
| 3           | L                    | 7,331                   | + 1.8           |
| 4           | L                    | 7,294                   | —               |
| 5           | June C               | 7,771                   | + 6.5           |
| 6           | Feb L                |                         |                 |
|             | Any C                | 7,727                   | —               |
| 7           | C                    | 7,343                   | - 5.0           |
| 8           | C                    | 7,390                   | —               |
| 9           | C                    | 7,024                   | - 5.0           |
| 1890        | C                    | 7,615                   | + 8.4           |
| 1           | C                    | 7,795                   | + 2.3           |
| 2           | Aug L                | 7,847                   | —               |
| 3           | L                    | 7,756                   | - 1.1           |
| 4           | L                    | 7,821                   | —               |
| 5           | June C               | 7,866                   | —               |
| 6           | C                    | 8,565                   | + 8.8           |
| 7           | C                    | 8,949                   | + 4.4           |
| 8           | C                    | 8,847                   | - 1.1           |
| 9           | C                    | 9,427                   | + 6.5           |
| 1900        | C                    | 10,044                  | + 6.5           |
| 1           | C                    | 10,715                  | + 6.6           |
| 2           | C                    | 11,314                  | + 5.5           |
| 3           | C                    | 11,816                  | + 4.4           |
| 4           | C                    | 11,924                  | —               |
| 5           | C                    | 11,070                  | - 7.1           |
| 6           | Dec L                | 10,494                  | - 5.4           |
| 7           | L                    | 10,608                  | + 1.0           |
| 8           | L                    | 11,595                  | + 9.3           |
| 9           | L                    | 12,190                  | + 5.1           |
| 1910        | L                    | 12,896                  | + 5.8           |
| 1           | L                    | 13,505                  | + 4.7           |
| 2           | L                    | 13,604                  | —               |
| 3           | L                    | 14,736                  | + 8.3           |
| 4           | L                    | 16,692                  | + 13.2          |

|                        |               |      |
|------------------------|---------------|------|
| <u>Years in Office</u> | Conservatives | 17.5 |
|                        | Liberals      | 17.5 |

Conservatives

- 1) No. of Years in which Portsmouth workforce Increased - 10
- 2) No. of Years in which Portsmouth workforce Decreased - 4

Liberals

- 1) No. of Years in which Portsmouth workforce Increased - 11
- 2) No. of Years in which Portsmouth workforce Decreased - 3

Years in which the Portsmouth workforce increased by > 5% = 15

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Liberals      | 8.5 |
| Conservatives | 6.5 |

Moreover, the Liberals could claim a better record in conditions of work within the Dockyards. It was a Conservative Government which introduced classification schemes for Dockyard craftsmen in 1891, a Liberal Government which substantially modified this in 1893. It was a Liberal Government which introduced the eight hour day for Admiralty workers in 1894, and a Conservative administration which authorised the dismissal of Richard Gould and the other organisers of the meeting protesting at Labourers' pay levels in 1898.

That the Conservatives were not invariably sound on "bread and butter" issues before 1900, however, is best illustrated by statements made by ministers during the reductions of 1887. Conservative commitment to defence was matched with a commitment to retrenchment which could rival the Liberals, and an association with the private trade. In 1887 the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord George Hamilton explained the Dockyard reductions, to a protest delegation from Chatham, by saying, "... It could no longer be said that the Government Dockyards were, as they were thirty years ago, beyond the reach of competition by private enterprise. Work had been put out to contract for building every conceivable type of ship. These ships were now being delivered and, highly as he appreciated Dockyard work, he was bound to say that they were just as good, cheap and satisfactory as if they had been made in Government establishments." <sup>4</sup> A statement

such as this gave the Portsmouth Liberals considerable ammunition against the Conservative Government and it was alleged that the secretary to the Admiralty, A. Forwood, was favouring his connections in Liverpool at the Dockyard's expense. This line of attack was also taken up at the start of the reduction of 1905 when Portsmouth's senior Liberal M.P, Sir John Baker, argued, "Portsmouth suffered by work being taken away and given by preference, or privilege and influence, to private people and no-one suffered more than the workmen."<sup>5</sup> In the circumstances of a major reduction initiated by a Conservative - led Admiralty men were Conservative in spite of "bread and butter" issues not because of them, and in 1887 defence of the Dockyard cut across political dividing lines as Mayor and Town Council organised protest meetings and deputations to London. In September 1887 Baker headed a deputation to Hamilton which included the local Conservatives,<sup>6</sup> Handley, White, Ford and Edmonds.

The Conservatives could also run into trouble with Dockyardmen, throughout the 1880-1914 period, over the attitude of prominent local Conservatives, particularly those with Naval associations, to the quality of Dockyard work, and Dockyardmen as workers. There was a line of thought in Navy circles that Dockyardmen were cosseted by the exceptional security of their employment, and that there was amongst Dockyardmen a consequent tendency to be workshy. This view received its clearest expression in the evidence presented to Admiral Graham's Committee on Dockyard Management of 1886. Similar opinions could also be voiced in Conservative circles, and the vehement denials of such views might lead the more cynical to suspect that lapses were made in this direction. When Admiral Lord Charles Beresford first appeared

as a Parliamentary candidate in Portsmouth, in 1909 for a by-election which was overtaken by the General Election, he thought it necessary to stress at his adoption meeting that, "He denied ever having said that Dockyardmen were idle or indolent and he expressed a very high opinion of Dockyard work." Hampshire's Conservative M.P, Lee, was less defensive about his attitude to the Dockyard. Replying to a charge levelled by the Liberals that he had "sneered" at the Dockyard, Lee claimed he was not as parochial as were Portsmouth's Liberal M.P's, and "I believe in the Navy first and the Dockyard second, and that is the main difference between me and the Borough members."<sup>7</sup>

These comments from Beresford and Lee indicate that there was still scope for Liberals in Portsmouth to stress the special relationship between their party and the Dockyard, to appeal to Liberal Governments' past records, and the work of M.P's such as Baker and Bramsdon in defence of the Dockyard interest. By 1909-10, however, the Conservatives were more effectively than previously, able to stress differences in Naval and defence policy between themselves and the Liberals, and to make a bread and butter appeal to Dockyardmen. By 1900 the Radical wing of the Liberal Party could be labelled "Little Englanders" and "Pro-Boers", and as the Naval race with Germany developed the Liberal left, and the Socialist element in the nascent Labour Party, could be pilloried for opposing Naval expenditure. This line of Conservative attack can be easily, and frequently, seen in the Portsmouth Times, particularly in the handling of the town's first Labour candidate for a Parliamentary election, W. Sanders, in 1906. A typical example of the advice given to working-men electors was the comment, "One of the principal

items in the programme of the Labour Party in the House of Commons is that no more battleships should be built .... Did the workmen of Portsmouth Dockyard know that they were voting to extinguish themselves when they supported Alderman Sanders?"<sup>8</sup> In 1913 the argument was reiterated with "Portsmouth and Barrow, not to mention other places, subsist largely on the building of warships, and yet the people were asked to elect as M.P's men who would scrap every Dreadnought and presumably convert the Dockyards into allotment gardens. Could madness go further?" This line was re-inforced by questioning of the patriotism of the left. For example, in its report of MacTavish's adoption as Portsmouth's Labour candidate in 1913 , the Portsmouth Times concluded with, "Needless to say the meeting closed without the singing of the National Anthem."<sup>9</sup>

The electoral impact of this line of attack was acknowledged by the Liberal Party and Labour in Portsmouth as effective. The Liberal success of 1906 was reversed in January 1910 when Beresford and Falle defeated Bramsdon and Lambert, with Sanders, the Labour candidate having his vote cut from 8,000 to 3,000. The success of Beresford and Falle was repeated in December, but this time in the absence of Sanders, and with new Liberal candidates in Hemmerde and Harben. The January defeat was explained by the Hampshire Telegraph largely in terms of Naval and defence policy, "Southsea has vied with Landport, the rich with the poor, in telling England that Naval strength and national safeguard must precede social reform."<sup>10</sup> The Liberal Government's mistakes, in the Portsmouth context, were listed as: the abandonment of the Cawdor shipbuilding programme, the reduction in fleet personnel, the curtailment of the Royal Marines, the cutting

of the coastguard and the suspension of the Dockyard establishment. Similarly, the local Labour Party in its discussion of how, and when, to replace Sanders as its candidate for Portsmouth, was reported as believing it had little chance of success in the town while so prominent a Navy man as Beresford was the senior Conservative<sup>11</sup> candidate.

From this period the simple economic rationale for Dockyardmen in voting Conservative became increasingly stressed in Portsmouth politics, and this could well help explain the strength of Conservatism in Portsmouth in the post-war period, when comparable shipbuilding centres were consolidating a predominantly Labour allegiance. However, this study is concerned with a period beginning in 1880, and in the first half of this period it cannot be demonstrated that "bread and butter" issues dictated Conservatism amongst Dockyardmen, or that Liberal political propaganda claiming genuine, and effective, support for Dockyard interests was without material basis. The search for the basis of working class Conservatism has to be widened, and pursued through an examination of the men active within Portsmouth's Conservative politics from the 1880's, and attention paid to the cultural factors underpinning Conservatism in the town.

The identification of working men active within Conservative and Unionist politics in Portsmouth from the 1880's is more difficult than in the case of working-class Liberals. The reporting of Trades and Labour Council coverage together with that of the W.M.L.U. makes it possible to correlate names with occupations and establish profiles of some, at least, of Portsmouth's leading working-class Liberals. There is no similar overlap between the Trades and Labour Council and



the W.M.C.A, with the exception of the Dockyard fitter, A.S.E. member, and Liberal Unionist, Henry Hall. Occasionally the direct speech of working class-Conservatism surfaces in the Portsmouth newspapers but considerable reliance has to be placed on the arguments addressed to working men on behalf of Conservatism, via the Portsmouth Times, to form a picture of the ideological framework within which Portsmouth's working-class Conservatism operated. The picture which emerges from such source material, however, is one which substantially corresponds to existing knowledge of working-class Conservatism in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. The principal elements of working-class Conservatism in Portsmouth were deference, patriotism and use of leisure.

The deference of these workers consisted in an acceptance of a hierarchical society. Working-class Conservatives knew their place as workers, and this place did not entail engaging in Town Council or Parliamentary politics. There was also a utility in such a political stance, for the interests of the workers might be better served if represented by a sympathetic social superior who could deal on equal, or near equal, terms with the decision makers affecting workers' lives. This attitude is nicely illustrated by a W. Henderson who spoke at a meeting endorsing the candidature of A.J. Majendie as a Unionist in the 1900 election. The Liberal Unionist, A.W. White, the owner of transport and furniture enterprises in the town, stated that the Dockyard members of the Conservative Association supported Majendie, and Henderson, speaking "as a working man," supported this by saying, "He did not consider Mr. Bramsdon (the town's Coroner and junior Liberal candidate) a fit and proper person to represent the

town. What they wanted was a gentleman like Mr. Majendie, they wanted a society man with influence, and a man who could go to the War Office<sup>12</sup> or Admiralty carrying weight."

This attitude represents a considerable contrast to that of the town's working-class Liberals, and the political position of the Trades and Labour Council. The argument for working-class involvement, and representation, at all political levels had been forcefully put by J.W. Earle in the 1880's, and the Liberal Party had run Earle and the Dockyardmen Boss, Vine, Gould and Willis in elections for the School Board and Board of Guardians. The Trades and Labour Council by 1894 had chafed at the inability of the overall Liberal Party in Portsmouth to satisfy the political aspirations of working men, and had moved into independent Labour politics, at municipal level, from 1894. The Portsmouth W.M.C.A. was not wholly removed from working-class representation; Henry Hall was involved on the School Board in the 1890's, standing unsuccessfully for the School Board in 1892 and 1895,<sup>13</sup> but for the most part Portsmouth's Conservative working men were not given, and do not appear to have sought, political responsibility. This can be seen in the leadership of the W.M.C.A. Many of the figures prominent in the W.M.C.A. were not working men. At the A.G.M. of the St. Thomas's Ward branch of the W.M.C.A. in 1890, the President was reported as T. King, the committee, Lt. Cowd R.N, J.W. Gieve, E. Main, H. Hall, S.P. Knight, Bassett, Brumham and W. Beale.<sup>14</sup> Of those that can be identified, King was a Town Councillor and draper, Gieve, who was later to be a Councillor, the proprietor of a Naval outfitters, Main, a building society manager, Beale a Lloyd's agent, and Hall a Dockyard fitter. In 1899 the A.G.M.

of the Working Men's Central Conservative Club in Arundel St, was presided over by J. Bishop, a Town Councillor and owner of a large shoe shop.<sup>15</sup> The involvement of the middle-class in the Liberal W.M.A, while there with the participation of the schoolmaster, Proctor and music seller, Blessley, was not of the same order.

Similarly, the W.M.C.A, and the Conservative Club did not match the level of active political discussion and debate to be found in Portsmouth's Liberal institutions. Robert Roberts in his study of his childhood in Edwardian Salford commented, "Our Conservative Club, except for a few days at election times, didn't appear to meddle with politics at all. It was notable usually for a union jack at the window and a brewers' dray at the door."<sup>16</sup> The picture which emerges of the Conservative Clubs in Portsmouth is not markedly different. While the Liberal Club, at its foundation, had voted not to have a bar, and ran regular series of political lectures,<sup>17</sup> the Arundel St. Conservative Club appears to have concentrated on its bar, and social facilities. In 1899 its President, J. Bishop reported that the Club's accounts were £137 in the black and that a doorkeeper had been taken on "as a means of making the club more select." Large sales of liquor were principally responsible for the Club's financial position, even though a concession had been made to temperance by reducing the price of mineral waters. In the course of the year, "Various improvements for the comfort of members had been carried out." For the coming year the President suggested "the formation of a Conservative cycling club, and said that the committee might consider the advisability of a coal club." The only political reference in the President's address was the complaint that, "The Political

Committee, he thought, might do more to help the Conservative Party  
18  
in local elections."

