

WORK, DISCIPLINE, AND CONFLICT IN THE
HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, 1770-1870

By
Edith Burley

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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University of Manitoba
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ABSTRACT

The Hudson's Bay Company is usually seen as a group of explorers and fur traders, an image reinforced by fur trade historians who focus on officers, native-European relations, women, and "fur trade society," while paying scant attention to the majority of the HBC's men who were labourers and tradesmen. The notion that trading posts resembled traditional households in which subordinate members were subsumed has come to dominate the discussion of HBC employees, thereby relegating them to the margins of Canadian history. Labour historians tend to ignore the HBC altogether. But, the posts and ships of the HBC were workplaces and, therefore, "contested terrain," as indeed was the pre-industrial household itself. The assumption, shared by the London committee and fur trade historians, that order and subordination were the norm in such traditional settings means that conflict and disobedience are considered almost aberrant and attributed to ethnic peculiarities. The HBC has thus come to be seen as a monolithic, paternalistic organization in which all members were united in a *mentalité* characteristic of the harmonious, pre-industrial society from which most of them were drawn.

However, pre-industrial social relations were negotiated, not imposed from the top. This thesis rests on the assumption that such negotiation occurred in the HBC and explores this relationship for the period 1770-1870, a century of drastic change for the company. The HBC's archives preserve the journals, logs, and reports of unusual events, which officers and ships' captains had to submit, correspondence between them and the London committee, letters from HBC recruiters, petitions from servants asking for assistance or demanding justice, and a variety of personal letters. These records document the behaviour and views of both officers and servants and reveal that conflict was very much a part of life in the HBC. Regardless of ethnicity and like other workers, HBC men negotiated the terms of their engagements, retained customs and habits their superiors abandoned, engaged in private trade, were frequently disobedient and defiant, tried to control the pace and conditions of their work, and acted collectively to increase wages or oppose unfair treatment.

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ABBREVIATIONS

HBC Hudson's Bay Company Archives

HBCA Hudson's Bay Company Archives

NAC National Archives of Canada

NWC North West Company

OA Ontario Archives

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the century from 1770 to 1870 a new social order emerged in Europe and North America. Capitalism introduced new agricultural techniques and manufacturing processes and transformed labour into a commodity whose value was determined by an impersonal market. Traditional relations between workers and employers were more than merely monetary transactions. Servants and apprentices were dependent members of their masters' households and received wages, food, lodgings, guaranteed employment for the term of the contract, and care during illness. Employers were responsible for the moral and physical well-being of everyone in the household, both kin and workers. In the workshop, masters and journeymen laboured together, observed the rituals of their crafts, and shared the feasts that brought all labour to a halt. Likewise, in the countryside everyone joined in the celebrations and holy days that marked the passage of the seasons. Now employers came to see these customs as obstacles to discipline and efficiency. The care of the old, the sick, and the unemployable became the responsibility of impersonal authorities and bureaucracies to be carried out in the thriftiest manner. The meanness of social assistance and the severity of the law were intended to make any employment at any wage preferable to either the ministrations of the overseers of the poor or a life of crime. In addition, the elimination of nonmonetary sources of subsistence, such as common land for grazing livestock, produced a landless rural population dependent on wages as their sole source of support, while the destruction of old crafts, the division of labour, and mechanization destroyed independent tradesmen. Human beings became factors of production or, in modern business parlance, human resources.

These new relations did not suit all employers. Indeed, during the nineteenth century many industrialists sought to restore the emotional bonds that they thought had once prevailed without, of course, restoring the economic and social structures that had supported

them.¹ The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) never abandoned them. It always preferred to hire at least a proportion of its employees in the traditional manner, i.e. as servants bound by longterm contracts that clearly specified the obligations of both parties. The governing committee retained its paternalistic attitude towards its employees. In return for faithful and diligent service it was prepared to reward its workers with opportunities and benefits that were increasingly unavailable elsewhere, while paying low wages appropriate to the social status and modest expectations of the men it hired. The HBC was a mercantile company not a manufacturing enterprise and, therefore, conservative. Merchant capital promotes the exchange of commodities, but produces nothing itself. Unlike industrial capital, therefore, it does not alter the mode of production but becomes a parasite on it. It has what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese have called a "Janus Face"² because it contains within it the customs of the past and the seeds of the future. It has the potential to undermine traditional social relations because it promotes production for exchange rather than for use. It also increases the circulation of money and permits the concentration of money wealth, both of which are necessary for the development of capitalist production. But, because it does not matter *how* those commodities are produced, merchant capital does not *require* a change in the mode of production, particularly since the greatest profits are possible where production is least developed. As a result, merchant capital has tended to be a conservative force and where it dominates, independent producers are in fact turned into wage-workers whose surplus labour is appropriated under an old mode of production and in conditions worse than under industrial capitalism, such as slavery.³

¹See, for example: H. I. Dutton and J. E. King, "The Limits of Paternalism: the Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54," Social History 7 (Jan. 1982) : 59 -74; Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980).

²Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3.

³Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. 3: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole (Hamburg, 1894; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 323-337.

The HBC fits this pattern in two ways. It accommodated itself to the mode of production of the people of North America who remained independent commodity-producers, although they now trapped furs for exchange as well as for use, while the profits of their labour left the country rather than being invested in it. It is this aspect of merchant capital that has attracted the most attention and indignation. But such a relationship existed not only at the point of production but also at the point of recruitment. The HBC tapped into the native trading networks of North America, ultimately contributing to the subjugation and marginalization of what remained of the original population, but it also fitted itself into the customary way of life of the areas from which it recruited. It contributed to their economies by providing profits for the suppliers of provisions and incomes sufficient to perpetuate that way of life, but otherwise did not concern itself with the affairs of those societies or hesitate to look elsewhere if they no longer supplied sufficient or desirable men. For the majority of the company's employees, the service did not permit much upward social mobility and was one of a number of temporary occupations, such as joining the British army and navy and work in fishing fleets or the kelping industry, that helped to support the populations of the northern parts of Scotland in their traditional pursuits and, therefore, also reinforcing traditional social and economic relations. It was a conservative force, feeding off the existing mode of production and strengthening "feudal social relations."⁴ The parasitical relationship of mercantile capitalism with pre-industrial modes of production also manifested itself in its retention of paternalistic master-servant relations in its own organization.

The HBC preferred to engage men as servants because, as such, they were bound to their masters by vows of fidelity and obligated to dedicate themselves exclusively to the company's interests. This preference did not, however, rule out efforts to make the business more economical and the men more frugal and diligent. Nor did the retention of traditional social relations ensure discipline and deference because, whatever the ideal, those relations never had guaranteed subordination. As long as the natives brought furs to the posts and the cost of doing

⁴Fox-Genovese and Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital, 5-6.

business remained low, the servants did not need to be paragons of virtue because, except for private trade, their disobedience would have little effect on the company's profits. Less than a century after its founding, however, the company had to launch itself into the interior to compete with rivals who made it unnecessary for the Indians to come all the way to the bay to trade. The company now required more men and demanded stricter economy and greater dedication. Instead, labour was in short supply because of almost constant warfare and the servants objected to the company's new strategy. Nevertheless, although its men were obstructing its efforts, demanding higher wages and gratuities, and sometimes simply refusing to do as they were told, the London committee did not wish to alter its labour practices because to do so would not necessarily solve its problems.

The destruction of traditional social relations may have freed employers of their paternalistic obligation, but it was accompanied by what E. P. Thompson has called "the growth of a newly-won psychology of the free laborer."⁵ One might suggest that only an employer possessing the corresponding psychology of the free master would be pleased with this development, particularly after the French Revolution aroused widespread fear that unruly British workers were subversive. Such workers could, however, be serviceable for factory work where machinery and close personal supervision enforced discipline or outwork where low piece rates and the threat of starvation ensured diligence. Work in the HBC remained pre-industrial, its routine dependent on the seasons not the clock and its duties performed largely by men who supervised themselves. Whatever difficulties the company had with its traditional recruits, the alternatives were hardly better and it continued to hire men from areas where traditional social relations prevailed. One should not assume, however, that the HBC was entirely averse to modifying its policies. On the contrary, the London committee tried to lighten the burdens of paternalism and even contemplated measures that, had they succeeded, would have completely

⁵E. P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," Journal of Social History 7 (Winter 1974): 384.

transformed its relationship with its workers. But, the nature of the business and the committee's conservatism and desire for control prompted rapid retreats whenever change failed to have immediately satisfactory results.

The HBC was a small enterprise, highly vulnerable to the fluctuations of the market for furs in Europe, and its rivals, traders based in Montreal who amalgamated to form the North West Company (NWC) in 1804, were trouncing it in North America. These circumstances promoted caution. Thus, after 1770 when competition forced it to send men into the interior, its servants resisted, but rather than replacing them with more active, experienced, but also expensive, French Canadians, the committee offered bounties to its Orcadian servants to induce them to obey with more enthusiasm and hired the occasional Canadian who came and offered his services. It was not until 1810 when crisis demanded desperate measures that the committee decided a thorough reform was necessary: no more bounties; fewer imported provisions; higher prices for supplies; the reduction of Orcadians; and, the introduction of piece work. The men would now bear more of the cost of their upkeep, but as long as the HBC imported labour, it still had to feed and house them. In the short term, it planned to continue to recruit in marginal areas where pre-industrial social relations prevailed, namely, Canada, Ireland, and the Scottish Highlands, although the populations of these places possessed reputations for unruliness which would benefit the HBC as long as it was directed against the enemy but which might also lead to a loss of discipline in the service itself. If, however, the committee's other measures had the desired effect, disorder could be avoided. It established the Red River Settlement, where servants could retire on land granted them for faithful service and provide both provisions and workers for their former employer. It regulated the acquisition of land in such a way as to ensure that the lowest ranked servants could not support themselves by farming alone, but would have to alternate it with wage labour. In this way the HBC tried to create a traditional society of its own and eventually avoid the expense and bother of importing men from others. But, none of these measures had the desired effect partly because of the circumstances under which they

were introduced and partly because of the servants themselves.

The NWC redoubled its efforts and the competition became violent and often bloody. Attacks on the colony prevented it from achieving stability let alone becoming a haven for retired workers. The new men were unruly, the old servants resented the new conditions, the Norwegians, hired on a form of piece work, demonstrated an impressive indifference to the terms of their agreements and no one else seemed attracted to them either. Fortunately, the merger of 1821 allowed the committee to revert to a more sedate way of doing business. Frugality could once more replace extravagance, faithful Orcadians could replace the unmanageable new men, and the colony could now fulfill its promise. The business did become more economical, but Orcadians became less interested in joining the HBC, while the colony became a source of mainly seasonal labour whose obstreperousness sometimes reduced the transport of goods and furs to chaos and who, when not employed by the company, defied its monopoly. Nevertheless, the committee never again abandoned its traditional mode of hiring. The London committee remained a paternalistic employer, engaging men from areas where pre-industrial social relations survived and providing them with benefits that few other employers offered any more: food, housing, medical care, and, constant employment and wages during their contracts. It also provided charitable assistance to worthy former servants fallen on hard times. In return, the London committee expected to benefit from the habits of deference and submission that were supposed to characterize the lower orders of pre-industrial societies.

The fact that the company of 1870 so closely resembled the one of 1770 creates an impression of stability and harmony. Like any workplace, however, the company's posts and ships were "contested terrain."⁶ Since the company's survival depended not only on the decisions of the men at the top but the cooperation of their subordinates, it is obvious that the

⁶Richard Edwards, Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1979.) Although Edwards is discussing mainly the struggle for control of the work process in large, modern companies, this phrase expresses aptly the situation in any workplace.

majority of them accepted their subordination and performed their work well enough to keep the HBC in business. But, acceptance should not be mistaken for blind obedience. That the HBC endured was due not to the *absence* of conflict but to the fact that the company could survive most of its manifestations because these rarely attacked the relations of authority upon which the company was based. Historians of the HBC have focused on the absence of discord and assumed that obedience and diligence were the norm. This image has been most strongly reinforced by Jennifer Brown's representation of the HBC post as a pre-industrial household, a notion that has become part of the canon of fur trade history, as evidenced by its inclusion in the Canadian Historical Association's historical booklet on the fur trade.⁷ Brown's notion is not without merit because it describes the relations of authority taken for granted at the time of the company's founding and preferred by the London committee throughout its history, but it overlooks important aspects of both pre-industrial households and pre-industrial society.

Jennifer Brown has suggested that, as the basic unit of production in seventeenth century England, the household provided "an implicit model for structuring Bay posts," since traders would naturally bring with them "British social patterns and values." The household comprised a married couple, their children, and servants, apprentices, or journeymen, all living and working together. The head and master of the household was the father to whom all other members were subordinate and owed their allegiance. For servants, household membership was paramount. They were allowed little private life, were expected to remain unmarried, and had few opportunities to establish "significant horizontal relationships with their peers." The household, suggests Brown, was, therefore, characterized by "closely integrated vertical social relationships" and so was the HBC post, whose men were even more isolated than conventional servants. The masters of the posts assumed the role of patriarch and, as such, claimed the right to take wives and establish families. The youth of HBC servants, like that of their counterparts in

⁷Frits Pannekoek, *The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society 1670-1870* Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet, no. 43 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Society, 1987), 13.

more conventional households, promoted the development of personal ties with their superiors which reinforced their attachment to the company. Moreover, during the seventeenth century, observes Brown, classes "were not yet prominent." Master-servant ties were still "primordial status relationships rather than contractual arrangements" and the "special conditions of Bay life" meant that master-servant relationships in the HBC "preserved much of this flavour." The company, in fact, dominated the lives of its employees as much as the modern Japanese corporation does. In both organizations, personal ties determine promotion and success and, in return for their complete loyalty, workers receive housing, recreational facilities, and security from their employers. Such a situation creates company men who identify with their corporation and not with outsiders even those who have the same occupation as they. As a result, HBC servants were tightly bound to their superiors.⁸

In her model Brown has, however, combined domestic service as it existed in the nineteenth century with both an earlier and different type of service and a modern and equally different type of employment. Traditionally, service was a stage in the life-cycle which marked the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people usually entered service at fourteen or fifteen and remained there until they married. Like apprenticeship, service was an opportunity to prepare for marriage and the establishment of an independent household, which marked the achievement of adulthood and autonomy. Most servants were employed in husbandry, i.e. they were engaged by farmers. To be called a domestic servant did not necessarily mean one was a maid or a valet; it indicated that one lived in one's employer's house. Most servants lived and worked with their employers and were, along with wives, children, apprentices, and journeymen, subservient members of their masters' families, there being no word in early modern English

⁸Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 20-22, 32-35. Brown's model builds on John E. Foster's article, "The Indian-Trader in the Hudson Bay Fur Trade Tradition" in *Proceedings of the Second Congress*. Canadian Ethnology Society, vol. 2. National Museum of Man, Mercury Series, paper no. 28. (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975), 571-585.

which distinguished kin from other household members.⁹ Brown takes her concept of the household from Peter Laslett's study of pre-industrial English society but her portrayal of servants from Leonore Davidoff's examination of relations between nineteenth-century domestics and their masters. Davidoff's intention was to investigate the lives of a group that was "hardly touched by the new order" that emerged in British society. While laws enfranchised and protected other workers, domestic servants and working-class married women continued "in their pre-industrial, almost Biblical, subordination to their masters and husbands." Domestic servants lived with their employers as subordinate members of the household, isolated from the rest of society, and subject to paternalistic authority. They were usually single, working-class girls and young women whose careers as domestics ended when they married.¹⁰ So far their situation does resemble that of their precursors. But, nineteenth-century servants were increasingly relegated to sculleries, servants' halls, and attics, thereby isolating them from their masters and emphasizing their place as employees, not family members. Thus, Brown refers to a group of individuals who lived in households that did not conform to the model she has introduced to explain harmony in the HBC. Moreover, the model itself is based on a faulty view of pre-industrial society.

In Peter Laslett's England social relationships were marked by "unquestioning subordination" due to geographical isolation, a widespread and common poverty that promoted resignation, and a degree of social mobility that ensured that the elite could adapt to changing circumstances and hence continue to rule. People accepted the established social order with no expectation of change. Class conflict was impossible because there was not one group of "outs" in "a mass situation" confronting a group of "ins." In fact, there was only one class in pre-industrial England, since only the tiny ruling elite fits his definition of a class: a group of people

⁹A. Kussmaul, Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-10; 70-83.

¹⁰Leonore Davidoff, "Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian and Edwardian England," Journal of Social History 7(Summer 1974): 406-411.

banded together "in the exercise of collective power, political and economic" and "capable of concerted action over the whole area of society," a definition which, incidentally, virtually eliminates the possibility of there ever being more than one class. This elite sat at the apex of a universally accepted hierarchy of ranks and exercised power. Working people were not a class because they were separated from one another and subsumed within the personalities of their masters. Even day labourers became part of the family, albeit temporarily, by "breaking bread with the permanent members. It was almost a sacramental matter." Conflict in this society was mainly political and dynastic not social because familial relationships had "the power of reconciling the frustrated and the discontented by emotional means." As a result, not only did revolutionary social change never happen, it was "almost impossible to contemplate." Laslett goes so far as to suggest that in pre-industrial England "every relationship could be seen as a love-relationship," a conclusion that prompted Christopher Hill to comment that, "recalling the many stories of apprentices who had to be rescued from their brutal masters by J. P.'s, one can only feel that Laslett has a rather peculiar definition of the word love."¹¹ Hill was, of course, being facetious. Nevertheless, Laslett's work has been justifiably criticized for its rosy portrayal of the past.¹²

R. S. Neale has, however, observed that in Western European society "feudal bonds" had never been as rigid as elsewhere because there was always "a strongly implied and frequently an actual contractual relationship in the act of fealty." Moreover, England "possessed a social structure characterized by many strata based on different forms of property." Contrary

¹¹Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost (London: Methuen & Co., 1975), 5; 183-205; 23-24; 28-29; 53-54; 15-16; 4; Christopher Hill, review of The World We Have Lost, by Peter Laslett, in History and Theory VI, 1 (1967) : 122-125. This is the review of the first edition of Laslett's book, published in 1965. The 1975 edition corrected some factual errors that Hill mentioned, but made no changes in interpretation.

¹²C. H. George calls The World We Have Lost a "quaint history" in "The Making of the English Bourgeoisie, 1500-1750," Science and Society 35 (1971) : 388. Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé consider Laslett's book "an exaggerated version of the 'family' interpretation of English society." Captain Swing: A Social History of the Great English Agricultural Uprising of 1830 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 53.

to Laslett, seventeenth-century England was not a one-class society. People had not yet developed the terms in which to discuss class relationships, but the basis of a class society had already been established. Like Jennifer Brown, Neale turns to the work of Chie Nakane to examine the nature of vertical relationships, but, unlike Brown, he considers Japanese society quite different from pre-industrial England. Neale considers Japanese society an example of an order-based society, "clearly articulated around true vertical relationships" which "flowed upwards and lasted for a man's lifetime." Status in such a society is determined by ascription, but in England status could be acquired, since it was based on private property in land. Moreover, the development of private property in land imparted "a strong contractual element" both to English landholding and to master-servant relations. Capitalist market relations were dominant by the end of the seventeenth century, even in the agricultural sector. The result was that farm servants and cottagers were "essentially wage labourers" whose claims on their superiors did not outlive their usefulness as workers. Thus, they had no lifelong vertical relationship with their employers. Moreover, kinship ties had always been stronger than ties to a household, even over great distances.¹³ Thus, servants were not necessarily subsumed in their households. As Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé have pointed out,

England was not a country in which family structure (even that of the extended family which included servants, clients and other dependants) prevailed over or replaced class structure. Even the small farmer who worked beside his servant in the field, yard or barn was perfectly aware of the difference between his son and his milkmaid, his daughter and his horseman.¹⁴

And, no doubt, the milkmaid and the horseman shared this awareness, which would have existed even in the absence of crisis because the institution of service itself distinguished household members.

For masters, servants were a source of labour or prestige. For servants, masters

¹³R. S. Neale, Class in English History 1680-1850 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 68-96.

¹⁴Hobsbawm and Rudé, Captain Swing, 38.

were the source of benefits that would provide a start for their more significant post-service occupations. Only the master had a permanent stake in his household. For servants, and for apprentices too, it was important to secure the best possible terms of service so that they could leave with savings or skills that allowed them achieve a modest independence. Servants did not usually renew their contracts. They changed places frequently, always looking for better terms -- better housing and food, kinder treatment, and such perquisites as being allowed to pasture livestock with the master's.¹⁵ Servants could not afford to sacrifice their own well-being to the ideal of service. Although they did not expect wealth and social prominence once their period of service was up, they hoped for a degree of independence and a reasonable level of subsistence, neither of which was possible for individuals dependent upon wages alone. It had traditionally been assumed that workers, even day labourers, also had access to land and those without it sank low indeed, often becoming paupers and vagrants, subject to the forced labour provided for in the various statutes enacted to control them.¹⁶ Thus, service was a period during which a young person secured his or her future. For the servant, complete identification with the household was neither possible nor advisable. Moreover, those forced into the service would be even less inclined to identify with the household or its patriarch. Regardless of how servants entered households, however, they were temporary members, whose commitment was limited, no matter how faithfully their master fulfilled his obligations. The difference between a servant and the rest of the household was further emphasized by the fact that a servant occupied a distinct legal status.

Brown's contention that "in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, master-servant ties were still dominantly primordial status relationships rather than contractual

¹⁵Kusssmaul, Servants in Husbandry, 51; 39.

¹⁶Christopher Hill, "Pottage for Freeborn Englishmen: Attitudes to Wage Labour in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in C. H. Feinstein, ed. Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth: Essays Presented to Maurice Dobb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 340-344.

arrangements" and her observation that in the HBC's records "recurrent categories such as master, servant, and apprentice, suggest the primacy of dyadic relations connecting men of senior and junior rank"¹⁷ fail to consider that these relations were not only customary or informal. The terms used in the company's records classified individuals and distinguished the superior from the subordinate and described more than "status relationships" or "dyadic relations." The institution of service had arisen out of efforts by the ruling elite to "curb the insubordination" of the lower orders benefiting from the shortage of labour and the accompanying rise of wages after the plague of 1348-9. The Ordinance of Labourers enacted in 1349 and the Statute of Labourers of 1351 were intended to *eliminate* the fact that the relationship between master and servant had become a contractual one and to restore it to a status relationship. This was accomplished by defining the rights and duties of the parties to the contract and giving masters the right to use force to capture runaway servants and rights against anyone engaging them. These laws and the amendments added over the centuries sought to provide a reliable source of labour by restricting mobility and requiring all persons to be employed at some occupation. The effect of such legislation was to establish "the existence of a class of servants and laborers-- that is, common, unskilled manual workers--categorically defined by reference to their lack of productive assets and hence penury and dependence" and "by casting them at all times as potential vagabonds in need of state-enforced discipline" to keep them from engaging in economically independent behaviour, the state "unambiguously branded them as a proletariat." In 1563 the Statute of Artificers replaced the earlier legislation and remained in effect for 250 years. It retained all the restrictions of the old laws and added new ones which made the institution of service a weapon. It required one year hirings for certain occupations and compelled all unmarried persons or those under 30 who had been trained in or had worked in one of them for three years to work for anyone of that trade who needed employees. All those aged 12 to 60 were required to serve in husbandry by the year unless they had land or rent worth 40 shillings a

¹⁷Brown, Strangers in Blood, 32, 47.

year or property worth £10 or were already employed in a recognized trade or in husbandry or had a farm or holding upon which to work. A servant could not leave an area or take a new position unless he had a testimonial from the authorities declaring him or her a liberty. Masters who broke this regulation were fined £5, but servants who did were imprisoned or whipped as vagabonds. Assaulting one's master was punishable by a year's imprisonment. Over the next two centuries, other legislation increased the penalties for misbehaving servants, but not for masters. The effect of all such legislation was to reinforce the view that manual workers were a "readily identifiable class" apart, made up of "impoverished perpetual quasi outlaws." The result was a "network of laws and institutions designed to enforce behavior in conformity with a legal status creating a liability to serve." It was the compulsion to accept work on demand at wages determined without one's consent with the threat of punishment for refusing or not performing it according to direction that, according to Blackstone, made the master-servant relationship a status relationship, not the fact that a servant was part of the family.¹⁸

The institution of service was a means of social control and had coercive overtones which contrast sharply with the "sense of emotional cosiness" that imbues Laslett's saccharine description of pre-industrial English society in which the household contributed to the "reproduction of paternal or patriarchal attitudes and relations which permeated the whole of society" and hence to the absence of class-consciousness and class conflict. His notion of paternalism, thus, suggests "human warmth, in a mutually assenting relationship" in which fathers know their duties and responsibilities and sons acquiesce in their filial subordination. But, paternalism is a "concentration of economic and cultural authority" and a term applicable to both the gentry of England and the slave-owners of colonial Brazil. It tells us nothing about the real relations of power and authority. If anything, it is "a description of social relations as they may be seen from above," emphasizing the centrality of the concerns and culture of the elite without

¹⁸Marc Linder, The Employment Relationship in Anglo-American Law: A Historical Perspective, Contributions in Legal Studies, no. 54 (New York; Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1989), 45-61.

considering that the lower orders might have their own interests and priorities.¹⁹ Bryan Palmer has pointed out that paternalism "grew out of the necessity to justify exploitation and mediate inherently irreconcilable interests" and its "ultimate significance, regardless of its character, lay in undermining the collectivity of the oppressed by linking them to their 'social superiors.'" Paternalism rested on the notion that authority belonged to those who had either inherited or earned the right to rule and, as a result, dissatisfaction rarely resulted in a challenge to paternalism itself, but rather in "negotiation" over the way in which paternalistic responsibilities were to be carried out.²⁰ Indeed, the master-servant relationship was a "perpetual process of negotiation, conflict, and compromise."²¹

In the ideal household the *paterfamilias* presided over a household of contented and dutiful subordinates. In reality, it comprised a mix of individuals with differing interests. Servants not only changed households regularly looking for better situations, but they attempted to control the conditions of their work within the household as well, prompting one disgruntled observer to assert in 1700, "There is not a more insolent and proud, a more intractable, perfidious and more churlish sort of people breathing, than the generality of our servants."²² This complaint probably says more about the complainant than about the objects of his criticism. For some masters, no doubt, only the most abject forelock-tugging subservience constituted the proper demeanour for servants. Servants, however, had other ideas. They took their masters to court if they failed to fulfill their obligations and might be disobedient and negligent. Eighteenth-century household servants were nothing like the lonely maids pining away behind the walls of nineteenth-century

¹⁹E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3 (1978): 134-136.

²⁰Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto; Vancouver: Butterworth & Co., 1983), 13-15.

²¹Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 6.

²²Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry*, 45.

suburban villas. Although recruited mainly from the countryside, domestic servants were employed mostly in the city, particularly in London, where, far from being isolated from their peers, they enjoyed extensive connections with other servants. They gathered at public houses, gave entertainments, shared information about employers, provided false character references for one another, and formed friendly societies and an organization which functioned much like a trade union. Servants' solidarity enabled them to combine to agitate against the employment of French servants in 1744 and 1745. They were not afraid of dismissal because their services were in great demand and behaved in ways that clashed with their position. They expected gratuities from shopkeepers and tradesmen, sold playing cards and candles to visitors, and extorted hefty tips, known as "vails" from guests. Efforts to abolish this custom led to rioting and threatening letters.²³ Even in the nineteenth century households could be tense. Leonore Davidoff has pointed out that the servants' identification with their place of work and residence co-existed with a so-called "restlessness" that prompted them to leave "apparently without 'reason'" and engage in traditional forms of resistance such as spoiling materials, sulking, wasting time, and impudence.²⁴ Even the most peaceful household contained the seeds of conflict, as indeed did pre-industrial society itself.

Pre-industrial social and economic relations were conducted within a "contractual framework" in which the "structurally superior" accepted certain responsibilities for the "structurally inferior" in return for recognition of their superiority. But, this relationship was traditionally not deferential or perceived as such.²⁵ It was a social contract within which the lower orders acted according to what E. P. Thompson has called a "moral economy," that is "a

²³J. Jean Hecht, The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 9-11, 77-87, 131-133, 158-174; Kussmaul, Servants in Husbandry, 32, 45-47.

²⁴Davidoff, "Mastered for Life," 416-18.

²⁵Bob Bushaway, By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880 (London: Junction Books, 1982), 22.

consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community."²⁶ The paternalist could mete out punishment even in the form of a beating as long as it appeared just. Indeed, beatings, floggings, mutilations, and gruesome executions were common, but injustice, attempts to alter customary relations, and transgressions of popular morality aroused fierce resistance. Society may have been hierarchical, but an individual's view varied according to his or her position within that hierarchy. Historians have tended to adopt the view from the top, seeing the popular disorder that characterized early modern England as "merely unfortunate obstacles blocking the progress of culture and good government."²⁷ Peter Laslett, for example, sees the upheavals of the seventeenth century as nothing more than routine manifestations of conflict which is merely "a common enough form of social interaction,"²⁸ thereby denying, or at least trivializing, the social and economic transformation that was destroying the basis of traditional social relations.²⁹ He appears to belong among those historians who maintain, as Carlo Ginzburg suggests, "that the reintegration of the subordinate classes into general history can only be accomplished through 'number and anonymity,' by means of demography and sociology, 'the quantitative study of past societies.'" Although this approach appears to rescue ordinary people from obscurity, they "seem condemned, nevertheless, to remain 'silent.'" Of course, the sources tend to record the voices of only the least typical. Ginzburg could reconstruct the idiosyncratic world view of

²⁶E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present 50 (Feb. 1971): 79.

²⁷Barrett L. Beer, Rebellion and Riot: Popular Disorder in England during the Reign of Edward VI (The Kent State University Press, 1982), 2.

²⁸Laslett, The World We Have Lost, 169.

²⁹See: A. L. Beier, "Vagrants and the Social Order in Elizabethan England," Past and Present 64 (August 1974): 3-29; Roger B. Manning, Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England, 1509-1640 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 158-170. Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975); Christopher Hill, A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church 1628-1688 (New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988).

Menocchio, the heretic miller, only by analyzing his testimony before the Inquisition. But, as Ginzburg points out, the distinctiveness of such individuals was not unlimited. Menocchio was part of his culture and his testimony reveals "in a particularly distinct, almost exaggerated form, a series of convergent elements, which, in a similar group of sources that are contemporary or slightly later, appear lost or are barely mentioned." A case study, therefore, "permits us to define the latent possibilities of something (popular culture) otherwise known to us only through fragmentary and distorted documents, almost all of which originate in the 'archives of the repression.'"³⁰

That these same archives can illuminate the culture of the lower orders is demonstrated by the work of Ginzburg himself as well as that of such historians as Keith Thomas, Christopher Hill, David Underdown, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. They have revealed that the lower orders of pre-industrial societies had their own ways of looking at the world and, indeed, had available to them "a universe of boisterously profane pre-modern ritual and imagery, providing an arena for licensed disorder, merry-making, mischief and protest."³¹ They have demonstrated the "existence of different cultural levels within so-called civilized societies." Those who belonged to the "subordinate classes" did not passively accept the culture of the dominant classes: they, in fact, had one of their own and it was frequently oppositional. To understand it one must, says Ginzburg, distinguish between mentality and culture, not "an idle distinction." What characterizes histories of the former is "their insistence on the inert,

³⁰Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Harmondsworth; Markham: Penguin Books, 1980), xx-xxi.