Attachment to Conservative politics was not a markedly active creed, but rather a more passive adoption of a set of labels and responses, to be activated at election time, or when the values inherent in these labels and attitudes came under threat. Studies of working-class Conservatism in Northern England for the 1880-1900 period, notably P.F. Clarke's work on Lancashire in general, and R. Greenall's analysis of Salford politics, have identified the key  
19  
features of such political allegiance. At its core was patriotism, a defence of England's material interests against external competition, and, at home, an attachment to the Monarchy and the Church of England against Protestant competition from Non-Conformity and against the alien creed of Roman Catholicism; the "No-Popery" line being interwoven with anti-Irish feeling. Backing this up was a defence of a way of life, or use of leisure, based on drink and related pursuits, gambling included. The attack in this area came from the Temperance movement, and those who sought to sway the working-class away from immoral and irrational uses of leisure. These features of working-class Conservatism can be found in the Portsmouth context. Henry Hall, for example, based his Conservatism on the Church of England, just as the  
20  
shipwright C.W. Vine based his Liberalism on his Non-Conformity. Hall  
21  
had broken with the Liberals over Home Rule, and his involvement in the Church of England was shown by his being an active member of  
22  
the St. Mary's Vestry.

In the 1900's with the emergence of a more influential role for the Progressive wing of the Liberal Party, coupled with the growth of

independent Labour politics, and the appearance of Germany as a serious industrial and Naval competitor the factors underpinning Conservatism amongst working men in Portsmouth were revealed, and accentuated. The essentials of working-class Conservatism in this period, particularly the intense dislike of working men on the left of the political spectrum for breaking ranks and rising above their station in life, can be seen in the pages of the Portsmouth Times. During the preliminary discussion amongst Dockyard workers before the pay claim of 1913, which produced an overtime ban by the engineering trades, Tom Mann addressed a mass meeting in the Town Hall. The Portsmouth Times felt that Mann's message of syndicalism had not been accepted by the Portsmouth men and commented, "This is gratifying for it demonstrates very clearly that the great bulk of the Dockyardmen, to whom this appeal was mainly directed, can see through the ingenious schemes of leaders whose principal objects in life are self-aggrandisement<sup>23</sup> and the adulation which is so dear to them." The classic statement of what the Portsmouth Times perceived to be the working-class Conservative position, however, came later in the year, and was given after George Barnes had addressed the Dockyardmen taking action against the Admiralty. The Portsmouth Times leader asked, "How long will it be before the workers realise that there is not the slightest bond of sympathy between their leaders and themselves? The average Labour M.P. is a self-centred fanatical puritan, the product of the village chapel, devoid of humour or of the ordinary little human failings, and taking no interest in sport of any kind, whereas the average working man is still a convivial soul, who likes to have a bob on his fancy and is altogether scarcely aesthetic in his tastes. Moreover, he is

still a patriot at heart, and has no yearning for the German domination which his wantonly foolish and short-sighted leaders would seemingly<sup>24</sup> welcome."

#### Dockyardmen and Liberalism

The simplest explanation of working-class Liberalism in Portsmouth was provided by the Dockyard shipwright, C.W. Vine, when in an address to the Working Men's Liberal Union, given in 1887, and entitled, "Why I am a Liberal," he stated, "He was a Liberal because he was a Non-Conformist, because he was a Free Trader and because he<sup>25</sup> was a political reformer." The vote of thanks for Vine's address was supported by his fellow Dockyardmen, Googe, Colpus and Willis, and by the Trades Council President, Gray. The Liberalism of such men, however, had at its core an element of class consciousness, based upon a commitment to trades unionism as the principal means of remedying the shortcomings of the capitalist system for the workers, and a belief that working men should play a full role in the political process. The clearest statement of such a political perspective came from J.W. Earle, again in 1887, when he addressed the Working Men's Liberal Union on, "What shall be the Future of the Working Man?" In this Earle argued, "Working men had been pressing forward for something noble - the education of the mind, and he believed the day would come, toiling as they were in the mines, in the factories or in the harvest fields, or contending upon the battlefields when working men would be masters of the situation." He went on to say that while he had nothing against Liberal leaders such as Gladstone and Cobden he had to remark that hundreds of M.P's had not been in sympathy with working

men, but now, "Thanks to the progress of Liberalism, the cloud was passing away from working men and times would be better for them. They might be called the lower orders but it was they who made the capital... When their prosperity was what their forefathers told them it should be, when every working man should be paid a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, when every citizen should be a sober and thinking man, then would come the glorious millennium when their greater evils would be swept away."<sup>26</sup>

Earle himself was not a Dockyardman, he was an ironfounder, but he belonged to the group of craftsmen, predominantly Dockyardmen, which ran the W.M.L.U. and which was also involved with the town's Trades and Labour Council. The vote of thanks for Earle's speech, for example, was proposed by the Dockyard shipwright, and union official, Stephen Boss.<sup>27</sup> This nexus between Dockyard trade unionists, and other craftsmen in the town, and Liberal allegiance was actively encouraged, along the ideological lines described by Earle, by Portsmouth's Liberal Association. This can be seen in the activities of the town's radicals, drawn largely from a middle-class background, and in the response of the Liberal Party's Portsmouth establishment, as represented by the Liberal newspapers and the Liberal Parliamentary candidates. The encouragement for Portsmouth's trade unionists to become involved in political action, via the Liberal Party, came principally from the schoolmaster, F.J. Proctor, and, until their departure from Portsmouth in 1896, the Revs. R. Dolling and C. Joseph, the latter a Baptist minister, the former an Anglican. These men consistently argued the case for greater working-class representation in politics, and the widening of trades unionism as the principal

28

means of social and economic amelioration. In October of 1887, for example, Proctor told the W.M.L.U. that, "It is high time every Radical and Liberal, Whig and Tory working man, ignored mere paper distinctions and joined issue under one grand democratic standard for a better

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representation of the people." Similarly, Dolling, who throughout his time in Portsmouth as priest in charge of the Winchester College Mission, at St. Agatha's, Landport, ran conferences on Sunday afternoons

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for working men, sometimes in conjunction with Joseph, would argue that, "When all trades were properly organised and men were manly enough to stand by their organisations, so that those who represented them could speak for the whole of their bretheren, they could do away with much of the prevailing distress by regulating the hours of labour

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and their wages." Dolling's support for trade unionism was such that he was frequently involved with Trades Council affairs, helping to establish a branch of the Typographical Association in the town, and speaking at, sometimes chairing, Trades-Council-organised demonstrations. In such work Dolling was able to promote the principle of working-class representation, as demonstrated by his response to the concession by the Admiralty of an eight hour day to the Dockyardmen in 1894. Dolling was present at the Trades Council meeting which discussed the new working hours and included in his contribution the comments that, "It (the eight hour day) was a great triumph for Labour, but, he reminded them that it was owing to organisation that they now had better wages and shorter hours. Mr. Dolling impressed on the men that they would deserve to lose their eight hours day if they did not do their utmost to obtain it for other workers of both sexes. It was their duty to get all sections of Labour into one Federation and to



work for the eight hours day for the whole nation. In conclusion, Mr. Dolling impressed on his hearers the duty of taking an active  
32  
interest in municipal affairs."

The involvement of Dolling, Joseph and Proctor, all prominent members of Portsmouth's Liberal Association, all, for example, being  
33  
members of the Liberal 600 in 1892, was endorsed by the party leadership in the town as strengthening the hand of Liberalism in elections at Parliamentary and local level. At the formation of the L.W.M.U. in 1886, a meeting chaired by J.W. Earle, with W.J. Willis, Dockyard fitter and A.S.E. activist as its secretary, and with other identifiable Dockyardmen/trade unionists such as S. Boss, T. Kersey, C. Gray and C. Vine listed as present, the Hampshire Telegraph's report emphasized the importance of such a political grouping to Portsmouth's Liberal Party. The comment was, "The Liberal working men of Portsmouth were chiefly instrumental in winning the greatest Liberal borough victory at the late General Election ... Working-class questions are now coming to the front in imperial and local politics alike, and it is very encouraging to find working men so alive to the  
34  
claims made upon them by the higher duties of citizenship." This point was echoed, and re-inforced, at the subsequent Liberal banquet held to celebrate the 1885 election result when the town's M.P., Vanderbyl stated, "Referring to his own election he was often asked by his Tory friends how he had managed to get in for Portsmouth. He told them at once that it was the intelligence of working men that had gained the election for him. He believed that it was the spontaneous organisation of the working men and their invincible determination which had produced the great Liberal Victory." J. Bonham Carter, a

member of Portsmouth's premier Liberal family, elaborated on this theme with his reflection, "They could also look to what he considered the most striking instance of the development of Liberal ideas when they could point to a gentleman like Mr. Broadhurst (Applause) - that a thoroughly representative working man should be placed in such a position showed that Liberal principles were bearing fruit."

At local level "Liberal principles" were implemented by the running of J.W. Earle by the Liberals for the School Board in 1886.<sup>35</sup> Again, the Hampshire Telegraph's leader on Earle's candidature nicely illustrates the combination of principled support for increased working-class participation in politics, and awareness of the electoral dividends for the Liberals which could result from this. The comment was, "We are glad to see that the working-classes on this occasion have a candidate who is specially qualified to speak in their name and on their behalf, Mr. Earle is a bona fide working man, who has a thorough acquaintance with the wants and aspirations of his order, and, what is not less important, who is able to give clear and forcible expression to his opinions ... There is one feature of Mr. Earle's address that is specially pleasing ... Mr. Earle asks to be elected as one of a band faithfully carrying out a consistent policy at the Board, and he expresses a desire, in asking for 'a fair share' of the votes of his friends, that they will not forget such 'tried men' as Alderman Baker, Vicar Grant, Mr. H. Blessley and the Rev. T. Medhurst."<sup>36</sup> Earle was successful in this School Board election, along with the other Liberals, and later working-men Liberal candidates followed him on the Liberal "slate" for School Board elections.<sup>37</sup> In 1892 the Dockyardmen, W.J. Willis (fitter and A.S.E)

and C.V. Vine (shipwright and A.S.S.) were run for the Board, with Vine being initially successful, while Willis, had to wait until the<sup>38</sup> elections of 1895 to join him. Later the Dockyard shipwrights, and trade unionists, S. Boss and R. Gould, were successfully backed by<sup>39</sup> the Liberals in elections for the Board of Guardians.

Such promotion of working men into municipal representative office was clearly modest by national standards, but it was sufficient in Portsmouth by 1892 to establish a Trades Council/Liberal Party electoral alliance. During the election of that year the Trades Council's support was given unreservedly to the Liberal candidates, Baker and Clough. In theory the Trades Council had weighed the Liberal candidates and unionist candidates exclusively in the balance of attitudes towards "Labour" questions, as defined by the Council. These questions were based upon demands for a pension system for all Government workers, a more equitable operation of the establishment and bonus systems in the Dockyard, and opposition to cutbacks in Admiralty workloads. The Trades Council's President, C. Gray, argued this during a Liberal rally at the Town Hall when he denied that the Trades Council had become a political organisation, and claimed, "The questions and answers (posed by the Council to the candidates) were looked at purely from a Labour standpoint, and it so happened that the answers received from the Liberal candidates were more<sup>40</sup> satisfactory than those received from the other side." In practice, however, it was unlikely that the Trades Council would interpret the defence of Labour interests in the political field in any other way. Trades Council leaders, such as Willis (who also spoke at the Liberal meeting, denouncing the Unionist candidates, Ashley and Willis, as

only posing as friends to the working men), Vine and Gray, were already active Liberals, operating within the W.M.L.U, as can be seen from press reports of this organisation's activities from its inception in 1886. By 1892, Baker and Clough were able to capitalise upon the political groundwork of Radicals such as Dolling and Joseph, and their own willingness to accept the importance of trades unionism and working-class political involvement as "Liberal principles." An idealised view of the relationship between the Liberal Party and the working-class, with the former being presented as the political vehicle for the achievement of the latter's aspirations, was expressed by the Dockyard shipwright, Stephen Boss, when, as Chairman of the W.M.L.U, he received a set of portraits of local Liberal dignitaries for the Liberal Club, and, "... He observed that in other towns branches of the Independent Labour Party were being formed, but in Portsmouth the industrial classes had no occasion to adopt such a course, for the W.M.L.U. provided them with every opportunity of focusing their ideas and placing their opinions before the Liberal Association, who paid their institution every attention and never snubbed them." The seconder of the vote of thanks to which Boss was speaking was his fellow Dockyardman, W.J. Willis.<sup>41</sup>

This view of the relationship between the Liberal Party and working men, and the bonds which had existed between the Trades Council and Portsmouth's Liberals, did not remain unchallenged. Shortly after Boss had given his view of the pointlessness of I.L.P. politics in Portsmouth, an I.L.P. branch was formed in Portsmouth. In June of 1893 a meeting in the Shipmaster's Arms, Edinburgh Road, was told by George Hales, "... in view of the fact that most towns in the North

had a branch of the I.L.P. established in their midst, it had been thought opportune to attempt the formation of a branch in Portsmouth... It was high time that working men should be represented by their own class and fight their own battles, as with the middle-class men who they now elected to represent them it was too often a case of one for the workers and two for themselves." <sup>42</sup> Following the appearance of the I.L.P. in the town, the break-up of the old Trades Council/Liberal connection began. In 1894 the Trades Council, in conjunction with the I.L.P., formed a Municipal Labour League, and the first "Labour" candidates were run against Liberals in Town Council elections. By 1900 Trades-Council-supported candidates were in consistent opposition to Liberals in local elections, with the break at Parliamentary level being made in 1906 with the London Councillor, W. Sanders, being run as a Labour candidate by the Trades Council against Baker and Bramsdon, the local Liberal ex-M.P's. In this period a new generation of Dockyard trade unionists, notably J. MacTavish and D. Naysmith emerged to spearhead the move by the Trades Council towards independent Labour politics, while the longer-established leaders of Portsmouth Trades Unionism, notably W.J. Willis made the transition from Liberal to Labour politics. The beginnings of this transition, as well as the complexity of the process can be seen in the establishment of the Municipal Labour League in Portsmouth, and the first clashes between Liberalism and Labour in Town Council politics.

When the Municipal Labour League was formed by the Trades Council, the Dockyard Trades Council, the Fabian Society, the Portsea Island Co-operative Society and the I.L.P. in 1894, the Hampshire Telegraph comment was, "Few people are hardy enough and dense enough

nowadays to deny the ability of working men to manage their own affairs ... Politics are to be wholly eschewed by the new League, that alone should tend to the public interest if the organisation is strong enough, as no doubt it will be, in certain wards to carry<sup>43</sup> its candidates." Such an appraisal might be seen as slightly disingenuous by the Telegraph, for the eschewal of politics by the candidates of the Municipal Labour League was highly unlikely. The experience of the W.M.L.U, and the connection between that body and the Trades Council, from 1886, had indicated that the Municipal Labour League would operate within the orbit of Liberal politics. That working men should represent working men was something of a standard Liberal line, voiced by Progressives and Parliamentary candidates, and the Trades Council had supported Liberals in the elections of 1885 to 1892. At the time of the League's formation a Liberal observer might reasonably expect men of the stamp of S. Boss, W.J. Willis and C.W. Vine to emerge as Labour candidates, and to continue a tradition of Portsmouth working-class Liberalism emanating from J.W. Earle. Evidence for this was provided at the Trades and Labour Council meeting following the Municipal Labour League's formation. It was resolved by the Council that only candidates unconnected with either political party were to be adopted as Labour candidates in local elections. C.W. Vine wanted a clarification of what constituted a link with an established party, and was told by Strugnell that the proscription applied to officials of parties, and ended at the management committee level, "a man might be an individual member of a party and stand as a Labour candidate."

The appearance of the M.L.L, however, did see the beginning of

the rift between the Trades Council and the Liberal Party in Portsmouth. The League's first candidates for the Town Council were W. Grant and J. Finch, standing for the St. Matthews' and St. James' Wards respectively. Grant was once a Tory, but now stood as a working man, representing the interests of Labour, and endorsed by the Trades Council, Finch was an I.L.P. member. These candidates were unacceptable to the Liberal Ward associations of St. Matthew's and St. James' and Liberal candidates were run against both men. The Liberal establishment in Portsmouth was aghast at such a development, with the President of the town's Liberal Association, T.A. Bramsdon, and its secretary, Morris, advising the wards to drop their candidates. According to the Hampshire Telegraph, "They pointed out that Mr. Finch, although a member of the I.L.P. had been selected by the Trades Council, and that to oppose him might set about the idea that the Liberal Party was opposing Labour representation on Municipal bodies whereas the very opposite was the case."<sup>45</sup> The Evening News' comment on this development was, "In Portsmouth, as elsewhere, Liberalism is being brought into conflict with Labour. When it was announced that a Tory candidate was about to oppose one of the Labour Party's nominees no-one was surprised, but now that the Ward Liberal Associations are also bringing forward opponents, the best friends of Liberalism and Labour may well despair. There is so much that is identical in the programme of both that it is sheer folly for one to run counter to the other..."<sup>46</sup>

In the event both wards were lost by the M.L.L. candidates and their Liberal opponents to Conservatives. The events of 1894, however, encapsulate the future development of relations between the Trades

Council, as the foundation of the Labour Party in the town, and the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party could not contain the political aspirations of the Trades Council men, who encouraged by the Liberal left, wanted Labour's interests, as defined by them in predominantly trade union terms, represented by working men. Whatever the opinion of the radical elements in the Portsmouth Liberal Party, or the appreciation of Liberal Parliamentary candidates that the Trades Council/Liberal nexus enhanced electoral prospects, the traditional membership of the Liberals, at ward level, would not give the Trades Council men the scope that they wanted.

The working out of this process, however, was a protracted business. In the General Election of 1895 the old Trades Council/Liberal alliance was maintained. At the Municipal Labour League's foundation the then President of the Trades and Labour Council, J.A. Strugnell, denied that any Parliamentary activity was contemplated, <sup>47</sup> and stated that Baker and Clough would not be opposed by a Labour candidate.

The possibility of eventually running a working man in a Portsmouth Parliamentary election was not discounted, but was not expressed in terms of conflict with the Liberals and was to be put off to a more practicable time. When the election came in 1895 the Trades Council's response was similar to that of 1892. The Trades Council's annual march in 1895 was headed by Charles Dilke and Sam Woods, and while Baker and Clough were absent the Hampshire Telegraph reported of the borough members that this, "indicates no lack of interest or sympathy on their part but is due to an arrangement approved by the principal speakers at the meeting and by the Trades Council's officials." At the meeting which concluded the march the Trades Council's support was



pledged for Baker and Clough, and prominent Trades Council men made a series of speeches on their behalf. Willis told his audience that the new Unionist candidate, Harmsworth had ridiculed John Burns and this alone should turn working men against him. P. Peddy (a Dockyard shipwright and A.S.S. official)<sup>48</sup> reminded the meeting of Baker's and Clough's efforts on behalf of Dockyardmen with the Admiralty, while the carpenter, Warren, stressed that, "In the address of Messrs. Ashley and Harmsworth... there was one damning point. They were pledged to support the policy of Lord Salisbury and he would remind the Council that it was Lord Salisbury who had described Trade Unionism as a cruel organisation."<sup>49</sup> The Council's voting on the decision to back Baker and Clough was reported to the meeting as being 34 to 6.

Following the Trades Council march, a Trades Council Manifesto was issued, published in the Hampshire Telegraph, which detailed the reasons for the Council's call on working men to support Baker and Clough. Five major factors were listed as reasons for working men to support the Liberal candidates:

- 1) Baker's and Clough's three year record of support for Dockyardmen; including their successful influence on the Admiralty over the classification issue and the introduction of the eight hour day.
- 2) The Liberal programme, including Irish Home Rule, control of the drink trade, the ending of plural voting, Irish Land Legislation and the disestablishment of the Church of Wales, was felt to be "beneficial to the nation and the town."
- 3) Liberal support for the payment of M.P's.
- 4) Liberal support for Employers' Liability Legislation.
- 5) Liberal support for a new Factory Bill.

The Council concluded its statement with, "No mere party politics induced us to this decision, but the true growth of our Labour principles ... The Labour Party (and we are one in Portsmouth) must not be beaten."<sup>50</sup>

In 1895 the friction between the Trades Council and the Ward Liberal Associations of St. James' and St. Matthews' might have been seen as something of a hiccup in the normal relationship between organised Labour and Liberalism in Portsmouth. There were some indications that the rift of 1894 had been healed. In 1896 W.J. Willis, the Trades Council Secretary, was given an unopposed, by the Liberals, and unsuccessful, run against the Tory Councillor, Bishop, in the St. Mary's Ward. Willis was described in the Portsmouth Times as "the nominee of the Trades Council and the Ward Liberal Association."<sup>51</sup> Earlier in the year the Dockyard shipwrights Stephen Boss and Richard Gould had been elected to the Board of Guardians with Liberal backing.<sup>52</sup> Willis continued his connection with the Liberals into 1898, when he continued to stand under Liberal auspices for the School Board,<sup>53</sup> and the Trades Council showed itself unwilling to oppose working-men Liberals in Board of Guardian elections. In 1899 the Trades Council was informed by Willis that the Council did not intend to run a candidate in the Northern Ward Guardians election because the Council did not have the funds for this, and "added that Mr. Boss intended to stand again and he was a good Trades Unionist."<sup>54</sup> At Parliamentary level the Trades Council continued its support for Liberal candidates in 1900. The by-election at the start of the year occasioned by the retirement of Clough, saw the Trade Council support the successful campaign of T.A. Bramsdon, the town's coroner and past President of the

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Liberal Association. This support was continued for Bramsdon and Baker in the later General Election, which saw the Unionist candidates, 56  
Majendie and Lucas returned. After 1900, however, the potential split between the Trades Council and the Liberal Party was realised. A Labour candidate, W. Sanders, was run against Baker and Bramsdon in 1906, and the town's first Labour Councillor, J. MacTavish, was elected against Liberal opposition for Buckland in 1908. While Stephen Boss remained within the orbit of the Liberal Party until his death in 57  
1905, and other Trades Council men maintained their support for Liberalism, wishing to achieve Labour representation within the context of the Liberal Party, as did J.H. McGuigan and the Single-Taxers, the majority of the Trades Council leaders followed W.J. Willis in moving to a belief that working men had to achieve independent Labour representation. Willis was willing to appear on platforms attacking Liberal Parliamentary candidates in Portsmouth following the Trades Council's endorsement of Sanders as Labour candidate, chairing a 58  
Sanders' meeting in 1910. However, even in the period in which the Trades and Labour Council was controlled by a majority committed to independent Labour politics, and willing to use the Socialist label to emphasise this, the Liberal Party retained a strong support amongst the workers of Portsmouth, continuing to capitalise upon the class-based, anti-Tory vote, which had originated in the mid-1880's with the growth of the W.M.L.U.

The importance of the Liberal Party's having taken the initiative in building a working-class base to the anti-Tory vote in Portsmouth, and the consequences of this for independent Labour politics in the town was implied in an analysis of the difficulties facing Labour in

1905 made by the President of the Trades and Labour Council, A.L. Baxter. Baxter, in a reply to a letter published in the Evening News criticising the lack of progress made by the Trades Council in Labour representation in comparison to Woolwich, where in a town similarly dominated by Government employment Will Crooks had been elected M.P, stressed that in Portsmouth the Labour Party had to work within the confines of a genuine and well-established struggle between the Liberals and the Conservatives. It had been different in Woolwich where, "the Liberal Party was as dead as a dodo,"<sup>59</sup> and the anti-Tory working-class vote was developed almost exclusively around the Labour movement. In Portsmouth, however, while Sanders polled over 8,000 votes in the 1906 election it was Bramsdon and Baker who topped the poll with 17,000 votes each, and even in the Unionist success of 1910 the Liberal candidates remained the principal opposition. In municipal politics, while Buckland was lost to MacTavish in 1908 and it was Labour rather than Liberal candidates who defeated Tories in St. Mary's and Kingston, the Liberals maintained their position of vying for council control with the Tories, and held such Dockyard dominated seats as Fratton and Highland.<sup>60</sup>

The background to this survival of Liberalism as a principal force in Portsmouth politics until the Great War, was the essential overlap between Labour and Liberal policies with regard to the working-class. Whatever the aspirations of Portsmouth's committed socialists, men like Stephen Pile and John MacTavish, for the ultimate public ownership of industry, and pursuit of pacific foreign policies, in practical terms socialism in Portsmouth meant that working men should represent working men, that workers' interests should be protected,

and furthered, by trades unionism and that social injustices in specific areas, such as the inequality of educational opportunities, or poor working-class housing conditions should be fought against. This was the basis of the working-class Liberalism of J.W. Earle's generation, and it enabled the Liberal leadership in Portsmouth to appeal for continued working-class support on the basis of its past record; re-inforced by the charge that independent Labour men, by splitting the anti-Tory vote, were merely playing into the hands of the common enemy. This line of argument can readily be seen in the Liberal response to Sanders' appearance as prospective Labour candidate in 1905. Sir John Baker's argument was, "So far as Labour and work was concerned if Portsmouth required workers - Labour members - they would get them in his colleague and himself."<sup>61</sup> Baker fought against Labour challenges to his right to call himself, as he did from 1905 to the 1906 election, "Portsmouth's Labour candidate." When his right to do this was denied, Baker responded by appealing to his record as M.P. in defending Dockyard workers' interests, "Ask the Dockyard men if this (that Baker should not call himself a Labour candidate) was true, they would laugh at the idea ... In Parliament, with the exception of Mr. Keir Hardie, all the Labour men were his closest friends and comrades ... In any question relative to the welfare and rights of workers of this country he would never fail to give his support."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Baker argued, "The so-called Labour man was not compared with the man who on every point, every principle of Liberal policy was at one with him except on the one point of socialism, and on the seclusion of themselves from the Progressive and Liberal Parties."<sup>63</sup> The vote-splitting charge was made by, "It was obvious to the man of

the smallest political feeling and thought that nothing could do more to promote and advance the interests of the Tories than by the intervention of a Labour man to split the Liberal vote in Portsmouth." Consequently the slogan was adopted against Sanders, "A vote for Sanders is a vote for Chamberlain," just as, in the municipal context, John Pile had been confronted in the Kingston election of 1905 with,<sup>64</sup> "A vote for Pile is a vote for the brewer."

Liberalism was also shored up by the maintenance of the Party's link with Non-Conformity in the town, at least at the leadership level. Sanders' appearance did cause some discussion amongst the leaders of the Free Churches in Portsmouth, but in the end their support was thrown behind Bramsdon and Baker. At the A.G.M. of Portsmouth's Free Church Council in 1905 the Rev. W. Miles proposed a resolution of support for Baker and Bramsdon. The Rev. J. Smith intervened by asking "What about Sanders?" The Free Church, according to Smith, should not be as antagonistic to the working man's candidate. Rev. Miles' reply was that to bring Sanders' name into the meeting would "cause a division which would be disastrous to their supporters." After this the pro-Liberal resolution was passed without opposition,<sup>65</sup> the Rev. Smith abstaining. What platform support Sanders did receive from clergymen in 1905-6 came from Anglicans, notably the Rev. P. Bircham, Rev. G. Tremeneere and Rev. C. Garbett, erstwhile Tories, but interested in social reform and anxious to stress the link between working men and the Church of England.<sup>66</sup>

The prolongation of the vitality of Liberal politics, as they had emerged from the Victorian period in Portsmouth, with traditional Liberalism re-inforced by a working-class vote, might have been more

marked if the town's Liberal leadership had had its way in maintaining a working relationship with the Trades and Labour Council, which was the backbone of the Labour Party in Portsmouth even after its formal surrender of control to the L.R.C. in 1911.<sup>67</sup> However, the error made in 1894 when local ward Liberal associations had defied the recommendations of the Liberal leadership and run candidates against T.L.C. nominees was continued. In 1913 the Executive Committee of the Association recommended that in the next election a Liberal candidate should run with the Labour man MacTavish against the Unionists, but<sup>68</sup> the full meeting of the Liberal Association turned this down.

#### The Trades Council, Labour and the Single-Taxers

A way into a discussion of the play of ideas within the Portsmouth Trades Council, at the time of its break with the Liberal Party at all levels, is provided by the debates provoked within the Council on the issue of Henry George's schemes for land reform. Between 1905 and 1906, when the Trades Council moved against the Liberal Party at the Parliamentary level with the adoption of the Battersea Councillor, W.S. Sanders, as Labour candidate for Portsmouth, a group of Henry George's followers, calling themselves, "The Single-Tax Party", fought a rearguard action on behalf of the old Liberal/Trades Council alliance against the Socialists on the Council. The arguments generated by these debates show the ideas current amongst the Trades Union leadership in this period, and the votes taken on the resolutions proposed by the Single-Taxers illustrate the shift to independent Labour politics which had been made by the Trades Council.