³¹Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," 107. See: Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England (Harmondsworth; Markham: Penguin Books, 1971); Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down; David Underdown, Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms and Night Battles: Witchcraft & Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Harmondsworth; Markham: Penguin Books, 1983); and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Carnival in Romans, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1979).

obscure, unconscious elements in a given world view" and the inclusion of "survivals, archaisms, the emotional, the irrational," which are thereby removed from related disciplines such as the history of ideas or the history of culture. To have discussed Menocchio "within the limits of the history of mentalities" would have meant "downgrading the strong rational element (which is not necessarily identifiable with our own rationality) in his vision of the world." The concept of culture, on the other hand, recognizes the existence of diverse views which make sense to those who hold them. Even more important, however, it allows for the existence of some sort of class structure. The history of mentalities has "a decidedly classless character" because it emphasizes what all members of society had in common. It permits, for example, Lucien Febvre to assert, after concluding that Rabelais was not an atheist, that religion exercised as "restrictive and oppressive and also inescapable" influence on all sixteenth-century men as it did on Rabelais. In this way, "the results of research on a narrow stratum of French society composed of cultivated individuals are extended by implication, with no one excepted, to encompass an entire century." Febvre's sole acknowledgement of existence of the peasant majority was to dismiss it as "half savage" and "prey to superstitions."³² Likewise, Peter Laslett can assert, confidently --and erroneously -- that "all our ancestors were literal Christian believers, all of the time" and that "it is true to say that the ordinary person, especially the female, never went to a gathering larger than could assemble in an ordinary house except when going to church."³³ In fact, of course, popular religious beliefs differed considerably from those espoused by the established church and substantial numbers of people regularly went to fairs, joined in communal rituals, and frequently rioted to protest food prices, high rents, and enclosure.

Fur trade historians can be included among those who study mentalities. Thus, Jennifer Brown is concerned with the development of "distinguishable fur trade social patterns," a process in which she believes the company's officers to have had the dominant role. She

³²Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms, xiv, xxiii-xxiv.

³³Laslett, The World We Have Lost, 74, 9.

considers them to have been "role models" in "familial and other spheres." Moreover, as the company's hierarchy became more rigid after 1821 the standing of the servants became more "frozen," thereby rendering them less worthy of notice because "the study of social ranking is perhaps most interesting when focused on those whose rank is ambiguous, changing, and variously defined within their social order--in this instance, officers' native families and those officers themselves as husband-fathers of such families."³⁴ She thus implies the existence of a mentality which united everyone in a "fur trade society," a concept that has gone largely undefined. The term serves to make an important point, namely that the fur trade had social and cultural as well as commercial aspects, but this has led to concentration on relations between natives and European traders. Critics of the term have pointed out that the fur trade varied according to time, place, company, and region and even all fur trade communities within the HBC were not alike.³⁵ They have not, however, questioned the assumption that those at the bottom of this "fur trade society" followed their superiors in all things. Thus, in his study of private trade in the mid-eighteenth century, Gerhard Ens, referring specifically to Peter Laslett, observed that the "concept of the trading post as a single patriarchal household became strained" as men established their own families and sought to function as patriarchs themselves and the presence of ships' captains who defied the company's edict against private trade undermined the officers' authority. But, he accepted the "hierarchical nature of fur trade society" and focused on private trade as "a new basis to analyze the interaction between the Hudson's Bay Company and Indian bands in the vicinity," which he concluded resembled that of the French traders and Indians in the St. Lawrence- Great Lakes system.³⁶ For Sylvia Van Kirk, "fur

³⁴Brown, Strangers in Blood, xxi.

³⁵See, Michael Payne, 'The Most Respectable Place in the Territory': Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989), fn 164-5.

³⁶Gerhard Ens, "The Political Economy of the 'Private Trade' on the Hudson Bay: The Example of Moose Factory, 1741-1744," in Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985, ed. Bruce G. Trigger et al (Montreal: St. Louis

trade society" combined Indian and European elements "to produce a distinctive, self-perpetuating community" so harmonious that she entitles the concluding chapter of her book "A World We Have Lost."³⁷ More recently, Frits Pannekoek has selected Laslett as his source of information on the pre-industrial family and "used heavily" Laslett's "observations on the importance of the patriarchal unit in an analysis of social structure" for his recent book. He has, however, misinterpreted the most important of Laslett's conclusions and emphasized one of his shakiest. Thus, Pannekoek points out that the "Red River way" was the extended family, with adult sons increasingly living at home, a trend rooted in the hierarchical traditions of the fur trade and the "family structure common to many of the Scottish-born fathers." But, the pre-industrial family was not made up of parents and adult children. If nothing else, Laslett's book demonstrated that the pre-industrial household comprised a married couple, their young children, and apprentices or servants or journeymen. Adulthood meant leaving the parents' household. Pannekoek also refers to Laslett's observation that pre-industrial English society was utterly Christian and that most people, particularly women, rarely went to any large gathering except when they went to church. Pannekoek appears to rely on this highly questionable statement to account for the ability of the colony's clergymen to exercise their strong, if baneful, influence.³⁸

Harmony was also allegedly assured by the recruitment of men who brought with them a mentality that made them ideal servants, in particular the stodgy, docile Orcadians. "Bred as crofters and fishermen in the far north, used to the cold and hunger of their own homesteads, and with their native hardihood unimpaired by evil living in the slums of England," Orcadians "proved admirable servants in the Bay" and hiring them allowed the "steady weeding out" of undesirables. Although they suffered from a "dour lack of enterprise, they were free of

Historical Society, 1987), 383-4, 396-7.

³⁷Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing Ltd., [1980]), 5, 231-242.

³⁸Frits Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70 (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1991), fn249, 21-22,

the "latent Jacobinism" of the Highlanders and their "steadiness and comparative sobriety" were "invaluable" because their officers were "typical products of the artisan class" in England, incapable of "continence or sobriety" and "not bred to command" because they were mostly "promoted servants."³⁹ This description by E. E. Rich remains the standard image of Orcadians in the fur trade. It reflects Richard Glover's elaboration of the Orkney stereotype in his introduction to the Hudson's Bay Record Society's publication of the Cumberland House journals for 1779-1782. Glover was trying to reconcile the contradiction between the fact that Orcadians "carried the old Company through the hardest years of competition and laid the foundation of their victory in 1821" and the charges of cowardice and inactivity levied against them early in the nineteenth century. Since, Glover says, their "racial character" could not have changed in such a short time, their "slow inanimate habits" must have been due to "a lack of "spirited leaders", upon whose example the courage of "the common man" depends, as well as a sensible reluctance to fight rivals whose size and numbers made victory doubtful. In fact, Orcadians served the company well. They were "peculiarly fitted for" service in "the rugged wilderness of North America" because of the "hard and primitive" existence they endured in their home land. They clung to ancient superstitions and backward agricultural techniques. Their livestock was ugly, unimproved, and partly wild. Wages were abysmal, but the population continued to grow beyond what the Islands could support. Therefore, women left to work as servants in the south, while the men manned the Greenland and Iceland fisheries and the Royal Navy. They also entered the HBC, in whose service they found not only freedom from famine, but an opportunity to save money. Fortunately for the HBC, Orcadians were law-abiding and loyal, and possessed an avariciousness that made it possible to fine them into obedience, unlike their Canadian counterparts whose perennial indebtedness made fining meaningless and who, therefore, required more drastic measures. They were also good gardeners and fishermen and possessed

³⁹E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*. Vol. 1: 1670-1762 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), 496-500.

a modest education, which made it possible for the company to draw on them when it needed masters of subordinate posts. Glover, however, considers the latter qualification to have been a mixed blessing, since he suspects that "the labouring men" who rose in the service "were inadequate to their new positions" and that "good labouring material misused as officer material" was probably "one of the great weaknesses" of the HBC. Nevertheless, he concludes, the partnership between the HBC and its Orkney servants was a fruitful one and benefited both sides.⁴⁰

Glover's depiction of Orcadians is based on the opinions of their clergymen and accounts of officers and travelers who expected to find simple, hardy, honest folk unspoiled by too much contact with civilization, as, indeed, he himself expects. For information about the Islands he relied almost exclusively on J. Storer Clouston's collection of material from The Statistical Account of Scotland, a compilation of information on all the parishes in the country drawn up by the resident clergymen for the years 1791-98. He also regularly referred to Samuel Johnson's account of his travels through the Hebrides for corroboration of his statements about the unproductive agriculture and bad housing which the islanders endured, although conditions in the Hebrides were always different from and worse than in the Orkneys. Nevertheless, using Glover as her chief source, Jennifer Brown observes that Orkneymen "attracted the company's attention" because, "isolated and poor, Orcadians, with their Norse inheritances, were accustomed to a harsh environment and familiar with boat-building and other water-related occupations."⁴¹ Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz observe that Orkneymen, "bred to the harsh life of the crofter and fisherman and innocent of the depravities of the city," were considered "ideal for work in James Bay."⁴² John Nicks considers Glover's introduction one of a "number of

⁴⁰Richard Glover, "Introduction," in Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-82, Second Series 1779-82, ed. E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952), xxxvii-lvii.

⁴¹ Brown, Strangers in Blood, 27.

⁴²Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern

excellent general accounts" available on the background of the Orkneymen "and the contribution they made to the history of the Hudson's Bay Company" although his own work is a far better piece of historical investigation. His admiration of Glover, unfortunately, predisposes him to interpret his findings so as to strengthen the stereotype. Nicks's research on men recruited from the parish of Orphir prior to 1821 revealed that most men served for eight years or less and that it was possible during this term for them to save enough to establish themselves as farmers when they left the service. A man needed £40 to £60 the first year to pay the £10 rent and acquire livestock worth probably £30. The mean savings of the three labourers who served for eight years was just over £62, while the one tradesman employed the same length of time managed to accumulate a little more than £170. Of the 28 labourers studied, six spent more than eight years in the HBC and they were able to save more, the largest amount being £107,19,0, the mean savings for the three employed for ten years, while the one labourer serving for eleven years saved £99,11,5. From these figures, Nicks concludes that "most returning servants could have afforded to become farmers if they had wished to do so," but does not consider that a man would spend most of his money to establish himself, leaving little as a cushion if he became ill, his crops failed, he fell behind in his rent, or his cow died. Moreover, Nicks could not discover how many of these men actually became farmers or how successful they were.⁴³ Nevertheless, his conclusion that Orcadians could save a substantial amount of money has reinforced the notion that their eagerness to do so ensured docility and long service.

Jennifer Brown relies both on Nicks's study and on the memoirs of Isaac Cowie, "a trader with personal knowledge of the Orkneys in the mid-nineteenth century," to observe that men who entered as "low-paid labourers might leave after twenty years wealthy by Orkney standards, and able to buy their own farms." According to Cowie, servants could save enough of

James Bay 1600-1870 (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), 90.

⁴³John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821," in Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), fn124, 119-23.

their small wages after a few years of service "to buy a small croft, and settle down as independent crofters and fishermen, to be emulated and envied by less fortunate neighbors." He reported that "some retired employees" had "been residing in comparative opulence on the island of Harray where they were known as the 'Peerie (Little) Lairds o' Harray.'"⁴⁴ The promise of post-service security, therefore, promoted obedience. Thus, John E. Foster has observed that the fine "was an effective tool for dealing with the refractory British-born servant" because for them "the remunerative aspects of work were of cardinal importance." With "Mixed Bloods," however, "physical coercion" seemed to work because for them "the social aspects of work were of greater importance." "Similarly" the British-born servants "tended to be argumentative over what might be termed the monetary aspects of their work," but "Mixed Bloods became troublesome when work appeared to disrupt their social interests." This difference in behaviour he attributes to the possession by the "Mixed Bloods" of "a value system distinct from that of many of the British-born."⁴⁵ Foster based his conclusions mainly on the observations of a few officers who saw their men's behaviour according to cultural and racial stereotypes. He has described the view from the top and failed to appreciate that the "value system" of British-born servants coming from a pre-industrial society had much in common not only with the North American offspring of their fellows but with that of the Indians themselves. Likewise, when Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz point out that during the eighteenth century "Indians had their own attitudes to trade and could not be induced to respect the conventional economic incentives,"⁴⁶ they do not clarify what they mean by "conventional," but they appear to assume that eighteenth-century Europeans possessed a late nineteenth-century attitude to wages.

However, traditionally, the price of labour was not something whose worth fluctuated

⁴⁴Brown, Strangers in Blood, 27; Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913), 62-3.

⁴⁵John E. Foster, "The Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West," Essays on Western History, ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 76-77.

⁴⁶Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Furs, 64.

according to the dictates of the marketplace, but varied according to status and moral considerations. Wages for servants were determined by law, enforced by justices of the peace, and varied according to age. Servants did not customarily receive adult wages until their late teens and very young servants might receive no wages at all.⁴⁷ Price was not "simply a mechanical mediator." The price of labour, like the price of food, had to be fair, i.e., "determined by customary expectations and 'normal' human needs." Thus, when eighteenth-century industrial workers clashed with their employers, their protests were motivated by the desire that wages and other conditions of work be regulated to preserve "certain minimum standards of subsistence."⁴⁸ This desire did not diminish until well into the nineteenth century. E. J. Hobsbawm has pointed out that skilled workers did not begin to learn the rules of wage bargaining in a market economy until the middle of the nineteenth century. An artisan wanted wages appropriate to his social status and high enough to permit him to maintain himself and his family in respectable independence and to have sufficient leisure to allow him to rest from his labours. Traditionally, craftsmen's wages equaled about twice those of common labourers and wage differentials among and within crafts depended on social status. As a result, skilled labour actually cost less than it should have and workers' demands were modest while their pride in their crafts ensured diligence, at least as defined by customary notions of a fair day's work.⁴⁹ K. D. M. Snell has observed similar attitudes among rural labourers in the early nineteenth century. They valued good relations with their masters, the opportunity to live in, access to land, year-round employment, the freedom to leave if their situation proved unsatisfactory, and the well-being of their families more than high wages. Workers could achieve these goals without high

⁴⁷Kussmaul, Servants in Husbandry, 34-37.

⁴⁸Robert W. Malcolmson, "Workers' Combinations in Eighteenth-Century England," in The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism, ed. Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.; London: Humanities Press International, 1991), 170-1.

⁴⁹E. J. Hobsbawm, "Custom, Wages, and Work-Load in Nineteenth-Century Industry," in Essays in Labour History, eds. Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: Macmillan & Co., 1960), 113-120.

wages as long as service allowed them to accumulate some savings and customary benefits, such as gleaning rights, pasturage for livestock on common land, and secure tenure of a cottage, supplemented wages after they left service. Once agricultural "improvements" eliminated these customs and farmers found it cheaper to pay wages than to provide room and board, labourers faced a precarious existence.⁵⁰ That these changes were not accepted without protest suggests that agricultural labourers also had to learn the rules of wage bargaining.

One should not, of course, dismiss economic motives, since men joined the HBC in order to earn a living and they did so as long as it offered better economic rewards than the alternatives. But, to emphasize money as their major concern is to be, in the words of E. P. Thompson, "guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function" because such an approach is based on "an abbreviated view of economic man." Thompson points out that it is a "schizoid intellectual climate" that permits the acceptance of the "psychic energies involved in the cargo cults of Melanesia" but refuses the same complexity to "the eighteenth-century English collier who claps his hand spasmodically upon his stomach, and responds to elementary economic stimuli."⁵¹ Fur trade historians appear to operate in a similar intellectual climate. If, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has suggested, the work of quantifiers R. W. Fogel and Stanley Engerman has presented the American slave as "Poor Richard at Work in the Cotton Fields,"⁵² because of the economic rationality that motivated his labour, then one might suggest that fur trade historians have presented the Scottish servant at least as Poor Richard at Work at the Trading Post. Not so, however, the French Canadian and Métis servants who are usually presented as picturesquely unruly and irresponsible, working in pre-industrial spurts and preferring the excitement of hunting, paddling

⁵⁰K. D. M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10-14, 122-4, 168-70, 215.

⁵¹Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," 78.

⁵²Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital, 90.

canoes, and singing obscene voyaging songs to the routine drudgery of agriculture. Daniel Francis has called the *voyageurs* "an unruly mob" and suggested that the HBC post resembled "a military barracks" while the North West Company establishment "had more in common with a rowdy tavern." He credits *voyageurs* with "independence and pride" that gave them "a tendency to resist the authority of their employer" and contrasts them with the "disciplined and obedient" Orkneymen, although he does say that Orcadians were motivated to join the HBC by "a thirst for adventure".⁵³ Frits Pannekoek describes the Métis in terms reminiscent of the accounts left by old HBC officers:

Unlike their European progenitors, they were not work oriented -- they did not live to work. The things that were of utmost importance were their kin, their social life, and those things that allowed one to excel in the hunt -- guns and horses. Most "squatted" on their long, narrow river lots, rather than bothering to take out a formal land title, and they put little time in agriculture, except perhaps to plant a few acres of barley and a patch of potatoes. The Métis built wooden homes using the Quebec post-on-sill method. A review of their income and expenditures would suggest that they took considerable pride in their clothing.⁵⁴

There is, of course, considerable truth in this description. The Métis did not behave like factory workers in industrializing Britain or their masters or like the HBC officers who dedicated their lives to the company and worked hard in order to rise in it. But, neither did their "European progenitors," most of the wage-labourers of industrial Britain, and most of the workers within the HBC itself. Europeans also valued their social lives, their kin, and their leisure. Until the mid-nineteenth century, employers assumed that this was the case and that the higher they raised wages the less time labourers would work because they could then earn enough to supply themselves with the necessities of life more quickly than before. Therefore, poverty was necessary to spur them on to work the number of hours that masters considered appropriate.

⁵³Daniel Francis, Battle for the West: Fur Traders and the Birth of Western Canada (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1982), 51; 61.

⁵⁴Frits Pannekoek, The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society 1670-1870, 20. The appearance of such a statement in a CHA booklet suggests that it has become the standard interpretation.

The acceptance of such stereotypes is to deny these groups an identity defined in terms of its own logic. Fur trade historians have come to see HBC servants as willing to accept low wages because they came from pre-industrial societies. But they consider British-born servants docile because wages were as important to them as they were to late-nineteenth century British workers, while native-born servants possessed an attitude toward work and wages that was characteristic of pre-industrial workers. Historians' interpretations of disorder reflect this perception of the company's servants. Orcadians' reluctance to risk their lives in the company's service is seen not as a logical response to the dangers of venturing into an unknown wilderness but as an unreasonable display of self-interest. Thus Richard Glover has adopted a tone verging on sarcasm in his discussion of the HBC's difficulties in persuading men to travel inland.⁵⁵ Behaviour that does not conform to notions of the Orkneyman's customary sobriety is attributed to unusual circumstances. Thus, Frits Pannekoek considers the drunkenness and disorder at Moose Factory the result of the isolation and boredom of life in Rupert's Land without considering what drinking habits prevailed in Britain at the same time or how the behaviour of HBC workers compared with that of workers elsewhere.⁵⁶ French Canadian voyageurs, on the other hand, have been credited with energy and spirit, and their drinking habits, though disruptive, are seen as parts of their particular culture. Carousing Orkneymen are considered unusual and annoying, although such episodes as the burning of Moose Fort in 1735 while the men were still engaged in Christmas festivities should suggest that Orkneymen also enjoyed a good party, but it is rowdy French Canadians who have given the fur trade its colourful and romantic image. In fact, early Scottish writers accused the Orcadians of heavy drinking.⁵⁷ Although this judgement must be weighed as carefully as any other, this alternate view of the

⁵⁵See Richard Glover, "The Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company's Penetration of the West," Canadian Historical Review, XXIX (September 1948): 240-254.

⁵⁶See Frits Pannekoek, "'Corruption' at Moose," The Beaver, Outfit 309 (Spring 1979): 4-11.

⁵⁷Hugh Marwick, Orkney (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1951), 242.

perennially sober Orcadian should raise some questions about the desirability of simplistic representations of human beings. The HBC's workforce was a complex group, not a collection of unidimensional figures. Yet, Francis's book has been "highly recommended" in The Canadian Historical Association's pamphlet, published in 1987 and presumably outlining the currently accepted paradigm of fur trade studies, because it attempts to "encompass all of the recent research in a readable form."⁵⁸ Francis has indeed incorporated the new work being done in the social history of the fur trade, particularly the role of natives and women in the development of both the trade and western Canadian society. But, his portrayal of the men of the HBC does not go beyond the ethnic stereotypes. It is these which provide the terms in which the men's behaviour is still explained.

Thus, Jennifer Brown observes that Orcadians were prone to unite with one another to impose wage increases and, therefore, "became known as a sometimes troublesome group with a potentially subversive concern for its own interests." As evidence for this tendency Brown refers to a report of "a kind of Combination" entered into by several Orcadians at York Factory to exact higher wages in 1777 and William Auld's complaint in 1811 that Orcadians were good servants as long as there was never a large number together whose contracts expired at the same time. Moreover, although Orcadians were supposed to possess strong economic motives for joining the HBC, she attributes this propensity for collective action to the fact that, once among Englishmen, other Scots, Indians, and French Canadians, Orkneymen became more "tribal" and "aware of their distinctiveness and of their common interests as a group." They, therefore, combined "on an ethnic basis."⁵⁹ Ethnicity was not entirely insignificant, of course. It was easier for men who came from the same place and who might be related to one another to

⁵⁸Frits Pannekoek, The Fur Trade and Western Canadian Society 1670-1870, 24.

⁵⁹Brown, Strangers in Blood, 31; Jennifer S. H. Brown, "A Parcel of Upstart Scotchmen," The Beaver Vol. 68, no. 1 (February-March 1988): 5-6.

join in a common effort. Indeed, community was an important basis for collective action.⁶⁰ However, prior to 1821, Orcadians comprised the vast majority of the company's labour force, so that there was hardly anyone else to *combine with*, while, after 1821, they acted with men from other backgrounds. It is, therefore, difficult to determine how great a role ethnicity played in their behaviour. Also, to emphasize ethnicity as the basis for collective action is to ignore the social structure of the society in which the HBC was based and what it meant to be a servant.

As British historians have tended to see the popular disorders that were endemic in early modern England as "merely unfortunate obstacles blocking the progress of culture and good government,"⁶¹ fur trade historians seem to see disorders in the HBC as unfortunate obstacles blocking the progress of business and good management, a view which would have found enthusiastic support from George Simpson. It is assumed that acquiescence was and should be the norm and that any dissent came from outside the company, usually in the form of independent-minded natives, free traders and incipient Métis nationalism, not from within. Therefore, Gerald Friesen, in his survey, The Canadian Prairies, was able to write chapters entitled "The natives' fur trade 1640-1840" relying on current studies which emphasize that "continuity and autonomy" and "adaptation" were "central aspects of the native experience" and "The Europeans' fur trade 1640-1805" describing the exploits of "European entrepreneurs" and the expansion of the rival companies into the interior.⁶² He could not write a chapter entitled "The servants' fur trade" because historians have assumed that, except for their ethnic peculiarities and, sometimes because of them, the servants shared the views of their superiors.

⁶⁰See: Craig Calhoun, The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 174-82; David Underdown, Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 106-10, 174-76.

⁶¹Barrett L. Beer, Rebellion and Riot: Popular Disorder in England during the Reign of Edward VI (The Kent State University Press, 1982), 2.

⁶²Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 35, 45.

Class conflict appears to be completely absent. It is true that HBC servants never organized unions and geographical dispersion prevented large-scale combination. But they did act individually and collectively in defense of what they perceived as their interests against the authority of their employers. They also disobeyed orders, neglected their duty, and indulged in rough behaviour. Indeed, it makes perfect sense that they would do so.

If the servants' goal was to use the service as a way of establishing a financial basis for their lives after they left, their commitment could not be anything but temporary. Ensuring their economic security after they returned home might mean being obedient and frugal, but it could also mean avoiding excessive hardships and dangers in order to preserve the health and fitness that a man needed to survive, not only in the service but also on his return home. Only those who aspired to promotion -- and there was only a little room at the top -- could identify wholeheartedly with the company. For officers, service meant a lifelong commitment to the company and the use of their initiative, first, in its interest and, second and indirectly through the various incentives offered to officers only, in their own. Their inferiors would receive the same opportunities that servants in general received: the opportunity to accumulate savings and perhaps acquire skills that provided the servant with the wherewithal to establish an independent household and set himself up in farming or some other occupation after leaving service. Most HBC servants could expect nothing more than to follow the cycle which Gordon J. Schochet has observed was the life of a typical servant: a series of movements from "lowly beginnings to a servile position in the home of one of his social betters and then back to his menial origins to bear children who would join the procession."⁶³ HBC servants knew who they were and where they stood. Even though they accepted their place, their acceptance was not unquestioning and their obedience was not guaranteed.

Fur trade historians have been able to see that natives and the part-native offspring

⁶³Gordon J. Schochet, Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes Especially in Seventeenth-Century England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 70-71.

of Europeans had their own views and customs, which could lead to conflict with the HBC. They also recognize that the written records are biased and can not simply be accepted without question. Why do they not consider that descriptions of the company's servants must be examined with equal care? Historians have managed to penetrate Indian stereotypes and study native cultures and societies as systems that made sense to the people within them and examine the ways in which they were able to adapt to and even to some extent control relations with the traders. The notion that Indians were no more than pawns completely in the grasp of the fur trading companies has been most strongly disputed by Arthur J. Ray, Toby Morantz, and Daniel Francis.⁶⁴ Such studies have recognized that the relationship between fur traders and Indians was a negotiated relationship and that both sides influenced it, but little such sensitivity has been extended to the company's own servants. Historians were up in arms over Peter Newman's stereotypical depiction of natives, but no one expressed any qualms over his appalling chapter, "The Salty Orcadians," full of hardy, frugal, unimaginative, docile young men with no individuality and jumbled inaccuracies about the company's recruitment policies.⁶⁵ The relationship between the company and its servants was also a negotiated and it was a class relationship. As E. P. Thompson has observed, class is "defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition."⁶⁶ Class is not static. It is defined as people find themselves confronting exploitation and, as a result, become conscious of themselves as a class. As E. P. Thompson observed, "class and class-consciousness are always the last, not the

⁶⁴Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay 1660-1870 (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, 'Give us Good Measure': An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763 (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Furs..

⁶⁵Peter C. Newman, Company of Adventurers, Volume I (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1985), 175-182.

⁶⁶E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth; Markham: Penguin Books, rev. ed. 1974), 11.

first stage in the real historical process."⁶⁷ Class was a factor in pre-industrial society and in such organizations as the HBC, where the servants occupied a subordinate position that had both legal and social significance. Moreover, as in Britain, the drinking habits, rough and rowdy pastimes, uncouth language that constituted plebeian behaviour were increasingly frowned upon in and by officers, thereby setting the servants apart from their officers culturally as well as hierarchically. Nor did officers and servants live or work together. Therefore, although servants might not develop a class-consciousness that led to revolutionary action, they would know that they had more in common with one another than they had with their officers.

HBC servants, in fact, resembled the inhabitants of another workplace that was also based on the paternalistic household, namely seamen. Like them, HBC employees were "among the first collective laborers," working "among a large number of like-situated people." Like sailors, HBC workers received part of their pay in the form of room and board, worked in groups widely scattered across the continent the way ships' crews were scattered across the oceans, and were expected to submit to the paternalistic authority of their officers the way sailors were to submit to their captains. The fact that a seaman belonged to an institution that expected him to identify with his officers did not mean that he did. In fact mariners were among the most militant of workers, their militancy extending to piracy, which was more than a criminal activity. A pirate crew was an alternative society of masterless men, in which the captain was elected and could be deposed at any time. All crew members had a share in the profits of the enterprise and they enforced swift and certain retribution against cruel captains of captured merchantmen. Almost all pirates had served on legitimate merchant ships or privateers or in the Royal Navy.⁶⁸ Clearly,

⁶⁷Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?", 149.

⁶⁸Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 78, 254-287. See also his "'Under the Banner of King Death': The Social World of Anglo-American Pirates, 1716 to 1726," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd. ser., 38 (April 1981): 203-227. See also: Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd. ser., 25(July 1968): 371-407; Eric Sager, Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914 (Montreal;

belonging to a strictly disciplined and hierarchical organization did not guarantee that one would be subsumed within it or that the institution would be free of conflict. Breaches of discipline should not, therefore, be seen as irrational obstreperousness or the manifestation of ethnic peculiarities. Like seamen, the servants of the HBC had their own expectations and interests. These have, unfortunately, been neglected both by fur trade historians and labour historians.

The daily life of the HBC man has only begun to be examined in any detail. Philip Goldring has produced a series of reports for Parks Canada and several articles describing the labour force of the company's Northern Department from 1821 to 1900. These rely particularly on the analysis of servants' lists and abstracts of servants' accounts and provide information on such aspects of the HBC's workforce as origins, wages, occupations and ranks, and recruitment, but contain little discussion of the servants' behaviour or their relations with their superiors.⁶⁹ The data which he and his research assistants gathered have allowed some analysis of the ethnic and racial character of the company, but this has only reproduced the emphasis on ethnicity as the basis for action.⁷⁰ Moreover, all these statistics describe only the post-1821 period and the Northern Department, leaving out many years and a large part of the company's operations and, therefore, neglecting the increasing complexity and diversity of the company's business. Further work has been done by Michael Payne in two reports and a book for Parks Canada, and his recently completed Ph.D. thesis. These deal with social relations and the daily

Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 164-200.

⁶⁹Philip Goldring, Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900, Volume I. Manuscript Report Series, no. 362, Parks Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1979; Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900, Volume II. Manuscript Report Series, no. 412, Parks Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1980; Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900, Volume III. Microfiche Report Series, no. 299, Environment Canada Parks. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1984.

⁷⁰See, Carol M. Judd, "Mixt Bands of Many Nations': 1821-70," in Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 127-146; Judd, "Native Labour and Social Stratification in the Hudson's Bay Company's Northern Department, 1770-1870," Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 17, 4 (1980): 305-314.

life of the men at Fort Prince of Wales (Churchill) and York Factory during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These constitute an important advance in fur trade history. Payne discusses the lives of HBC employees in the context not only of a "fur trade society" but relates them to what was happening in the outside world and examines work in the fur trade as a form of pre-industrial employment. He also suggests that officers, tradesmen, and servants constituted three separate classes characterized by different wages, customs, and benefits.⁷¹ One might disagree with his identification of classes with strata, but Payne has at least treated HBC employees as workers with their own perceptions, customs, and motives that determined their behaviour and which the company had to take into account in carrying out its business.

Ron Bourgeault and Glen Makahonuk have gone a step further. They have examined the HBC within the context of Marxian ideas about the conservative and yet revolutionary effect of mercantile capitalism. Makahonuk focuses on the company's servants and suggests that they understood the operation of the labour market and tried to use it for their own benefit by trying to extract high wages when labour was scarce. He sees conflict in the HBC as a form of class conflict which erupted mainly over wages and working conditions. Bourgeault focuses more on the effect of the company on the native population which, he says, was transformed from an independent people living in a state of primitive communism into serfs within a feudal relationship. The company's own servants also entered a feudal relationship when they signed up. The result was the rise of class and national consciousness among the natives and class conflict between servants and the company.⁷² These articles represent a major

⁷¹Michael Payne, Prince of Wales Fort: A Social History 1717-1782 Parks Canada Manuscript Report, no.379 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979); A Social History of York Factory 1788-1870 Parks Canada Microfiche Report Series, no. 110 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1984); The Most Respectable Place in the Territory; "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870: A Social History of York Factory and Churchill." (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1989).

⁷²Glen Makahonuk, "Wage-labour in the Northwest Fur Trade Economy, 1760-1849," Saskatchewan History, XLI, 1 (Winter 1988):1-17; Ron G. Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from 'Communism' to Capitalism," Studies in Political Economy, 12 (Fall 1983):45-80.

breakthrough in the study of the HBC's labour force, but they overemphasize the "modern" motivations of the HBC's workers and underestimate the powerful influence that paternalistic ideas had on their perceptions. Masters had to live up to their obligations or face the wrath of their servants and paternalistic relations certainly contained the seeds of social conflict, indeed, of class conflict, but it is simplistic, to suggest, as Ron Bourgeault does, that "collective class antagonisms" occurred in the late eighteenth century with "the growth of inland water transportation" and that the *voyageurs* became "the advanced elements of the working class in the fur trade."⁷³ Nevertheless, the raising of class in the context of fur trade history is an important move away from the ethnic stereotypes that have dominated and limited discussions of HBC employees.

Since the London committee and its officers believed and acted upon these stereotypes, they can not, of course, be ignored. After all, particular ethnic groups were hired or rejected on the basis of national character and it was hoped that proper management would make up for any flaws so that Scots would be more adventurous, the French Canadians more sober, and the Métis more trustworthy. Canadian historians have divested themselves of the racism inherent in these characterizations, but they still accept them because they accept the officers' view of the trade. It was they, after all, who produced most of the company's documents, reported the behaviour and misbehaviour of the servants, and left collections of personal papers. Officers expected that long service would bring promotion, a handsome income, retirement benefits, and social mobility. They identified themselves with the company, particularly after 1810 when they were given a share of the profits in order to encourage greater effort in promoting the trade. They prospered as the company prospered. They suffered when servants disobeyed and their reputations suffered if they left themselves open to charges of unbecoming behaviour, embezzlement, and cruelty to their subordinates. It was necessary for them to demonstrate their probity and avoid blame for their men's misbehaviour. The records

⁷³Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade," 54.

they left reflect their concerns not the concerns of their inferiors and the standards they purported to uphold and with which they judged their subordinates. Thus, the company's records reflect the biases and interests of those at the top and must be used with caution. As Raymond Williams has observed, every society has a system of dominant practices and values, which are passed on partly through "selective tradition"; that is, the past as interpreted in terms of what the dominant culture deems significant. But, this dominant culture co-exists with other ways of life which can not be eliminated, but which may be diluted or absorbed by the dominant one if necessary to prevent them from becoming truly subversive.⁷⁴ In the writing of history, if one is to escape the hegemony of past dominant classes, one must go beyond the views of the past handed down in the records created by those classes.

In the case of the HBC, it is necessary to examine the records from the perspective of the dominated to find the signs of alternative views that appear in those records, but which have been ignored or interpreted from the perspective of the upper ranks. The company's archives actually provide much information on the kind of workers for whom few records exist, namely, workers who did not form craft associations, particularly the unskilled and semi-skilled. Yet, Canadian labour historians have ignored the HBC Archives as a source of information about Canadian workers and indeed have not included the HBC's labour force in that category. This neglect may be due to the dominance of ethnic stereotypes and the popular perception of the HBC as a company of explorers, fur traders, and singing voyageurs. But, the majority of company employees were craftsmen and labourers, for whom the enterprise was not a great adventure but a form of employment. They, like their counterparts elsewhere, were concerned with making a living on the best possible terms they could and resisted injustice, complained about poor working conditions, and fought for the control of the work process. Canadian labour historians have not given much thought to the idea that there was a labour process in the fur

⁷⁴Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," New Left Review 82 (Nov-Dec 1973): 9.

trade, while the image of the company as a rigid paternalistic organization completely dominating its members has led them to overlook the frequent but vague references to alienated, discontented men that appear in the work of fur trade historians. HBC employees have never caught the eye of labour historians, who seem to be adept at ferreting out all signs of worker disaffection everywhere else.

Partly this lapse is due to a fixation on class formation and class consciousness in the context of industrialization. Thus, Bryan Palmer's history of Canadian labour does not even mention the employees of the HBC and their absence from a survey is a clear demonstration of their absence from Canadian labour history.⁷⁵ The data on labour protest and organization from 1820 to 1890 being collected for Volume II of the Historical Atlas of Canada do not include the protests of HBC employees, except possibly the two strikes listed for British Columbia from 1815 to 1859. There were two strikes of miners working for the HBC during those years. A table containing information on strikes from 1860 to 1879 shows one strike for the Prairie West.⁷⁶ But the period covered by the article included years of frequent disorder among the HBC's employees. Seamen on the company's ships mutinied, tripmen engaged in almost annual strikes during the 1860s, the Norwegian servants rebelled frequently during the 1850s, and there were many smaller confrontations which constituted labour protest. Without suggesting that the HBC was a hotbed of rebellion, it is safe to say that its workers were not quiescent. Indeed, this thesis proposes that disobedience and insubordination were an integral part of the history of the HBC.

The thesis will first examine the company's organization and what the London committee expected to achieve through it. The following chapter will outline the history of the HBC's recruitment policy. Hiring was both the first point of contact and the first point of conflict between the company and its men, as the two sides negotiated the terms of employment. The

⁷⁵See: Palmer, "Chapter 1: Producing Classes, Paternalist Authority, 1800-1850," Working-Class Experience, 7-59.

⁷⁶Bryan D. Palmer, "Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada, 1820-1890," Labour/Le Travail 20 (Fall 1987): 61-83.

next chapter describes the day to day relations between the London committee and its officers, on the one hand, and the servants, on the other, with emphasis on the kinds of disobedience and conflict that might be considered endemic in the service. Chapter 5 focuses on a more serious type of disobedience, the refusal to obey orders or to work. Chapter 6 narrows the discussion further by describing those occasions when men acted collectively to demand higher wages and better treatment, including what their superiors referred to as mutinies. This chapter, therefore, deals not only with regular servants, but with the tripmen, seamen, and miners who joined the work force in the nineteenth century and brought new bases for conflict into the HBC.

Although the records of the HBC can certainly be numbered among the "archives of repression," they nonetheless provide ample material to permit the examination of the behaviour and customs of the servants on their own terms. The company's headquarters were in London and the governing committee demanded accounts, journals, and correspondence from all posts annually and as these increased so did the volume of material sent to London. The retrenching system introduced in 1810 sped this process up. The committee, aware that it needed better information, now also required annual reports from every district. The masters of individual posts were to submit reports to their immediate superiors who examined them and submitted their own reports to the governors of their respective departments. The governors in turn were supposed to prepare reports on the affairs of their departments and comment on all the reports they had received from those under their jurisdictions. The system of annual reports lasted only about ten years in most areas, but the journals and an ever increasing variety of records permit the examination of every sector of the company's enterprise and the actions of its employees. As a result, the HBC archives are vast and it is impossible to read all the material for the period from 1770 to 1870. It was possible, however, to read all journals, correspondence, and ships' logs relevant to the first outfit of every decade. The HBC's year, called an outfit, began on 1 June and ended 31 May of the following year. The first outfit examined was therefore 1770-71, the second 1780-81, and so on. The last was 1870-71. For each outfit, it was necessary to read

two years' worth of material because incidents occurring in one outfit might spill over into the next. Thus, for 1770-71, for example, it was necessary to read documents from both 1770 and 1771.

Journals are one of the best sources of information about the servants' behaviour because it was there that officers recorded the most detailed accounts of events at their posts. Officers were required to make daily entries in which they described the weather, trade with the Indians, the duties performed by the men, and any unusual occurrences. The journals thus provide a record of both the routine and the unusual and it is there that officers first reported their men's misbehaviour and their insolent language. Most officers carried out their clerical duties faithfully and, even though editorial comments were not wanted, frequently gave their opinions on the quality of the servants. Naturally, the journals reflect the officers' interpretation of events and all forms of disobedience are condemned equally. But enough information is given to provide some idea of the men's motives. The ships' logs, found in the C.1 series, and the miscellaneous ships' papers, found in the C.7 series provide equivalent information for the company's seamen. All ships' logs available at ten year intervals, beginning in 1770-1, were read and the logs of certain ships known to have had difficulties were also examined for other years.

Correspondence was less easy to divide into such neat chunks because of the distances involved. The decisions made in one year might not be implemented until the following one and their effects not reported until the year after that. But the correspondence is found in a variety of collections which can be consulted so as to ensure adequate coverage of the period. Much of it was copied into the post journals which were sent to London and could be read along with the journal. Where letters were not part of the journals, they were copied into separate books, found in the B./b series. These could be approached in the same way as the journals. The A.5 series comprises the company's general correspondence outward and, therefore, contains the committee's letters to its recruiting agents. These provide information about the company's manpower needs and recruitment difficulties, action taken against men for breach of

contract, requests from former servants or their families for assistance, complaints by servants of bad treatment, and applications for employment. It was necessary and, fortunately possible, to read all the correspondence in this collection from the first book that covered the years 1753 to 1776 to those for 1870-71. The A.10 series is the companion collection, containing the incoming general correspondence. Except for the years 1712 to 1837 for which the correspondence was manageable, it was necessary to read the material at ten year intervals and rely on material from the A.5 series and other collections to determine what further use of A.10 needed to be made. Together, these two series provide a comprehensive source of information on the company's concerns about hiring, its willingness or lack thereof to fulfill its paternalistic responsibilities to ex-servants, and the views of disgruntled servants. The A.6 series comprises the company's official correspondence and is the major collection of the HBC's letters to its officers. It provides information on the company's policies, their effects, cases of misbehaviour among servants, and the state of the trade in general. All of this collection from A.6/11 (1767-73) to A./44(1870-71) was read. Its companion collection, A.11, which is made up of correspondence in from the company's posts, was also read in its entirety up to 1870-71.

Two particularly interesting collections of correspondence are the B./c series and E. series. The former comprises the correspondence sent to the company's posts. It contains the originals of some letters duplicated elsewhere, usually official ones, but also includes a variety of personal correspondence such as smutty letters between officers and letters from servants' families back home. This collection, amounting to over one hundred files, was also read in its entirety. E.31/2 is a box of undelivered letters mostly to servants from family members. They provide much insight into the family backgrounds of their recipients, suggesting that, in some cases, men joined the HBC to escape the responsibilities that family life imposed. Some, complete with locks of hair, are from sweethearts who express fears that their men will marry native women and others from wives who are wish to know why they have not heard from their husbands for so long or received any financial support. Other collections in E. contain private

papers and letters, all of which provide information about life in the HBC as discussed by officers among themselves and not necessarily revealed to the committee. The A.12 and D. series are also important. These contain correspondence from the company's governors to the London committee, the former covering the years from 1823 to 1870 and the latter 1818 to 1870.

George Simpson, whose influence on the company from 1823 to 1860 was immense, produced a large number of these letters. Since letters to and from Simpson appear in all the collections of correspondence and in some of the journals, it was thought best to rely on other collections for Simpson's letters and refer to the D.4 series as necessary in regard to specific incidents or policies if necessary. An index of the Simpson correspondence makes it possible to locate letters by correspondent and source. His annual reports to the committee which appear in the A.12 series are long and detailed and these and the letters scattered throughout other collections provide adequate coverage of his opinions and decisions for the purposes of this thesis.

Specific information about individuals appears in A.30, which comprises the surviving servants' lists from 1774 to 1841, with those after 1819 providing little information. Not until 1788 are the parishes of residence given and not until 1793 are ages given. However, all give occupations, wages and bounties, length of contracts, and reports on character and behaviour. By 1815 the need for fit, active men to meet often bloody competition and an increased emphasis on good record keeping are reflected by the addition to the forms printed for the purpose of servants' lists of two new columns: one to record a man's height and the other his physical condition. The keeping of such lists appears to have ended by 1821. The B./f series, which is made up of servants' lists kept at the posts from which the larger lists seem to have been compiled, duplicates to a large extent the earlier lists and continues beyond 1821 but is incomplete with only a few major posts, such as York Factory, being well represented. Other lists, however, appear in the account books, B./d, although not every year. But they are extensive and, in addition to the personal statistics contained in A.30 and B./f, record each man's debt at the end of the outfit, whether he was fined for misbehaviour, and the amount of the fine.

Further information on individuals can be obtained in A.32, the servants' contracts. This series contains contracts from 1780 to the twentieth century and, although far from complete, describes the basis upon which servants were hired by specifying the duties, wages, and benefits a man would receive and also the penalties should he prove disobedient. Since a servant had to sign the contract, his signature or its lack provides information about the literacy of the HBC workforce.

Several collections in the National Archives of Canada were also consulted, the most important of these being the Hargrave Papers. James Hargrave was an officer of the HBC for 38 years, for fifteen of those years a chief factor. His papers are extensive and include not only letters to him but also notebooks into which he copied letters he sent to others. Unfortunately, these notebooks are almost illegible, but many of the originals of these letters ended up in other collections of correspondence in the HBC Archives and could be consulted there. What is most striking, although not surprising, about Hargrave's letters is the extent to which the servants are absent from them. Like most people, Hargrave and his family were, of course, primarily interested in the affairs of themselves, their relatives, and their friends. Servants did not figure prominently in these groups. The letters of Hargrave and of other officers underline the extent to which officers and servants lived in different worlds. Fur trade historians' heavy reliance on the personal papers of HBC officers has pushed the servants to margins of Canadian history. But, they were not simply obedient, stolid Orkneymen and colourful *voyageurs* and they deserve, as much as English weavers, to be rescued from "the enormous condescension of posterity."⁷⁷

⁷⁷Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 13.

CHAPTER 2.

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

Oh, let us love our occupations
Bless the Co & their relations
Be content with our poor rations
And always Know our proper Stations¹

Although composed in a facetious vein by a disgruntled officer in 1846, this verse expressed precisely what the London committee of the HBC always wanted from its employees: loyalty, dedication, unquestioning obedience, and a willingness to endure whatever hardships were necessary to further the interests of the company. Authority rested in the hands of a governor, a deputy governor, and a committee of seven, all elected from among the shareholders, none of whom ever set foot in Rupert's Land until Nicholas Garry was sent to tour the territory in 1821. Officers were hired to manage operations on their behalf and trade with the Indians, while labourers and craftsmen were engaged to do everything else. But, even the officers were supposed to be "Faithfull Servants."² The HBC was a conservative, paternalistic organization and its governing committee possessed a "social outlook" based upon the assumption that society should be "authoritarian, hierarchic, organic and pluralistic." At the top, the elite, as the owners of property, had both the right and the responsibility to rule and guide everyone else who had only to obey. Paternalists tended to favour draconian laws to prevent indiscipline and social disorder, but they also supported popular notions of a just price, fair rent, and equitable wages. Social relations, after, all had to be governed by morality. Nevertheless, as David Roberts has observed, "authority, power, command, and surveillance" are "the

¹National Archives of Canada (NAC), MG 19 A25, Robert Campbell Papers, Journal, 1 May 1846-29 April 1847, 31 July 1846. No doubt, a sarcastic paraphrase of "God bless the squire and his relations/And keep us in our proper stations." Roy Porter, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (Markham: Penguin Books of Canada, rev. ed., 1990), 15.

²HBCA, A.6/2, London Committee to Governor Geyer and Council, 2 June 1688, p. 8.

attributes far more essential to patriarchal paternalism than benevolence, compassion, sympathy, and generosity, virtues that are more its embellishments."³

"Ideologies of management," says Reinhard Bendix, "are attempts by leaders of enterprises to justify the privilege of voluntary action and association for themselves, while imposing upon subordinates the duty of obedience and the obligation to serve their employers to the best of their ability."⁴ Paternalism was no exception. It "grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation" and included even American slavery, a variation in which racial differences "heightened the tension inherent in an unjust social order" and which, "like every other paternalism," had "little to do with Ole Massa's ostensible benevolence, kindness, and good cheer."⁵ Inequality was its most important feature. Its goal was, after all, the achievement of deference, as Patrick Joyce has defined it: "a social relationship that converts power relations into moral ones" and, it was hoped, cultivated among subordinates an "emotional identification" that would lead them "to acquiesce in their own subordination."⁶ The flippancy of Robert Campbell's bit of doggerel suggests, however, that the view from the top was not the only perspective and that even those who belonged to that stratum closest to the top might not identify wholeheartedly with their masters.

When the HBC received its charter in 1670 traditional master-servant relations were the norm. Gerhard Ens has contended that the posts "were to be models of the English

³D. Roberts, Paternalism in Early Victorian England (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 2-7, 135.

⁴Reinhard Bendix, Work and Authority in Industry: Ideologies of Management in the Course of Industrialization (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1956), xxi.

⁵Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books, 1972), 4.

⁶Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 90-2.

patriarchal household,"⁷ but this statement, perhaps unintentionally, implies that the London committee deliberately set out to establish traditional households in the wilderness. During the first expeditions to North America trade was carried on from ships which stayed only for the summer. When, after a few years, men remained over the winter,⁸ it was clear that the committee's primary concern was the pursuit of profit and the establishment of factories, i.e. establishments "for traders carrying on business in a foreign country,"⁹ not conventional colonies. Indian women were barred from the factories, their presence condemned as "very prejudicial[sic]" to the company's affairs "by being a meanes[sic] of our Servants often debauching themselves, but likewise by embeazling[sic] our goods and very much exhausting our Provisions."¹⁰ During the early 1680s the committee toyed with what Jennifer Brown has called "company familism" by allowing some employees to bring their families. But, it probably did not intend this practice to be as widespread as Brown implies when she says that the company allowed "servants'" families to live at the posts,¹¹ since only two wives were given permission to join their husbands, both officers, and permission for one of them was withdrawn only a little more than two weeks later.¹² Thereafter, "military monasticism" became the order of

⁷Gerhard Ens, "The Political Economy of the 'Private Trade' on the Hudson Bay: the Example of Moose Factory, 1741-1744," in Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985, ed. Bruce G. Trigger et al. (Montreal: St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 396.

⁸E. E. Rich, ed. Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1942), 14 and 16 May 1674, 107-109. On these dates a subcommittee ordered that men fit to say in the country be recruited and henceforth lists of such recruits appear regularly in the minutes.

⁹The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, 3rd ed., s.v. "Factory." This meaning of the word was well established by 1670 when the company was chartered.

¹⁰E. E. Rich, ed. Copy-Book of Letters Outward &c Begins 29th May, 1680 Ends 5 July, 1685 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1948), London committee to Governor Nixon, 15 May, 1682, 40-4.

¹¹Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 10.

the day. Unencumbered by families, European or Indian, company employees were expected to devote themselves to their master's business. Nevertheless, the posts rapidly became places of resort and residence for local Indian bands, and many men acquired Indian wives. Since these women brought with them the good will and trade of their relatives and also performed important work around the posts, the committee came to tolerate such liaisons.¹³ But, the purpose for which men were sent to Rupert's Land was to conduct the company's business and nothing else.

Servants were to be kept "in Military Discipline," and officers were to promote "oeconomy, frugality & diligence."¹⁴ Mindful of its paternal obligation to see to the moral well-being of its servants and hopeful that "Christian-like behaviour will beget a decent decorum & peaceable demeanour," the committee ordered daily prayers aboard its ships and "publick prayers and reading of the Scriptures or some other religious Books"¹⁵ at the company's establishments every Sunday, although officers seem to have neglected this duty if Edward Thompson testifying before a parliamentary committee in 1749 was telling the truth. He swore that he had heard neither sermons nor prayers while at Moose Factory and had not heard of "any such thing, either before his Time or since."¹⁶ Nevertheless, the committee regularly repeated its orders to hold Sunday services and periodically sent religious books for those who could read

¹²Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684. Second Part: 1682-84, 12 April 1684, p. 224; 25 April 1684, p. 229.

¹³Brown, Strangers in Blood, 10-11.

¹⁴E. E. Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688-1696 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957), Committee to Governor Geyer and Council, 2 June 1688, p. 8.; HBCA, B.42/b/44, London Committee to Samuel Hearne and Council at Churchill, 21 May 1783, fo. 1.

¹⁵E. E. Rich, ed., Letters Outward 1679-1694 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1948), Committee to Capt. Walsall Cobby, 21 May 1680, p. 15; Committee to John Nixon, 29 May, 1680, p. 24.

¹⁶Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. Select Committee. Report from the Committee appointed to inquire into the State and Condition of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay and of the Trade carried on there (24 April 174). Testimony of Edward Thompson, 244.

and were "inclinable to improve by them."¹⁷ On the whole, though, the committee displayed little interest in its employees' lack of religious zeal, perhaps because it did not expect much. After all, the men did not come from those strata of society noted for their piety or even religious orthodoxy. As late as 1794, a minister of North Ronaldsay in the Orkneys reported that he saw fifty of the inhabitants singing and dancing in the moonlight around a standing stone.¹⁸ Still, religious worship was too much a part of everyday life to be abandoned. Even if the majority of the men were indifferent to it, regular doses of religion reminded them "of their Duty to God, their Neighbour, and themselves,"¹⁹ not to mention to their masters. And, no doubt, the committee did not want its reputation to suffer if it was seen as unfit to be entrusted with the care of the young men and boys whom it transported to an unfamiliar territory. Of course, the committee supplemented moral suasion with more forceful measures.

Although the committee recommended "mild and Gentile[sic] Usage," it was "sensible enough[sic] what sort of men" the officers had to "deale with" and cautioned against letting the "Rines of Government lie too loose" because "as much mischief[sic] might arise from thence." It urged upon the officers "moderation in all things" and, "to draw" the servants "to Love & Obey" their officers, promised that those who behaved themselves "most meritoriously" would receive wage increases.²⁰ Here, the committee revealed its paternalistic viewpoint: a desire to be evenhanded and humane, tempered by a belief in the rightness of a stable social order based upon the rule of the elite and the deference of everyone else, and the assumption that the lower orders were unruly and insubordinate and needed to be controlled. Rewards alone could not guarantee obedience, particularly in the face of customs that conflicted with the company's

¹⁷HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to Samuel Hearne and council, Churchill, 21 May 1783; 19 May 1784.

¹⁸Hugh Marwick, Orkney (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1961), 186.

¹⁹HBCA, B.3/b/7, "Orders & Instructions to Mr Thos Powell, Master at Henley House," fo. 2.

²⁰E. E. Rich, ed., Letters Outward 1679-1694 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1948), Committee to John Nixon, 15 May 1682, p. 39.

business. Its first great fear, that its employees would trade for themselves rather than the company, was a logical concern, since, traditionally, participants in trading ventures were paid by shares in the profits.²¹ After a few years of allowing its officers to trade on their own accounts, the committee required all employees to "enter into articles or otherwise oblige themselves" not to trade in beaver or forfeit "theyr[sic] goods & wages" and in 1673 ordered the preparation of an oath which would be administered to all members of the company to ensure their good behaviour.²² In 1674, it prohibited private trade in furs of any kind and ordered the captains of the company's ships to ensure there were no places where "any manner of privacy" might be hidden in their vessels.²³ This regulation coincided with the establishment of permanent posts, occupied by men hired for several years at a time²⁴ and, therefore, with new opportunities for misbehaviour. Further tightening of discipline ensued.

In 1679 the committee ordered that every member of the company guilty of defrauding it would be punished, shareholders by a loss of stock or a "pecuniary Mulct" and officers and servants by the forfeiture of their salaries and a further "Mulct and penalty." Also, all officers and servants, in addition to swearing an oath, now had to give a "bond with security that they will submit to orders" and were informed that if they "misdemeane[d]" themselves they would be turned out of the service or suspended until the next general court of the company was

²¹K. G. Davies, The Royal African Company (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 109-113. Both the Royal African Company and the East India Company permitted their ships' captains and officers a degree of private trade and found that, not only was this privilege regularly abused, but when they tried to abolish it, the practice continued anyway.

²²Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674, 17 May 1672, p. 38; 22 Dec. 1673, p.67.

²³Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674, 8 May 1674, p. 103.

²⁴Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674, 14 and 16 May 1674, pp. 107-109. On these dates a subcommittee ordered that men fit to say in the country be recruited and henceforth lists of such recruits appear regularly in the minutes.

held.²⁵ By this time, merchants and financiers had taken control of the company from the gentry stockholders who had founded it and taken measures to make the enterprise more efficient. The new adventurers paid greater attention to financial matters, restricted membership on the committee to those holding at least £200 in stock, prohibited committee members from revealing company business to non-members, and ruled that only committee-members would henceforth be allowed to look at any of the company's records.²⁶ Increasing control by men of business led to a more commercial attitude toward the employees and made more explicit the fact that the master-servant relationship was essentially a financial transaction. Private dealings were forbidden because, the committee declared in 1686, "what comes to our servants['] hands, whether by the one way or the other...ought to be esteemed as our owne, for we are at great & vast charges there, we pay for their tyme which is not theirs but ours, & all Goods that comes to their hands is by virtue of our maintaineing[*sic*] them."²⁷ This was no "love-relationship." This was the expression of "a calculating commercial spirit" by members of an elite that was "selfish, demanding, and parsimonious."²⁸

The committee now requested annual lists of servants with details of their employment. It ordered all private letters intended for the Bay to be "publicly communicated" to the committee before being sent and presented before the shareholders for confirmation. All letters coming from the Bay were to be sent to the committee so "that no private correspondence may be maintained to our prejudice." Moreover, Governor Nixon was to keep this measure a secret so that all would "write their minds freely and be upon no reserve or Jealousy of being

²⁵E. E. Rich, ed. Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684. First Part: 1679-82 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1945), 28 Nov. 1679, pp. 3, 5.

²⁶E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume I: 1670-1763 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), 169-171.

²⁷Rich, ed., Letters Outward 1679-1694, London Committee to Henry Sergeant, 20 May 1686, p. 185.

²⁸Laslett, The World We Have Lost, 4; Roberts, Paternalism in Early Victorian England, 20.

discovered."²⁹ Furthermore, the men's subordination was to be impressed upon them with proper ceremony as soon as they stepped ashore by a formal reading of commissions and orders and stirring words to make them mindful of the "Dutyes" they owed to the committee "whose Servants they are, whose breade they eate and whose wages they take."³⁰ The chief officer enjoyed the confidence of the committee and could consider himself its ally and partner. Officers, therefore, received commissions which, although obligating them to obey the committee's orders, granted them the authority to command in the company's territory.³¹ Everyone else agreed to terms emphasizing subordination. Apprentices, as was customary, signed indentures that obligated the company to provide food, lodging, education, and, at the end of the term, money and clothing.³² Servants swore "oaths of fidelity" and signed "Indentures."³³ In the 1691 version of the oath, the earliest to survive, servants pledged their loyalty to the Crown and swore to be "faithfull & Just" to the company and "respectull & Obedient" to the governor and deputy governor in residence in Rupert's Land. They promised to obey all orders, defend the company's rights, refrain from any trade on their own accounts in any

²⁹Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684: First Part, 1679-82, 21 May 1680, p. 72; 29 May 1680, p. 77; Rich, ed., Letters Outward 1679-1694, Committee to John Nixon, 29 May 1680, pp. 8, 21.

³⁰Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward 1688-1696, "Instructions for Capt. John Marsh", 18 Jun. 1688, p. 39.

³¹For example George Geyer's commission of 2 June 1688. Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688-1696, 23-4.

³²K. G. Davies, ed. Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40 (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1965), pp. 308, 356, 413; Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679-1684. First Part: 1679-82, 47-8; Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1679-84. Second Part: 1682-84, 234.

³³Rich, ed., Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-84: Second Part, 1682-84, 16 March 1683, p. 84. The committee ordered three quire of the oath and several copies of the indentures; Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688-1696, London Committee to George Geyer, 2 June 1688, p. 20. The committee here indicated that it was sending "a New forme of Contracts for our Servants..."

commodities, "endeavour to hinder" anyone seeking to trade within the company's territories, and "promote the Interest & Proffits[sic]" of the company to the best of their "skill and Endeavours."³⁴

The committee expressed its opinion of the place of the servants in the scheme of things most forcefully in its general letter of 21 May 1788 to Churchill. The officers there had requested that the servants be allowed goods from the post's warehouse in exchange for the feathers they collected which, in the past, they had traded with the captains of the company's ships. In 1701 the committee had given the servants permission to keep such feathers for bedding as an indulgence that would make the service more attractive.³⁵ It had certainly never intended for this activity to become part of a thriving private trade. Incensed no doubt as much by such clear evidence of disobedience as the questioning of its orders, the committee declared:

We will have no Dealings carried on between our Servants at the settlement & those on board our Ship; with whose ammunition or Nets were those Feathers procured & whose time was employed in collecting them or in whose Territory undoubtedly the Companys To whom the Time & Labour of their Servants & all the Produce of their Chartered Country exclusively belongs.³⁶

The testiness of this response to the officers' request reflected the committee's growing dissatisfaction with its servants who regularly behaved with an independence that did not accord with their status or the terms of their contracts, which had, by this time, replaced the oaths.

These contracts bound the committee and its employees in a master-servant relationship, in which the latter were burdened with duties and threatened with penalties while the former possessed all the power and authority. Every servant was required to perform duty on the ships carrying him to Rupert's Land. Once at his destination, he swore, he would defend the company's property and rights "with the utmost Hazard and Peril of my Life, in my Station, with

³⁴"The Oath to be taken by all the Company's Servants that have not taken it in England" [28 May 1691], Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688-1696, 134.

³⁵E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume I: 1670-1763 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1958), 376.

³⁶HBCA, B.42/b/44, Committee to Council at Churchill, 21 May 1788, fo. 30d.

Courage and Fidelity." He also promised "in all Things" to submit "to the Commands and Discipline of the Governor or Commander in Chief for the said Company, and all other...superior officers, by his Directions." He further pledged not to trade on his own account or for anyone else and to hold all goods in his possession "only in Trust, and for the sole Use and Benefit of the said Governor and Company and their Successors." He would also "endeavour to hinder" and "detect" those who engaged in private trade and "discover" the commodities so traded and report all to the governor and the committee. If a servant failed to fulfill his obligations, he and his "Executors and Administrators" would forfeit all wages or other monies due him and in addition pay the company a sum of money equal to two years' wages over and above the damages caused by his disobedience.³⁷ He also had to give two years' notice of his intention either to leave or to renew his engagement.³⁸ In return, the company promised wages, maintenance, and free passage to and from Rupert's Land. The contract changed slightly over the next century, reflecting both the committee's attempts to deal with crises and its increasing interest in freeing itself of some of its paternalistic obligations.

A shorter form of the contract, printed for the European recruits of 1811, dealt with the labour shortage by signing them on for three years instead of five, and raised wages to £20, but explicitly excluded clothing from the necessities that the company provided. It also committed both parties to the contract to the payment of £60 sterling to be paid by the party failing to perform its part of the bargain.³⁹ Since the servant's obligations were far more onerous and the law favoured the employer, the committee probably assumed it would never have to pay this fine and that its magnitude, equaling three years' pay, would surely deter any sensible servant from misbehaving. The 1815 contract brought back the old terms, but eliminated the penalty of two years' wages for disobedience and added the requirement that a servant give a

³⁷HBCA, A.32/7, Contract of John Best, 14 July 1795, fo. 1.

³⁸HBCA, A.5/2, London committee to William Tomison, 24 May 1786, fo. 148d.

³⁹HBCA, A.32/56, Contract of James Toomey, 3 June 1811.

year's notice of his intention not to renew his contract when it expired. Failure to do so would mean that he had to serve another year at the same terms as his current contract.⁴⁰ The 1818 contract introduced two levels of punishment: "wilful neglect" of the company's property, punishable by the deduction of the cost of damage or loss from the wages of the man in whose charge it had been, and neglect of duty or the refusal to perform it, punishable by the forfeiture of the man's wages. That contract also added that the committee could dismiss a servant at any time and stipulated that a servant continued in the service on the same terms until a ship was available to take him back to Europe.⁴¹ This regulation was important because if a servant's contract ended exactly on 31 May he was at liberty to do nothing, at the company's expense, until a ship left for Europe in September. Even worse, if a ship was unable to get out of the bay because of an early winter, as occurred several times before 1818, a servant might consider himself legally entitled to do nothing for a whole year.

Different contracts were printed for servants recruited in Lower Canada. French Canadians never had to pay a sum equal to two years' wages if they disobeyed orders, though they were subject to all the other penalties. Prior to the merger, their contracts also granted each an "equipment" consisting of specified quantities of blankets, shirts, woollen vests, handkerchiefs, tobacco, leather shoes, and collars, since they were accustomed to receiving such benefits from the North West Company (NWC). They were also obligated to contribute one per cent of their wages to the "Fond des Voyageurs."⁴² Their contracts also required them to transport themselves and the company's goods inland and "servir, obéir et exécuter fidèlement tout ce que la dite Compagnie ou toute autre personne ou personnes représentant."⁴³ The merger of the two companies in 1821 placed Canadians on the same footing as their

⁴⁰HBCA, A.32/18, Contract of Thomas Garrioch, 24 June 1815, fo. 140.

⁴¹HBCA, A.32/19, Contract of James Leask, 8 April 1818, fo. 151.

⁴²HBCA, A.32/59, Contract of Joseph Wittman, 1819, fo. 163.