The Single Tax Party was led by a Dockyard shipwright, J.H. McGuigan,

supported by a fellow shipwright, E.J. Trodd. The connections between the shipwrights and the Single-Taxers appear to have been quite strong. When McGuigan stood as a Single-Tax candidate in the Town Council elections of 1906, standing against John Pile, the Trades-Council-backed Labour candidate at Kingston, the Evening News reported that on the platform at one of McGuigan's meetings were J.W. Perkins and Messrs. Grant, Sharp and Trodd. Perkins was a prominent Liberal, McGuigan, Todd and Grant, all Dockyard shipwrights, all officials of the A.S.S, and all from the same district of Fratton. McGuigan lived at 43, Brookefield St, and had been Vice-President of the Trades and Labour Council in 1898, when his fellow shipwright Richard Gould had been elected President. In 1905 McGuigan was Chairman of the A branch of the A.S.S. Trodd had lived at 107 Newcombe Road, when he had been Vice-President of C branch of the A.S.S. in 1899-1900. In 1904, he was President of C branch and living nearby at 72 Penhale Road. Grant was Vice-President of A branch in 1900, while living in 98 Clive Road. It is probably such a group of men that J.A. Hobson was thinking of when he wrote in an essay of the influence of Henry George, "In my lectures upon Political Economy about the country, I have found in almost every centre a certain little knot of men of the lower-middle or upper-working class, men of grit and character, largely self-educated, keen citizens, mostly Non-Conformist in religion, to whom land nationalisation, taxation of unearned increment, or other radical reforms of land tenure are doctrines resting upon a plain moral sanction."

The Single Tax Party, or Single-Tax League as it also appears in the newspapers, maintained a presence in Portsmouth politics until



the Great War, with McGuigan writing letters to the local newspapers expounding George's arguments, and organising lectures on land reform.<sup>73</sup> Such a series of lectures was held in 1908. The Single-Taxers were also prepared to use other people's lectures as a platform for their views. In 1906, for example, when the Rev. C. Garbett gave a talk on "the economics of Socialism," McGuigan took exception to his contention that Henry George's writing did not contain the answer to England's social and economic problems, and the question session of Garbett's talk was dominated by an argument between McGuigan and the town's leading Socialist, another Dockyard shipwright, J.M. MacTavish.<sup>74</sup> The Single-Taxers made a second attempt to secure representation on the Town Council, when after McGuigan's attempt at Kingston in 1906, a W. King stood in Buckland, polling 216 votes behind A.G. Gourd, the Labour man, with 583, R. Stokes with 658, and the independent Hemmingway with 1,243.<sup>75</sup> However, the Single-Tax League had little life in it after McGuigan's departure from Portsmouth in 1912 to take up a Chargeman's post in Hong Kong Dockyard,<sup>76</sup> and its heyday was in 1905-6, when it mounted a serious, albeit unsuccessful challenge to what was becoming the Socialist, Independent Labour, orthodoxy of the Trades and Labour Council.

Two Trades and Labour Council debates, one in 1905 concerning unemployment and one in 1906 concerning the adoption of W.S. Sanders as Parliamentary Labour candidate, together with the reaction to McGuigan's intervention in the Kingston Ward election of 1906 best illustrate the state of opinion within the Trades Union leadership in Portsmouth on the relative merits of Socialism and Independent Labour politics, and land reform within the context of the old Liberal

alliance. In 1905 during a Trades Council debate on unemployment McGuigan moved a resolution to set up a Committee to examine the causes of unemployment. This resolution occasioned an argument between the Socialists on the Council and the Single-Taxers, for it would seem that the Socialists saw this Committee as a potential vehicle for McGuigan's views. The Chairman of the meeting, Heditch (standing in for the Trades Council President, A. Baxter, who was terminally ill) wanted McGuigan's resolution defeated because, "the branches had complained that their delegates did not want to go to the Council meetings merely to hear discussion of Single-Tax." The Single-Tax issue, however, was discussed with a Socialist, Chase (whose occupation and union has not emerged from press or union sources) proposing an amendment arguing that McGuigan's Committee was inappropriate. For Chase, "the cause of unemployment was due to the lack of co-operation amongst working men, to the lack of collectivism, and to the lack of the controlling of those forces which produced the wealth of the country. The great problem was not as to the production of wealth but as to its distribution. There was plenty of wealth produced but it was controlled by a monopoly ... What was really required was that the markets should run not for the sake of the few, but for the national interest." Chase was particularly concerned to prevent McGuigan's Committee, for in the previous year he had succeeded in persuading the Trades Council to accept, by a vote of 22 to 16, that "Socialism was the only remedy for existing evils."<sup>77</sup> The main Single-Tax argument was reported as coming from a Mr. Smith (while Smith is difficult to indentify there is a chance that this Mr. Smith was another Dockyard shipwright - in 1907,<sup>78</sup> W. Smith was the Chairman of D Branch of the A.S.S.) Smith's argument

followed well-established land reform lines, contending that land reform was central to employment in the industrial towns for, "if conditions of life were better in the country districts people would not flood into the towns." At the debate's conclusion, however, McGuigan's Committee was lost, with Chase's amendment being carried by 19 votes to 15.<sup>79</sup>

The narrowness of the vote against McGuigan's resolution, in spite of Heditch's views on the attractiveness of Single-Tax as an issue for trade unionists, and the Socialist's opposition to it as a distraction from the real issues facing workers, showed that there were delegates on the Trades Council prepared, at least, to give Single-Tax a hearing. By 1906, however, this position was changing. In the aftermath of W.S. Sanders' candidature in the General Election, and his creditable poll, beating the two Unionist candidates with 8,172 votes, the atmosphere of Trades Council meetings was far less sympathetic to McGuigan and the Single-Taxers. This can be seen in a meeting held in 1906 to re-adopt Sanders as Portsmouth's Labour candidate. This meeting was not strictly a Trades Council meeting, but was a mass meeting open to all Trades Unionists called by the Trades Council and attended, in the estimation of The Hampshire Telegraph reporter, by 300-400. McGuigan tried to oppose Sanders' re-adoption at this meeting, and The Hampshire Telegraph's report shows the manner in which this attempt was received. McGuigan was shouted down when he began "Fellow Trade Unionists," amid repeated interruptions and laughter (McGuigan) proceeded under difficulties to argue that the Labour Party was impudent to arrogate such a name to itself as it was with equal justice borne by men like Tom Burt, "Mabon", and Fred Maddison (hisses) and John Ward (Voices:

'Baker and Bramsdon' and a roar of laughter) "McGuigan went on to argue ... While the Labour Party held to its position independent of Conservatism and Liberalism (applause) it admitted Socialists to its ranks (hear, hear) and Trade Unionists provided the sinews of war. Why were they asked to support such a party? (a voice: 'Commonsense' - laughter and uproar followed by 'look out here's MacTavish'). Trodd backed up his colleague by arguing that he objected to Sanders because he was a Socialist, and "it was a dishonest thing for a Socialist to run under a trade union organisation (cries of 'No') with trade union funds (No)." In the event, the resolution to adopt Sanders was carried with just sixteen votes against.

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Undaunted by this McGuigan continued to stand for the Single-Tax and the association between trade union politicians and the Liberal Party. It was in this context that he opposed John Pile, the Fratton railway porter, A.S.R.S. official, Trades Council member and avowed Socialist in the Kingston election of 1906. The result of this election was:

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| T. Brewis     | 755 |
| J. Pile       | 615 |
| J.H. McGuigan | 254 |

81

1,624 votes cast out of a possible 2,637.

Although the "Lights on Labour" correspondent of the Evening News believed that McGuigan had not cost Labour the seat, his opinion was that McGuigan had gained the support of "the Liberal rump," those who would never vote for a Socialist, and that in a straight fight with the Tory, Brewis, Pile might have lost more heavily, the opinion of Pile's supporters, and the Socialist majority on the Trades Council,

was that McGuigan, by splitting the working-class vote, had cost  
Labour its first seat on Portsmouth's Town Council.<sup>82</sup> The Hampshire  
Telegraph reported that there was a near riot when McGuigan rose to  
speak after the election result was declared,<sup>83</sup> and so great was the  
criticism of McGuigan on the Trades Council that his branch of the  
A.S.S. informed the Council that it would call a special meeting to  
decide its delegates for the coming year.<sup>84</sup> While the result of that  
meeting was not reported in the newspapers, McGuigans's name does not  
appear in the subsequent reports given of Trades Council business,  
which may indicate he was replaced.

At the end of his time in Portsmouth, during his address to the  
meeting of the Single Tax League called to make a presentation to him,  
McGuigan believed, "Although the Labour Party in the town had been  
fighting against the Single-Tax movement yet amongst the rank and file  
of that party there was a great sympathy with their principles."<sup>85</sup>  
There is something to be said for this view. By 1912 the leadership  
of the Labour Party in Portsmouth, which was still essentially that  
provided by the trade union leaders, was predominantly socialist. Also,  
while Labour had made its breakthrough in municipal politics with  
MacTavish holding Buckland, Pile, St. Mary's and Muir Allan, Kingston,  
the Liberal Party was still the principal opposition party to the  
Conservatives in Portsmouth at Parliamentary and local level. In the  
second election of 1910 there had been no Labour candidate, and while  
the Conservatives controlled the Council in 1912 they were quite  
closely matched by the Liberals who still held such predominantly  
working-class wards as Fratton and Highland.<sup>86</sup>

The Labour Party, Socialism and the Dockyard.

The Dockyard between 1891 and 1911 employed, as a mean average,<sup>87</sup> 56% of the male industrial workers over the age of 20 in Portsmouth, and to an emerging Labour Party encouraging working men to elect at every level representatives from their own class to ensure that the problems of the workers were effectively tackled, the Dockyard had to be of central importance. However, the Dockyard, particularly for those describing themselves as socialists, and this involved virtually all the leading figures of the Trades and Labour Council, and Labour League, was a problematic area for the pre-Great War Labour Party in Portsmouth. The Dockyard had to be the source of the Party's strength, but, in some respects, Socialism could make Labour Party support particularly hard to sell in the Dockyard context. This can be seen in two broad areas, the extent to which the Dockyard could be taken as the prototype of a nationalised industry, and the element of pacifism involved in the Socialism of the period.

Local Labour leaders were prepared to emphasize the fact that the Dockyards were large scale industrial enterprises belonging to the state and under the ultimate control of Parliament. The Dockyards were referred to as "national workshops." For example, a resolution passed at a Labour Party protest demonstration against the Dockyard reduction of 1905, held on Southsea Common, stated that, "the Dockyards - national workshops with national plant - should be kept fully employed<sup>88</sup> before private yards." Moreover, Portsmouth Socialists were willing to use the Dockyards as examples of Socialism; J.M. MacTavish, speaking on the topic of "Socialism" at the Albert Hall, Landport, in replying to an attack on Labour and Socialism which had been made in an earlier

public meeting by A.W. White, a leading Liberal Unionist in Portsmouth, said, "Let him look around him throughout the civilised world, and he would find socialised the Army, the Navy, the Dockyards Arsenals, Water, Gas, Tramways, Telephones etc." <sup>89</sup> A similar line was pursued by W. Sanders, the defeated Labour candidate in Portsmouth in 1906, and prospective Labour candidate for a by-election in 1909 (an election which was not held, the General Election of January 1910 overtaking it), when he said, in response to a question at a public meeting in the St. Mary's Institute, that he was a Socialist and sought to justify this with the comment, "You have decided to build ships in your National Dockyards under the control of the community, so I believe your railways, your mines, your great industrial monopolies, including <sup>90</sup> the land, should all be under your control in the same way."

This line of argument, however, was one fraught with danger for Portsmouth's Socialists, inviting counters from such diverse figures as the Rev. C. Garbett, later Archbishop of York, but, before the Great War, Senior Curate at St. Mary's, Portsea, and F.T. Jane, the Navy candidate in the 1906 election in Portsmouth and Naval journalist. Garbett was well-disposed towards the Labour Party in Portsmouth; he organised political talks for working men in the St. Mary's Parish Institute, appeared on Labour platforms (he was present, for example, at the 1905 meeting to protest against the Dockyard discharges) and in <sup>91</sup> 1906 had publicly supported the election campaign of W. Sanders. While Garbett was sympathetic to Labour representation, and involved in social reform, he was not a Socialist in the sense of nationalising industries. In a talk on "the Economics of Socialism," given at the St. Mary's Institute, Garbett argued, "The sensible critic could not

pretend that the present state of things was satisfactory, but with the state administration of land and capital - collectivism - would things be any better? There had been a whisper of people discharged<sup>92</sup> from the Naval Dockyards." F.T. Jane was prepared to be more outspoken in making the point that the Dockyards were not particularly good advertisements for state ownership, and to highlight the contradiction which Labour men seemed to involve themselves in when talking about the Dockyards. During the Dockyard unrest of 1913, when the engineering trades were banning overtime in pursuit of a 6/6d per week increase in pay claim, and threatening to go on strike, Jane argued in his weekly Naval Matters column in the Hampshire Telegraph, "Will the Socialist lights brave the ridicule certain to be directed at apostles of state ownership thundering about the superior virtues of private employers, or will they presently drop the Dockyardmen like a hot brick."<sup>93</sup>

Comments such as these must have been embarrassing for Labour men in Portsmouth, for they, and national figures in the Trade Union and Labour movement, frequently attacked the Admiralty for not matching private shipyards in pay rates, or in demarcation practice. That Dockyardmen were badly-off in comparison with the major private yards was a commonplace in Dockyard circles. However, the Socialists within Portsmouth's Labour movement were able to reply to their critics in this respect. At Garbett's talk the I.L.P. man, J. King, reacted to Garbett's contention with, "referring to the State control of Naval Dockyards ... what was wrong was that the Dockyards were managed by a state department of Capitalistic members, who owned private yards.



Managed by the State on Socialistic lines it would be very different."<sup>94</sup>

This point was also made by MacTavish. In 1913, when he was adopted as Labour candidate for Portsmouth, MacTavish addressed a meeting at the Town Hall, and in the course of his speech remarked, "Portsmouth was a Government town, and as such it ought to be an oasis in the industrial desert. Work ought to be continuous, wages should be touching the top figure and poverty ought to be reduced to almost a minimum." However, this was not the case, and, "All this was because the Government was a bad employer of labour."<sup>95</sup>

The full Socialist position, therefore, was that there was more to Socialism than state ownership, such ownership would have to be combined with a management capable of combining national interest with the requirements of its workforce in respect of pay and conditions. Argued in such terms, it is possible to envisage that Socialism could be plausibly promoted in a Portsmouth context.