⁴³HBCA, A.32/60, Contract of Michel Yestomis, 1859, fo. 5.

counterparts from elsewhere, i.e., deprived of their traditional nonmonetary benefits and bearing most of the cost of their maintenance. The contract now changed little. In 1870 Sinclair Young of the Shetland Islands still promised to "faithfully serve the said company as their hired Servant...and devote the whole of his time and labour in their Service and for their sole benefit", to serve "by day or by night...as he shall be required to do," and to defend the company's property "with courage and fidelity." He pledged neither to "absent himself from the said service" nor to "engage or be concerned in any trade or employment whatsoever except for the benefit of the said Company and according to their orders." In case of "any wilful neglect or default" committed by him when in charge of the company's goods, the loss or damage caused thereby would be covered by a deduction from his wages. He promised keep watch and ward and work aboard the ship taking him to and from North America and to work his passage between posts as well. This latter regulation had been added in 1863 by request of the Council of the Northern Department which had encountered difficulty with tradesmen who thought they ought to travel as passengers rather than workers when they were transferred from post to post. He promised to give a year's notice of his intention to leave or to re-engage, failing which he was obliged to remain in the service for another year. Moreover, he was to remain a "hired servant" until a ship arrived to take him home. "Upon condition of the due and faithful service...in like manner as aforesaid, but not otherwise" Sinclair would receive his wages. If he deserted or neglected or refused duty, he would have to pay for his passage to Europe and forfeit his wages "for the recovery whereof there shall be no relief either in Law or Equity."⁴⁴

The contract explicitly laid out the relations of authority that were to exist in the company and threatened serious penalties, but it could not guarantee that these relations of authority actually prevailed or that the penalties could or would be enforced. Indeed, the committee's own actions regularly undermined the authority of its officers. Officers were not

⁴⁴HBCA, A.32/60, Contract of Sinclair Young, 1870, fo. 21; B.239/k/3, York - Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1851-70, 21 June 1862, p. 239; B.239/c/14, London committee to Alexander Grant Dallas and officers, 15 April 1863, fo. 117d.

allowed to devise their own disciplinary measures. Instead, they were simply to send home "slothfull[sic] Drones" and "factious or Grumbling" servants.⁴⁵ Fear for its reputation reinforced this tendency to interfere and made it hesitate to impose the penalties specified by the contracts. After witnesses had testified before a House of Commons committee that HBC officers abused them with impunity, the committee ordered that men sent home for misbehaviour were to be examined by a council of officers and the ship's captain before they left and the details of their cases submitted so that the committee could inflict the proper penalties.⁴⁶ However, it frequently ignored the officers' recommendations, actions which, the officers complained, weakened their ability to command. In 1785, the officers at Churchill complained that the committee's refusal to recall two undesirable servants as requested the year before was "no great encouragement" to the "promotion of diligence" and "unless your Chief has a discessionary[sic] power to rid the Factory of all those that become abusive, subordination will soon cease & anarchy & confusion take its place."⁴⁷ Soon after, the committee decided that fines were the best penalties and recommended them as the first resort in the event of "neglect of duty or other gross misconduct by a servant." The officers, sitting in council, would hear the complaint against the accused and impose a fine, which, the committee promised, it would deduct from the offender's wages.⁴⁸ Fining, wrote the committee, was the "best mode for preserving due Subordination," although it ought to have had some doubts, since in the same letter it reprimanded the officers at Moose for not finding and severely punishing the culprit who had committed "so flagrant a Breach of good

⁴⁵Rich, ed., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward, 1688-1696, Committee to Governor and Council, 17 June 1693, p. 189.

⁴⁶HBCA, A.5/1, London committee to James Isham, 22 May 1754, fo. 3; London Committee to Moses Norton, 15 May 1765, fo. 68

⁴⁷HBCA, B.42/b44, Samuel Hearne and Council to London committee, 28 August 1785, fos. 15d.-16.

⁴⁸HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to council at Churchill, 25 May 1792, fos. 43-43d.

Order" as to tear down the notice posted in the guard room to announce this new measure.⁴⁹ This hint that fining might not be as effective as the committee thought was confirmed in 1796, when the officers at Churchill reported that "the Idea of mulcting a Man's wages in this Country is openly ridiculed by the people here, nor do we believe they will be convinced untill[sic] they feel the smart of it."⁵⁰ The war in Europe, however, made fining seem like a good idea, since potential employees and any men who went home were likely to be pressed into the army and the navy. Therefore, the committee considered punishment by fining more "eligible" than sending men home. Even unruly men were better than none.⁵¹

So intent was the committee on preventing the loss of men that in 1797 it warned the officers that if they sent home anyone without permission except in a case of "flagrant breach of duty" the chief officers would be charged 5 guineas each to cover the cost of passage to England.⁵² The officers did not, however, cease this practice until the regular re-engagement of those dismissed in disgrace persuaded them that sending servants home for misbehaviour was futile. In 1804, the officers at York protested and declared that they were not going to bother sending home some who deserved it that year.⁵³ The committee was probably glad that the officers were finally doing what they were told, especially since the war with France made labour so scarce that it had to hire whatever men it could find. It might have been this labour shortage that prevented the committee from making disobedient servants pay the charges and damages their contracts specified, although the fact that most servants would not have had the means to

⁴⁹HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to council at Moose Factory, 29 May 1794, fos. 101-101d.

⁵⁰HBCA, B.42/b/44, Council at Churchill to London committee, 29 August 1796, fo. 60.

⁵¹HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to council at Churchill, 30 May 1793, fo. 46.; London committee to council at Churchill, 31 May 1797, fo. 61d.

⁵²HBCA, A.6/16, London committee to officers at York, 31 May 1797, fo. 42. A guinea was worth 21 shillings.

⁵³HBCA, B.239/b/79, Officers at York to London committee, September 1804, fo. 45d.

make such payments might also have influenced its hesitation to impose them. The committee, however, declared sanctimoniously that "excessive Punishments as well as too lenient ones have their Evils" and regularly carried out its promise to "mitigate" fines if they were "oppressive," leading to complaints from York Factory that this policy had a "very bad effect."⁵⁴ Such situation would have been worrisome any time, but both the London committee and its officers now thought they faced a rising tide of disorder.

The London committee could not help but be aware of the transformation of British society. During the eighteenth century the withdrawal of the gentry from personal contact meant that the lower orders developed their own norms and values, while the proliferation of small employers and outwork gave many workers complete control over the conditions of their labour. This transition deprived people of the benefits of customary work relations, but also liberated them from their restrictions, a situation that the French Revolution transformed from an inconvenience to a menace.⁵⁵ Social unrest in Britain was indeed increasing. Nearly a third of all labour disputes reported in Britain during the eighteenth century occurred in the decade 1791-1800, mostly in 1791, 1792, 1793, and 1795.⁵⁶ Most of these conflicts were wage disputes, but there was also much discontent over rising prices and the loss of traditional perquisites and non-monetary benefits, which the British populace had always been quick to defend when they were threatened. Indiscipline appeared to be rife in Rupert's Land as well. Officers were complaining of their men's increasing defiance and insolence and some of their journals suggested that

⁵⁴HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to council at Churchill, 29 May 1794, fo. 49d.; HBCA, A.6/16, London committee to council at York Factory, 20 May 1801, fo. 126d; B.239/b/79, Council at York to London committee, 21 Sept. 1801, fo. 36d.

⁵⁵E. P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," Journal of Social History 7 (Winter 1974): 384-5.

⁵⁶C. R. Dobson, Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1717-1800 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 26.

disobedience and insolence were rampant in the service.⁵⁷ In 1796, John Sutherland, went so far as to observe that "it really appeared as if the french Revolution has got in People."⁵⁸ Although perhaps not afraid of a revolution among its seventies, the committee was itself coming to conclusion that things were altogether too lax in the service at a time when the company was struggling to compete with its rivals from Canada.

From "all the journals We have perused," the committee remarked in 1795, "there appears such a deficiency of the Authority in the Superiors and Consequently such a Lassitude or Indolence and Stubbornness in the inferior Servants there is no Wonder of scanty returns instead of an increasing Trade." Servants stationed inland had to be "bribed by Spirituous Liquors to do their duty, and, in Short, [were] under no Subordination."⁵⁹ Unlike their energetic Canadian counterparts, they had "their set distances to travel daily" and when "accidental obstructions" delayed their journeys, rather than making up for lost time by "pushing on with greater Spirit and alacrity, proceeding with their accustom'd Languor they tediously prolong their Journey."⁶⁰ Some of the officers also believed that the company was facing "a most important Crisis" which "demands no inconsiderable share of attention." In August 1799 four experienced officers found it so difficult to persuade men to go to their assigned posts inland that they declared that "it now Remains to take such steps as may most effectually serve to eradicate that

⁵⁷See, for example: HBCA, B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4, 4 Feb. 1794, fo. 17; B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-7, 21 August 1796, fo. 9; B.104/a/1, Lac la Biche journal, 1799-1800, 6 Oct. 1799, fo. 15; B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, 22 Oct. 1789, fo. 17; B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, 19 April 1790, fo. 51; B.121/a/6, Manchester House journal, 1790-91. William Walker to William Tomison, 2 March 1791, fos. 26d.-27. For examples of journals in which there were frequent and regular incidences of insubordination and insolence see: HBCA, B.3/100, Albany journal, 1796-7; B.3/a/103, Martins Fall journal, 1799-1800; B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4; B.42/a/123, Churchill journal, 1796-7; B.59/a/78 and 79, Eastmain journals, 1800-1, 1801/2; B.166/a/1, Portage de l'Ile journal, 1793-4; B.192/a/3, Sandy Lake journal, 1800/1.

⁵⁸HBCA, B.159/a/3, Fort Pelly journal and correspondence, 1796-7, 9 July 1796, fo.1.

⁵⁹HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to officers at Albany, 30 May 1795, fo. 129d.-130.

⁶⁰HBCA, A.5/3, London committee to John McNab, 30 May 1795, fos. 153-153d.

mutinous Disposition which has indeed several times manifested itself in a smaller degree but has now broken loose with such unexampled Violence." How John Ballenden, who was in charge of York Factory and its inland posts, acted "on this occasion" would either "ensure the obedience of Servants" or "convince them that they may with impunity Contemn the orders of their Superiors..." Now would be "indisputably decided" whether the company's officers would have to submit "to the will of Servants and supinely to adopt or Relinquish such schemes as they may think proper to approve or reject" or "whether for the future the Servant is to comply with the orders of his Master or the Master to act under the immediate direction & Control of his Servants."⁶¹ Naturally, the committee would agree that only in a world turned upside down could servants be in control of anything. Such a state of affairs could not be allowed to continue if the HBC was to survive.

The servants' behaviour was not really getting worse,⁶² but their misbehaviour did more damage because the company now operated under far less favourable circumstances than before. Increased competition, more expensive trade goods, and a poor market for furs meant reduced profits. The annual dividend dropped from six to four per cent in 1801 and remained at that level until 1809 when no dividend was paid at all. An appeal to the government for relief on the grounds that the HBC had not sold any furs for export since 1806 and had three years worth of stock on hand fell on deaf ears. The company was seriously in debt. The situation called for drastic measures. George Hyde Wollaston, a member of the committee, suggested that the HBC abandon active participation in the fur trade and simply outfit independent traders who could assume the costs of dealing with the competition. The company went so far as to hire William Tomison and Donald Mackay, two former officers, to recruit their own men and undertake trading operations in the interior in return for a share of the profits from these

⁶¹HBCA, B.239/b/63, Peter Fidler, James Bird, Joseph Howse, and Henry Hallett to John Ballenden, 5 August 1799, fos. 13d.-14d.

⁶²See Table 1.

ventures. The HBC would supply goods and sell the furs, but would be free of all the burdens that its traditional methods entailed. It sent William Auld, one of its traders, to Scotland to hire his own men for the inland settlements established from Churchill. None of these ventures proved successful.⁶³ The committee remained open to such strategies until Andrew Wedderburn, later Colvile, persuaded it to adopt his "Retrenching System" in March of 1810, which reaffirmed that the trade would "continue to be carried on for Account of the company by Servants entirely under the Controul & removable at the pleasure of the Committee."⁶⁴ This re-organization led, according to E. E. Rich, to a "new attitude" toward servants with more attention being paid to their opinions and greater independence in actions and decisions being allowed them. Moreover, efficiency was now so vital that even "old important" servants were fired.⁶⁵ One might, however, suggest that this re-organization was the result rather than the cause of a new attitude. And Rich's lumping together of all employees under the rubric of servants obscures the true significance of what happened because it was only a certain type of servant whose opinions the committee wished to hear.

The "Retrenching System" was the first real attempt to rationalize the business, although it has been overshadowed by the merger of 1821, which E. E. Rich observed "introduced system and certainty in place of experiment and expectation."⁶⁶ But, it was the *opportunity* not the *desire* to do so that was new in 1821. The years from 1810 to 1821 were a period of intense and often bloody rivalry with the NWC. Costly expeditions were undertaken to establish the company in the Northwest, labour was in short supply and, therefore, difficult to manage, and old officers and servants often resisted the changes that were introduced. The

⁶³E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay company 1670-1870. Volume II: 1763-1870 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), 264-7; 283-4.

⁶⁴HBCA, A.1/49, Minutes of the Governor and Committee, 1805-10. Minutes, 7 March 1810, fo. 115.

⁶⁵Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. II, 290-93.

⁶⁶Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Vol. II, 406.

coalition of the companies eliminated these difficulties, at least temporarily, and the energetic and ruthless George Simpson provided the necessary hardheaded leadership that had been absent in 1810. 1821 has also been seen as the point at which the company's hierarchy hardened and eliminated the possibility of promotion for ordinary servants. Jennifer Brown has suggested that this change occurred because the merger "generalized" the "social stratification" of the NWC "to the new company as a whole," although she does point out that such stratification was "incipient" in the HBC.⁶⁷ More recently, Michael Payne has pointed out that after 1821 wage and salary structures were rationalized and formalized, that more attention was paid to rank and status and maintaining proper distinctions between officers and men, and there was a decline in social mobility within "fur trade society" as a whole.⁶⁸ In fact, the re-organization of 1821 was the culmination of the process begun in 1810 and, indeed, owed as much to the "incipient" stratification of the HBC as to the divisions that characterized the NWC. The committee had always distinguished between the various ranks in the company's organization. The "Retrenching System" clarified these distinctions and, for the first time, explicitly laid out the HBC's hierarchy, reinforcing the barrier that had always existed between officers and servants. Moreover, the committee now embarked upon radically new measures which suggested that it, like other employers, had begun to adopt new attitudes towards working people and wanted to be free of the burdensome obligations that traditional social relations demanded of the elite.

In 1810 the committee proclaimed a "Radical Change in the System of Carrying on the Trade." It divided the business into two departments, the Northern and the Southern. The former included York and Churchill and two new factories: Saskatchewan, which comprised all the territory "on waters of that name above Cumberland" and Winnipeg, which included all the country drained by waters flowing into Lake Winnipeg. The Southern Department consisted of

⁶⁷Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 205.

⁶⁸Michael Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870: A Social History of York Factory and Churchill" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1989), 52, 79-80, 484.

Albany, Moose, Eastmain, and their outposts. Each department was governed by a superintendent with the "power...to regulate and control" the chief factors and other officers in their respective districts. Chief Factors were in charge of the factories and had the authority to trade at whatever rate they wanted with the approval of their Superintendents. Below them were the Traders who managed individual posts and the districts belonging to them. Chief Factors could suspend any officer guilty of "malversation, negligence, or disobedience," but they had to regulate their actions according to instructions from the Superintendent who could suspend any officer he considered guilty of improper conduct and temporarily appoint another in his place. All such cases had to be submitted to the committee for its approval, however. Each factory was also to receive an accountant responsible for producing accurate accounts every year and for reporting any improper practices by Chief Factors or Traders. Moreover, these accounts were henceforth to be kept in sterling money instead of Made Beaver.⁶⁹ The HBC's books would now resemble those of other companies and be easier to understand. The rest of the company's records also came under scrutiny.

In 1814, declaring that the information it ought to have was "in many points imperfect" and what it had was "too much scattered to be easily collected together," it directed that "every Chief, & Master of a Trading District" submit a report with maps and sketches to the superintendent of his department "as to the present State of the district under his Command." These reports were to tell the committee about the topography and climate of Rupert's Land, the Indians, the condition and location of each post, the establishments of the NWC, and the ages, occupations, character, and physical descriptions of all employees. The committee also requested an account of the trade together with suggestions for "any alterations by which it might be rendered more profitable." From now on, traders in charge of districts were to submit such reports annually, minus the geographical details, but with lists of all officers and servants of the district, reporting their names and conduct of the preceding year. "Every subordinate officer"

⁶⁹HBCA, PP-1810-1, "Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay," pp. 3-4.

and each of "the common men" were to be judged according to his sobriety, honesty, willingness "in the discharge of his duty," obedience and respectfulness, activity, intelligence, skills and "any other useful qualification," courage, and readiness to support his master "in case of violent attacks" on the company's property. "No anecdote" was too "trifling" if it threw "light upon the character of an individual," particularly of an officer with "claims to promotion" and withholding information was "an important breach of duty." The master of a district submitted his report to his chief factor who examined all the reports of the traders under him, reported their correctness to the superintendent of his department, and wrote his own report on the "general conduct" of the masters under him. The superintendent in turn reported on his whole department and on the accuracy of the reports of the chiefs and the masters, made suggestions for improving the trade, and provided information on the arrangements he had made for the following year. In addition, the clerk stationed at each post would keep a journal, "under the inspection of the Master when he is at home," containing "nothing but a plain & simple memorandum of facts, without comments or observations." Every day's events and each man's daily duties, together with information on the weather, flora, and fauna were to be recorded and submitted.⁷⁰ The clerks also provided further details in the form of waste books, Indians' and men's debt books, fur books, and ledgers.⁷¹ All this paperwork constituted a significant new burden for the officers and was probably beyond the capabilities of many of them. The committee was certainly not satisfied and complained in 1815 that the reports had been "meagre and defective," there had been no sketches, and, as a result, the committee had no idea where all the places mentioned in the journals were.⁷² Several years later the committee declared that any officer who did not keep a

⁷⁰HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 149-213.

⁷¹HBCA, B.3/a/118, Albany journal, 1814-15. Thomas Vincent to Jacob Corrigan, n.d., 1814, fo. 4.

⁷²HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Vincent, 29 Mar. 1815, fo. 271.

journal and write a report would be considered "not entitled to" his salary and emoluments and be fined.⁷³

The demand for standardized and regular information from managers was a characteristic which placed the HBC in the forefront of the development of "systematic management." This managerial philosophy has been identified with railroads and manufacturing firms, whose drive for efficiency included "substituting managerially mandated systems for ad hoc decisions by individuals." These systems were controlled through communication: instructions, information, and procedures were conveyed downward from those at the top of the hierarchy; data and analyses, summarized and analyzed as they traveled up the hierarchy, enabled the directors to evaluate the success of their policies, monitor the individuals in the organization, and make decisions about the business; lateral communication coordinated and documented interactions.⁷⁴ This development in the HBC altered the nature of the officers' work and indeed the nature of the officers themselves. It served to distinguish them further from their inferiors and eliminated the opportunities for advancement, however small, that the company's expansion had created. It was no longer enough to be able to bargain effectively with the natives. An officer now had to know how to write well and to understand, if not to keep, accounts. He had to be a man of business with the "Prudence & Zeal...Spirit & activity to break Thro the stumbling & wastefull[sic] habits that have pervaded the people."⁷⁵ Those without these virtues would not fit into the new system.

Thus, in 1814, the committee denied a promotion to John Mannal because of his unwillingness to deviate from "old customs" and make a greater effort to secure "country provisions" in accordance with the company's new policy of reducing the quantity of imported

⁷³HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to William Williams, 3 Feb. 1819, fo. 68d.

⁷⁴JoAnne Yates, Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. xvii.

⁷⁵HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 26 May 1813, p. 91.

goods.⁷⁶ Officers whose pride and egotism led them to act with too much independence would no longer do either. A man like John Clarke, for example, a former Nor'wester, who joined the HBC in 1815 as one of the officers in charge of the expedition into the Athabasca area, may have had energy and toughness, but he was otherwise ill-suited to the company. He was, according to James Bird,

a Man of little or no Education, vain, pompous and so excessively fond of Shew and parade that to excel in those points would...afford him the highest Gratification he is capable of feeling. It will be readily concluded that a Man of such a Taste has very little regard for Economy; and indeed he appears to have no Idea of the value of property. He may be very well calculated to force an Establishment in a Country where opposition is violent and when the Expence at which it is accomplished is not an object of Consideration, but he will never conduct a large and complicated Business advantageously. Resolution and the Art of managing Canadians are the only valuable Qualifications he possesses.⁷⁷

Robert Logan, on the other hand, Bird observed, seemed quite able "to discharge advantageously the Duties of Store Keeper in a large Business," but was "not calculated to thrive as an Indian Trader although he is by no means deficient in Resolution." Aulay McAuley, with his "rough manners" was not qualified for more than the charge of a single post and he was later criticized for having "little system or management."⁷⁸

The ideal officer, appearing several years later in the form of George Simpson, was a subtle blend of toughness, energy, and parsimoniousness, a man who could both "force an establishment" and manage it properly and whose vanity and pomposity were directed at insubordinate inferiors. The acquisition of such officers became an important aspect of the "Retrenching System" and one of the reasons for the sharp curtailment of opportunities for promotion from below. The new system required levels of literacy higher than the average servant's. Young men with the requisite skills had to be recruited and given further training in the

⁷⁶HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, p. 170.

⁷⁷HBCA, A.10/1, James Bird to London committee, 27 Aug. 1816, fos. 442-442d. Clarke's management was regularly criticized by Roderick McKenzie in the Fort Chipewyan journals from 1815/16 until 1816/17. B.39/a/6, 8.

⁷⁸HBCA, A.10/1, James Bird to London committee, 27 Aug. 1816, fos. 442d.-443; A.34/1, Servants' Characters and Staff Records, 1822-30, p. 5.

specifics of the fur trade and the principles of economy upon which the business was henceforth to be conducted. These were the men who would rise to positions of responsibility. Training as a clerk was now essential to ensure that officers possessed "habits of regularity & correctness in business."⁷⁹ Clerks were also another means by which the committee achieved greater control. The committee assured Thomas Vincent that the clerks were not intended to be "spies" on the conduct of the trader, that their memoranda of all the goods would ensure "greater regularity." But, since they were in charge of the accounts and the books of the post and of the stores, from which they distributed goods according to the master's written orders,⁸⁰ their presence made it impossible for officers to conceal extravagance and dishonesty, thereby allowing the transformation of the company into an efficient and economical enterprise. The old ways would be eliminated by sending out "young men of good education" from England,⁸¹ who, moreover, because of high unemployment among them, would be available in such abundance that high wages would be unnecessary. Indeed, Andrew Colvile observed, "it ought to be considered that the real remuneration is to be obtained afterwards by the advancement in the service w^{ch} those young men would qualify themselves for the superior Situations will assuredly receive."⁸²

The committee hoped for great things from this opportunity to introduce new blood to the service. "We think," wrote the committee in 1818, "much benefit will be derived from respectable clerks at the Out Posts who may be depended upon for activity & care of the goods in place of trusting so much to the old hands among the Common men & a succession of Experienced Traders will thus be formed in a few years." But "a great deal" depended on the "management of the Superior officers, upon the example which they may shew & upon their

⁷⁹HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Robert Semple, 27 May 1815, p. 284.

⁸⁰HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, fo. 153; A.6/19, London committee to Thomas Vincent, 18 May 1816, fo. 14.

⁸¹HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to Thomas Vincent, 14 May 1817, fos. 25d.-27.

⁸²HBCA, A.5/6, Andrew Colvile to John McDonald, 25 April 1818, fo. 18.

treating the Young men in a kind & liberal manner while they conduct themselves properly & attend to their duty." The committee added that "various circumstances" had led it to believe that "an injudicious & short sighted oeconomy" had "been adopted towards the Young Clerks & the men," which tended to "disgust them with the Country & the Service of the Company..." In particular, in many instances the "principal Officer" at a post had not associated with the clerks and shared with them "the little luxuries within his reach, which has driven the Clerks to associate with the common men."⁸³ No, clerks had to be made to "feel the importance" of their situation. They needed to learn that orders had to be obeyed "implicitly," but they were to "partake" of the "little luxuries on the mess table" and be made "sensible by acts of kindness that they are only considered as parts of one family."⁸⁴ Here, the committee explicitly described the post as a household in the traditional sense with clerks welcomed in and tied to it with bonds of affection. At the same time, it sharpened the distinctions between officers and servants by requiring of the former skills that the latter rarely possessed and increased the distance between itself and its servants through the interposition of an expanded managerial stratum.

The ordinary servants were more firmly relegated to the bottom:

the Common Men should be impressed with a proper sense of their duty, to yield most exact obedience to the commands of the Officers sent over them. They must be made to feel, that they are not to judge for themselves what is proper to be done, but to do neither more nor less than their officers shall order them.

"Discipline appears to have been relaxed to the most pernicious degree," the committee declare. Conveniently ignoring its frequent disregard of the punishments its officers had prescribed, it identified "the neglect of our principal Officers to enforce due obedience on the part of the Men" as "the one most important cause of the decline of the Trade." Henceforth, Chief Factors were to overlook "no disobedience or improper behaviour" anywhere.⁸⁵ Moreover, procedures for the

⁸³HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to James Bird, 20 May 1818, fos. 49-49d.

⁸⁴HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to Thomas Vincent, 20 May 1818, fo. 59d.

⁸⁵HBCA, PP 1810-1, Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay 31 May 1810, p. 9.

enforcement of discipline reflected the formality and rigidity of the rest of the new organization. In any case "of an aggravated nature" the offender would be brought to the factory by his officer or some other "confidential person" to be judged by the Chief Factor "with due solemnity." The officer making the complaint had to submit a written charge and the accused receive the opportunity to state his defence. The Chief Factor would take as his "Assessors" any two or more of "the most respectable Officers" at the place and hear the evidence from both sides, take notes of everything, and submit them to the committee through the superintendent. Any man found guilty would be fined the full amount of his wages and sent home by the first opportunity "for the further determination of the committee on his case" unless the Superintendent had a reason to order otherwise.⁸⁶ In this way, the committee extended "systematic management" to discipline and increased the stack of paperwork demanded of the officers.

New improved discipline also required new improved servants. Instead of relying on "the very inefficient men" supplied by the Orkney Islands in the last few years, the company would look to the western coast and islands of Scotland where "a more spirited race" could be found.⁸⁷ These new men would not mingle with the old servants lest the bounties and too ample rations they still received excited "unpleasant feelings" amongst the newcomers who were not to be spoiled "by improper Indulgence."⁸⁸ "A Set of completely new Men" was to be placed under the command of William Hillier, an ex-army officer, to be inculcated with "habits of subordination" without fear of contamination from "Men accustomed to a more relaxed state of discipline." Together with any nearby Canadian servants, these new recruits would be guided to

⁸⁶HBCA, PP 1810-1, Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay 31 May 1810, p. 9.

⁸⁷HBCA, A.5/5, A. Lean to G. Geddes, 8 Dec. 1810, fo. 31.; PP 1810-1, Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay 31 May 1810, p. 9.

⁸⁸HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Vincent, 31 May 1810, p. 7.

the East Winnipeg factory by "trusty" men, there to direct their energies against the NWC.⁸⁹ Success against the Canadians depended on the men's supporting their officers, which they would never do where the "lax discipline" that had "prevailed" in the service continued to exist. No longer could servants take "into consideration whether the orders of their superiors are to be obeyed or not." That this situation had arisen was, the committee said, due not to "any intrinsic defect in the character of the Orkney men," but to "the indulgences & improper compliances & familiarities, which they have experienced from their Superiors" and which "would have rendered any set of men intractable." These "bad habits" might be cured by "perseverance in enforcing the obedience that is due," but "where habits of insubordination have been enfirm'd by a long system of mismanagement they are not to be cured at once, nor without a great effort..." It was probably easier to restore order "by the introduction of a new set of men, from other parts of the Kingdom, who being order'd from the first to habits of prompt & exact obedience might be depended upon in every situation."⁹⁰ Thus, retrenchment would restore the discipline and subordination that the committee and its officers believed had been lost.

The "Retrenching System" might also be considered part of what Michael Payne has called "the campaign to undermine customary rights in the fur trade and to substitute a system of remuneration for work based on wages alone for the older complicated system of remuneration based on both wages and non-financial or indirectly financial benefits," which he considers to have begun after 1821. To this effort he attributes the fact that the company began to make it harder for both officers and men to wear furs by requiring them in 1825 to trade any they trapped to the company at the same standard of trade as the Indians and in 1841 to purchase them for the same price as prime furs fetched at London auctions.⁹¹ But, the committee began this

⁸⁹HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to William Auld and Thomas Thomas, 31 May 1811, pp. 27-8.

⁹⁰HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 175-176.

⁹¹Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870," 371-2.

campaign in 1810. It planned to introduce greater economy by eliminating many of the nonmonetary benefits and indulgences that everyone had taken for granted for the last century. No longer, declared the committee, would it supply "extravagant" imported provisions for men who were "natives" of a country "where butchers' meat forms scarcely any part of the ordinary diet of the labouring people." In 1811 the quantity of meat sent would be reduced by three quarters and the difference made up by pemmican from the Winnipeg and Saskatchewan districts, while Indians would be encouraged to grow vegetables around the posts.⁹² The fact that servants sold their provisions to the Canadians and their own officers not only subverted "Discipline and Subordination," it also indicated a "Superfluity" in their allowances.⁹³ The company would no longer supply clothing, leather, except for two pairs of shoes when men were tracking boats, or brandy during journeys and it would no longer pay for furs trapped by servants. Also, no longer could anyone take a wife without permission from the governor of his department.⁹⁴ That the committee hoped to do away entirely with nonmonetary benefits is suggested by its willingness to increase wages to compensate for their loss and to hire men on three year contracts with no allowances at all.⁹⁵ In the past, the HBC could boast to the hostile Rev. Francis Liddell that, although wages in the service were low, they were only a small part of what servants received, since their support equaled £40 a year and "few sober men can spend any part of their wages in Hudsons Bay."⁹⁶ Now the men would support themselves to a large extent by producing their own food and spending some of their wages on clothing.

⁹²HBCA, PP 1810-1, Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay 31 May 1810, pp. 6-7.

⁹³HBCA, B.42/b/55, William Auld to James Bird, 8 March 1811, fo. 5; A.6/18, London committee to Robert Semple, 27 May 1815, p. 285; B.59/b/30, Thomas Thomas to George Gladman, 20 April 1811, p. 5.

⁹⁴HBCA, A.5/5, A. Lean to Alexander Kennedy, 16 April 1811, fo. 44; B.3/a/118, Albany journal, 1814-15. Thomas Vincent to Jacob Corrigan, n.d., fos. 3d.-4.

⁹⁵HBCA, A.1/50, Minutes of the London Committee, 1810-1814, 5 Dec. 1810, fo. 11.

⁹⁶HBCA, A.5/3, A. Lean to Rev. Francis Liddell, 17 May 1794, fo. 132d.

Although there was no wholesale attack on the men's amusements or customs as was increasingly the case in Britain, officers were not discouraged from taking steps in that direction in order to reduce the unprofitable use of the company's goods. Thus, one officer was commended for refusing to permit his men to celebrate St. George's Day, 23 May, in the usual manner by firing at a target and drinking brandy on the grounds that it was "an unnecessary expense."⁹⁷ The superintendents of the two departments agreed to curtail the manufacture of chests for the men by company carpenters, a custom that put the company to considerable expense. Men cutting down timber for the posts kept the best for themselves to supply wood for the chests. Blacksmiths ordered large quantities of iron and steel to make locks, hinges, and handles, in the manufacture of which they also used the HBC's tools and coal. Moreover, the servants demanded high quality locks with "numerous securities against picklocks." From now on these chests would be manufactured only when it could be "conveniently done," the men would have to pay 20 shillings for them, and cheap ready made locks would be ordered from England.⁹⁸ Nor was the company's time any longer to be squandered. Officers and servants waiting for ships to take them home, rather than being "kept idle," would spend the time which, after all, the HBC had purchased, transporting goods to the interior or performing whatever other tasks could be found for them.⁹⁹ The committee also frowned upon "the laziness of the workmen" and criticized the "misapplication of labour." It considered the method of haymaking "ridiculous" and deplored the fact that the collection of firewood appeared to be "the main activity" of most of the men. It decided that the "improper construction" of fireplaces led to such enormous fuel consumption and, recommending that a lesson be taken from "other northern countries," decided to substitute stoves. Gathering wood would now take up less time, while the workshops would be more "comfortable" and work could continue even in the severe cold. The

⁹⁷HBCA, B.145/a/26, New Brunswick House Journal, 1811-12, 23 May 1812, fo. 14.

⁹⁸HBCA, B.42/a/136^a, Churchill journal, 1810-11, "Mr Aulds Memorandum Book," fos. 8-8d.

⁹⁹HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Robert Semple, 27 May 1815, p. 288.

committee also attacked the traditional autonomy of the artisan. To prevent the "waste of labour," each HBC craftsman was to keep a memorandum book in which he specified what he and any apprentices or journeymen under him did each day and, at the "conclusion of any work set down," the "money price" which he would be "entitled" to charge in his native country in a column "ruled for that purpose." He was also to record the quantity of materials used and the "extent of the work according to any sort of measurement" which could be applied. And all journals were to have a separate section for keeping an "exact diary" of the employment of all the men.¹⁰⁰ In this way, costs could be calculated more precisely and the men's efficiency, diligence, and honesty more easily judged. Since most of the HBC's work was performed without direct supervision from officers, such records would make it possible, as never before, to determine who squandered the company's time or materials. Frederick Taylor would have approved.

Retrenchment also introduced a new system of remuneration for both officers and servants. Officers presented a more complicated problem than ordinary servants, who, as servants, occupied a position which relegated them to complete subordination. Officers had to obey the committee, but, at the same time, exercise their own authority and deal with the daily affairs of the trade with a degree of independence. Employers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally mistrusted men hired to manage their enterprises, because, since they were salaried, it was assumed that they had no stake in the business and were therefore untrustworthy. Bad management provided by such uninterested men was seen as the ruin of many large-scale companies and as evidence that self-interest was "the only possible driving force in industry."¹⁰¹ Much of the self-interest of the HBC's officers had heretofore been directed at illicit trade and self-aggrandizement and their energy expended on rivalries among

¹⁰⁰HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 195-9.

¹⁰¹Sidney Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), 12-23.

themselves.¹⁰² In 1806 the committee tried to motivate the chief officers by supplementing their salaries with one per cent of the profits of each consignment of goods sent to them. In 1809 it moved to abolish fixed salaries for Chief Factors in order for them "to participate in the Success of the Trade by making their remuneration arise from their exertions" and decided to allow them a fixed premium on each fur traded at their factories and at the posts within their districts. In the following year, traders would also receive premiums on the furs they collected and a sum equal to their premiums would be divided among their men. In this way, it was hoped, everyone would be motivated to do his utmost for his masters. In 1810, the committee decided to set aside half of the profits to be divided among the officers, a third going to each of the superintendents of the departments and the remaining third divided equally among the other officers. Until this system was properly established, officers would continue receiving salaries as well as guaranteed shares of the profits. For the next three years superintendents would receive annual salaries of £150 each plus a share of the profits amounting to at least £250. Chief Factors were guaranteed salaries of £100 and £50 in profits, while traders received £50 in salaries and £20 from the profits.¹⁰³ These provisions were subject to further refinement as circumstances dictated.

In 1813, the committee decided that, since "frontier posts" were less profitable than those nearer to the Bay, their profits would be combined and divided equally among the officers stationed there. Accountants would receive salaries of £60 a year instead of shares of the profits. And, because the profits had not proved to be as high as had been hoped, officers' salaries were to be continued for another three years.¹⁰⁴ In 1814 the committee decided that the fund of profits from the "frontier posts" would provide bonuses for their officers. The rest of the

¹⁰²HBCA, A.6/16, London committee to Albany, 25 May 1803, fo. 159d.; A.5/3, London committee to John McNab, 30 May 1795, fo. 152d.

¹⁰³HBCA, A.6/17, London committee to officers at Albany, 26 May 1809, fos. 157-157d.; A.6/18, London Committee to William Auld, 31 May 1810, pp. 1-2; Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Volume II, 291-2.

¹⁰⁴HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 26 May 1813, pp. 94-95, 101.

profits would be divided into one hundred shares, of which Superintendents would get ten each, District Masters four each, Second Masters two, and Junior Masters one. These positions were Chief Factors, Chief Traders, and Traders with new names. The committee also decided to introduce a Second to the superintendent, now often referred to as the governor, to supervise the masters of the trading districts. He would receive two shares of the profit. The Southern Department soon after received two Seconds, perhaps due to a suggestion made by Thomas Vincent while he was acting governor in 1814, that a Second in that department had more to do than a Chief Factor and there should be two.¹⁰⁵ The committee feared, however, that giving shares to junior officers provided them with too much information about the company's affairs. Therefore, in 1815, it decided to limit shares to "Chiefs or Officers of the First Rank" and throw the shares then assigned to Seconds and Masters into "an aggregate fund" from which they would be paid salaries. Although this new arrangement might "weaken & confine that stimulus to exertion, which it has been the great object of the new arrangements to give," the supervision of "seven or eight superior officers deeply interested in the success of the trade" would be enough to prevent "any neglect" on the part of those under their command. In fact, junior officers were naturally looking to promotion and, with "every one anxious to lay a foundation for this by shewing a good balance of profit upon the account current of the Post under his charge," they would surely behave. The profits of each trading district would be apparent from the annual statements submitted to superior officers by the accountants and naturally any man aspiring to promotion would try to ensure that the statement from his post reflected favourably on himself.¹⁰⁶ Even junior officers could, therefore, consider themselves partners in the enterprise and, although not guaranteed promotion, conduct themselves in such a way as to prove themselves worthy to ascend to whatever positions opened up.

¹⁰⁵Rich, *History of the Hudson's Bay Company, Volume II*, 313; HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 157-8; B.239/b/85, Thomas Vincent to Thomas Thomas, 3 Dec. 1814, fo. 11.

¹⁰⁶HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Robert Semple, 31 May 1815, pp. 312-14.

The committee also had new plans for the servants. The committee had always preferred to reward men for their efforts by offering bonuses instead of raising wages and had offered bounties to persuade servants to perform new duties, travel inland, and renew their contracts.¹⁰⁷ Now it planned to abolish all such bonuses and hire men at "fixed wages,"¹⁰⁸ though it hoped eventually to replace these with payment by the task. The HBC was not alone in adopting the attitude that a system of payment by results was an effective way of remunerating and controlling workers. Piece work, long standard in such occupations as mining where supervision was difficult, was considered "quaint" and "peculiar" until the second quarter of the nineteenth century when it became "the managerial orthodoxy." Piece work came to dominate the putting out trades, but it was also introduced into the factory where time wages were more logical. But, as John Rule has observed, the principle that underlay the piece work system was "the stick" not "the carrot." Piece rates were so low that workers had to work harder and longer to earn the same income as before. Their purpose was to transfer to employers the control over the pace of work that workers had traditionally enjoyed.¹⁰⁹ Employers' acceptance of the desirability of piece work was a manifestation of their increasing withdrawal from the rituals and celebrations that had cemented relations between masters and workers. Sidney Pollard has

¹⁰⁷See: HBCA, A.5/2, London committee to Humphrey Marten, 14 May 1777, fo. 27; London committee to Thomas Hutchins, 12 May 1779, fo. 40; B.135/c/1, London committee to council at Moose, 21 May 1788, fo. 195d.; B.42/b/44, Council at Churchill to London committee, n.d. 1794, fo. 51d.; A.5/4, Alex Lean to D. Geddes, 16 May 1798, fo. 35; B.135/c/1, London committee to council at Moose, 21 May 1788, fo. 195d.; B.42/b/44, Council at Churchill to London committee, n.d. 1794, fo. 51d.; A.5/4, Alex Lean to D. Geddes, 16 May 1798, fo. 35; HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to council at Albany, 30 May 1795; A.6/17, London committee to William Auld, 30 May 1804, fo. 27d. A.6/17, London committee to John Hodgson and council at Albany, 31 May 1806, fo. 68.A.5/3, Alex Lean to David Geddes, 2 Feb. 1795, fo. 146; A.5/4, Alex Lean to David Geddes, 27 May 1807, fo. 174d.; A.5/4, A Lean to David Geddes, 25 May 1807, fos. 170d.-171; A6/17, London committee to council at Albany, 20 May 1808, fos. 124d.-125.

¹⁰⁸HBCA, A.5/5, A. Lean to G. Geddes, 8 Dec. 1810, fo. 31.

¹⁰⁹John Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850 (London; New York: Longman, 1986), 120-26; Bob Bushaway, By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880 (London: Junction Books, 1982), 111-18.

pointed out that older systems of payment by results, particularly in mining, were a type of "group piecework" in which the "cohesion and ethos" of the group were as much a source of discipline as the wage. The new systems were aimed at individual effort and also, Pollard suggests, marked "a major change and forward step" in the employers' attitude towards labour. It signified the beginning of the notion that workers were responsive to monetary incentives and an end to the belief that workers were looking only for subsistence and that longterm contracts were effective sources of discipline.¹¹⁰

In 1814 the committee decided enthusiastically that employing men "by the piece in lieu of fixed yearly wages ought to be adopted in every department where practicable." The committee began by introducing it in the timber business, limping along near Moose Factory since 1809, and in the construction of a winter road from York Factory to the outlet of Lake Winnipeg. It was not specific about how this plan would work at the sawmill, but thought that the roadbuilders would purchase provisions and European goods from the company and receive a small piece of land to cultivate for themselves. The committee expected these conditions to prove most beneficial. The men themselves would have "a strong motive for economy, as well as industry" and, even if their earnings by the piece were less than the current level of wages and they had to pay for their supplies, they could feed themselves from their gardens. Once it became clear how much money could be saved under the new system, others would be "tempted to apply for the same advantages, and this competition" would permit the reduction of "the rates of payment." It was this beneficial effect that made it worth introducing piece work even "where no immediate saving may arise from it." Moreover, the committee remarked,

The introduction of piece work may be of use collaterally in exciting some emulation in the workmen who are employed by the year and enabling the Officers to judge more correctly whether these men do fair days' work. It appears very evident that some stimulus is much wanted: & that the quantity of work done by our people both labourers & tradesmen; bears no proportion to the days' work of a man in any part of Britain. The enormous length of time employed by the Carpenters at York in making the Boats supplied to the Red River Settlement is disgraceful; and we have learnt with surprize that at some of the Southern

¹¹⁰Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management, 190-91.

Factories the workmen have been allowed to consider half the day as their own time. The remedy of such gross abuses deserves your most serious attention.¹¹¹

Furthermore, since the committee was unable to recruit as many officers "as advisable" to supervise the men working on these special projects, the employment of men "at Piece work" would provide "sufficient stimulus" to keep them at work with only a "trusty man" to take charge of and serve out provisions and liquor.¹¹²

At the sawmill near Moose Factory, Alexander Christie, was advised that men were to be employed "by the piece" in his department,¹¹³ while eight Norwegians, "expert axemen," were hired to begin the construction of the winter road between Lake Winnipeg and York Factory. This road was to have a chain of five posts to accommodate the men and horses employed in the transportation of goods along the route and the Norwegians were to begin work on the first post, Norway House, at the outlet of the lake. The terms upon which they were hired were a mixture of old and new. They were engaged for three years at £20 a year, but to encourage them to exert themselves, they were told that when any of them had cleared 15 acres of land and planted it with potatoes or grain, he would be considered to have performed his service of three years and receive his three years' wages. If he cleared and planted more land than required he would receive £4 a year for the surplus. And, as an additional incentive, they would receive a premium of one shilling for every bushel of potatoes harvested from each acre over and above 80 bushels per acre and 3 shillings for every bushel of grain over 15 bushels per acre.¹¹⁴ The agreement did not, however, stipulate that the men purchase their provisions, since the committee expressed its opinion that paying the men wages for three years when they might complete their tasks in two would prove profitable because the company would save the expense of one year's provisions and have the job done sooner than it would have been by men under the

¹¹¹HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 193-5.

¹¹²HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 28 May 1814, pp. 230-1.

¹¹³HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Alexander Christie, 25 May 1814, pp. 217-8.

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Peter Fidler, 8 Sept. 1814, fos. 1-1d.

usual contract.¹¹⁵ However, only the committee appears to have been optimistic about this innovation.

It expressed surprise that Thomas Thomas, the superintendent of the Southern Department, doubted the "practicability" of "applying the principle of task work" to anything other than the timber business. It declared itself "sensible" that annual wages could not be completely abolished in all cases, but thought that "men may always be stimulated to industry by premiums upon the quantity of work done over and above a specified task," as in the case of the Norwegian labourers. "This principle" might also be applied to "every sort of work that admits of being measured, or that is paid by measurement in this and other countries." Cutting and bringing in firewood and timber, boatbuilding, all types of carpentry, cutting and stacking hay, digging gardens, ditching, and putting up fences could all be rewarded through such bonuses. And, where men were not employed under "the constant supervision of their officers," which had always, of course, been the case for most servants, it would be "very desirable to try its effect." The committee was sure that the Orcadians and the men from the north of Scotland, all of whom had reputations for frugality, would be "stimulated" to "spirit and activity, of which at present many of them appear totally destitute..." If they had the opportunity of adding "from sixpence to a shilling" per day to their "regular wages," they might be "induced to do two or three times as much work" as otherwise.¹¹⁶ The committee responded to Alexander Christie's doubts by suggesting that the "Prejudice of the Men & their Unwillingness to work by the Piece" might be "surmounted by Firmness & Temper" on his part and "by convincing them that the plan proposed is calculated as much for their Advantage as the Company's..." It also commended him for allowing some of the men to leave and keeping only "the most deserving." The situation looked promising now and the committee expected that the "success" of the Norwegians in "their piece

¹¹⁵HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 28 May, 1814, pp. 231-2.

¹¹⁶HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 4 Jan. 1815, pp. 252-3.

work" would "most likely induce others to work in the same way."¹¹⁷ But, these hopes were to be dashed. The timber business faded away while the Norwegians stationed at Norway House demonstrated their indifference to this new incentive by doing little more than terrorizing their hapless overseer.¹¹⁸ Thomas's efforts to replace them with men from the new settlement proved fruitless.¹¹⁹ The committee dropped its efforts to extend piece work and made no further attempt to introduce piece work until the 1850s in the company's coal mining operation on Vancouver Island. Its success there demonstrated the futility of innovations that clashed with servants' expectations. For colliers, piece work was the traditional, accepted method of remuneration and it was the company's attempt to hire miners on its usual terms that led to resistance and discontentment among them.¹²⁰

Although the introduction of piece work failed in 1815, the London committee had introduced another plan that might have the same effect, namely, the establishment of a colony, which would some day supply both cheap and reliable provisions and cheap and reliable labour. In 1810 the committee decided to offer one hundred acres of land and the opportunity to purchase more on good terms to retiring servants who had fulfilled their contracts with a "good character."¹²¹ It soon added the promise that the land would be held by the men "in perpetuity," their families would be transported to the country at low cost, and for every additional three years of service employees would be entitled to an additional one hundred acres. Anyone willing to engage for a five year term would receive two hundred acres at the end of the period.¹²² If men responded appropriately to these offers, the company would finally have the tractable, reliable,

¹¹⁷HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Alexander Christie, 27 May 1815, pp. 304-5.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.239/b/85, James Sutherland to Thomas Thomas, 28 Feb. 1815, fos. 29d.-30.

¹¹⁹HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Miles Macdonell, 25 March 1815, fos. 38d.-39.

¹²⁰See Chapter 6.

¹²¹HBCA, A.5/5, Secretary to Charles McLean, 4 Dec. 1810, fos. 32-32d.

¹²²HBCA, A.5/5, Secretary to Charles McLean, 10 Jan. 1811, fo. 35d.

and experienced employees it had always wanted, men with all the virtues of Orcadians, but none of the drawbacks. They would be accustomed to the country and have few alternatives to employment with the HBC. Transporting them to their posts would be easy and their removal equally simple if they proved undesirable. The provisions produced by the settlement would eliminate the necessity of importing supplies, further reducing the company's expenses. But, it was a bad time to attempt such a reorganization. Continuing competition with the NWC made frugality impossible, the Canadians' attacks on the colony delayed its permanent establishment, and the company's need for manpower meant it still employed men like Andrew Spence, reported as "too independent & masterly to be a good Servant" and possessing "a temper that sets at defiance all order & regularity that ought to be observed between master & man."¹²³ The merger of the rival companies promised a solution to all these problems.

The re-organization of 1821 has been credited with sharpening the distinction between gentlemen and servants and eliminating the possibility of promotion for the latter. As evidence for this change, Jennifer Brown cites the committee's order in 1824 that commissioned officers and clerks were henceforth to mess separately from lower-ranked servants and the fact that, after the merger the company "began to devise general criteria by which to assess and predict the utility and future performance of employees already on company books as well as of future applicants."¹²⁴ But, officers had always messed together at their posts and aboard the company's ships. Clerks had been dining at the chief's table since the 1790s to "serve as an Excitement to their Assiduity, and Maintain a proper distinction between them and the common Men."¹²⁵ Writers and clerks had always been encouraged to think of themselves as gentlemen,

¹²³HBCA, B.159/a/7, Fort Pelly Journal, 1818-19, 13 Dec. 1818, fo. 8d; 23 March 1819, fo. 16d.

¹²⁴Brown, *Strangers in Blood*, 205, 206.

¹²⁵Glyndwr Williams, ed. *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay 1767-91* (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1969), 243; HBCA, A.6/16, London committee to council at Albany, 31 May 1797, fo. 37; A.5/5, W. Smith, secretary, to John McDonald, 15 April 1818, fo. 187.

to set moral examples for their men, and to avoid mingling with them lest they be corrupted.¹²⁶ Nor had it ever been entirely proper for officers to join in the work of the common servants and situations that had made it necessary did not sit well with status-conscious officers. Thomas Staynor, in his journal of 1789-90 had complained that "Custom has made it become Natural to expect the same Work from every one who goes the Journey" and, as a result, he was required to "work the same as a labouring Man, /tho' in the Station of an officer./" Inland duty was not for such as he, he declared: "People, who have been brought up to Labour from their Infancy are much fittest for Your Honors[sic] Inland Service." He was himself not "fully capable" of carrying heavy loads for long distances; nor did he "consider it requisite" for him to do so." To require officers to perform such heavy labour was, he declared, "unreasonable" and "demeans your Service very much."¹²⁷ Under normal circumstances the committee agreed with him. In 1813 it pointed out that officers "should not unless in Instances of Necessity join in the labour of the inferior servants; it lessens their dignity & loosens too much those Bonds of Discipline which arise from the respect felt for the superiority of the officers Station & Rank."¹²⁸ The normal procedure was for the master of the post or his assistant, if there was one, to give the servants their orders for the day and then leave them to it. Social contact occurred only on special occasions such as Christmas, when officers appeared briefly to dispense treats and paternalistic condescension. Fraternization outside of such functions led to suspicion. More than one officer was censured for mixing with his inferiors. William Harper, who had served as sloopmaster for nine years and always performed satisfactorily, was criticized because "he associates too much

¹²⁶HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to Council at Churchill, 19 May 1784, fo. 6d.; A.11/44, John Thomas to London committee, 2 Sept. 1789, fos. 123-123d.; B.3/b/18, "Instructions for Mr John Hodgson Locum Tenens at Henley House," 20 Aug. 1781, fo. 45d.

¹²⁷HBCA, B.121/a/5, Manchester House Journal, 1789-90, 1 Nov. 1789, fos. 7-7d; 13 June 1790, fo. 46.

¹²⁸HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 26 May 1813, p. 98.

with the Men for an Officer in his Station."¹²⁹ Likewise, Jacob Truthwaite was reported as satisfactory except for "being on too great terms of familiarity with those under his command."¹³⁰

Regular evaluations of employees was not new either. Their characters and habits had always been reported in letters, journals, and servants' lists and deserving servants had received certificates of good character without which they would not be permitted to re-enter the service after quitting.¹³¹ More recently, in 1814, the committee had outlined clearly on what basis its employees would be evaluated. Of course, Brown's major concern was the fact that after 1821 race became "one major criterion used in judging employees," and that the "more rigid stratification" of the company was "soon matched by equally rigid racial distinctions."¹³² These distinctions were now increasingly important, but, although they prevented *qualified* men from assuming positions they might have occupied before 1821, they were less significant for common servants because their prospects were already limited. The significance of the increased rigidity produced by the merger was that it produced new distinctions between officers. The committee could now finally exercise the preference it had always had for hiring qualified men from outside as officers rather than promoting from the lower ranks. It was not so much, as Michael Payne has suggested, the hardening of a traditional hierarchy,¹³³ but the addition to it of a management stratum of middle class white-collar workers with pretensions to gentility and respectability. Educated young men possessing commercial skills were now preferred to those experienced only in the ways of the fur trade and they were expected to abandon ungentlemanly conduct which, in Rupert's Land, included excessive drinking, the use of uncouth language, and

¹²⁹HBCA, B.3/e/4, Annual Report of the Albany District, 1817-18, fo. 2.

¹³⁰HBCA, B.145/e/10, Annual Report of the New Brunswick District, 1819-20, fo. 2d.

¹³¹HBCA, A.6/14, London committee to Edward Jarvis and council at Albany, 16 May 1787, fo. 2d.

¹³²Brown, Strangers in Blood, 205-6.

¹³³Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870," 484-5.

the acquisition of native wives. George Simpson epitomized the new type of officer. Recruited from outside, promoted over the heads of older, experienced officers, he ruthlessly stamped out inefficiency and waste wherever he found it. His personal life was a model of middle class respectability: after sowing some wild oats, he acquired an ornamental, British wife and became a family man, a pillar of society, and eventually an important member of the "commercial aristocracy of Montreal" with extensive business interests.¹³⁴ But, his meteoric rise to the top was impossible for most of those who came after him because men now had to progress through a hierarchy of ranks that was more clearly defined than ever before.

The merger of 1821 was a partnership agreement binding for 21 years. The officers were divided into three ranks. At the top were twenty-three Chief Factors. Below them were twenty-eight Chief Traders. The profits of the trade were to be divided into one hundred shares and of these forty shares were reserved for these two groups of officers. These forty shares were split into eighty-five sub-shares. Each Chief Factor would receive two of these and each Chief Trader would receive one in lieu of a salary. The ten remaining sub-shares were to support redundant officers during the first seven years of the coalition. After that, these sub-shares would be combined with ten whole shares to provide for retiring personnel. The Northern and the Southern Departments were each to have a council. The Northern Council was to have a governor and at least seven Chief Factors and the Southern Council a governor and at least three Chief Factors. When Chief Factors were unable to attend meetings, Chief Traders could fill in for them. Decisions were made by a majority of the council, but had to be approved by the

¹³⁴John S. Galbraith, The Little Emperor. Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976), 90; 171-86. Unfortunately, George Simpson's biographers have focused on his role as the HBC's governor in chief and even Galbraith devotes only a small proportion of his book and his biography of Simpson in the eighth volume of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography to Simpson's other life. By 1826 Simpson was based in Lachine and, although he undertook frequent expeditions through his fur trade domain and kept himself well informed about the business, he was as distant from the everyday life of his subordinates as the committee in London. George Simpson was a businessman and his concern was to ensure that the ventures in which he was involved, whether as manager or investor, realized a profit. He viewed the HBC not from inside a "fur trade society," but rather from a "world of balance sheets." (Galbraith, 17)

governors.¹³⁵ In 1821, these ranks were assigned to the officers with the most seniority and prestige and their names were listed in the Deed Poll that defined their duties and privileges. The rest became clerks, paid salaries rather than sharing in the profits of trade, and promoted only when a place at the top fell vacant. The road from clerk to commissioned gentleman might now be exceedingly long.

It took Robert Campbell 33 years to advance from clerk to chief factor. Others *never* made it to the top. Charles McKenzie, for example, had joined McTavish, Frobisher and Company, one of the firms in the North West Company, in 1802 as an apprentice clerk. He remained with the HBC when the two companies merged in 1821, left the service in 1823, but returned in 1827. When he retired in 1854, he was still a clerk, a fact which he deeply resented.¹³⁶ Years of service might be rewarded with nothing other than the security of more years of service. Indeed, the ideal officer no longer possessed lofty ambitions, but instead resembled John Scott who was in charge of Split Lake when George Simpson passed through in August of 1824. Scott impressed Simpson as a "plain stupid oeconomical Man but competent to the management of a small post in this part of the Country." Scott was "at the height of his ambition on a Sal^y of £40 p. Annum" and, Simpson remarked,

it is to be regretted we have so few of his description in the Service instead of Young Gentlemen of higher expectations who can never be provided for by shares in the concern and to whom the business cannot afford such Sal^{ys} as their qualifications and respectability might appear to entitle them and who consequently become dissatisfied and disaffected.¹³⁷

¹³⁵Rich, History of the Hudson's Bay Company Volume I, 406-7.

¹³⁶Coates, Kenneth Stephen, "Robert Campbell," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Volume XII 1891 to 1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 155-166; Charles A. Bishop, "Charles McKenzie," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Volume VIII 1851 to 1860 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 556-557. See also Philip Goldring, "Governor Simpson's Officers: Elite Recruitment in a British Overseas Enterprise, 1834-1870," Prairie Forum 10 (Fall 1985): 276-8. The table summarizing the post-1821 careers of 111 chief traders that appears on these pages suggests that an apprentice clerk or a clerk might wait over twenty years before being promoted into the ranks of the elite officers.

¹³⁷Frederick Merk, ed., Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal Entitled Remarks Connected with the Fur Trade in the Course of a Voyage from York Factory to Fort George and

Dissatisfaction also grew because, as William Mactavish complained, "partiality will do everything, & interest in this service is all in all, a few quarrels among the Nobs & you are done for ever let you be as useful as you may." Even worse, it was not necessary to promote a good clerk "so as to secure him" because "after being for about 10 or 12 years engaged in the Fur Trade a man becomes totally unfit for other business, & of course feels his incapacity," and was therefore "obliged to stick by the Country." The "Gents" also knew that almost all had families in the country and therefore were unwilling to leave since "those families are most of them at least perfectly unable to appear in society." And getting wives in England would "never do" because the conditions were intolerable for British women.¹³⁸ Like their white-collar counterparts in more conventional enterprises, junior HBC officers might now have to settle for modest economic rewards and seek consolation in their distinction from the servants and whatever constituted "the paraphernalia of gentility"¹³⁹ in Rupert's Land, such as the uniform which had been adopted for all "gentlemen" in 1825 at George Simpson's suggestion. He thought it would "add to the respectability of the service in a certain degree in the estimation of our Servants" and "tend to introduce a certain Esprit du Corps which is much required." And, ever concerned with economy, he also pointed out that it would reduce both a gentleman's baggage and his clothing bills. He proposed that all gentlemen, clerks included, each be required to provide himself through the company's clothier with a dress and voyaging uniform as well as a side arm. Although uniforms were worn only on formal occasions, according to James Hargrave, officers always carried pistols and a sword for "defence and amusement."¹⁴⁰ Every officer, even

Back to York Factory 1824-25 With Related Documents (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, rev. ed. 1968), 6.

¹³⁸NAC, MG 19 A 21, Hargrave Papers, series 4, William Mactavish correspondence. William Mactavish to Mary Mactavish, 17 Sept. 1837, pp. 262-3.

¹³⁹J. A. Banks, Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning among the Victorian Middle Class (London: Routledge & Paul, 1954), 87.

¹⁴⁰HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to governor and committee, 25 August 1825, fo. 199d.-200d; National Archives of Canada, MG 19 A21, James Hargrave Correspondence. James Hargrave to William Lockie, 3 Jan. 1826.

the most humble clerk, thus, possessed a visible reminder of his superiority, even though many clerks found themselves spending more years than they had anticipated in what George Barnston called "Paper Bondage."¹⁴¹

The merger seemed to elevate the senior officers to grand heights, but it actually undermined their independence. The annual meetings of the councils of the Northern and Southern Departments centralized and co-ordinated the operations of each department. Officers had to run their districts or posts according to what had been decided in council, although, since they comprised the councils, they should still have had considerable independence. But, they were no match for the energetic and despotic George Simpson who identified himself utterly with his employers and would stop at nothing to eliminate waste and disorder. Simpson exemplified a new type of management, appropriate to modern enterprise and illustrative of a new style of authority, which emphasized uniformity and regularity. Like the social reformers who were horrified to find that criminal subcultures not the supervision of honest, dedicated warders were responsible for whatever order there was in eighteenth-century prisons,¹⁴² Simpson was determined to introduce a whole new regime within an institution which his inspections indicated had become wasteful and lax. He was going to shake up the world the fur traders had made. Having learned about business in his uncle's sugar brokerage firm from where he was recruited in 1820 by Andrew Colville, Simpson possessed neither a sentimental attachment to any of the customs of the country nor an antipathy toward old NWC enemies to deter him from doing what was necessary to make the HBC an efficient, well disciplined organization. His appointment as governor of the Northern Department in 1821 both broke with the past and broke a promise made by another committee in 1688 that it would never "Send New Raw & unexperienced men

¹⁴¹NAC, MG 19 A 21, Hargrave Family Papers. George Barnston to James Hargrave, 22 March 1829, fo. 157. Barnston was complaining that after serving a six year apprenticeship, his "emancipation" was "somewhat alloyed by a trifling Engagement for 3 Years," although it was "not usual now for Clerks to pass such agreements..."

¹⁴²Michael Ignatieff, A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850 (London: Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, Peregrine, 1978), 29-43.

to put over the heads of such as have Served us Longe[sic] & faithfully."¹⁴³ But the times and the committee had clearly changed. A hardheaded and, if necessary, hardhearted, businessman was required to wrench the company's traders out of their lethargy at last.

The course Simpson would pursue was foreshadowed in a private letter to John George McTavish in 1822. His host, Colin Robertson, he reported, was proving to be free of "those narrow constricted illiberal ideas which so much characterise the Gentry of Ruperts Land," and although "as a Man of business he [did] not shine" he had "every inclination to conform to wiser...regulations" and, therefore, Simpson thought, he would prove "a useful member of Council." He would manipulate the officers, but resort to less subtle methods of control for the ordinary servants. Some "Malcontents" had been "troublesome" because their allowances had been shortened, "but a good drubbing has brought them to their Senses."¹⁴⁴ A. S. Morton might have been able to see in Simpson's letters to McTavish "great kindness" and a "laughter-loving character,"¹⁴⁵ but Simpson's words often revealed a harsh disdain for those he considered inferior. A few years later when a pilot "was about to shew the cloven hoof...by arguing a point," Simpson "brought him to his senses in the course of the day by compelling him to Sing in spite of Sore throat." "On the whole," Simpson commented, "I think we shall get on very well."¹⁴⁶ In 1843 he warned Wemyss Simpson against entrusting keys to the stores to any servants because, he observed, "99 out of 100 of our people are Thieves."¹⁴⁷ And, when Simpson referred to the native women he considered fit for his amusement but not for marriage, he used terms that robbed them of their humanity, his reference to Colin Robertson's wife as a "bit of

¹⁴³HBCA, A.6/2, London committee to Governor Geyer and council, 2 June 1688, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴HBCA, B.239/c/1, George Simpson to John George McTavish, 1 Jan. 1822, fo. 66.

¹⁴⁵Arthur S. Morton, Sir George Simpson Overseas Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. A Pen Picture of a Man of Action (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1944), x, 163.

¹⁴⁶HBCA, B.239/c/1, George Simpson to John George McTavish, 4 Aug. 1828, fo. 360.

¹⁴⁷HBCA, B.46/c/1, George Simpson to Wemyss Simpson, 22 Oct. 1843, fo. 5.