The great problem for MacTavish and his fellow Socialists, however, was pacifism, and there is little evidence that the critics of Socialism in Portsmouth could be countered in this as they were in the matter of the shortcomings of employment conditions in state-owned Dockyards. From 1900 to the outbreak of the Great War Socialists in Portsmouth, whether local men or national figures, gave ammunition to their critics by identifying Socialism, and consequently Labour politics, with the pacifist cause. The same men who fought for improved Dockyard wages, and castigated the Admiralty on behalf of the workers, persistently revealed themselves as ultimately wishing Dockyardmen out of a job. A good example of this is provided by the local man John Pile, a railway porter and A.S.R.S. man, who in 1911 joined MacTavish on the Town

Council as a Labour representative. In 1905 Pile wrote to the Evening News concerning the recent discharges from the Dockyard. He argued that in this context the debate about free trade and tariff reform as a means of solving unemployment was irrelevant; Britain was no longer the workshop of the world and must look to non-industrial jobs to solve employment. The answer for Pile was a return to the land. As for the Dockyard, "What could it matter how many men were sent out of the Dockyard if they could be found healthy and useful employment on the land? Some of us who believe in universal peace and the brotherhood of man would welcome the time when all men were withdrawn from the employment of making engines to destroy life and were employed doing something to produce life, real life."<sup>96</sup> While Pile's views were confined to Portsmouth, Keir Hardie was saying the same sort of thing in the House of Commons in 1906, for the benefit of the country as well as the readers of the Hampshire Telegraph. In an attack on the Dreadnought programme, Hardie argued that the men in the Dockyards would be better employed digging holes and then filling them up, "it would moreover be much more healthy work."<sup>97</sup>

The comments of Labour men appearing before Dockyardmen either in their newspapers or from the platforms of public meetings in Portsmouth did not always espouse pacifism so overtly, although as J.R. Clynes said in his chairman's address during the 1909 Labour Party Conference held in Portsmouth, "the cause of peace finds a consistent advocate in the Labour Party. Costly and growing armaments have not increased our security."<sup>98</sup> More usual, however, was a commitment to defence, but a belief that virtually all increases in Naval expenditure were unnecessary and harmful to the economy; as W. Sanders said to

F.T. Jane in debate in 1908, he believed in Naval strength but not  
99 Naval expansion. This argument was supported by attempts to educate Dockyardmen away from a belief that Naval expansion was good for them. Two nice examples of this approach are provided by speeches of the A.S.E. Secretary, George Barnes, and MacTavish given in 1913. George Barnes, speaking to the engineering tradesmen of the Dockyard during a Town Hall meeting held in the midst of the pay agitation of that year, encouraged the men to persist in their pay demand, pointing out that Dockyard wages were now particularly inadequate, having lagged behind recent increases in the cost of living. However, Barnes then went on to inform his Dockyard audience, "One reason for the increased cost of living was the waste of capital and labour due to the immense bloated  
100 armaments." MacTavish later elaborated on this with an outdoor meeting on Southsea Common devoted to "Labour and Armaments." MacTavish argued increasing expenditure on armaments adversely affected all workers by diverting resources from socially useful expenditure. Moreover, Dockyard towns did not really benefit from such expenditure, the percentage of armaments work being given to private firms was on the increase so Dockyardmen were not the sole beneficiaries of such spending. Also, when Governments became alarmed at the cost of arms spending, cut backs would probably be made in the Dockyards initially, and, being single-industry towns, the Dockyard towns would be particularly badly hit. According to MacTavish, Labour's policy was to end the escalation of arms expenditure, and to disarm by degrees. All industry would be nationalised to ensure the minimum of hardship to armaments  
101 workers, new products would be developed and full employment ensured. Clearly, MacTavish's prescription applied to the long-term future when

Labour would be in power, but in the meantime Portsmouth men could see the commitment of Labour to such policies in the action of the Labour M.P's in the Commons where increases in the Naval Estimates were consistently argued, and voted, against. These votes were recorded  
102  
for Yardmen to read in the Portsmouth press.

It does not automatically follow that a line similar to that of Hardie, Clynes, MacTavish and Pile on the ultimate utility of the Dockyard and its future under Socialism was anathema to all Dockyardmen. MacTavish himself was a working shipwright in the Dockyard until his becoming a full time Labour Party organiser in Portsmouth in 1911, and it is quite possible to envisage men working in the Dockyard out of economic necessity, even taking a pride in the exercise of their craft skills, but who, at bottom, had little sympathy for the Navy, aggressive patriotism, or the social order which the Navy existed to protect. Clearly, how many men in the Dockyard were persuaded of views similar to MacTavish's cannot be quantified, but it is unlikely that there were many. The desire for job security was a key element in the Dockyardmen's make-up; this was a point acknowledged by James Matthews, (later Sir James Matthews for his work in the W.E.A. and on Southampton Council) who as a young shipwright in the Dockyard before the Great War was also secretary of Portsmouth's I.L.P. branch. In his view, "Dockyard workers' minds were dominated by the desire for security, which meant for most, establishment with a pension at sixty, owning your own terrace house and being mildly obedient towards authority as well as scared when the Naval Estimates were under  
103  
consideration. Rumour about this was always rife." Moreover, it was for the relative security of Dockyard employment that Admiralty

pay rates and demarcation practice was accepted. Against this background it is hard to see Dockyardmen welcoming talk of "bloated" armaments, or appreciating attacks on the Naval Estimates. Whatever the moral force of arguments concerning Naval expansion, or the lucidity of long-term analyses of the future of the Dockyards, increasing Naval Estimates meant more work in the Dockyard to-day, re-assurance that jobs were not to be lost, and the prospect of enhanced earnings through overtime, such as had been generated during the building of the Dreadnought. Equally, attacks on arms spending countered head-on the notions of patriotism, based on defence of home and Empire, which were so important to the Conservatism of this period. The potency of the combination of economic self-interest and patriotism, at least in Parliamentary politics, in Portsmouth can be seen in the Unionist domination of the town while Lord Charles Beresford was the Senior Conservative and Unionist M.P. As the Hampshire Telegraph commented in a leader written during the January election of 1910, "The fact cannot be too strongly emphasized that the issues which struggled for mastery in the by-election which never was have now been relegated to a second place. Lord Charles Beresford has made the predominant issue the Navy, whether it is to be omnipotent without a shadow of a doubt, or whether it shall give us but a fighting chance in our next Naval conflict."<sup>104</sup>

Given the dangers inherent for the Labour Party in Portsmouth in the light of its Socialist members' views, or a least part of their views, on the Dockyard, the surprise in Portsmouth politics in the pre-war period is not that the Labour Party fared so badly in local and Parliamentary elections in comparison to the experience of many of

the Northern shipbuilding towns, but that it made as good a showing as it did. At the Parliamentary level, Sanders polled 8,172 votes in 1906, behind the Liberals Bramsdon and Baker, with 10,500 and 10,236 respectively, while the Unionists trailed with Hills, 7,970, Whitelaw 105 7,752 and Jane, the Navy candidate, 1,859. In the January 1910 election, with the additional emphasis being given to Naval and patriotic matters from the arrival of Lord Charles Beresford on the scene, the Labour vote for Sanders fell to 3,529. The Portsmouth seats were won by Beresford, 16,777 and Falle, 15,592, the Liberals, Bramsdon 106 and Lambert polling 12,397 and 9,965. In Municipal elections, however, the Labour Party made more sustained progress, taking seats from Liberal and Conservative councillors in wards, with their rows of respectable three-bedroomed terraced houses, which were at the heart of the Dockyard residential area. In 1908 MacTavish ousted the long-serving Liberal, Aylwin, at Buckland, and in 1911 held the seat, while being joined on the Town Council by Stephen Pile, elected at St. Mary's. In 1912 a third Labour man, and A.S.E. and T.L.C. activist, Muir Allan joined the Town Council after defeating the long-serving Conservative 107 Councillor, T. Brewis, in Kingston.

This Labour group was eventually broken up, when MacTavish and Pile were defeated in 1914, refusing to support the War in the face of the patriotic fervour engendered in the town. In MacTavish's words, "Both were defeated at the war elections, for daring to protest against 108 the coming of Armageddon." However, in the pre-war years the Socialists, particularly MacTavish, in Portsmouth had shown it was possible to gain votes from Dockyardmen, and their families, in spite of the aspects of Socialism as presented in Portsmouth which might seem

inimical to Dockyardmen's immediate material interests. It would also seem that MacTavish after 1911 was well thought of by sufficient Dockyardmen for them to provide him with his income. In 1911 MacTavish was on the point of leaving his manual work in the Dockyard, after illness, to take a clerical post in the newly-opened Dundee Labour Exchange, but was able to stay in Portsmouth after being appointed a full-time Labour officer;<sup>109</sup> his salary being raised, according to the memories of old Labour party men in the town, from a 1d per week levy organised in the Dockyard.<sup>110</sup> To help explain this level of support, the aspects of Socialism, as preached in Portsmouth, which could feasibly be supported by a wide range of Dockyardmen must be examined.

If the scope of the Labour Party's support in Portsmouth was limited by its association with a Socialism that rejected "bloated armaments," then it was given the opportunity to remedy this, and appeal to a wider audience, including Dockyard families, through its foundation upon a straightforward class-consciousness, and the willingness of its Socialist activists to subordinate their ultimate commitment to state ownership in industry, and world peace through disarmament, and to concentrate on the solution of practical problems affecting the quality of working people's lives within the capitalist system, coupling this with an ability to articulate what workers saw as breaches of their notions of fairness. The ideas, as revealed in the newspapers, and actions of J.M. MacTavish as Portsmouth's leading Labour politician, and avowed Socialist, can be used as a focal point for the elaboration of this argument. MacTavish went to great lengths to equip himself with economic and political theory, involving himself

in the Workers' Educational Association from his arrival in Portsmouth,  
becoming Portsmouth W.E.A. President in 1906,<sup>111</sup> and attending  
Cambridge University Extension Lectures given by C.K. Webster from  
1912-13. It was from Portsmouth that MacTavish made his celebrated  
speech to the W.E.A. national conference at Oxford, and which paved  
his way to become the movement's secretary from 1916-1927. However,  
political theory does not appear to have been MacTavish's strong suit.  
In a monograph on MacTavish's secretaryship of the W.E.A. Ted Mooney  
has shown that while MacTavish was capable of using rhetoric which  
borrowed from Marxism it cannot be said that MacTavish was a Marxist,  
or to discern any consistent socialist theory in his writings. In  
Mooney's words, "To identify where MacTavish stands is difficult, for  
his writings display little uniformity, much confusion and a mixture  
of ideologies that are sometimes contradictory. The only consistent  
theme that runs through MacTavish's writings is his strong commitment  
to the working-class."<sup>112</sup>

It is this strong commitment to the working-class which provided  
the basis for what success MacTavish and the Labour Party enjoyed in  
Portsmouth, and the terms in which that commitment was expressed show  
the real basis of MacTavish's, and most of the Labour men in Portsmouth's,  
socialism. Underpinning all this was the conviction that working men  
were good enough, from the perspective of intellectual ability, and,  
through their own efforts, education, to hold any representative office.  
Moreover, only working men could fully appreciate the conditions of  
working-class life and in this way were better suited than other  
politicians to eradicate the problems affecting the working-class.  
This, as it was in the rest of the country, was a commonplace in



Labour politics. The reports of Trades Council and Labour Party meetings in Portsmouth provide a multitude of comments to this effect. A concise example is provided by P. Steer, the Branch Secretary of the A.S.E. in 1906, who at a meeting to endorse W. Sanders as Labour candidate, said, "Working men now felt that capitalists, employers of Labour, Financiers and such people were not to be expected to advance the workers' needs in the House of Commons. Working men's needs would best be advanced by having an independent Labour Party on the floor of the House."<sup>113</sup> MacTavish justified his own acceptance of the Labour candidature in Portsmouth in 1913 by saying in his address at his adoption meeting, held at the Town Hall, "He had run the whole gamut of Dockyard experience, and although he was no longer earning his living behind the Dockyard Walls he was still living in his home the life of an ordinary Dockyardman. It was this experience which fitted him to deal across the floor of the House with the First Lord of the Admiralty and his more agile secretary, Dr. MacNamara, and it was that experience which made the present borough members mere children in the hands of men cleverer than themselves."<sup>114</sup> In this context of class representation, Portsmouth provides an illustration of the weight which could be attached to this. In 1906, while W. Sanders, after having been a working man but by now a Labour full-timer, could say, "I am as poor as the poorest man in this great meeting and it is because I am poor that I am sure to do my best on behalf of my own class,"<sup>115</sup> he was also sensitive to accusation that he had distanced himself from the working class. At another public meeting he had to defend himself against this, "I am told because I do not drop my H's, because I happen to speak with a decent regard for English

Grammar and because my hands are not black and I try to dress as well  
as my salary will allow, I am not a Labour candidate."<sup>116</sup>

Together with this shared working-class experience MacTavish and the other Portsmouth Socialists concentrated on the over-riding concern of working people's lives in the formation of their political objectives; wages and income. The pressing problems of working-class life, decent housing, food and clothing, the ability to have some recreation, all revolved around money. MacTavish and his colleagues in Portsmouth's Labour movement saw their political involvement as re-inforcing the struggle to improve wages and working conditions pursued by the trade unions. The centrality of the struggle to improve wages as the key to working-class advancement in MacTavish's, and the Portsmouth Labour men's view of socialism, is nicely illustrated by their occasional contacts with Tom Mann in the couple of years before the Great War. In February 1913 Mann was in Portsmouth to promote syndicalism. The opportunity for this was provided by a Trades and Labour Council - organised mass meeting at the Town Hall, called to set up a local federation of all shipbuilding and engineering unions. The meeting was presided over by the Dockyard sailmaker and T.L.C. president, G. Porter, and the resolution moved by the Dockyard fitter, D. Naysmith, "That this mass meeting is of the opinion that the time has come for closer unity in the ranks of the workers." Mann wanted to push this desire for unity in the direction of workers' control of industry.<sup>117</sup>

In his contribution to the meeting MacTavish was not

prepared to endorse this, saying he preferred collective bargaining supported by political action as the way for workers to achieve social and political advancement. In the same vein, MacTavish gave an I.L.P.-organised talk on "the State as Employer" and, after discussing the various socialist views on how best to achieve state ownership of industry, and how to organise industry thereafter, concluded that, "Whatever important political proposal was brought forward the working people ought to ask how it was going to affect their wages - was it going to increase their spending power and was it going to increase their earning power?"<sup>118</sup> In such a view there is something to support the contention of G.D.H. Cole and R. Mellor that, "In Great Britain, where men have been constitutionally averse to idealism ... Socialism<sup>119</sup> has been almost purely a doctrine of distribution of income." It is rather extreme to say that MacTavish, and the other Labour men in Portsmouth calling themselves socialists, were purely concerned with the distribution of income, but it was on industrial matters, whether agitating for the Town Council to pay trade union rates or on behalf of Dockyardmen against the Admiralty, that they were most frequently heard, not on abstract issues of socialist theory.

A similar preference for action, or, more accurately, the statement of views, on immediate problems can be seen in the approach of MacTavish, and the other Labour men, to non-economic issues in Portsmouth. As a Town Councillor from 1908, on behalf of his class, MacTavish was outspoken in his criticism of the Council on a range of issues which offended his notion of fair play. MacTavish opposed the Council's decision to implement the clause of the Education Act<sup>121</sup> allowing it to discontinue free school meals in the summer. He

attacked the Portsmouth Grammar School for discriminating against working-class boys in its scholarship exams, alleging that preference was given to teacher<sup>122</sup>s' sons.

Throughout his time as a Councillor MacTavish complained that the Council concentrated its expenditure on the development of Southsea, as a middle-class residential district and as a holiday resort, at the expense of the rest of the town, particularly the working men who constituted the bulk of the

<sup>123</sup>ratepayers. In this respect, MacTavish was particularly scathing in his criticisms of the losses incurred by the building and operation of South Parade Pier. MacTavish was also prepared to attack the Council for accepting money for a library from Andrew Carnegie, "an American exploiter," and to use the occasion of the Czar Nicholas II's visit to a Naval review at Spithead to castigate the social and political <sup>124</sup>iniquities of the Czarist system.

Inseparable from the arguments which MacTavish advanced was his rhetorical style, which was seen to particular effect in the Council Chamber. The Tory Councillor H. Palin was so incensed by the fierceness of MacTavish's denunciation of the Council's curtailment of school meals in the summer of 1910 that he called MacTavish a "blighter" and an angry scene, involving several Councillors ensued. The Hampshire Telegraph lamented this episode, commenting that while MacTavish was correct in principle, it was a pity that he was so aggressive. His approach was compared unfavourably with that of the Labour men in the <sup>125</sup>House of Commons.

Similarly, in 1912, a full scale row was precipitated in the Council Chamber when MacTavish, in the course of an attack on the Council's budget proposals, referred to his political opponents as "pigs" and was, in turn, accused of having "a disordered

126  
brain" by the Mayor. While the Hampshire Telegraph may have decried MacTavish's approach to political debate it might be argued that such passion played an important part in MacTavish's, and Labour's, appeal to the workers of Portsmouth. It helped to make Socialism acceptable; to mask, or to compensate, for the aspects of Socialism concerned with state control of industry, and disarmament, which did not have wide appeal in a Portsmouth context. Whatever MacTavish or Pile, or national Labour figures, said about disarmament, MacTavish could be chaired by a mass of workers from the Town Hall to the Labour Party 127 Headquarters, as he was after his re-election for Buckland in 1911, because he represented them as a working man, fought for them on wage issues, and voiced their protests against the unfairness of the established order to the working class.

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36. H.T. January 2 1886.
37. H.T. January 16 1886.
38. P.T. January 12 1895.
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## Chapter IX

### Conclusion.

#### The Dockyardmen, The Making of the Working Class and the Labour Aristocracy.

This study is primarily a work of local history. It focuses upon the working environment provided by the Admiralty in Portsmouth Dockyard between 1880 and 1914, and how the Dockyardmen coped with this changing environment. It deals with the grievances held by the men, generally or sectionally, against their Admiralty employers, with the issues which caused friction between sections of the workforce, and with the development of institutions ranging from trade unions to athletic clubs. Local as it is, this work should be of intrinsic interest. The Dockyards, with Portsmouth as the principal Dockyard, were major features of Britain's industrial landscape, and, like so much of that landscape, they are disappearing. Chatham has closed, Portsmouth has been run-down (technically it has closed, for in 1985 Portsmouth Dockyard became subsumed within the Portsmouth Naval Base) and the surviving Dockyards, Devonport and Rosyth, are faced with administrative take-over by private firms. This projected future for the Dockyards creates a certain irony, for what is left of the shipbuilding industry of the Northern rivers, whose commercial practice in the period of this study was so frequently cited, or used as a reference point, by the Admiralty or Dockyardmen, is now controlled by a nationalised industry, while the Dockyards are poised to become privately commercialised. In these circumstances it seems appropriate to examine the social history of Portsmouth Dockyard in its heyday.

This local study, however, has also to be matched to the broader

picture emerging from published works on the development of the British working class in this period. On the broadest front, the very nature of the working class, what constituted its institutions and culture, the material emanating from Portsmouth 1880 to 1914 largely tallies with the argument advanced by Prof. E.J. Hobsbawm in his Ford lecture<sup>1</sup> on, "The Making of the Working Class 1870-1914." According to Hobsbawm these years, 1870 to 1914, were the formative period, from the perspective of institutions; the trade unions, the self-help organisations and the Labour Party, and culture; the use of leisure based on the pubs, the music hall, the football match, for the working class of the modern period. It is in this late Victorian/Edwardian period that what Hobsbawm calls the "Andy Capp Working Class" emerged.<sup>2</sup> Although Portsmouth is rapidly changing under the impact of modern town planners, rationalising breweries, and Dockyard-reducing governments, the physical appearance of the modern city indicates the extent to which the years pinpointed by Hobsbawm were years in which Portsmouth, certainly from the perspective of its Dockyard-based working-class, was made. The Central districts of the city, Kingston, Fratton, St. Marys, Stamshaw and Buckland, those districts North of Thomas Owen's mid-Victorian and middle-class Southsea,<sup>3</sup> and South of the inter-war semi-detached houses of Hilsea and Drayton, are largely composed of late-Victorian terraced housing designed for the expanding Dockyard workforce. Just as the physical environment in which subsequent generations of Dockyardmen's families were to live was established in this period, so were the foundations laid of a way of life built upon the experience of Dockyard employment.

Certainly, continuity in Dockyard history has to be acknowledged.

In the period under study, the kernel of the Dockyard, the area from the Main Gate to No 1 Basin, an area encompassing the Dockyard's administrative centre, the Boat House, the Rope House, and several of the stores, was essentially as it had been in Georgian times. The forms and terminology of Admiralty employment remained such as they had been developed by the seventeenth century; for example, the right of men to petition the Admiralty, and the annual re-organisation of the gangs known as shoaling was maintained. However, the Dockyard in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was transformed; transformed in the scale of its operation and, through the development of iron and steel shipbuilding, in the technology of its operation. Associated with these changes in scale and technology of operation was a re-casting of the Admiralty's management, and disciplinary structures.

The transformation of the scale of the Dockyards can be easily seen from the recent work of Dr. R.C. Riley. By 1876, with the opening of the Dockyard Extension, the Dockyard had gained 261 acres, trebling its eighteenth-century size and equipping it with three new docks and four new basins.<sup>4</sup> Within the Dockyard the tonnage of shipping launched virtually trebled from 1871 to 1910, while the workforce more than doubled -

5

Tonnage Launched by Portsmouth Dockyard 1874-1910.

| <u>1871-1800</u> | <u>1881-1890</u> | <u>1891-1900</u> | <u>1901-1910</u> |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 55,720           | 65,488           | 145,820          | 152,950          |

Employment in Portsmouth Dockyard 1880-1910.

| <u>1880</u> | <u>1890</u> | <u>1900</u> | <u>1910</u> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 5,892       | 7,615       | 10,044      | 12,896      |

While this expansion was taking place, as the opening chapter of

this study describes, the Admiralty developed the distinctive organisation of its workforce, and re-organised its management system. It was the progression from iron to steel shipbuilding which saw the completion of the Admiralty's unique division of labour within the shipbuilding industry. This left the shipwright as a generic shipbuilding tradesman, while other tasks in metal shipbuilding were denied trade status and were assigned to the skilled labourers.<sup>6</sup> In the wake of Admiral Graham's Committee on Dockyard Management, the Admiralty developed the management structures which it felt appropriate to this new, and complex, workforce; adjusting the balance in its management tactics between payment incentive schemes, and improvements in its supervisory hierarchies. It was this which produced by 1914 the chargeman, recorder, inspector, foreman hierarchy, re-inforced for the labourers, and some trades, by piecework and classification schemes.

For the workforce, as much as the Admiralty, the period covered by this study was a formative period. While the traditional form of the petitioning system was preserved, the men responded to the emerging conditions of Admiralty employment with the development of trade unionism, which by 1914 resulted in the Dockyardmen being organised as men in the private shipbuilding industry were. This process began with the creation of the Ship Constructive Association by the shipwrights, and continued through the establishment of branches of the nationally-organised shipbuilding Trade Unions amongst the skilled men, to the involvement of the labourers in the New Unionism of the 1890's. This pattern of trades unionism's development amongst the Dockyard workers was reflected in the cultural and political aspects of their experience. It is from 1880 that the leisure institutions of the Dockyard community,

the Excursion Committee and the various sports clubs, were developed. The same applies to informal leisure pursuits which can be related to the Dockyard, gambling and the support of the local professional football team for example. In the field of collective self-help, while there was a mid-century artisan tradition of friendly society activity on which to draw, the heyday of the Portsea Island Co-operative Society, the Oddfellows, the Foresters and the rest was in this late-Victorian/Edwardian era. In politics, the Working Men's Liberal Union was founded in 1887, and it was from this background that Portsmouth trade unionists, again reflecting the national experience, made their shift towards independent labour politics by the start of the twentieth century. Much of the material in this study, therefore, supports the contention of Prof. Hobsbawm concerning the importance of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the formation of a working-class whose institutions and ideas could be regarded by post-war sociologists such as D. Lockwood as traditional. The traditions of the Dockyard-based working-class in Portsmouth, while sometimes couched in terms derived from a Dockyard whose origins were in the reign of Henry VIII, were largely those worked out from 1880 to 1914.

However, having argued for this formative period in the social history of the Dockyard workforce, it remains to examine the nature of the class consciousness generated within Portsmouth at this time, and to relate this to what is known of the working-class experience nationally. In this the published work of Dr. G. Stedman Jones is particularly useful. While Dr. Stedman Jones may have modified his ideas since the 1974 appearance of his article, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900," now being prepared



to acknowledge that political responses were not so narrowly determined by localised social factors, there is much in his contention that, "The main impetus of working-class activity (by 1900)... was concentrated into trade unions, co-operatives and friendly societies, all indicating a de facto recognition of the existing social order as the inevitable framework of action ... The rise of the new unionism, the foundation of the Labour Party, even the emergence of socialist groups, marked not a breach but a culmination of this defensive culture,"<sup>7</sup> which appears applicable to Portsmouth. Dockyard workers set up trade unions to maximise wages and the acceptability of workplace conditions, within the framework established by the nature of Admiralty employment. The collective self-help of the Dockyardmen was designed to protect the lifestyle afforded by Dockyard employment. The leisure pursuits of the Dockyardmen, whether the institutionalised entertainment provided by the Excursion Committee and the sports clubs, or the informal pleasures of betting, football spectating, "pub-going," or music hall attendance, were all ways of achieving an acceptable, or enjoyable, way of life within the existing social and economic order.

The lack of challenge posed to the established order by a working class coalescing around the institutions under discussion here is illustrated by the relationship which existed between these institutions and the Portsmouth middle class. Although the closure of the Registrar General's records prevents discussion of the social interaction between the Dockyard community and Portsmouth's middle class being built on a quantitative foundation, material in the local newspapers makes it possible to say something about the quality of this relationship. As a preliminary to this some understanding of Portsmouth's middle class

is required. A fully detailed analysis of the composition, and internal dynamics, of the town's elite would constitute a major research project in its own right, entailing for the post-1880 period something similar<sup>8</sup> to John Field's work on the bourgeoisie of mid-Victorian Portsmouth. However, a working picture of the nature of the town's middle class can be sketched. Broadly, Portsmouth's economic and consequently social and political elite was made up of commercial and professional families. Admiralty policy in creating a mostly self-sufficient Dockyard and in denying land use to potential competitors for industrial labour, had precluded the emergence of great industrial capitalist families in Portsmouth. There was some industry in Portsmouth, a few engineering<sup>9</sup> and small boat building firms, and a building industry, centred around family firms, sustained by the expansion of the Dockyard and consequent expansion of the town. Outside of this, the town had a major professional element comprised of Army and Navy officers, who were the key element in the growth of Southsea, and clerics, medical men and lawyers. Alongside the professionals were the commercial operators servicing the food, drink, clothing and entertainment requirements of the town. At the head of this commercial middle class were the brewers, the Dupres and the Brickwoods who ran the largest enterprises in the town outside<sup>10</sup> of the Dockyard.

The dominance of the services, Navy and Army, in Portsmouth's economic life produced socially, and politically, something akin to the town/gown divide generated in university towns. Put simply, there is apparent within Portsmouth's middle-class in this 1880 to 1914 period a Navy, Anglican, Tory nexus in competition with a Town, Non-Conformist, Liberal connexion. There are exceptions, of course, to this

broad pattern. Anglican clergymen in Portsmouth, much to the chagrin of local Tories, did not always give support to the party.<sup>11</sup> In the 1880's the Vicar of Portsmouth, E.P. Grant was a prominent Liberal, and from the time of Father Dolling, Anglican clergymen can be found on the left of Portsmouth politics. Equally, Portsmouth's brewers supplied the town as much as they did the Navy, and yet were uniformly Tory. However, there is evidence to support this contention that, just as the Dockyardmen were made distinctive from comparable workers because of the peculiarities generated by Admiralty employment, so the Portsmouth middle class was given a distinctive character by the Dockyard. The pillar of Portsmouth Liberalism in this period was Sir John Baker, successively Town Councillor, Alderman and M.P. Baker's income was generated by his clothes shop, a shop geared to the market provided by the townsfolk. In contrast to Baker were the Tories, J.W. Gieve and W. Handley. Gieve was the proprietor of an outfitters catering for officers in the armed services, Handley the owner of the most fashionable store in Southsea. Similarly, the Liberals tended to look within the town for their Parliamentary Candidates, their most successful being Baker and T.A. Bramsdon, the town's coroner, a professional whose interests were based on the town rather than the Navy, while the Tories looked to socially prestigious outsiders, finding the ideal candidate in Admiral Lord Charles Beresford.