Brown" being particularly well known. He also referred to his own "country wives" as an "article" and a "commodity."¹⁴⁸ Of course, since, as Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown have pointed out, in Simpson's opinion, an officer's wife had to be not only white, but also a lady, few women would have enjoyed his approval or received his respect.

Simpson's regime brought an entirely new tone to the company. His appointment as governor of both the Northern and Southern Departments in 1826 together with his regular visits to London beginning in the 1830s entrenched his authority firmly. His enormously detailed annual letters ensured that, even when he was not there in person, it was chiefly his views and his recommendations that came before the committee. As a result, he exercised an unprecedented influence in London. Even a case as complicated and controversial as the murder of John McLoughlin Jr. by his men at Fort Stikine in 1842 resulted in the committee's deferring to Simpson's judgement that the incident was a case of "justifiable homicide" even after it began to entertain doubts about his verdict.¹⁴⁹ His dominance prompted one unhappy officer to ask in 1854, "Is he not the Committee and Governor as regards this Country?"¹⁵⁰ Another officer, John McLean, his ambitions thwarted by Simpson, went much further in his criticism. In his memoirs, published in 1849, he observed that the governor "combined with the prepossessing manners of a gentleman all the craft and subtlety of an intriguing courtier; while his cold and callous heart was incapable of sympathising with the woes and pains of his fellow-men." He had won over the old Nor'westers and acquired such influence with the London committee that he could introduce any measures he desired. The councils had become a sham, the company was "ruled with a rod of iron," and "the mercantile Colony of Rupert's Land" was

¹⁴⁸Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), 161-3.

¹⁴⁹Williams, Glyndwr, ed. London Correspondence Inward from Sir George Simpson 1841-2 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1973), George Simpson to the London committee, 6 July 1842, p. 162. This case is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁰NAC, MG 19 A 44, Charles and Hector Aeneas McKenzie Correspondence, 1828-88. Charles McKenzie to Hector A. McKenzie, 1 May 1854.

governed by an "authority combining the despotism of military rule with the strict surveillance and mean parsimony of the avaricious trader." The disillusioned McLean extended his attack to the whole company, observing that the "object" of "Commercial rule...wherever established, or by whomsoever exercised, is gain" and that "no other object is discernible...thought of...or allowed" in the HBC's dealings with the natives.¹⁵¹ It is significant, however, that McLean should criticize Simpson for his tyranny and the company for its calculating attitude toward the Indians, but neglect entirely the condition of the ordinary servants. As an officer, McLean had only a limited interest in the company's workers, since they were obligated by their position in the hierarchy to submit to whatever rules the company made. But, the Indians were another case entirely. They and other non-European groups were the object of philanthropic concern and the readers of McLean's book might, therefore, be incensed that the company was exploiting people without making them Christians first and sympathize with the officers whom an unfeeling employer prevented from showing that compassion which they had customarily bestowed upon the natives.

Except for Simpson, however, the officers, even those who called themselves "wintering partners," a term originating in the NWC where officers really *were* partners, were only very highly paid and privileged servants, partners only in the sense that their income depended upon the profits their own efforts produced. They might have thought that their knowledge and experience in the trade would give weight to their opinions and decisions. But, they were mistaken. The committee never hesitated to put them in their place. In 1823, after the chief factors had "promulgated" the classification of clerks submitted to them, the committee told them they had "misconceived" the powers bestowed by the Deed Poll of 1821. It had given them only the authority to make suggestions. The classifications had been submitted for their consideration

¹⁵¹McLean, John, Notes of a Twenty-Five Years' Service in the Hudson's Bay Territory, ed. W. S. Wallace (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1932), 327-8, 333-4, 383-6.

and to elicit their opinions, but the committee made the final decisions "in all matters."¹⁵² The following year the committee reprimanded the officers for dismissing a clerk without a trial proving conclusively that he was guilty of "habitual intoxication" or "fraudulent or wilful misapplication of the property." The officers should have submitted the evidence to the committee for "consideration and approval." As for the man's alleged drunkenness, that required "only the proper regulations of his superiors to check it," since liquor was available only from the company's stores. The committee insisted that the man be retained, though as a clerk of lower rank, because his long service and capabilities entitled him to "more consideration" and reprimanded the chief factors for their "misperception of their authority." All rules and regulations made by the officers, all fines levied as punishment for misbehaviour, expulsions of officers from the councils, the dismissal of clerks, and the allowance of provisions required the approval of the London committee. Officers had no right to refuse to carry out any of the committee's orders, though they might protest them. The committee also considered itself obliged to ensure that servants were not charged unfairly for goods.¹⁵³

In 1834, a new deed poll further assailed the officers' position. The "present constitution" permitted chief factors and chief traders to retire whenever they wanted, but, complained the committee, the company had "no power" to "dispense with the services" of any commissioned officer, however "old, infirm or troublesome" he might be. This was "contrary to mercantile usage and to the usage of all public or private Services and might be productive of serious inconvenience and injury to the Concern." Now, officers, like the ordinary workers were subject to dismissal, an "alteration" whose "reasonableness and expediency" no one could possibly question. Moreover, the number of chief factors would be reduced, while the number of chief traders would increase and, "as sole Proprietors of the Country, and of the Capital employed in the Trade," the committee considered it "reasonable" that it had the "power" and

¹⁵²HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 13 March 1823, fos. 45d.-46.

¹⁵³HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 12 March 1824, fos. 52-55d.

"authority" to elect those officers without being "confined" to the "nomination" of the councils as heretofore. The committee considered itself better informed about more candidates and unlikely to be influenced by "feelings of partiality or prejudice."¹⁵⁴ There was now even less room at the top and those who got there had less authority. Moreover, from 1834 Simpson, whose dominance had almost three more decades to expand, resided permanently at Lachine, not in Rupert's Land. Although he kept himself well informed and regularly visited the west, Simpson was a man of business, not a fur trader. His attitude toward the fur trade would have differed from that of those who actually conducted the trade. His towering presence added another layer to the hierarchy of the company and put more distance between the London committee and its employees.

The merger affected the lower ranks too, of course. At last, the company could hire only "efficient valuable Servants" and "none of those, who are only useful during an opposition." Those in debt to the company would be retained so that they could work their debts off. And, since fewer men would now be needed, it was expected that these could be acquired on "much more reasonable terms" than before.¹⁵⁵ As always, for the committee, "reasonable" meant severely reduced wages and benefits. New men should be hired at "a fixed rate of wages" with Orcadian labourers receiving £15 and Canadian middlemen 400 *livres* "Montreal money," equaling £20. Steersmen and bowsman would receive £22,10,- if recruited in the Orkneys and 600 *livres* if from Quebec. When stationed where work was "more severe" and conditions harsher, a small sum would be added in compensation. Skilled workers would get no more than £40 and interpreters no more than £50. The committee expected to eliminate the latter in a few years because it now insisted that no apprentice could be promoted to a clerkship until he could speak "the Indian Language." All remuneration was to be in the form of money. Apprentices would receive "equipments," but men would have to purchase "a proper stock of clothing to

¹⁵⁴HBCA, A.6/23, London committee to George Simpson, 3 march 1834, fo. 76.

¹⁵⁵HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 26 Feb. 1821, fo. 18

enable them to do their work." It was much better, declared the committee, to have a "fair scale of wages" and allow a man to "dispose of his money" as he wanted by setting a "moderate price" on all goods, except for spirits which should be expensive and sold only in limited quantities.

"The more sober and careful of their own means that the men are," the committee observed, "the more careful they will be of the company's property; and these habits will only be produced by giving fair and reasonable wages, and supplying the people with their clothing and other necessities at a moderate profit." The committee also encouraged thrift by prohibiting servants from accumulating debts greater than two thirds of their wages.¹⁵⁶ Gratuities and bonuses for extra services were, finally, eliminated for ordinary servants in 1827.¹⁵⁷ With fewer economic resources, clerks and servants were now responsible for the support of their families.¹⁵⁸

Marriage itself became more regulated. In 1824 marriage to Indian women was prohibited "on any account" and marriage to other women subject to approval from the prospective groom's chief factor.¹⁵⁹ Marriage contracts were introduced obligating a man to support his wife, have a marriage ceremony performed at the first opportunity, and, in some cases, pay a penalty if he failed to fulfill the latter pledge.¹⁶⁰ The costs of marriage were now to be borne by the servant

¹⁵⁶HBCA, A.6/20, London committee to George Simpson, 27 Feb. 1822, fos. 16-16d.

¹⁵⁷HBCA, B.239/k/2, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1832-50. Minutes of 3 June 1835, fo. 57.

¹⁵⁸HBCA, B.135/k/2, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-34. Minutes of 5 and 6 Aug. 1822, fo. 4.

¹⁵⁹HBCA, B.135/k/2, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-34. Minutes of 6 Sept. 1824, fo. 13.

¹⁶⁰HBCA, B.49/z/1, Marriage contract of William Rowland and Betsey Ballenden, 1825, fo. 1; marriage contract of George Ballendine and Jeanny Black, 17 July 1829, fo. 3d.; Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties"*, 117-9. Van Kirk suggests that the insistence on financial compensation in case the man defaulted on his pledge was most common in marriage contracts drawn up between French Canadian engagés and the fathers or guardians of the women involved. Although this proviso might indeed have been related to the ethnicity of the parties involved, both of the contracts cited above also contained it. In neither case were French Canadians involved. However, Jeanny Black was the daughter of Chief Trader Samuel Black. The fact that the penalty specified amounted to the enormous sum of £500 suggests that this stipulation might

and not by the company, although the latter still interfered in the former's family life. In 1839 the council of the Southern Department made it compulsory for the sons of servants to be separated from their families after the age of fifteen and engaged as apprentice labourers or tradesmen for terms of seven years, which they would spend in the Northern Department. A parent who did not consent to this arrangement would be discharged.¹⁶¹

The company also stopped granting land to servants wishing to retire to the Red River Settlement. The colony was not serving the purpose for which it had been founded. In 1822, William Williams, governor of the Southern Department, observed that some of the men could not cultivate their land very well and that grants should be of a more manageable size.¹⁶² In 1825 Robert Parker Pelly, the governor of the colony, told Williams that he thought the settlement had become overcrowded and Williams suggested to the committee that it detain in the service for a year any who were desirous of retiring to the colony.¹⁶³ Two years later, Roderick McKenzie complained that the colony harboured people who depended on the company's charity or preferred hunting, fishing, and roaming to full-time farming and were too independent to make good servants. To avoid adding to this "expensive & vagrant class of people," he suggested, future applications for retirement should be judged according to whether the applicants would add to the "prosperity" of the place or would prove a burden "to their old masters as paupers for life."¹⁶⁴ Thirty years later, George Simpson commented that free land grants had "occasioned an inconveniently large drainage of men from the service" which had

also have another method by which fur trade officers tried to protect the status of their mixed-blood daughters.

¹⁶¹HBCA, B.135/k/1, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-75. Minutes of 8 August 1839.

¹⁶²HBCA, B.239/b/87a, York Factory correspondence book, 1821-2, fo. 2d.

¹⁶³HBCA, D.1/7, William Williams to London committee, 11 Sept. 1825, fos. 1d., 12.

¹⁶⁴HBCA, B.235/e/3, Red River District Report, 1826-7, fos. 6-6d.

prompted the company to require servants to pay for their land.¹⁶⁵ This measure was first introduced in the Northern Department, where in 1834 the council resolved that no servant could retire to Red River until he had purchased 50 acres.¹⁶⁶

The committee thought, however, that the possession of "so much as fifty acres" would permit the purchasers to become "small independent Farmers." The "great difficulty" encountered by "Persons of capital" when "settling in a new Country" was that everyone was in "that situation" and "none in that of Labourers, who find it necessary and for their advantage to give themselves to work for others." The committee suggested that "it would be of advantage" to establish villages with "small lots of Five or at most Ten acres" which retiring servants would have to buy, thereby solving the problem of squatting but also providing "the means of cultivating exportable Produce afforded to Persons of Capital."¹⁶⁷ In establishing a colony, the committee had tried to achieve what its secretary was to describe in 1849 as the "object of every sound system of colonization": not the re-organization of "Society on a new basis, which is simply absurd," but the "transfer to the new country [of] whatever is most valuable and most approved in the institutions of the old, so that Society may, as far as possible, consist of the same classes, united together by the same ties, and having the same relative duties to perform in the one country as in the other."¹⁶⁸ It had tried to recreate a traditional society in which wages were low because access to small amounts of land supplemented earned income. It would resemble a British community. Wealthy farmers, primarily retired company officers whose rank entitled them to larger grants of land than ordinary servants, would be the leaders of the

¹⁶⁵HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to W. G. Smith, 10 Jan. 1857, fo. 36d.

¹⁶⁶HBCA, B.239/K/2, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1832-50. Minutes of 1 July 1834, fo. 41.

¹⁶⁷HBCA, A.6/23, London committee to George Simpson, 4 Mar. 1825, fo .

¹⁶⁸HBCA, A.6/28, A. Barclay to James Douglas, 17 Dec. 1849, fo. 91.

settlement, as their designation of "Principal Settlers" indicated.¹⁶⁹ The company's own hierarchy would be mirrored in the colony's social structure. The humble faced restricted opportunities for advancement so that their labour would be available for those who needed it to build an economy based on the export of agricultural products. Meanwhile, the company retained its monopoly in the fur trade.

In spite of the committee's objections, the council of the Southern Department passed a resolution requiring men to purchase at least 50 acres of land at 7s.6d. an acre, with payment made to the officers in charge of their posts prior to their departure for the settlement.¹⁷⁰ But, in 1843 it decided that no more servants from the Southern Department be allowed to retire to Red River, although those from the Northern Department could still settle there.¹⁷¹ In the Columbia District, however, the company hoped to achieve what it had failed to do at Red River. In 1852 it offered land grants to the English labourers employed by the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company in hopes of making them less "refractory."¹⁷² In Nanaimo, town lots were sold in order to create a permanent settlement of miners "and others" near the coal mines. Lots were to be small and speculators were to be kept out by attaching conditions to the land, such as requiring the purchaser to build a house within a certain time.¹⁷³ In 1857, the committee, at Simpson's suggestion, reintroduced land grants in the Red River Settlement for new recruits. Labourers were offered 25 and tradesmen 50 acres on the completion of a five year

¹⁶⁹John E. Foster, "The Country-born in the Red River Settlement: 1820-50" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1973), 96-102.

¹⁷⁰HBCA, B.135/k/2, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-34. Minutes of 3 May 1836, fo. 75.

¹⁷¹HBCA, B.135/k/1, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-75. Minutes of 7 Aug. 1843, fo. 123; B.239/k/28, Standing Rules and Regulations, 1843-75, Par. 60.

¹⁷²HBCA, B.226/c/1, A. Colville to James Douglas, 17 Nov. 1852, fo. 307.

¹⁷³HBCA, A.6/32, W. G. Smith to James Douglas, 16 May 1856, fo. 49.

contract and the same quantities of land for additional five year terms.¹⁷⁴ By this time, however, the company's attempts to control settlement were pointless. In the west, the company's license to trade was soon to expire. In Red River, most of the inhabitants were squatters and had never purchased land at all and the company did not interfere with them. In his testimony before the Select Parliamentary Committee of 1857, Simpson mentioned that the company was willing to give grants to those who applied for them, but people seldom did. When land was granted, however, the recipient had to sign an indenture which prohibited him from selling the property without the consent of the governor and the company.¹⁷⁵ The change in circumstances led the committee to question the wisdom of the old regulations. The original intent had been to "prevent the influx of pauper settlers...and to give every new comer, as a proprietor of Land, an interest in the Colony," but the rule had been "allowed to fall into disuetude frequently" and "it was felt a great hardship in cases where it was enforced." Therefore, it recommended its abolition.¹⁷⁶ Simpson agreed that it was time to make some modifications.¹⁷⁷ In 1862 the council of the Northern Department requested that no further grants of land in the Red River Settlement be made to servants engaged in Europe until an examination of the unoccupied lands had been made.¹⁷⁸ In 1863 the London committee, in compliance with the request of both councils, abolished the custom of granting land at Red River to retiring servants.¹⁷⁹

At the same time, however, the London committee displayed vestiges of a paternalism that clashed with Simpson's more modern philosophy. The colony was a

¹⁷⁴HBCA, A.6/32, W. G. Smith to George Simpson, 30 Jan. 1857, fo. 118d.

¹⁷⁵Report of the Select Committee, 1857. Testimony of George Simpson, pp. 94-5.

¹⁷⁶HBCA, A.6/35, London committee to George Simpson and councils, 18 Apr. 1860, fo. 67d.

¹⁷⁷HBCA, A.6/34, Thomas Fraser to William Mactavish, 20 Jan. 1860, fo. 201d.

¹⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/k/3, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1851-70. Minutes, 23 June 1862, p. 259.

¹⁷⁹HBCA, A.6/38, London committee to A. G. Dallas, 15 April 1863, fo. 74.

disappointment to the HBC. Rather than providing reliable, tractable labour, it produced men who, George Simpson complained, "gave more attention to the advancement of their own interests than those of their employers," a situation "in part attributable to the high tone of independence assumed by the halfcaste population" whom the company was "under the necessity of employing largely in the capacities of servants and subordinate officers."¹⁸⁰ The problem resulted from the servants' ability to save too much of their pay and retire too early. Simpson suggested that the company provide luxuries like tea, sugar and a "finer description of clothing" for the men to buy, thereby preventing both "dissatisfaction" and the accumulation of "the large credit balances" which "give rise to a feeling of independence, which at times may be attended with inconvenience." The men should certainly be able to retire "with a little means," but it was "unprofitable and impolitic to put them in a condition to retire while their services are required, some of the men being young and in the prime of life."¹⁸¹ For the committee, however, economy and paternalism still went hand in hand and it did not embrace enthusiastically Simpson's cost-cutting suggestions. In 1823 it had responded to his proposal that wages be increased to attract labour, but prices be raised at the same time, by declaring that it was "a vicious system" to give high "nominal wages" and "look to seducing the men into extravagance, and imposing upon them by charging an undue price for their goods as a compensation for these high wages." Moreover, where men were "possessed of sense or discretion" the plan would not work anyway. It was a system which the committee declared itself "determined not to sanction." Low wages and low prices were its preference and eventually through "patient and full explanation" the men would come to see the advantages themselves. It wanted its men to be "well paid and clothed" and expenses kept down by hiring "none but really effective men." Fewer

¹⁸⁰HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to the London committee, 26 June 1856, fo. 121.

¹⁸¹HBCA, B.153/c/1, George Simpson to William Nourse, 1 Mar. 1844, fo. 67.

men would thus be required and the result would be a "great Saving and facility in provisioning the posts."¹⁸²

Twenty five years later, the committee still had the same opinion. In 1848, the council of the Northern Department introduced resolutions increasing wages and the prices of goods sold to servants and rescinded the measures the following year because the committee refused to approve them. If wages had to be raised in order to get men, the committee observed, they would be raised, but to raise prices at the same time was "not defensible in point of principle" and the men would soon see that they were no further ahead. The "great objection" to this "alteration" was that the men had to purchase at the company store. If they could buy elsewhere, then the company could charge what it wanted. Clearly, the committee did not wish the company's character besmirched by insinuations that it oppressed its workers through the hated truck system. Moreover, the committee pointed out, these remarks applied "with equal if not greater force" to the system that prevailed with regard to the Hawaiian labourers in the company's service. These men were paid £30 a year, but were charged 140 per cent on the invoice prices of the goods they bought, while European labourers, earning £17, paid only 50 per cent. This, declared the committee, was "far from right." Necessary labour should be paid for "at its full value" and the Hawaiians should not be punished for being "more useful...than other servants." No distinctions should be made in the prices of goods sold to servants on account of the wages they received.¹⁸³ The committee, thus, believed in tempering economy with mercy and retaining a traditional paternalistic interest in the welfare of its employees, insisting on discipline and subordination, but not forgetting that, in return, servants were entitled to proper treatment and demanding of its officers that they not forget it either.

¹⁸²HBCA, A.6/20, London committee to George Simpson, 13 March 1823, fos. 71-72.

¹⁸³HBCA, B.239/c/5, London committee to George Simpson, 4 Apr. 1849, fos. 95d.-96; George Simpson to James Hargrave, 28 June 1849, fo. 92d.

Thus, in 1844, not only was the committee distressed by reports of harsh treatment in the Columbia Department, it was also disturbed to discover that "a great proportion" of the men recently returned to Canada had either no wages owing to them or were in debt to the company even though they had been in the service for a long time. As a result, they were "disaffected" and on the voyage home "so refractory" that the officers in charge had "little influence over them." They frequently deserted along the way, consumed excessive amounts of rum, and left a trail of "disorder." To permit the men "thus to get into debt, in defiance of our repeated instructions," as well as the resolutions made by the governor and councils, was "extremely discreditable to the management" of the gentlemen in charge of them "inasmuch as it combines neglect of duty and indifference to the interests of the Concern." Not only did the company thereby lose the sums advanced to the men when they engaged, but it also suffered a "loss of character by the state of poverty in which the men return to their homes." Therefore, "effectual measures" were to be taken to put a stop to "a practice so injurious to the service." A few months later, the Council of the Northern Department resolved that servants re-engaged on the east side of the mountains to serve in the Columbia Department would not be given their freedom until they had served three years and had not less than a £50 credit balance. The councils of the Northern and Southern Departments accordingly passed measures designed to encourage the men to "economise their means &...be prevented from indulging in extravagance of any kind as much as possible."¹⁸⁴ The committee wanted to prevent its employees from sinking into debt because its concern for them extended beyond their periods of service.

The HBC did not provide pensions for its servants, but former servants and their families did turn to the company in times of need, suggesting that they saw the relationship between themselves and their employer as more than a cash transaction. The fact that the

¹⁸⁴HBCA, A.6/26, London committee to George Simpson, 4 Mar. 1844, fos. 107-107d. B.135/k/1, Minutes of the Council of the Southern Department, 1822-75, No. 52. B.239/k/2, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1832-50, fo. 168. B.239/k/28, Standing Rules and Regulations, 1843-75, No. 74.

committee often provided aid both reinforced this notion and indicated that the committee also believed in it. Assistance was not indiscriminate, of course, but, in the case of the deserving, the committee went to considerable effort to help, as the case of William Tomison indicates.

Tomison, engaged in 1836, returned from North America only two years later in such bad health that he could no longer take care of himself. He was placed in an asylum in Bethnal Green at the company's expense. Documents found on him were addressed South Ronaldsay and in 1840 the committee's secretary inquired of Edward Clouston, their agent in Stromness, whether Tomison had any friends there who could look after him. The committee was willing to transport him and grant him an allowance of about £10 if there was an asylum there to which he could be sent. Both a parishioner named William Bews and a sister residing in Stromness declared themselves willing to take Tomison in and Clouston was asked to investigate and determine which of them was the fitter guardian. Clouston's judgement in favour of the sister was accepted and Tomison was sent off.¹⁸⁵ Long, faithful service also deserved a reward. William Linklater's 39 years of toil were rewarded with an "allowance" of £6 per annum, beginning 1 May 1856.¹⁸⁶ But, not everyone was so fortunate.

James Johnston, after being granted £5 because of injuries sustained on the voyage to Rupert's Land in 1847, applied for a pension in the fall of 1851. His request was denied even though it was submitted by William Ross of Stromness who testified to Johnston's disability and accompanied by a doctor's certificate which declared that his hernia made hard labour impossible and that "he appeared not to be possessed of robust health."¹⁸⁷ David Robertson, who had injured his leg in a sawmill accident in the Columbia Department in 1835 and requested

¹⁸⁵HBCA, A.5/13, W. G. Smith to Edward Clouston, 1 April 1840, pp. 45-6; W. G. Smith to Thomas Crosse, 30 April 1840, p. 59; W. G. Smith to Edward Clouston, 6 May 1840, pp. 63-4; W. G. Smith to Edward Clouston, 22 May 1840, p. 71.

¹⁸⁶HBCA, A.5/20, W. G. Smith to Edward Clouston, 12 Feb. 1856, p. 11.

¹⁸⁷HBCA, A.10/30, William Ross to Archibald Barclay, 25 Oct. 1851, fo. 739; Doctor's Certificate, 25 Oct. 1851, fo. 740; William Ross to Archibald Barclay, 17 Nov. 1851, fo. 793.

relief after his return to Britain in 1839, was informed in 1840, that the committee did not think he had "any claim," but in consideration of his "distressed situation" he would receive a "donation" of £5. He was not, however, to expect "any further relief" from the company. He re-entered the service in 1845, returned home in 1851, and, on the grounds that his injury made it impossible for him to "labour for his own support," petitioned for "such Gratuity or Pensions" as the committee deemed "Proper" until he could work again. A doctor's certificate testified that Robertson suffered from extensive ulcers. But, the committee remained unconvinced of its obligation to provide assistance in this case.¹⁸⁸ Neither of these men was so incapacitated or had served long enough for the company to consider pensions appropriate. Like the rest of the commercial elite, the members of the HBC's London committee intended its philanthropy to help tide individuals over difficult times, not to encourage idleness or discourage self-sufficiency. Therefore, when in 1861, Peggy McLeod, having lost her husband and three sons, asked that her brother, John, then in the company's service, be permitted to return home, the committee not only granted her request, but also presented her with a "small amount of aid" in the meantime.¹⁸⁹ Of course, good deeds also benefited the company's reputation. Its donation for the support of the destitute family of the recently deceased John Groat, despite his having died in debt to the company, prompted Edward Clouston to comment that "such acts of benevolence raise the Company in public estimation."¹⁹⁰ Like other nineteenth-century employers, the HBC was expected to support good works directed at the underprivileged and needy. Therefore, it donated to such worthy causes as the Destitute Sailors' Asylum and the Seaman's Hospital Society and received appeals from such organizations as the Thames Church Missionary Society, formed in

¹⁸⁸HBCA, A.5/13, W. G. Smith to David Robertson, 2 Sept. 1840, p. 99. A.10/30, Petition of David Robertson, 29 Oct. 1851, fo. 749; Doctor's Certificate, 30 Oct. 1851, fo. 750.

¹⁸⁹HBCA, A.5/24, Thomas Fraser to Rev. John McRae, 12 Feb. 1861, p. 172.

¹⁹⁰NAC, MG 19 A 21, Hargrave Correspondence. Edward Clouston to James Hargrave, 16 Feb. 1844, pp. 2822-3.

1844 to minister to "the vast floating population on the Thames," by means of a "Cruising Vessel of Worship and Pastoral Visitation."¹⁹¹

Paternalism, true to its authoritarian roots, did not, however, allow for the sharing of power and the committee's treatment of its officers demonstrated conclusively how mistaken they were to think that they were partners. The takeover of the company by the International Financial Society in 1863 showed them that they too were subordinate. The Society's circular offering stock to the public announced its intention to develop the country's resources "in accordance with the industrial spirit of the age." The fur trade would continue on lands unfit for colonization, while the southern part of the territory would be opened up under "a liberal and systematic scheme of land settlement." The fur trade officers and establishments, so conveniently already present, would "inaugurate" the new policy.¹⁹² The officers had been dropped on a new path with complete disregard for their opinions. The company's directors had sold their controlling shares to the IFS without consulting the officers, leading some of them to protest in 1866 to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that they had been "treated as menials who could be transferred wholesale without explanation or notice, to different concerns." It was they and not the shareholders who would be most affected by changes in the business, but it was the "home shareholders who received the opportunity to retire with a high premium, while the Trade was forced to chew the end in silence under the new order of things." The accuracy of this description was demonstrated repeatedly during the next five years. Their claims for a share in the profits from the sale of the London headquarters, the proceeds of the transfer of the territory to Canada, and the sum paid by the American government in compensation for the loss of territory in Oregon were all denied. Much debate over their status ensued. The directors did not, of course, wish to alienate those upon whom the conduct of the business depended. They,

¹⁹¹HBCA, A.10/49, George Pierce to W. G. Smith, 14 Jan. 1861, fo. 46. A.10/80, Kembell Cook to London committee, May 1870, fos. 619-619d.; A.10/48, William Parrer to the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee, 9 Aug. 1860, fo. 159.

¹⁹²HBCA, F.27/1, International Financial Society Circular, 1863, fos. 94-94d.

therefore, decided to terminate the old Deed Poll and reimburse the officers for their contributions to the retirement fund. The Deed Poll of 1871 still allowed officers to consider themselves "wintering partners" and they continued to receive shares in the profits until 1893.¹⁹³ But, it also introduced the rank of inspecting chief factor to visit the districts, audit the books, report on everything, and suggest improvements, tasks previously the responsibility of the chiefs of the trading districts. It is not surprising that this innovation aroused opposition.¹⁹⁴ That this opposition had no effect is not surprising either, since it was the duty of the officers no less in 1871 than it had been one hundred years earlier to accept the committee's decisions.

By 1871, the shareholders of the company were people interested in resources other than furs and, particularly, in land. As far as they were concerned, the fur trade was doomed to disappear as soon as "civilization" came to Rupert's Land. They did not view the officers as partners and would have preferred to put them on straight salaries rather than to continue to allow them a share in the profits.¹⁹⁵ The fur trade did not, of course, come to an end and the new shareholders' hopes for enormous profits from real estate were dashed. For the majority of the employees, the situation changed little, but something new was in the offing. The committee no longer ended letters to its officers with the phrase "your loving friends."¹⁹⁶ Indeed, although officers still had to submit the usual journals, accounts, and letters, the committee seemed less interested in the events they described. When in the fall of 1863 James R. Clare complained about the "insubordination among the servants," Thomas Fraser, the committee's secretary, did

¹⁹³Duane C. Tway, "The Wintering Partners and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1863 to 1871," Canadian Historical Review 33 (Mar, 1952): 50-63; Tway, "The Wintering Partners and the Hudson's Bay Company, 1867-1879," Canadian Historical Review XLI (Sept. 1960): 215-218.

¹⁹⁴Arthur J. Ray, The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 15.

¹⁹⁵Ray, The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age, 8.

¹⁹⁶Douglas MacKay, The Honourable Company (Montreal; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, rev. paperback, 1966), 279.

not reply with exclamations of outrage at such mutinous conduct. Instead, he remarked that the men's behaviour was "much to be regretted," but it was "difficult to suggest a remedy to the discontent which will occasionally occur among men who have entered upon a novel service in a Country and with occupations so different from those which they have left."¹⁹⁷ A century earlier, the committee would not have shrugged off disobedience so casually. Indeed, in the past, re-organizations had always involved attempts to impose greater discipline on the servants. The takeover by commercially minded men in the 1680s, the "Retrenching System" of 1810, and the merger of 1821 had all led to measures designed to impose subordination and obedience. These measures had not been as successful as the committee had hoped, but its retreats had not been surrenders. Now, however, it seemed to be abandoning the battle entirely, suggesting that its relationship with its employees had changed even though the company still resembled the one of 1770.

Vestiges of paternalism remained. Servants still signed contracts obligating them to fidelity, diligence, and subordination and providing non-monetary benefits no longer available elsewhere. Servants' resistance had forced the committee to abandon such innovations as payment by the task and its desire to attract and keep workers had made it impossible to impose the stiff penalties specified in the contracts or keep wages as low as it hoped. But, it had been able to transfer to its employees most of the costs of their maintenance, thereby reducing the company's expenses and the losses that the servants' disobedience caused even though it might still provide assistance to needy former servants or their families. The paternalistic ties between the committee and its employees had not been broken, although the company's hierarchy was more rigid and the lower ranks were more firmly relegated to their lowly status. The committee's retention of the traditional mode of hiring suggests that it continued to value the master-servant relationship that it embodied, but its blasé view of disciplinary problems suggests it saw that relationship in far less emotional terms than its predecessors.