Where this distinction between those who identified with the Navy and those who identified with the town amongst Portsmouth's professional and business class breaks down is that, in the last resort, nearly all of Portsmouth, Southsea as much as Kingston, depended on the Dockyard, and in times of crisis for the Dockyard, that is during major

run-downs of its operations and workforce, usual political divides can be seen closing in a common defence of the Dockyard interest. This point leads into the most immediately striking aspect of the Dockyard-men's relationship with the middle-class elite of their town, the general absence of class hostility, and, in certain circumstances, a willingness to make common cause with interest overriding class, just as within the middle-class it could over-shadow normal political divisions.

The reaction in Portsmouth to the rundown of 1886-7 illustrates this. The Town Council, supported by the M.P's of Portsmouth and South East Hampshire, who were Unionists, initiated protest meetings against the Admiralty discharges, and organised all-party deputations to the First Lord, Lord George Hamilton. In 1886 Hamilton was met by a deputation headed by the M.P's of his own party, Wilson, Fitzwygram, and the Liberal Unionist Crossman, and including Baker, A.W. White, Capt. McCoy, A.R. Holbrook, W. Edwards, Fuller and Bennett, and was informed, "... the Government in selecting places like Portsmouth for its establishments had done so with the view of shutting out such competition in respect to the labour market as existed in other towns and thus in great measure made the whole town dependent on Government employment." The same all-party co-operation apparent by the town's most prominent politicians in making protests to the Admiralty on behalf of the Dockyardmen, directly, and themselves, indirectly, was also seen in the organisation of relief for the unemployed. A relief meeting at Fuller's Hall was chaired by A.W. White (Liberal Unionist) and supported by Baker, Pink (Conservative), Handley, Holbrook (Conservative), and Owen (Liberal).

A similar response was made to the discharges of 1905-6; the degree to which fundamental defence of the Dockyard could subordinate political divisions being nicely illustrated by the remarks of H.R. Pink, as President, to the A.G.M. of the Portsmouth Conservative Association in 1905, and the resolution proposed by Mr. Higgins, the President of the Portsmouth Radical Club, to a mass meeting, organised by the Trades Council a fortnight later. At his meeting, Pink argued, "In a place like the Dockyard work should be so arranged that there should be no discharges except for those men who were wilfully disobedient or incapable."<sup>13</sup> Higgins' resolution included, "... the Dockyards - national workshops with national plants - should be kept fully employed before private yards."<sup>14</sup> As in 1885-6 the campaign against the discharges was endorsed by the Town Council, and a formal protest made to the Admiralty.

The existence of this harmony between the town's middle-class leadership, as represented by the Town Council and local party notables, and the Dockyardmen to Admiralty policy which struck at shared economic interests, however, does not invalidate the notion of class in the Portsmouth context. While Dockyardmen may have reserved their hostility principally for external political figures such as Arthur Forwood, who was suspected of being more concerned with Liverpool shipbuilding interests in 1886 than the prosperity of the Dockyardmen, and Admiralty officials in London, there was still a discernible social divide between them, the other workers in the town, and the business/professional middle class of Portsmouth. The Dockyardmen, and comparable workers, as represented by the ironfounder J.W. Earle in the Working Men's Liberal Association, or A.F. Baxter, the printer,

President of the Trades Council in 1898, identified around their manual labour, and shared lifestyle. The class divide in Portsmouth was not so much one of antagonism as one of mutual indifference, punctuated by occasional points of contact such as the reaction to the crisis created by a Dockyard rundown, or the occasional endorsements of respectability for working-class institutions sought after, and received, on such occasions as the Oddfellows extending honorary membership to the town's M.P's and Mayor, or Dockyard Sports Clubs inviting senior Dockyard  
15  
officials to their showpiece events.

The extent to which labour politics emerged from this world can be seen in the mechanics of the Trades Council's transition to labour politics. The recognition required by the friendly societies of their respectability was a key element in the psychology of the working-class Liberalism of the 1880's. Working-men Liberals such as J.W. Earle were acutely conscious of their status as working-men, but diverged from the Conservative working-class, as typified by the Portsmouth man wanting a gentleman as M.P. to represent the Dockyardmen at the Admiralty, in believing that working men could fully participate in the political system. Again, the point to note here is that Earle and the men of the W.M.L.A. and the Trades Council were not identifying against the system, but, as working men, they wished to be recognised as competent to operate at all levels within it. The unwillingness of sections of the Liberal Association in Portsmouth to match this judgement of the capacity of working man was a key element in the Trades Council's shift to independent Labour politics. Even when advances had been made in the direction of independent Labour politics, and avowed Socialists, such as John MacTavish, David Naysmith and Stephen Pile came to the

forefront of Trades-Council-based politics, the essence of the earlier Lib-Lab politics was not fundamentally altered, still being based on a combination of class assertiveness and trades unionism. That Labour politics was still grounded in the struggle for income, for the ability to achieve or maintain a lifestyle within the system, was indicated by MacTavish's insistence in 1913, in debate with Tom Mann, that Portsmouth men should concentrate on what affected their wages, not the degree of control which they exercised over their industry.

The emergence of Labour politics in Portsmouth also sheds some light on the interaction of the national and the local in this period. Both Hobsbawm and Stedman Jones stress the degree to which developments were made throughout the British working-class in the post-1870's, as creating a distinctive period in working-class history. By the last quarter of the century it was possible to talk of a national working-class; trades unionism, the friendly societies, the forms of popular entertainment all made a nationwide impact. As Stedman Jones commented, "There was great diversity of local experience but no unbridgeable gulf. What is finally most striking is the basic consistency of outlook reflected in the new working-class culture which spread over England after 1870."<sup>16</sup> Seeing Portsmouth from this perspective is an easy enough matter. Coming into the last quarter of the nineteenth century few towns were as local, or distinctive, as Portsmouth, and the other Dockyard towns, with their long histories of large-scale industrial enterprise, based on a single unique employer, the state, and with the peculiar forms of Admiralty employment practice. From this time, however, Portsmouth moved into line with the other shipbuilding, the other large scale industrial, towns. The workers developed branches of

the nationally-organised unions, a Trades and Labour Council, branches of the major friendly societies, co-operative societies, and shared in the growth of music hall, professional football and the other aspects of popular entertainment of the period. With regard to trade union development, part, at least, of this integration of Portsmouth into the national experience was the product of Admiralty policy. From the 1880's the Admiralty consciously emulated the employment conditions obtaining within the commercially operated shipbuilding industry by diminishing the security afforded by the establishment system. As employment conditions corresponded more closely to those obtaining in the private trade the forms of trade unionism adopted by the Portsmouth men showed a similar development.

The emergence of a trade union movement in Portsmouth which matched the national movement, however, was a more complex process than a response to Admiralty policy. Re-inforcing this was the potential offered by the emergence of a nationally-organised trade union movement, with political influence, to the Dockyardmen within the framework of their established bargaining procedures with the Admiralty, and the educative effect within Portsmouth of events in, and ideas from, the wider industrial world. The chapter in this study dealing with the extension of the nationally-organised A.S.S.'s support amongst the shipwrights of Portsmouth Dockyard illustrates that a trade union which had political influence through the emergence of a trade-union element within Westminster could appeal to Dockyardmen as re-inforcing the publicity which was their most potent means of influencing Admiralty decisions. The education supplied to Dockyardmen which helped push the development of trade unions, and working-class politics, along the



lines emerging nationally was provided from two sources, the experience of the private shipbuilding industry brought into the Dockyard by men employed from outside, and through the political education supplied by the press and in talks and lectures, usually organised by clergymen for the working men of the town, which were common in this period.

The importation of outside experience can be seen in the contribution to trades unionism and labour politics within the town of David Naysmith, the A.S.E. Secretary in Barrow at the time of the 1897 lock out, and John MacTavish. Given the expansion of the Dockyard in this period, and the need for the Dockyard authorities to achieve most of this expansion through outside recruitment, the men coming into the Dockyard had had attitudes and opinions formed during their time in the private trade. Given this it is not surprising that so much of Portsmouth trade unionism, at the industrial and political levels mirrored national developments. David Naysmith in some respects is the archetypal early labour figure, a craftsman of the A.S.E, reacting defensively against the pressure which his union was under and turning to labour politics as a means of protection.<sup>17</sup> Re-inforcing the influence of such men was the role of the local newspapers in presenting Portsmouth working people with information as to national developments in the labour movement, with the Town's liberal newspapers the Hampshire Telegraph with its Dockyard Column, and the Evening News with its "Lights on Labour" prominent in this respect. Moreover, clergymen ranging from Father Dolling to the more conventional Revs. Garbett and Gordon Lang, combined their Christian ministry with the public airing of the day's leading social, economic and political issues as they affected working men.

It was against this background that, from the perspective of trade union and labour politics, Portsmouth, given the continuing distinctiveness of many of the features of Admiralty employment, produced a Dockyard-based trade union, and Labour, movement, which was largely in step with national development. In 1913 George Barnes could remark with some accuracy to his Dockyard A.S.E. members that the Portsmouth men now stood less distant from their fellows, <sup>18</sup> commenting at the mass meeting held at the Town Hall during the agitation over wages of that year, he was "glad to see Dockyardmen were more in accord with the labour movement, previously they had held aloof because of their privileges ..."

Having argued that much of the material in this study ties in with Professor Hobsbawm's views on the making of the contemporary "traditional" working-class in the late-Victorian and Edwardian period, it remains to relate this work on Portsmouth Dockyard to another idea particularly associated with Prof. Hobsbawm, that of the existence of an aristocracy of labour within the working-class of this same formative period. The labour aristocracy concept was re-introduced into historical <sup>19</sup> debate by Prof. Hobsbawm in 1954, and has subsequently been the subject of much debate amongst labour historians, particularly in the late 1970's. Since Hobsbawm's original essay, the concept has been <sup>20</sup> attacked by historians such as Pelling and Musson, denying that the mid-Victorian period saw the emergence of a new artisan elite justifying the aristocracy label, and by historians of the left querying the concept's utility in explaining the full range of mechanisms by which the Victorian working-class operated within, and not against, the Capitalist order. This latter range of criticism can be seen in the

published exchanges between Moorhouse and Reid on the shortcomings of  
the labour aristocracy concept,<sup>21</sup> and the respective merits of social  
control and sectionalism in more fully explaining the working-class  
experience. It is not the intention here, however, to embark on an  
essay cataloguing the contributions to the debate on the Labour  
aristocracy concept triggered by Hobsbawm. Such an exercise has  
already been undertaken by John Field.<sup>22</sup> Given, however, the several  
interpretations of the Labour aristocracy concept which have been  
developed in the course of this debate, and the various uses which have  
been made of it, it is necessary to outline, at least, the sense in  
which "Labour aristocracy" has been applied in this study of the  
Portsmouth Dockyard Workforce.

The essentially Leninist interpretation of the labour aristocracy,<sup>23</sup>  
as employed by John Foster in his work on mid-nineteenth century Oldham,  
has not been used in this study. Foster's premise of a near-revolutionary  
class-consciousness manifesting itself in the Oldham of the Chartist  
period, a class-consciousness subsequently dissipated by the fragmentation  
of the working class in the mid-Victorian period, a key element of which  
was the bourgeoisie's buying of the acquiescence of the artisans through  
wage levels and authority in the workplace, has been seriously challenged  
by the researches of A.E. Musson, and D. Gadian.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as Hobsbawm  
has remarked Foster's employment of the Labour aristocracy concept is  
exceptional amongst avowed Marxist historians. In any case, the choice  
of dates for the period of this study precludes a consideration of the  
nature of class consciousness in the Portsmouth of the Chartist period,  
its revolutionary potential or lack of it. By starting in 1880, the  
Dockyard workers are under consideration when industrial capitalism in

Portsmouth, as in the country's other industrial towns, was firmly established, although in Portsmouth the manifestation of industrial capitalism was made through the medium of a government department. What is under study here is the structure of the working community created by the Dockyard workplace, its internal divisions, its institutions, its culture, as it developed from 1880 to the Great War.

From this perspective, the interpretation of the Labour aristocracy concept which offers most as a heuristic device in a study of Portsmouth, or, conversely, for which Portsmouth material might provide re-inforcement is that which appears in the more recent published works of Prof. E.J. Hobsbawm. In this the labour aristocracy is comprised of those artisans whose wages and job security, while not releasing them from the world of manual labour, were sufficient to differentiate them within the rest of their class. Hobsbawm argues, it is very difficult to deny the existence of such a stratum in the Victorian working-class, "What then is at issue in the (labour aristocracy) debate? One thing that is not, or ought not to be, is the belief in mid- and late-Victorian times in the existence of a 'labour aristocratic' stratum of the British working-class, whatever exactly it was called. There is really too much contemporary evidence to the contrary."<sup>25</sup> He goes on to argue that those who ignore the labour aristocracy's existence, "seem to assume that contemporary observers of all kinds were living a collective delusion." However, Hobsbawm accepts that the nature of this stratum remains a legitimate subject for disagreement. Seen in this way, several lines of enquiry in Portsmouth are suggested, for example; which 'yardmen' can be seen fitting into a labour aristocracy in the town, to what extent did an

aristocracy of labour in Portsmouth include non-yardmen, and, given the existence of a labour aristocracy in Portsmouth, can an examination of its culture be made; an examination on similar lines to R. Gray's work on the artisans of Victorian Edinburgh and G. Crossick's work on the artisans of mid-Victorian Kentish London?