¹⁹⁷HBCA, A.6/39, Thomas Fraser to James R. Clare, 25 June 1864, fo. 108d.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOURCE AND SUPPLY OF LABOUR

... I pray you to send me Some country lads, that are not acquainted, with stronge drink, that will woorke hard, and faire hard, and are not debauched with the voluptuousness of the city. ...send over yearely 5 lykly country lads of 17 or 18 Years of age, and let their tymes be 7 years, so that before their Tymes be out they will be lusty Younge-men, and fit for your service both at sea, and land, and at small wages...if England can not furnish you with men, Scotland can, for that countrie is a hard country to live in, and poore-mens wages is cheap, they are hardy people both to endure hunger, and could, and are subject to obedience, and I am sure that they will serve for 6 pound pr. yeare, and be better content, with their dyet than Englishmen¹

This was Governor John Nixon's advice to the London committee in 1682, six years after the HBC had begun to establish permanent establishments which it still manned with men hired from the most convenient source, namely, London and its environs. Still, it did not need Nixon to tell it of the dangers of recruiting men from urban areas. City life, in general, was associated with intemperance and immorality and London, in particular, had a population renowned for independence and unruliness.² A new direction was intimated the following year when four Scots joined,³ though the HBC still hired local men with backgrounds strangely incongruous with the fur trade: Henry Crouch, a fishmonger, Ralph Knight, a merchant, William Bright, a haberdasher, and John Lawson, an apothecary.⁴ The committee was, however, aware of the need for personnel with the appropriate qualifications and it also began to accept apprentices,⁵ although it was not prepared to offer the opportunities for corruption and private trade that made posts in joint-stock companies attractive even to the younger sons of the

¹"Report to the Governor and Committee by John Nixon 1682, " in Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-1684. First Part: 1679-82, ed. E. E. Rich (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1945), 251, 277.

²Christopher Hill, The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 20-22, 40-41.

³E. E. Rich, ed. Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1679-84: Second Part, 1682-4 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1946), Minutes of 16 March 1683. p. 86.

⁴Rich, ed. Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1682-4, Minutes of 14 Jan. 1783, p. 189; 9 April 1684, pp. 222-3; 7 May 1684, p. 239.

⁵Rich, ed. Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1682-4, Minutes of 7 May 1684, p. 239.

gentry.⁶ Instead, it came to seek its employees among the socially and geographically marginal to whom it presented unusual opportunities and whose marginality, it was expected, rendered them deferential. Cheapness and tractability were the virtues the committee prized most highly in its employees, the majority of whom were hired not to trade, but to build and maintain posts, chop wood and haul wood, hunt and fish, transport furs and trade goods, load and unload ships, and carry packets and messages between posts.

For its apprentices, rather than the "country lads" recommended by Nixon, the HBC, like the early industrialists who could not persuade adult males to enter their factories,⁷ recruited the children of the poor in the form of parish apprentices, bound out by the overseers of the poor according to the provisions of the Poor Laws, and the pupils of charity schools. The former were available to anyone declaring himself willing to provide support and instruction, although these arrangements were apprenticeships for labour and not, like normal indentures, a way of teaching a child a trade. They were a method of relieving ratepayers of the burden of pauper children. Unlike regular apprenticeships, which normally began at the age of fourteen and lasted seven years, these bound out younger children and could require them to serve until the age of 24 if boys and 21 or marriage if girls. It was a system in which masters frequently abused, neglected, and even abandoned their apprentices, while the latter were virtually slaves, condemned to years of drudgery and shameful exploitation.⁸ For those with pauper children on their hands, the company's interest must have been most welcome. Many employers were unwilling to take very young children. Equally important, an apprenticeship was one way of

⁶Richard Grassby, "Social Mobility and Business Enterprise in Seventeenth-century England," in Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill, ed. Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1978), 374-5.

⁷Stanley D. Chapman, The Early Factory Masters: the Transition to the Factory System in the Midlands Textile Industry (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1967), 169-70.

⁸See: M. Dorothy George, London Life in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1965), 216-261; Hugh Cunningham, "The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England, c.1680-1851," Past & Present 126 (Feb. 1990): 131-3.

gaining a settlement, i.e. the right to live and receive relief in a particular parish. Every child removed from the parish thus eliminated a future burden as well as a current one and no parish was further away than Rupert's Land. For the HBC, such apprentices, though young and uneducated, promised to provide long-term, reliable workers who grew up in the service and knew no other life. Charity schools served a similar purpose both for the community and the company.

Like parish workhouses, charity schools were designed to prevent vagrancy by giving children a meagre education and teaching them that their place in society was humble and their duty was hard work and obedience. Some of these schools, however, provided their pupils with training that stood them in good stead and made them attractive to the HBC. It took most of its apprentices from such institutions, in particular, Christ's Hospital, known as the Blue Coat School, in London and the Grey Coat Hospital of the Royal Foundation of Queen Anne, in Westminster. These schools taught navigation, surveying, and mathematics, which became particularly important in the 1770s when the HBC began to expand inland.⁹ Unlike their less educated counterparts, hospital boys were intended "to rise to higher Stations in the Compys[sic] Service according to Merit"¹⁰ and they were, in effect, junior officers with salaries that elevated them above the common servants. Nevertheless, all apprentices, regardless of origin, were encouraged to become skilled and useful and rise to whatever station they were qualified to fill. One should not, however, assume that all benefited equally or even had the same interest in doing so. Jennifer Brown has suggested that the apprenticeship system was one of the vertical relationships that prevented the development of class identification in the HBC because apprentices grew up in the service, had few ties to Britain, and identified strongly with the

⁹Richard I. Ruggles, "Hospital Boys of the Bay," The Beaver Outfit 308 (Autumn 1977): 14-21.

¹⁰HBCA, A.5/2, Secretary of the London committee to William Wales, 26 March 1778, fo. 32.

company.¹¹ The exploits of Henry Kelsey and David Thompson and the distinguished careers of others such as Ferdinand Jacobs and Richard Norton have left the impression that all apprentices fulfilled their potential. But, the careers of the company's apprentices were too varied to make such a generalization and their situations not necessarily conducive to success.

John Hinson, for example, was a parish apprentice bound out to the HBC in 1708 at the age of eight to serve until he was 21. His contemporary, Joseph Adams, was five years old when he was apprenticed to the HBC in May of 1705 to serve until the age of 24. In 1719, both were "disconsolate," but Adams learned to read and write, spent several years in charge of Albany, and retired to London in 1737 as a gentleman, while Hinson died from "excessive hard drinking" at Albany in 1727. Samuel Hopkins, a Blue Coat boy, engaged in 1715 for seven years and sent to Albany to keep accounts, ran away in October of 1722 and stayed with some Indians until the first of May. A few weeks later he tried, unsuccessfully, to run away again because, he complained, he had been forbidden to leave the fort without permission. The committee subsequently discharged him and resolved never to hire him again. William Clowes, apprenticed in May 1737, was even less satisfactory. In May 1739, Thomas Bird noted in the Albany journal that Clowes was whipped for "severely cursing and damning me and wishing I was dead, and neglecting his watch." "...Indeed for Vileness," Bird commented, "I never saw his Fellow, and do realy[sic] believe few in any Gaole[sic] in England can of his age out do him in Wickedness."¹² Some of the company's apprentices seem to have been as unruly and unmanageable as popular opinion declared apprentices to be. Although it was impossible for HBC apprentices to participate in the kind of riotous apprentice sub-culture that existed in England, it should not be

¹¹Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver; London: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 25-26, 21, 34.

¹²K. G. Davies, ed. Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40 (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1965), 33, 63, 76, 88-9, 79, 123, 152, 233-4, 289.

assumed that they were unaware of it or that their behaviour was uninfluenced by it.¹³ Moreover, many of them had not entered the HBC of their own accord and were as likely to resent their situation as embrace the opportunities it presented. Besides, even though they were young and poor and had been supported by their parishes or lived in charity schools, one can not assume that they had no ties to family or friends. Anyway, even if all the apprentices turned out as the committee hoped, the apprenticeship system alone could not have had much influence on the overall discipline of the company because apprentices were a small minority of the workforce. The London committee could not staff its posts with little boys and teenagers. It needed able-bodied labourers and skilled tradesmen, adults whose characters and habits determined the state of discipline in Rupert's Land. The solution to the problem of discipline lay "in choosing such men as required no discipline."¹⁴ The London committee rapidly came to believe that these could be found in the Orkney Islands. And whenever it had to turn elsewhere for recruits, it always sought out areas that resembled them: pre-industrial societies on the fringes of the British Isles or of European civilization where one might expect a population that was not only properly deferential, but also strong, willing, and able to work hard for puny wages. Recruitment was not, however, simply a matter of gathering up all the eager hands offering their services. It was a process of negotiation between two parties with different perspectives. It was, thus, not only the first point of contact between the HBC and its employees, it was also the first point of conflict.

Expediency probably accounted for the first Orcadian recruits in 1702, but the fact that by 1722 company ships were stopping regularly at Stromness to pick up supplies and men¹⁵ was due to mutual satisfaction with the arrangement. Orcadians were already accustomed to

¹³See: Steven R. Smith, "The London Apprentices as Seventeenth-Century Adolescents," Past and Present 61 (Nov. 1973): 149-161; Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), 190-197.

¹⁴E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870. Volume I: 1670-1762 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), 498.

¹⁵J. Storer Clouston, "Orkney and the Hudson's Bay Company," The Beaver outfit 268, no. 1 (March 1937): 43.

leaving home to take up seasonal employment and the HBC offered wages which, though low, were better than the alternatives at a critical time. A succession of poor harvests from 1695 to 1702 had led to the loss of a third of the population and continuing crop failures meant continuing hardship. But, Orcadians were neither as unworldly nor as passive and their islands neither as rocky nor as isolated as fur trade historians tend to portray them. The islands had long had international trading links and were part of an extensive commercial system. The population produced goods for trade and worked in the fishing, kelping, and whaling industries. Orcadian society did not resemble Peter Laslett's lost world. People were poor and hungry not because the climate was harsh and their agricultural techniques were backward, but because they received only a small share of the fruits of their labour. Agriculture was the major economic activity and the islands were usually self-sufficient in grain, but the majority of Orcadians were tenant farmers and most of what they grew went as rent to their landlords, who exported it and pocketed the profits. The major landowners, descended from Scots who had flocked to the islands in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in search of position and economic opportunity, had no emotional ties with the islands. Their interest in their tenants extended only to their ability to pay rent. Failure to pay led to eviction and, because there was no system of poor relief, destitution, unless friends or relatives could provide assistance. Merchants and landlords also dominated the fishing and kelping industries. Far from being independent producers, Orcadian fishermen and kelpers were seasonal labourers earning meagre wages that never reflected the enormous profits their toil generated for their masters who controlled all the conditions under which they were employed, supplied equipment and provisions, and charged their cost against the men's wages. Many Orcadians found themselves in perpetual debt. Relations between ordinary Orcadians and their superiors were, thus, exploitive, the latter greedily monopolizing as many resources as they could, dividing up even the rocks and usurping the rights to seabirds that nested upon them.¹⁶ Such circumstances did, indeed, produce men who "were used to working

¹⁶Robert A. Dodgson, Land and Society in Early Scotland (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

hard for not much reward, and were able to endure much without complaint,"¹⁷ but the *ability* to endure hardship without complaining is not the same as a *willingness* to do so. Nor did it deprive Orcadians of the ability to understand the nature of their relationship with their employers, as even commentary usually used to support the Orcadian stereotype suggests.

In 1750, Murdoch Mackenzie, grandson of a bishop of Orkney and master of the grammar school at Kirkwall, observed that Orcadians were hardy and capable of "an abstemious and laborious life," but, "for want of profitable employment, slow at work, and many of them inclined to idleness." They were "sparing of their words, reserved in their sentiments, especially of what seems to have a connection with their interests; apt to aggravate or magnify their losses, and studious to conceal or diminish their gains." They were also "tenacious of old customs tho' never so inconvenient" until shown the superiority of the new by their successful adoption by one of their own rank. Though "honest in their dealings with one another," they were "not so scrupulous with respect to the master of the ground," running up debts to him while settling speedily with everyone else, a state of affairs arising from the "absurd and unpolitic custom of short leases, racked rents and high entries." Unlike Highlanders, Orcadians displayed neither "clannish adherence and subjection to their masters" nor "violence of resentments." Indeed, "their manners and customs" resembled those of the southern rather than the northern parts of Scotland. Other commentators remarked upon the superstitions which still governed Orcadian customs, such as the placing of knives in the walls of houses to protect against attacks by fairies and witches, and the people's unwillingness to do anything on particular days of the year. One might see in this evidence a picture of a quiet, conservative people with a tendency to indebtedness. Or one might see a society in which there were economic and cultural divisions

1981), 301-4; Frances J. Shaw, The Northern and Western Islands of Scotland: Their Economy and Society in the Seventeenth Century (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1980), 75, 77, 113-14, 122-3, 128, 150, 167, 199-201; Alexander Fenton, The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1978), 571-5, 61; James R. Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1976), 16-18, 34-5.

¹⁷Daniel Francis, Battle for the West: Fur Traders and the Birth of Western Canada (Edmonton: Hurtig Publications, 1982), 61.

that contained at least the seeds of class conflict. Humble Orcadians would have recognized that they had little in common with the Murdoch Mackenzies of the world and would have brought this knowledge with them when they accepted employment as fishermen, whalers, seamen, or HBC servants. Their harsh existence may have endowed them with hardiness, but it also taught them that it was necessary to make the most of the limited opportunities available to them. Therefore, they did not simply accept the terms offered to them, but were, as the Rev. William Clouston observed, "attentive to their interests,"¹⁸ which were not necessarily best served by unquestioning obedience or acceptance of the terms the company offered.

The extent of the London committee's knowledge of the Orkneys was probably limited, if Alexander Henry Sr.'s reference in 1775 to Orcadians as "Highlanders, from the Orkney Islands"¹⁹ is any indication. The Orkneys were neither geographically nor culturally similar to the Highlands, but given their location, the London committee, and other Englishmen, might simply have assumed that they were and been grateful to find that they were not inhabited by the "idle predatory barbarians" that allegedly infested the rest of the northern Scotland.²⁰ What counted was that the Orkneys were a marginal, underdeveloped area where "pre-industrial values" were strong and the ideal was "deferential" because it was free of the "new social attitudes" which industrialization encourages.²¹ The London committee foolishly assumed that "pre-industrial values" were synonymous with docility and submissiveness, but pre-industrial society was not a system imposed from the top upon a stolid, sheep-like peasantry. It was a

¹⁸J. Storer Clouston, "Orkney and the Hudson's Bay Company," The Beaver Outfit 267 (Dec. 1936): 6-8.

¹⁹Richard Glover, Introduction to Cumberland House Journals and Inland Journals 1775-82, Second Series 1779-82, ed. E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1952), xxxvii.

²⁰Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in The Invention of Tradition, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 25.

²¹Michael B. Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870: A Social History of York Factory and Churchill" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1989), 106.

complex system of reciprocal relationships which ordinary people invested with considerable meaning. Any arrangements into which they entered were negotiated and, although they did not behave as a class-conscious nineteenth-century industrial proletariat, pre-industrial workers tried to shape their relationships with their employers in their own interests. However, Orcadians' self-interest earned them a reputation for being, as Edward Umfreville put it, "strictly faithful to their employers, and sordidly avaricious."²² The London committee, therefore, assumed that Orcadians had the most to gain by behaving themselves so that they might leave with a tidy nest egg.

Orcadians did, of course, join the HBC for economic reasons. Joining the HBC was a way to earn money to acquire or secure a hold on the land or, in the case of craftsmen, to set up in trade on their own. John Nicks's research has revealed that the recruits tended to be young, mostly in their early twenties, and more than forty per cent of them were the eldest sons in their families. They came from the "middle and lower ranks of island society" and were "typically" the "unmarried sons of small tenant farmers, craftsmen, and cottagers."²³ Unlike fishing and kelping, employment with the HBC did not have to result in eternal debt and could enable young Orcadians to follow the traditional life-cycle. During the eighteenth century, the average age at marriage of a male Orcadian was slightly over thirty. As Michael Payne points out, a man could, thus, serve two five-year contracts before settling down.²⁴ HBC service did not guarantee success, however. According to the disapproving Rev. Francis Liddell, men who joined the HBC were destined for disaster. Although they brought home "a little money" with which they could "overbid the honest, industrious farmer" encumbered with children and behind in his rent to an

²²Edward Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson's Bay Containing a Full Description of that Settlement, and the Adjacent Country... ed. W. S. Wallace (London, 1790; Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954), 109.

²³John Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821," in Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference, eds. Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 106-7, 112, 113, 116, 122.

²⁴Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870," 33.

"unfeeling landlord," they also returned with "all the vices" and none of "the virtues of savages: indolence, dissipation, irreligion, and at the same time a broken constitution." Cursed with "ignorance and want of industry," the returned servant was soon "reduced to poverty" and dispossessed. As a result, Orcadian agriculture remained unimproved and deprived of the necessary manpower, fishing and kelping suffered, and, "the moment war is proclaimed, for fear of being pressed" young men "skulk away to this distant settlement."²⁵ Liddell clearly suffered from a prejudiced elitism and a complete ignorance of the hardships faced by ordinary Orcadians, but his remarks do suggest that former servants found it difficult to achieve the security they sought, though not, as John Nicks's study of the accounts of 41 servants from Orphir suggests, necessarily because of their ineptness or indolence.

During the period covered by Nicks's research, most men served for eight years or less. The mean savings of the three labourers who served for eight years was just over £62, while the one tradesman employed the same length of time managed to accumulate a little more than £170. Of the 28 labourers studied, six spent more than eight years in the HBC. They were able to save more, the largest sum being £107,19,0, which was the mean savings for the three employed for ten years. The one labourer serving for eleven years saved £99,11,5. To take up an average holding in Orphir a man needed at least £40 to £60 in the first year to pay the £10 rent and buy livestock worth probably £30. These figures lead Nicks to conclude that "most returning servants could have afforded to become farmers if they had wished to do so." However, he fails to consider that a man would have to spend most of his savings just to establish himself, leaving almost nothing to fall back on if he became ill, his crops failed, his cow died, or he fell behind in his rent. Since tenancy records for the major estates have not survived, Nicks could not discover how many of these men actually became farmers or how successful they were, but he was able to calculate that one third of the long-service employees and one

²⁵J. Storer Clouston, "Orkney and the Hudson's Bay Company," The Beaver Outfit 268, no. 1 (March 1937): 43, 62.

quarter of the career employees rejoined the company after several years at home. He accounts for this pattern by suggesting that some men missed the freedom of life in the fur trade and their friends and families in North America, while others were seeking to escape from domestic or personal problems.²⁶ These are all reasonable conjectures, but, given Nicks's contention that economic motives drove men to join the HBC in the first place, it is odd that he would ignore the possibility that they re-joined for the same reasons.

Nicks's work raises important issues for a discussion of discipline. The work of the fur trade was suited only to men in their prime, as the London committee recognized. It insisted on men who were "Stout, able & active" and no younger than eighteen or older than thirty, although the real cutting off point appeared to be forty five.²⁷ For most labourers and tradesmen, service with the HBC was one of a variety of occupations pursued over the course of a lifetime. In fact, life-long service might have resulted more from a failure to leave at the right time or economic difficulties that forced him back in than a conscious decision to make a career in the HBC. Retirement from the HBC did not mean retirement from work. To survive, a man had to return with both money *and* health, but the former was of little benefit without the latter, since a servant could not save enough to allow him to retire to a life of leisure. These considerations influenced the decisions of potential recruits and prevented them from accepting unquestioningly the terms presented to them. They engaged with the HBC only if the conditions under they which they were employed benefited rather than hurt them and their exertions on the company's behalf depended on whether the rewards outweighed the risks. As long as the natives continued to bring their furs to the Bay, the company's need for men remained the same and getting a regular supply of inexpensive men was not difficult. By the middle of the eighteenth century, this comfortable arrangement had changed drastically. Canadian traders penetrated the continent,

²⁶Nicks, "Orkneymen in the HBC 1780-1821," 119-23.

²⁷HBCA, A.1/146, Standing Rules, 1796-1805, fo. 10; A.6/16, London committee to John Hodgson, 28 May 1800, fo. 111; A.5/4, A. Lean to William Jefferson, 13 April 1802, fo. 94d.; A.5/5, A. Lean to D. Geddes, 8 Dec. 1810, fos. 31-31d.

intercepted the Indians before they arrived at the HBC's posts, and forced the company to contemplate venturing into the interior. It now needed more men to perform more arduous duties and actually to carry out the promise they had made to defend the company's property and rights "with the utmost Hazard and Peril...with Courage and Fidelity."²⁸ Under these circumstances, the rewards of HBC service no longer necessarily outweighed its disadvantages and recruitment became a problem, which, moreover, was aggravated by the almost uninterrupted warfare lasting until 1813. The army and the navy drew away potential recruits, leading to a labour shortage that gave the workers a decided advantage. Recruitment now became more than ever before a process of negotiation, although the London committee's enthusiasm for economy and control made it a poor negotiator.

Thus, in the summer of 1788, none of the men at York would agree to go inland until the officers had assured "the whole" they would "write to the Honourable Committee Humbly hoping" that its ships would touch at the Orkneys on their way home to drop off returning servants instead of landing them in London. The rest of the journey home was expensive and consumed "the remains of many years wages of hard Labour." William Tomison suggested a small wage increase would prove beneficial. The ships' captains also favoured an increase in order to attract better men. At present, Tomison observed, the "infirm, and Cripples constitute the whole at this place (Tradesmen excepted)."²⁹ However, the committee altered neither the ships' route nor the men's wages, although to have done so might have improved its ability to attract sufficient and suitable men. Instead, it sought to impose a solution from the top by trying to find a more trustworthy recruiter. It still relied on the captains to hire workers and, according to Joseph Colen, they were doing a bad job. All servants who left the service with a clean record received certificates attesting to their good character, a customary practice which the committee had adopted. No former servant could re-engage unless he produced such a certificate.

²⁸HBCA, A.32/7, Contract of John Best, 14 July 1795, fo. 1.

²⁹HBCA, A.11/116, William Tomison to London committee, 19 July 1788, fo. 21d.

Servants whose "infirmities" obliged them to leave the country also received such certificates" as encouragement to others." The captains were hiring anyone with a certificate, even if he was "incapable." In fact, Colen reported in 1790, the previous season one captain had sworn in public "that if any person whatever applied to him without a limb or otherwise infirm he would have engaged them provided they brot[sic] one of the Companys[sic] printed Characters with them signed by any of their Chiefs." As a result, the company's ranks were full of men incapable of the exertions demanded of them. Of the 57 men stationed at York Factory, Colen complained, nearly half were "objects for Hospitals &...a burden to the Factory." He recommended that the certificates mention not only the man's character, but also whether he was physically fit for the work he had to do.³⁰ The following year the committee ordered that the men's fitness and ages be recorded on the certificates³¹ and appointed an agent, David Geddes, in Stromness, to take charge of hiring in the Orkneys.³² It also contemplated the possibility of recruiting French Canadians, although the risks of such a move made caution advisable.

According to George Sutherland who had traveled with them in 1779, Canadians carried "very heavy loads" and were "very clever in the falls," while "on the Albany Establishment" there was no one "capable of conducting a large canoe up one bad fall." The company's men learned only the "Slavish and disagreeable duty" of cutting wood and tracking that "any lumper" with enough strength could carry out:

when the men come from the Ship the first work he does is to go to henly with the Boates. now if a man be lazier then the others the Stearsman calls out ho lo you white jacket, (perhaps he does not know his name) haul you lazy son of a whore you dont haul a pound. now he sees that he is taken notice of he mends his pace and hauls the Boat against the Currant by main Strength. this is well Enough where Strength puts it forward. but Such men as these are as incapable of working large Canoes as I am to be Bishop in the Church of Rome

³⁰HBCA, B.3/b/27, Joseph Colen to John McNab, 10 Mar. 1790, fos. 62-62d.

³¹HBCA, B.135/c/1, London committee to John Thomas and council at Moose Factory, May 1791, fo. 212d.

³²NAC, MG 31 G4, "David Geddes, Whom You Pronounced a Dunce...", typescript, 1970, 95-6.

The company would "do nothing" inland unless it employed Canadians and large canoes, but it would also have to tolerate the customs that belonged to a far less disciplined organization. Never," declared Sutherland, "did I see such a parcel of lazy fellows as these frenchmen are and they are fit to Eat the divel and smoak his mother for they must stop and smoak and Eat at Every miels End." They were "lazy sons of bitches", never starting before seven, eight, or even nine o'clock in the morning. They objected to tracking, which required getting out of the canoe and towing it through shallow water, saying that the "anglois are not better then slaves and that their feet are made of stell[sic]." Their own master, James Clark, complained that they were "a parcel of grouling[sic] Sons of bitches" and their rowdiness at Christmas convinced Sutherland that they were "heathens." "I wish I had only as much to doo with them as I have with my old shoes," he grumbled. The Canadians were "rogues" and might take the company's goods and furs to Canada, but their skill, their hardiness, and their willingness to live on fish and corn would outweigh the dangers and give the company the men it needed to fulfill its ambitions.³³

For the HBC, dipping into the labour pool heretofore the preserve of the its rivals held out the promise of procuring more energetic workers who came from a social milieu similar to the one that made Orcadians so attractive. The NWC's recruitment strategy in Quebec bore a strong resemblance to the HBC's in the Orkneys: it hired in rural areas, drawing upon "land-owning peasants" who could support themselves between "stints in the Northwest." Like Orcadians, they combined work in the fur trade with farming and used their wages to maintain their traditional way of life. Recruits were young and their fur trade careers short. Allan Greer's examination of the fur trade and French Canada led him to conclude that, for the population of Sorel, a major source of workers for the NWC and, after the merger, the HBC, employment in the fur trade was a "normal part" of an *habitant's* life. Like the Orkneys, Sorel had an economy based on subsistence agriculture and temporary wage labour. Poor soil and low productivity

³³HBCA, B.211/a/1, Sturgeon Lake journal, 1779-80, 31 July 1779, fo. 1d., 2 Aug. 1779, fo. 2, 3 Aug. 1779, fo. 2, 19 Aug. 1779, fo. 4, 14 Sept. 1779, fo. 10, 31 Dec. 1779, fos. 23-24d., 31 Jan. 1780, fos. 31d.-33.

meant that, unlike other parishes, Sorel could not produce wheat, the only cash crop available, and fur trade wages, rather than the proceeds of wheat sales, provided the funds *habitants* needed to pay their debts. Unlike other parishes, therefore, Sorel "remained a community dominated numerically by peasant proprietors, encouraged by fur trade wages to multiply despite the poverty of their agriculture." Like the communities which later supplied seasonal labour in the lumber camps, Sorel was backward and poor because the domination of merchant capital prevented economic development.³⁴ The recruitment of "Canadian peasants" who were "brought up to the Service from their Infancy" was, therefore, not an illogical step,³⁵ but the committee proceeded cautiously and largely ineffectively.

Rather than sending recruiters to Canada, the committee told its officers to encourage any Canadians in the neighbourhood to sign up, but only if their contracts with their former employers had expired. The committee realized it was offering wages lower than the Northwest Company paid, but was confident that once the men saw that the HBC did not charge "exorbitant" prices for its goods, they would realize that it offered an opportunity to live better and save more. It was, however, prepared to pay them as much as £15 a year for contracts as short as two years.³⁶ It hoped to compensate for the increased expense by carrying out the inland business with temporary outposts of log tents instead of larger, permanent establishments, a plan which Canadian familiarity with voyaging and living off the land would make possible, thereby reducing the quantity of provisions and the number of men to be imported. "Their Fidelity" would be ensured by their recognition of the HBC's superior terms and by a prudent mixing of

³⁴Allan Greer, "Fur-Trade Labour and Lower Canadian Agrarian Structures," Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers (1981): 197-214.

³⁵HBCA, B.3/a/79, Albany journal, 1780-81, May 1781, fo. 4.

³⁶HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to council, 27 May 1789, fo. 33d.; A.5/2, London committee to Edward Jarvis, 28 May 1787, fo. 161d.

Canadians and Europeans.³⁷ Indeed, it thought such mixing might "excite an emulation and in the end, tend to the more speedy Improvement, in the Knowledge of the Country."³⁸ However, not only were the company's British servants not willing to boldly go where no HBC man had gone before, they were unwilling to let anyone else go there either. Given Orcadians' reluctance to expose themselves to the discomforts of inland service, Joseph Colen's observation in 1788 that they considered themselves second to none in their ability to bear "fatigue and toil" must have prompted a few snide remarks among the members of the committee. Even worse, instead of manifesting itself in enthusiastic trekking, this manly pride manifested itself in "threats... not to return Inland with those of another Country."³⁹

In 1791 the officers at York Factory complained that rough treatment was driving Canadians out of the service. The British servants objected to getting into the same canoes with them because, they said, "the Canadians were not from their town." However, lest this behaviour be attributed to tribalism, it is important to note that the officers also reported that the men were "very disorderly" when their demands for wages were not met and most of them were indifferent to the company's offer of a 40 shilling bounty to build canoes. Moreover, almost all of the inlanders were drawing for the balance of their wages, which the officers suspected was partly in order to prevent their wages being stopped for refusing duty.⁴⁰ Making life difficult for Canadians was not, therefore, necessarily a display of ethnic solidarity. HBC servants were certainly quick to threaten to join these foreigners when their demands were not met. Only a few years earlier, the men arriving at York Factory from the interior, "one and all carryed[sic] things at a high hand" and with the "most insulting and threatening Language" declared that "if their

³⁷HBCA, B.135/c/1, London committee to John Thomas and council, 16 May 1787, fo. 187d.; A.6/14, London committee to Edward Jarvis and council, Albany, 21 May 1788, fos. 28-28d.

³⁸HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to offices at Albany, 29 May 1794, fos. 98-98d.

³⁹HBCA, A.11/117, Joseph Colen to London Committee, 29 Aug. 1788, fo. 24d.

⁴⁰HBCA, A.11/117, Officers at York to London committee, 26 Sept. 1791, fos. 118-119d.

terms were not complied with," they were "resolved to enter into the Canadian Employ as soon as they arrived in England for they were determined to do all the injury they could to the Honble Company."⁴¹ For British servants, keeping Canadians out of the service was a way of preserving their monopoly of employment with the HBC and their ability to combine to increase wages and exert some control over working conditions. In the face of hostility from HBC servants and an equally strong antipathy on the part of their officers,⁴² Canadians were unlikely to tolerate lower wages too, not that the company's passive strategy even supplied them in sufficient numbers. There was no significant influx of new men to rescue the company from its dilemma, which only worsened when the war with France resumed in 1793 while the HBC's popularity plummeted.

In 1794, the Reverend William Clouston reported, "Murmurs have been excited in this Country against the Company" due to "the small encouragement" given to men in its service.⁴³ Still unwilling to increase wages, the committee repeated its order to hire any Canadians who offered their services and gave "permission" to hire the grown sons of servants.⁴⁴ In 1797, to keep the men it had, it prohibited anyone from going home unless he could be replaced in the Orkneys,⁴⁵ an order that ignored the servants' notices, could be seen as a breach of contract, and could only blacken its reputation further. Mostly it had no effect because the committee could not get a regular supply of replacements.⁴⁶ The continuing

⁴¹HBCA, A.11/117, Joseph Colen to London committee, 7 Sept. 1789, fo. 31.

⁴²See, for example: the criticisms of William Walker, HBCA, B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, 17 Sept. 1789, fo. 11d.; and the complaints by Donald MacKay, a former Nor'wester regarding the hostility toward Canadians among the HBC's officers, B.3/100, Albany journal, 1796-97, 20 Oct. 1796, fo. 6; 29. Jan. 1797, fo. 7; 5 Feb. 1797, fos. 18d.-19; 18 Feb. 1797, fo. 19d.

⁴³HBCA, A.5/3, Rev. William Clouston to David Geddes, 27 May 1794, fo. 139d-140.

⁴⁴HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to officers at Albany, 29 May 1794, fo. 98d.

⁴⁵HBCA, A.6/16, London committee to Capt. John Richards, June 1797, fo. 35.