The obvious candidates for designation as labour aristocrats in Portsmouth are the tradesmen of the Dockyard, and in many respects these men nicely illustrate the arguments of Hobsbawm with regard to the labour aristocracy. While Dockyardmen may have perennially complained at the shortfall between Admiralty wages, and the wages available to skilled men in the major private yards, Dockyard tradesmen's wages were in the upper range of wages available to manual workers, and Dockyard tradesmen enjoyed the wage differential between themselves and the unskilled labourers of the Dockyard associated with workers accorded aristocratic status. Moreover, the economic foundation of the Dockyard tradesmen's claim to aristocratic classification was re-inforced by the exceptional degree of job security, touching the hired as well the established men, afforded by Admiralty employment. However, the tie-up between the Dockyard tradesmen and Hobsbawm's work on the labour aristocracy goes beyond the simple statement that Dockyardmen earned aristocratic wages. The development of the Dockyard tradesmen, as a group, from the 1880's, largely corresponds to Hobsbawm's views on the maintenance of trade, or artisan, status amongst groups of workers in the formative last quarter of the nineteenth century when the structures of the mature British industrial economy were being shaped. For Hobsbawm the labour aristocrats of this period were those who could, on the basis of their wages and job security,

maintain a ~~claim~~, an acknowledged ~~claim~~, to artisan status, even though their trades might be at the lower end of the market being de-skilled through the subdivision of labour, or whose skills were based on the relatively recent trades of the engineering industry and lacked an established artisan tradition.<sup>26</sup> In Portsmouth Dockyard the conditions of the tradesmen of the post 1880 period were different from those of the tradesmen working in the Dockyard at the century's start. The opening chapter of this study shows that the range of trades employed in the Dockyard was altered by the predominance of iron, and then steel, shipbuilding in the Dockyard. Trades such as that of wood-caulking virtually disappeared, the numbers, and importance, of the sawyers declined. The core trade, that of the shipwright, was radically different by the end of the nineteenth century from what it had been at the start, with shipwrights being required to work in wood and iron. Equally, the Dockyard tradesmen became more managed in this period, with the virtual autonomy of the gangs apparent in the late-eighteenth century being suppressed, and Dockyard tradesmen placed under the control of chargemen, inspectors and foremen, while having their work monitored by recorders. However, the shipwrights, and the new metal-working trades, those of the boilermakers and the various fitters, continued to be accorded trade, or artisan, status by the Admiralty, and by the organised trades of the wider shipbuilding industry.

The artisan status of the Dockyard tradesmen, however, was not unqueried; there was the suspicion on the part of the craft unions in the shipbuilding industry that Dockyard tradesmen were recruited by the Admiralty on the basis of their ability to perform the tasks required in the Dockyard to an adequate standard rather than on the strength of

their having been indentured apprentices. Such a suspicion surfaces in the correspondence of the Sailmakers' Federation where the desirability of taking up grievances on behalf of Dockyard sailmakers as a prelude to securing the membership of the Dockyardmen to the<sup>27</sup> nationally-organised federation was questioned. However, the Dockyard sailmakers were accepted by the Sailmakers' Federation, as were the other Dockyard trades by their corresponding nationally - organised craft unions. The acceptance of the artisan status of the Dockyardmen in this manner indicates that if a nationally discernible aristocratic stratum existed within the working class, then the Dockyardmen have a good claim to belong to it, and helps re-inforce Hobsbawm's point that membership of the labour aristocracy consisted principally in holding down a job with aristocratic wages and skills irrespective of how this position was acquired. As Hobsbawm commented, "Craftsmen who insisted that no labourers must be allowed to 'take up the tools' of the trade knew perfectly well that many of themselves had learned their trade in just such an 'illegitimate way.' The effective test of their status was that they had proved their ability to earn a tradesman's rate, and could as a group, insist on<sup>28</sup> their due status and conditions..."

A further piece of evidence in establishing the validity of seeing the Dockyard's tradesmen as constituting a recognised aristocracy, or elite, in terms of wages and skill, within the Dockyard workforce, and which corresponded to the artisan elite in the private trade, is provided by the relationship between the tradesmen and the skilled labourers in the Dockyard. In some respects the skilled labourers had a claim to aristocratic status; they shared the security of Dockyard

employment with the tradesmen, and while there was a wage differential between the skilled labourers and the tradesmen for a skilled labourer on piecework this could be narrowed to a few shillings from the tradesman's day pay. There was also the potential for a fully-fledged apprenticeship system with boys initially coming into the Dockyard as Yard boys during which time they acquired the skills of the skilled labourers. Moreover, outside of the Dockyards men performing work comparable to that of the skilled labourers were accorded trade status, and, as was indicated in evidence given to the Graham Committee, it was not unknown for apprenticed men anxious for the security of Admiralty employment to enter the Dockyard as skilled labourers. However, built upon the wage differential, whatever its size, between the tradesmen and the skilled labourers was an official, and acknowledged, even if resented, difference in status. The petitions from the skilled labourers requesting re-classification by the Admiralty as minor trades show the skilled labourers' appreciation of the important divide between themselves and the tradesmen, whatever their self-evaluation. While in the longer term the concession of trade status might have been used by the skilled labourers as a bargaining counter for the elevation of wage levels to those of existing tradesmen, in the short term the skilled labourers were concerned with status.

Having accepted the Dockyard tradesmen as labour aristocrats the way is opened for a consideration of the internal dynamics of this group. Merely to say, "the Dockyard was divided into aristocratic tradesmen and plebian labourers," is too simple, and ignores the subdivisions which could, and did, exist within the tradesmen stratum of the Dockyard workforce. If the Dockyard tradesmen were aristocrats,



then the complexities of Admiralty employment practice made them aristocrats requiring their own Debrett. The tradesmen could be further sub-divided on the basis of Admiralty regulations, with each official sub-division generating its own loyalties, between major and minor trades, between established men and hired men, between ex-Dockyard apprentices and men apprenticed in outside yards, and between the working tradesmen and those promoted to supervisory or monitoring posts, the chargeman, recorders, inspectors and foremen. Adding to this range of cross-currents running through the tradesman grouping was the rivalry between specific trades, most usually seen in the resentment shown by the other trades to the special position occupied by the shipwrights in Admiralty demarcation practice and in its management structure.

In such a world internal loyalties could run in different directions. For example, an established shipwright and an established fitter, both Dockyard-apprenticed men, might harbour trade resentments but could equally identify on matters concerning established men or ex-apprentices. Similarly with two shipwrights, one a former Dockyard apprentice the other an "outsider," both hired. In spite of their trade loyalty they might be expected to make different identifications on an issue such as the Ex-Apprentices Association petitioning for preferential treatment for ex-apprentices on entry to the established list, or in arguing for promotion to chargemen being by written examination only, a practice likely to favour the Dockyard-School-educated ex-apprentices. The preceding chapters of this study show a variety of such conflicting loyalties operating within the tradesman community. The existence of such complex sub-division, however, does

not undermine the validity of seeing the tradesmen as a distinct group. In some ways it rather strengthens the case for using the label "aristocracy" for rather like genuine aristocrats, parallelling those of the eighteenth century, the tradesmen aristocrats of the Dockyard had their own internal politics and tendency to faction, or sectionalism. This parallel with the genuine aristocracy might be pushed further with the Dockyard supervisors, the chargemen, inspectors and foremen being seen as the dukes and marquesses of the Dockyard, the established ex-Dockyard apprentices its earls, the established men its viscounts and the hired men its barons. Moreover, such a view could even encompass the skilled labourers. While they were not fully accredited members of the aristocracy they were an elite group amongst the plebian labourers, living on the fringes of the tradesmen world, and might be seen as the Dockyard's baronets.

While, therefore, the labour aristocracy concept can be usefully applied to the Dockyard workforce, the complexity generated within the aristocratic stratum by the peculiar conditions of Admiralty employment has to be acknowledged. These conditions of employment, besides giving the Dockyard aristocracy a distinctive complexity, affected, at least potentially, the abrasiveness of the status delineations within the Dockyard aristocracy, and between Dockyard aristocrats, and plebians, particularly the skilled labourers. In the world of private industry workers were active participants in the creation of the dividing lines between the skilled and the unskilled, and in the apportioning of tasks between trades. <sup>29</sup> Craft unions organised against employers, taking strike action, to prevent the intrusion of unapprenticed men into areas of work previously the preserve of the skilled, and

demarcation lines were established as the result of inter-union conflicts. This was a world far removed from that of the Dockyard, where the material resources of the state, and the allure of job security, precluded trade union militancy. The categorisation of artisan and labourer, and the demarcation system, was decided by the Admiralty as a central, and external, authority for the Dockyards. All Dockyardmen, whatever their trade or status, were subject to the same Admiralty regulations and work discipline. In such an environment pay schemes, gradings and demarcation decisions could be received almost as acts of God. Clearly, as the preceding chapters in this study show, resentments could be harboured between the trades, between skilled and unskilled, established and hired, and so on, but the workers involved in this had not actively participated in the creation of the system. While it cannot be proved that the dividing lines within the Dockyard workforce had a softer edge than those existing within the private trade, and that sectionalism was not as potent a force as discerned by A. Reid in his work on the division of labour within the commercial shipbuilding industry,<sup>30</sup> the potential effect of the unique nature of Admiralty employment in this respect deserves recognition.

A similar point can be made with regard to the divide between the artisan aristocrats of the Dockyard and the skilled labourers. In private industry, as the researches of G. Crossick and R. Gray into artisan communities of mid-Victorian London and Edinburgh indicate, there was scope for the creation of generations of artisan families, again a feature likely to harden the divide between skilled and unskilled, aristocrat and plebian, within working-class communities.

Artisans used their connections to have their sons taken on as apprentices in private industry, but in the Dockyard towns entry into Dockyard apprenticeships was not so informal, or easy. Entry into the Dockyard as an apprentice tradesman was dependent on competitive examination, and while, as the evidence from the Portsmouth Secondary School shows,<sup>31</sup> Dockyard tradesmen did make provision for their sons to enter the Dockyard via this procedure, there was no certainty of success. However, a tradesman's son who failed to gain an apprenticeship from the Dockyard examination could still achieve entry into the Dockyard, this time benefitting from his father's influence, as a Yard Boy, for Yard Boys were entered at the discretion of the local Dockyard authorities. Entry as a Yard Boy opened the prospect of adult employment as a skilled labourer,<sup>32</sup> and while deficiencies in Admiralty source material prevent a quantitative analysis of skilled and ordinary labourers with tradesman family connections, the possibility of the tradesman/labourer divide being less sharply defined between families in Portsmouth than in towns based on private industry is worth noting.

This potential, at least, within the Dockyard for the softening of the fundamental division between the tradesmen and the labourers leads into a further aspect, and complication, of the social character of the Dockyard workforce from 1880 to 1914; the extent to which, in spite of the validity of the labour aristocracy label's application and the sectionalism manifested within the Dockyard trades, a sense of Dockyard community existed which transcended these dividing lines. In some ways shot silk can be used as a metaphor in the understanding of the Dockyard's social fabric; just as the colour of shot silk changes

as the light catches the weft or the warp, so the Dockyard workforce could display fragmentation or cohesion depending upon circumstances. In years of reduction in the Dockyard, particularly during the major reductions of 1886-9 and 1905-6,<sup>33</sup> a sense of Dockyard community can be seen in the organisation of mass meetings in protest at the Admiralty's action. Less spectacularly this sense of community can be seen in Dockyard-based institutions affecting all Dockyardmen such as the Excursion Committee, and, perhaps more revealingly in the perception of all Dockyardmen as constituting a community by outsiders. Such recognitions of the Dockyard community ranged from the Hampshire Telegraph carrying a column specifically addressed to Dockyardmen to the resentment which sometimes surfaced against Dockyardmen from the ranks of the non-Dockyard working-class, as seen in the correspondence of the Portsmouth Dockyard Sailmakers' Union, and in comments appearing in the local newspapers from Trades Council, or public<sup>34</sup> meeting, reports.

In one respect this sense of community might be seen as a survival from an earlier Dockyard age. D. Wilson concluded from his research on Portsmouth at the time of the French Wars at the turn of the eighteenth century that, "Though the workforce of the Yard was broadly structured into a hierarchy topped by shipwrights it was not rent by these divisions into isolated and mutually antagonistic occupational groups. The very number of skilled men and the diverse roles they fulfilled militated against the development within the Yard of a restricted labour elite. Thus on all major issues the Yard labour force displayed considerable unity and conducted its affairs with an<sup>35</sup> egalitarian spirit." This study, however, argues that by 1914 the

Dockyard workforce had become more complex as a result of the Admiralty-imposed changes in workforce structure and working practice from 1880, and was more fragmented. The behaviour of the Dockyardmen in 1913, while mirroring a degree of union militancy being displayed throughout the country cannot quite be described as egalitarian or displaying considerable unity, with the engineering trades basing their pay claim in part on the erosion of their pay differential from skilled labourers, and with the recriminations between the shipwrights and the fitters at the conclusion of the latter's overtime ban.<sup>36</sup> Mention of Wilson's work in this context, however, does tie in with the underlying theme of much of the material in the preceding chapters, the interaction of the old with the new and the creation of a synthesis which by 1914 had seen the Dockyard world retain its distinctive character and much of its traditional forms but which reflected the major developments which had been made in the wider working-class experience.

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2. Ibid., p. 194.
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6. See Chapter 1. Section on Dockyard Management. p. 31 -
7. G. Stedman Jones, Languages of Class,  
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8. J. Field Bourgeois Portsmouth: Social Relations in a Victorian  
Town 1815-75. Unpublished PhD, Warwick 1979.
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11. P.T. February 3 1906.
12. H.T. December 18 1886.
13. H.T. July 1 1905.
14. H.T. July 15 1905.
15. H.T. April 5 1905.  
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18. See Chapter IV - H.T. 2 May 1913.
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24. D.S. Gadian, "Class Consciousness in Oldham and Other North Western Industrial Towns 1830-50," in Northern History 1977.  
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25. E.J. Hobsbawm, Worlds of Labour, 1984. p. 217.
26. Ibid., P. 232.
27. See the Sailmakers' Chapter V. Footnote 12.
28. E.J. Hobsbawm op.cit., p. 234.
29. K. Burgess, The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience, 1975.  
For examples of demarcation via industrial action see Chapter 1 p. 1-73.
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31. Gray op.cit.,  
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32. See Chapter VII. Footnote 88.
33. Example of mass protest meetings are recorded in H.T. 4 Dec 1886  
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34. See Chapter V. Footnote 13.
35. D. Wilson, "Government Dockyard Workers in Portsmouth 1793-1815,"  
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Section A. Vol XXX II

Item 2. Shipwrights Folios 51-106  
Item 3. Dockyard workers Folios 107-130  
Item 5. A.S.S.

Vol XXX III

Item 4. Sailmakers 286-360  
Vol XLII

Item 1. Government Workers 323-347

Section B.

Item 4. Fitters  
Item 5. Shipwrights

Section C. LXXXXI

Item 8. Ship Joiners

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