⁴⁶HBCA, B.135/b/25, William Bolland to John Thomas, 18 Sept. 1798, fo. 4.

shortage of labour meant that the men annually subjected their officers to "trouble and vexation" as those whose contracts were up demanded wage increases.⁴⁷ The crisis also led the committee to take David Geddes's suggestion that it permit three-year contracts during the war instead of the five-year agreements it preferred because he asserted, erroneously as it turned out, that those engaged for these terms would not "think of returning home" at the end of their first contracts. When peace broke out in April 1802 the committee again insisted on five-year contracts, but with so few men engaging and so many leaving, the company needed 120 to 150 men and, therefore, felt compelled to continue the "War Wages lately given," namely, £8 and the usual bounty of forty shillings for inland service to persuade them to join "freely." But Geddes was not to let anyone know how desperately the company needed men.⁴⁸ The servants already possessed too great a sense of their own importance and too little respect for the company's authority. However, peace lasted only until May 1803, new men still signed three-year contracts, and Orcadians remained reluctant to engage.

It was not the low wages alone that made recruitment difficult. The service imposed conditions for which those wages could not compensate. William Tomison observed in 1802 that during the last two years the men had "been almost perished to death" on their way to Rupert's Land because the ships had arrived so late. As a result, it was rumoured "all over the country" that the ships carried no provisions and men previously ready to join the HBC changed their minds. Tomison suspected that one of the captains was responsible for this story,⁴⁹ but

⁴⁷See, for example: HBCA, B.3/a/102, Albany Factory journal, 1798-99. 14 Oct. 1798, fo. 3d.; 5. Sept. 1799, fo. 32; 8 Sept. 1799, fo. 32d.; 10 Sept. 1799, fo. 33; 18 Sept. 1799, fo. 32d.; B.3/a/103, Albany Factory journal, 1799-1800. 15 June 1800, fo. 25; 9 July 1800, fo. 43d.; 29 Aug. 1800, fos. 32d.-33.; B.239/b/63, John Ballenden to Thomas Stayner, 3 March 1800, fo. 21; B.42/b/42, Thomas Stayner to John Ballenden, 18 Mar. 1800, pp. 26-27; B.42/b/43, Stayner to Ballenden, 19 Sept. 1800, p. 6.

⁴⁸HBCA, A.5.3, Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 2 Feb. 1795, fo. 146; A.5/4, Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 1 Dec. 1802, fo. 102d.; Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 20 April 1803, fo. 112.

⁴⁹HBCA, B.49/a/31, Cumberland House journal, 1801-2. William Tomison to John Ballenden, 6 June 1802, fos. 29d.-30.

dissatisfaction with the HBC was too widespread to be the result of one captain's rumormongering, as the insolence of William Tilloch, a sailor at Churchill, suggests. Reprimanded for negligence while unloading a ship at Churchill in August of 1804, he threatened to "post the Character of this Factory on the doors of the Churches in Orkney."⁵⁰ Tilloch's threat was no idle one. The HBC's recruitment notices were affixed to church doors⁵¹ and it would not do to have defamatory statements alongside them. Tilloch was not the only disgruntled man. The climax came in 1805 with a "combination" among servants, former servants now in the Orkneys, their friends, and their relatives to raise the HBC's wages. Rather than legitimate discontent, the committee saw only the "tricks" of opponents and vowed to use "every resource by natives or foreigners" to break the combination and "thwart" its enemies. It sent William Auld and Donald McKay to get men in Caithness and Sutherland, considered recruiting in the Shetlands, and pondered the establishment of recruitment agencies elsewhere. It also offered 2 guineas to each recruit, paid once the man was safely aboard ship at Stromness in June. These plans came to nothing.⁵² The following year the committee drew up an elaborate system of bounties to entice men into its employ: four to eight guineas to new hands engaging for three years; as much as twelve guineas for servants re-engaging for the same term; and, for those who agreed for four, five, or more years, bounties increasing in proportion. It was even willing to recruit boys under the age of fifteen as long as they were "stout & active Lads." David Geddes himself received an

⁵⁰HBCA, B.42/f/2, Servants Resolves, 1804, fo. 9. Churchill was already one of the company's most unpopular posts and the officer prudently decided that, on the basis of Tilloch's previous satisfactory conduct, he would not fine him, but only suspend him from work and pay until the man apologized, which Tilloch refused to do.

⁵¹NAC, MG 31 G4, "David Geddes, Whom You Pronounced a Dunce....," 95.

⁵²A guinea equaled 21 shillings, while a pound was worth twenty shillings. For men earning as little as £8, such a bounty was a significant sum. HBCA, A.6/17, London committee to Council, Albany, 31 May 1805, fos. 29, 32d.; A.5/4, Alexander Lean to William Auld, 14 Mar. 1805, fo. 138.; Archibald Barclay to Donald McKay, 1 May 1805, fo. 143d.; Archibald Barclay to David Geddes, 1 May 1805, fo. 144; Archibald Barclay to Francis Heddle, 1 May 1805, fos. 144-144d.; B.123/a/10, Martin Fall journal, 1805-6, letter from John Hodgson, 11 Sept. 1805, fos. 1d.-2d.

increase in his allowance from ten shillings to one guinea for every man he hired to encourage him to greater effort. In keeping with its parsimonious approach, it insisted that all these incentives were temporary and feared that they would only encourage men to "abuse the Liberality of the Company" by leaving in order to re-engage and collect the bounties again. It, therefore, declared that no bounties would be offered in 1807, but the continuing labour shortage forced it to retain them for another season, although it abolished them for new recruits.⁵³ Bounties would henceforth be used to encourage *re-engagements*. In 1808 the committee offered a bounty of twelve guineas to any servant not earning more than £25 who signed a new contract for five years.⁵⁴ It also urged its officers to "make the best Use you think Proper" of the information that "every Man of the King's Subjects as soon as he sets foot on British Ground according to the late Act of Parliament must be a Soldier the Local Militia Bill exempts none but the Aged & Crippled."⁵⁵ The spectre of impressment did not, however, cow the men into submission. The "Retrenching System" of 1810 promised to solve all these problems and free the company of the "very inefficient men" it had been receiving.⁵⁶

The committee had been toying with the idea of a more organized policy of recruiting French Canadians.⁵⁷ In 1810 Colin Robertson, a former Nor'wester, offered his services to recruit in Montreal. He praised Canadians extravagantly, describing their skill and love of the country while pointing out that Orcadians joined the HBC "more from necessity than inclination" and left as soon as they had achieved their "darling object of gathering a few

⁵³HBCA, A.5/4, Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 22 Jan. 1806, fos. 156-156d; Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 15 March 1807, fos. 170d.-171 A.6/17, London committee to council, Albany, 31 May 1807, fo. 94.; London committee to council at Albany, 20 May 1808, fos. 124d.-125.

⁵⁴HBCA, A.6/17, London committee to Thomas Vincent and council, Albany Factory, 20 May 1808, fo. 125.

⁵⁵HBCA, A.6/17, London committee to John McNab and Council, York Factory, fo. 140.

⁵⁶HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to David Geddes, 8 Dec. 1810, fo. 31.

⁵⁷HBCA, A.5/4, Alexander Lean to Jean Henry De Saulles, 10 July 1804, fos. 129d.-130.

Pounds." If ordered to a place that had "only the name of being hard or the voyage difficult to perform," they would "throw a hundred obstacles in the way, & when either discontented with the post or their Master," they could never be persuaded to do their duty "but by halves." Canadians were accustomed to wages twice what the HBC paid, but, Robertson pointed out, their pay took the form of overpriced goods and the *voyageurs* were so "attached to the Country" that they did not complain. Therefore, the modestly priced goods of the HBC together with the shortness of its summer voyages would give the company "a preference in engaging men" and, once this business was going well, it could reduce wages.⁵⁸ Unprepared for such expense, but "determined to send no more men from the Orkneys," the committee turned instead to the "Western Islands and Coast of Scotland, where the people are of a more spirited race than in Orkney."⁵⁹

Charles McLean of Coll, Donald Mackenzie of Stornoway, replaced a few months later by Colin Robertson, and Roderick McDonald of Glasgow were all appointed as recruiters, while Lord Selkirk agreed, in return for his land grant, to hire men in the Highlands. B. H. Everard of Sligo was appointed to hire labourers in Ireland.⁶⁰ The company had the intention of "forming an extensive local connection in the Highlands of Scotland & in Ireland,"⁶¹ an ambitious undertaking to procure men as marginal as the Orcadians but free of the bad habits they had developed. Orcadians' long association with the HBC might have taught them what to expect in the service, but familiarity had bred contempt. Orkneymen, the committee believed, had become accustomed to "indulgences & improper compliances & familiarities" that had rendered them "intractable." Although the company could regain control through "perseverance in enforcing the obedience that is due" the "habits of insubordination" had been "enfirm by a long

⁵⁸HBCA, A.10/1, Colin Robertson to London committee, 17 Jan. 1810, fos. 89-90d.

⁵⁹HBCA, PP 1810-1 Instructions for Conducting the Trade in Hudson's Bay 31 May 1810, p. 9.

⁶⁰HBCA, A.5/5, HBC secretary to Charles McLean, 4 Dec. 1810, fo. 31d.; J. M. Bumsted, "The Affair at Stornoway, 1811," *The Beaver* Outfit 312, no. 4 (Spring 1982): 53, 55.

⁶¹HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles McDonell to William Auld, 25 March, 1811, fo. 15.

system of mismanagement" and only "great effort" would effect a cure. "There was reason to expect that the object might be more readily attained by the introduction of a new set of men, from other parts of the Kingdom, who being order'd from the first to habits of prompt & exact obedience might be depended upon in every situation."⁶² The company's turn toward the Scottish Highlands, the western islands, and Ireland was a logical step, given its preference for servants from marginal, impoverished, and traditional societies. Wales, Ireland and the Scottish Highlands formed what Michael Hechter has called the "Celtic Fringe." With their economies subordinated to that of their English overlords and their populations viewed as good sources of cannon fodder and cheap labour, these areas had become "internal colonies." This unequal relationship was maintained both by force and by the denigration of indigenous cultures, leading to "a cultural division of labour" in which cultural distinctions were "superimposed upon class lines." Underdevelopment, poverty, and differences in social organization were attributed to cultural backwardness and the resulting ethnic stereotypes ensured that those belonging to those cultures would be deemed inferior and relegated to certain economic roles.⁶³ To these people,

⁶²HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, pp. 175-6.

⁶³Michael Hechter, Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536-1966 (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 9, 30-3, 72-3, 76-78, 81, 84-87, 90-95, 104-110, 112-123. See also: Malcolm Gray, The Highland Economy 1750-1850 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957); Hunter, The Making of the Crofting Community; Philip Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," Scottish Studies 24 (1980):23-42; J M. Bumsted, The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America 1770-1815 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1982). Some historians have adopted the perspective of the landlords in describing the transformation of Highland Society even though they are sympathetic to the plight of the ordinary Highlander. Gray, for example, says that, although the lords were destroying the traditional way of life and adopting new commercial attitudes towards the land and its occupants, they retained their "sense of paternalistic responsibility." (p. 58) Indeed, the landlords were only the agents of a change that was probably inevitable because it was the result of "the powerful individualism and economic rationalism of industrial civilisation on the weaker, semi-communal traditionalism of the recalcitrant fringe." (p. 246) Philip Goldring, describing the HBC's interest in the island of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, presents the situation as one of "rising population and falling economic opportunities." The collapse of kelping, he says, left the tenants without an "exportable commodity" except cattle and the landowners groping for another source of rent. Too poor to help their tenants leave, the landlords cleared the land for sheep, moving people onto small holdings and "encouraging" them to fish. Without emigration, the population rose beyond what the land could support, leaving the population particularly vulnerable in the event of a crop failure. Yet, the "islanders were generally considered to be fit and healthy, and it was usually

the HBC offered tempting terms: wages as high as £18 a year for three years and thirty acres of land in the new Red River Settlement, with ten acres for every additional year of service, followed shortly by an increase in the grant to 100 acres with a hundred more for every three more years of service. The offer became even better with the promise that such land would be held by the men "in perpetuity" and that their families would be transported to the country at a low cost. For a five year contract a man could look forward to 200 acres.⁶⁴ Such benefits would, it was hoped, attract willing workers, guarantee their diligence, and add to the population of the new Red River Colony, which, the committee planned, would eventually supply both provisions and labour in ample quantities. Until this happy result was achieved, however, the HBC was relying on men who, though apparently as marginal as the Orcadians, had no reputation for or history of docility.⁶⁵ No doubt it hoped that the proverbial ferocity of the Irish and Highlanders could be turned against the Northwest Company and lead to the HBC's triumph in the increasingly bloody rivalry. If the plan worked, the company would achieve a highly economical victory. Rather than incurring the expense of hiring spirited and experienced Canadians, it recruited impoverished Highlanders and Irishmen, unaccustomed to high wages, and rewarded them with land with no commercial value.

asserted that they did not consider their poverty intolerable." (p. 25) He also concludes, from the complaints of the HBC's officers and, somewhat illogically, from an increase in the amount of wages men sent home after their first year of service, that the character of the Lewismen had deteriorated, due to the "demoralizing hunger of 1836-7 and 1846-7, the forced emigration of the early 1850s, and the disrepute of the company's agents in Stornoway." (p. 36) Such judgements reflect the biases of socially superior observers, not necessarily the views of crofters, fishermen, kelpers, or fur trade servants.

⁶⁴HBCA, A.1/49, Minutes of the Governor and Committee, 1805-10. 21 Feb. 1810, fo. 114; A.5/5, Secretary to Charles McLean, 4 Dec. 1810, fos. 32-32d.; Secretary to Charles McLean, 10 Jan. 1811, fo. 35d.

⁶⁵See: James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 12-54; C. H. E. Philpin, ed. *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially: S. J. Connelly, "The Houghers: Agrarian Protest in Early Eighteenth-Century Connacht," 139-162; Maurice Bric, "Priests, Parson & Politics: The Rightboy Protest in County Cork, 1785-1788," 163-190; Thomas Bartlett, "An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793," 191-218.

The plans went completely awry. Selkirk's grant was not formally approved until 30 May 1811 and the wait for convoy and a favourable wind further delayed the ships' departure from London. They arrived in Stornoway on 17 July, where the recruits waited, bored and possibly alarmed by the dire predictions of "Highlander," really Simon MacGillivray of the NWC, in the *Inverness Journal*. Moreover, Roderick McDonald, the Glasgow agent, had hired ten labourers for the unacceptably high wage of £25 a year, leading to dissatisfaction among the rest. To the new writers he had promised high wages, annual increments, mattresses, blankets, and accommodation as cabin passengers. When they learned that they would receive none of these benefits, they joined in the general grumbling. While the ships were clearing customs, a "Captain McKenzie," according to Miles Macdonell, Donald Mackenzie, the HBC's former agent at Stornoway turned press gangster, was recruiting for the army. During the last muster of passengers aboard one of the ships, the *Edward & Anne*, the passengers were informed, in accordance with the Passengers' Act, that they were not legally bound to embark if conditions did not meet the act's standards, which, aboard this ship, they did not. As a result, a large number of men jumped overboard, some into McKenzie's waiting boat, taking with them not only the company's hopes for a breakthrough in North America, but also wages advanced to them. As a result, the company hastily recruited some Orcadians to replace the men who had absconded.⁶⁶ Only 81 men arrived at York Factory in September of 1811, of which 66 were "labourers and artificers" to be divided between the colony and the fur trade. Miles Macdonell demanded 31 for the colony, leaving only 35 for the whole Northern Department, which William Auld, the superintendent, considered insufficient. Also, they had been hired on three-year contracts and he believed they would not renew them but leave to take up their land grants, abandoning the company just as they were becoming useful. Furthermore, of the 33 Orkneymen who had arrived, all but one were "either raw ignorant men or old & useless Servants" who were "a dead

⁶⁶Bumsted, "The Affair at Stornoway, 1811," 53-58; NAC, MG19 A23, John McLeod Papers, Autobiographical Fragment, p.1.; HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 25 March 1811, fo. 15.

weight." David Geddes's list indicated that eight of them were forty years old, but some were "old factory mates." One admitted to being 56, although he had first joined the HBC in 1781, while another, "rated at 30," had first entered the service in 1784. Auld also foresaw nothing but trouble from the coming of the Irish. It was, he said, "in a great measure to the dislike of these people" that only one of the men whose contracts expired in 1811 would re-engage and then to serve exclusively at Severn House in order to "be at a distance from the Irish Men."⁶⁷

Of course, Auld's gloomy outlook rose out of his dislike of Miles Macdonell, the colony, and all the newcomers. But, Macdonell also noticed that the Orcadians resented "the arrival of strangers among them" because they had "enjoyed the exclusive advantages of the trade for a long time unmixed with any others which might induce them to suppose that no people ought to be employed but themselves."⁶⁸ And the events of that winter only served to justify Auld's pessimism. The newcomers had arrived too late to go inland and were encamped not far from York Factory along the Hayes River. There, on New Year's Day, a drunken brawl broke out, ending with a display of the Irishmen's "native propensity & prowess" when they "unmercifully" beat some Orkneymen "with sticks."⁶⁹ In February, fourteen men rebelled after William Finlay, a clerk, was sentenced to imprisonment for his refusal to work after being reprimanded when he would not drink a beverage made of pine needles that Macdonell thought would prevent scurvy.⁷⁰ Auld heaped all blame on the newcomers. The Irishmen were "murderous fiends" who had attacked the innocent Orcadians while they were getting ready for bed. The Irish should have received liquor only while closely guarded because, he said, "every body knows a drunken Irishman is synonymous[sic] with Devil Incarnate." Their "atrocious

⁶⁷HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld to Miles Macdonell, 16 Oct. 1811, fos. 2-2d.

⁶⁸HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 25 Dec. 1811, fos. 16d.-17.

⁶⁹HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 27 Feb. 1812, fo. 19d.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 27 Feb. 1812, fo. 20. This incident by men who came to be known as the "Glasgow Insurgents" will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

conduct" was "a too fatal confirmation" that their "brutal dispositions" made them "utterly unfit for this Service." The rebellion of William Finlay, an Orcadian, and his gang was all the fault of the men from Glasgow, "manufactours[sic] out of bread last May &...hired to sow their levelling & seditious principles among an ignorant & timid people as the Orkney-men always are." Glasgow and its vicinity had "long been notorious for the republican & levelling disposition of their inhabitants" and these "villains" proved "the legitimacy of their descent."⁷¹ Though violently prejudiced, Auld was not entirely wrong in his view of Glaswegians.

By recruiting in the Highlands and in the vicinity of Glasgow, the HBC was, indeed, hiring in areas inhabited by workers with a history of militancy. The American and French revolutions had met with widespread sympathy in the north of Scotland. Glaswegians were not the only Scots who possessed a "levelling disposition," but Glasgow was an important centre of dissent and its handloom weavers were at the centre of a nation-wide organization. In 1812, while William Auld was bemoaning the presence of such men in the HBC, Glasgow weavers were agitating for a minimum wage and the enforcement of apprenticeship regulations. Their employers' defiance of the Scottish Court of Session's approval of the weavers' wage proposals resulted in a violent strike in November and December of weavers in Glasgow and eighty other Scottish towns. The weavers' respectable and comfortable way of life was being destroyed as Irish immigrants, migrants from the countryside, and the urban unemployed flooded into weaving because it was easy to learn, thereby depressing wages and strengthening the hand of their masters.⁷² For their part, the Irish would not have forgotten the failed revolution of 1798 or the brutal repression that followed it. Mixing Irishmen and Scots was, therefore, probably unwise. The Irish attack on the Orcadians might well have been caused by longstanding tensions that, on

⁷¹HBCA, B.42/b/57, Remarks on letters from William Hillier and Miles Macdonell, fos. 20d.-21; William Auld to William Hemmings Cook, 18 March 1812, fos. 23-4; William Auld to Miles Macdonell, 30 April 1812, fos. 35-35d.

⁷²See: Young, The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class, 12-59; Malcolm I. Thomis and Peter Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 (Hamden, Ct.: Archon Books, 1977), 1-82.

a day usually celebrated with excessive imbibing, erupted into violence. None of the participants left an account of the event, however, and it was blamed on Irish ferocity. Of the three Irishmen against whom charges could be made to stick, one agreed to pay £7 to two of the victims, since Macdonell thought it wise to hang on to him because of his "numerous relatives & connections in Ireland" which might be of use for the colony, but the other two were "notorious bad characters" who should be gotten rid of.⁷³

The Irish went down in HBC history as "mutinous" and "addicted to quarreling and fighting," a notoriety reinforced the following year by a mutiny aboard the *Robert Taylor*, carrying men destined for the Red River Settlement. According to J. P. Pritchett, Andrew Langston, an Irishman, stirred up dissension by telling the passengers that they were being treated tyrannically and alleging that the Scots were being treated better than the Irish. Owen Keveny, one of the recruiters and "a hotheaded Irishman" himself, was prone to violent responses to the "most trivial offenses," putting offenders in irons or forcing them to run the gauntlet. Langston was subjected to the latter a number of times. The mutiny, apparently plotted among a group of Irishmen from the same town, including Langston, involved a plan to seize the ship, take it to some country at war with Britain, sell the vessel and its cargo, and divide the proceeds among the mutineers. The conspiracy was betrayed, however, and the three ringleaders were subjected to both of Keveny's favourite punishments and sent home on the next ship.⁷⁴ There was nothing distinctively Irish about this insubordination, but it strengthened the stereotype. Years later Charles McKenzie, recounting the company's recruitment history, observed that the Irish had been hired "to play the Shilala 'a bit of timber' on the N.S. Company - but it was found that more than one party could

⁷³HBCA, B.42/b/57, Complaint of William Hillier before Miles Macdonell, fo. 30; Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 3 May 1812, fo. 40; William Hillier to William Auld, 12 May 1812, fo. 42d.

⁷⁴John P. Pritchett, The Red River Valley 1811-1849: A Regional Study (New York: Russell & Russell, 1942; 1970), 68, 93-8; E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company Volume II: 1763-1870 (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1959), 304.

play at the Same and that Pat was more troublesome to his master than to his opponents."⁷⁵ But, the Irish were as disappointed with the HBC as it was with them. On their return to Ireland, some of them regaled the company's agent in Sligo with "miraculous storys[sic]", one man complaining that for three weeks he had had nothing to eat "but the bark of willow trees &c." The agent warned that neither the HBC nor Lord Selkirk "or any one within 100 miles of " them would ever get any of "the peasants" in Ireland to engage after the reports of the bad treatment the Irish servants had endured. Indeed, he believed that they had been "badly used" because all of them told the same tale of being "half Starved."⁷⁶ There is no evidence, however, that the committee was unduly distressed by this news, perhaps because its enthusiasm for Irish servants was already beginning to wane and it was turning its attention elsewhere. In 1812 it engaged the firm of Maitland, Garden, and Auldjo as its agent in Montreal to procure skilled *voyageurs* to establish a firm foothold in the Athabasca district. It requested twenty "Bout de canoe", i.e. men capable of acting as steersmen or bowsmen, and ten middlemen, the latter term denoting labourers who paddled in the middle of the canoe. The middlemen would receive wages as high as £20, the new maximum for labourers in the company, while the steersmen and bowsmen were to be hired as cheaply as possible, probably for no more than the £30 allowed skilled workers and steersmen. These terms attracted no recruits that year.⁷⁷ That the committee was willing to go to this trouble suggests that it was feeling hard pressed. Its recruitment of Scandinavians suggests that it was feeling desperate.

⁷⁵NAC, MG19 A44, Charles McKenzie and Hector Aeneas McKenzie Correspondence, 1828-55. C. McKenzie to H. A. McKenzie, 1 May 1854.

⁷⁶HBCA, A.10/1, B. H. Everard to Edward Roberts, 23 Dec. 1815, fo. 364.

⁷⁷HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to Auldjo, Maitland & Co., 1 Jan. 1812, fos. 52d.-53d.; B.239/b/83, William Hillier to William Auld, 4 Dec. 1812, fo. 1.

In 1814 it hired twenty Norwegians, two Danes, one Swede, and two Scandinavians of unspecified nationality.⁷⁸ The committee was not considering an extensive recruitment campaign in Scandinavia as it was to do in 1853. The acquisition of these men was, like the recruitment policy of its first years and its first engagement of Canadians, the taking advantage of a convenient source of apparently suitable labour, in this case, prisoners of war.⁷⁹ How these men were acquired, whose idea it was to hire them, and who made the necessary arrangements

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Peter Fidler, 8 Sept. 1814, fo. 1; A.30/14, Servants' List, 1814-15, fos. 21d.-22, 32d.-33, 37d.-38, 50d.-51

⁷⁹HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Enner Holte, 25 Mar. 1815, fo. 39d. The hiring of Norwegian prisoners of war to build posts for the winter road is clearly the basis for the notion that Norwegian convicts built Norway House. Richard Glover suggested that this story indicates that the HBC might have sent agents to get men from "foreign jails." ("The Difficulties of the Hudson's Bay Company's Penetration of the West," Canadian Historical Review XXIX (Sept. 1948): 251) More recently, Glenn Makahonuk refers to the HBC's resorting even to the "jails of Norway" in its search for workers to replace the increasingly unsatisfactory Orkneymen. ("Wage-Labour in the Northwest Fur Trade Economy, 1760-1849," Saskatchewan History XLI (Winter 1988): 7) His source is Glover's article and Glover gives no source at all, although it might have been A. S. Morton's History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (first edition, 1939; Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1973). Morton says that Norwegians, "apparently ex-convicts", were brought out to build the posts along the winter road. He also says that it was the Norwegians who built Norway House to be the depot on Lake Winnipeg. It is unlikely, however, that they did so. At least, it was not they who completed the job. The ill-fated Robert Semple, second governor of the colony, had planned to hire some settlers to complete the company's plans for a permanent post and "decent settlement" at Norwegian Point, as it was known. After the routing of the settlers from the colony in the summer of 1816 by the Métis, Colin Robertson and Semple's successor, Alexander MacDonell, decided to carry out the plan as a way of employing the "principal settlers" and inducing them to stay, thereby influencing others to remain as well, besides making it unnecessary to take men from the fur trade to do the work. The settlers demanded wages higher than the HBC was prepared to give, so MacDonell augmented the wages by £5 on behalf of Lord Selkirk, whose agent he was. As a result, nine men were engaged to build houses and a fort and one man was hired to build a gun boat. The rest of the settlers agreed to stay on condition that a vessel would take them home next year. (B.60/a/15, Edmonton House journal, 1815-16, 9 Aug. 1816, fos. 51d.-52.) Morton gave no source for his information, but his reputation was clearly such that whatever he wrote was acceptable even without any reference. Although, perhaps, in the grand scheme of things, insignificant, this inaccuracy is irritating and reflects the condescension with which fur trade historians frequently view the servants. Labeling the Norwegians "gaolbirds" (Glover, p. 251) suggests that they had no valid reason for misbehaviour other than the bad characters which led them into crime in the first place, while Makahonuk's allegation that the HBC recruited Norwegian criminals implies that the company was utterly desperate and its hiring policy entirely bankrupt. Glover goes so far as to suppose that the company searched foreign jails because the army and navy were bribing English convicts into their services by offering them pardons, thereby depriving the HBC of this source of manpower. These suggestions are illogical. The committee was always too concerned that it hire only men of good character to have recruited criminals, foreign or otherwise.

are questions which the HBC's archives do not answer. No doubt, however, members of the London committee had connections with the authorities who had jurisdiction over prisoners of war and took advantage of the situation to recruit men who came from a part of the world that promised to supply labour well suited to its the service. Scandinavia was as isolated and underdeveloped as the northern parts of Britain. Its people were poor, practised occupational diversity, and were accustomed to conditions that made them seem as suited for life in the fur trade as the population of the Orkneys, which, had at one time, in fact belonged to Norway. Thomas Malthus had, during a six week visit to the country, been much impressed with the people, claiming to observe there the workings of the preventive check on population that he wished to see in England.⁸⁰ As well-read individuals, the members of the London committee may therefore have thought that Scandinavians would do nicely in its service. They certainly appeared to think so when it assured Alexander Christie the Norwegians' "habits & previous employment" would render them "more useful and expert" than any men he had ever had under his command.⁸¹ They probably also expected that gratitude for their release would translate into good conduct. Also, being entirely new to the service, they would be amenable to whatever terms the committee proposed, particularly among the eight Norwegians hired on a form of piece work to begin the construction of the winter road from Lake Winnipeg to York Factory. The committee was mistaken.

The men employed erecting the first station of the road at what was to become Norway House were dissatisfied and insubordinate. They did nothing but build themselves "a paltry House" and threatened to give their overseer, Enner Holte, the interpreter, "a hearty Drubbing." James Sutherland, sent to check on their progress, reported that they were "a stubborn Set, and unanimous in their Obstinacy." Sutherland, deciding that "harsh Measures"

⁸⁰M. Drake, Population and Society in Norway, 1735-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 29-40.

⁸¹HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Alexander Christie, 25 May 1814, pp. 217-8.; A.30/14, Servants' List, 1814-15, fos. 35d.-37, 51d.-53.

would be ineffective with them, tried "Persuasion" and got them to work, but "in a very unsatisfactory manner," refusing to be hurried or directed. "It appears to me," he reported, "that they never have been accustomed to Subordination or hard Labour and are very unfit for the Job." In their defence, they claimed they had been "deceived in their Engagement" and had been led to expect European provisions. Instead they had to live on fish. They all declared themselves "completely tired of the Country" and wished "themselves back again in an English Prison." Sutherland believed that they were misbehaving deliberately in order to be sent off in the next ship.⁸² Holte thought that "having for such a considerable Time during their Confinement as Prisoners of War been on an equal Footing with their Superior" had "rendered them so obstinate that they will hardly know any thing of Inferiority."⁸³ Thomas Thomas agreed that their imprisonment "erased from their Minds every Idea of their Duty as Servants."⁸⁴ They were transferred to other work and their project was never completed. Although none of the other Scandinavians caused trouble, it does not appear that the service proved attractive to them either. Only one Norwegian and one Dane stayed when their contracts expired in 1817.⁸⁵

The end of the war raised hopes again. Unemployment soared in Britain and in 1818 the committee expected to acquire men for £15 per annum for five year terms and, though it wanted to encourage servants to re-engage, it did not consider it necessary to offer more than £20 except to steersmen and tradesmen. Renewals were also to be for five years.⁸⁶ The committee also turned again to apprenticeship to supply itself with "a body of valuable attached Servants." Unlike the pauper and hospital boys, however, these apprentices would be the "half

⁸²HBCA, B.239/b/85, James Sutherland to Thomas Thomas, 28 Feb. 1815, fos. 29d.-30.

⁸³HBCA, B.239/b/85, Enner Holte to Thomas Thomas, 28 Feb. 1815, fos. 29d.-30.

⁸⁴HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Enner Holte, 25 mar. 1815, fo. 39d.

⁸⁵HBCA, B.239/b/85, Thomas Thomas to Miles Macdonell, 25 March 1815, fo. 38d.; A.30/16, Servants' List, 1819, fos. 36d.-37, 51d.52. Only one Dane and one Norwegian appear in this list.

⁸⁶HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to James Bird, 20 May 1818. fo. 48d.

breed" sons of European labourers, taken on in their mid-teens for seven or ten years to be trained as tradesmen or canoemen or employed hunting furs or provisions. In return they would receive £5 or £6 a year, which covered the cost of their clothes.⁸⁷ The result would be a skilled labour force, inexpensively but appropriately trained, which, together with the young men from the Red River Colony, would provide workers familiar with the country and with few other sources of employment, at least if they respected the company's monopoly. This happy state of affairs was still in the future, however, particularly since the proposed apprentices "spurned the lowness of the Wages," leading Governor Williams angrily to declare that they could "shift for themselves, this class have been too long an expensive burthen to the Posts throughout the Country."⁸⁸ In the meantime, another agent was appointed at Stornoway, in Lewis,⁸⁹ Orcadians continued to be hired in spite of their apparent lack of spirit, and the company pinned its hopes for expansion on French Canadians. The first large contingent of Canadians was recruited in 1815 and the expedition for which they were intended proved disastrous, but, nevertheless, provided a number of important lessons for future reference.

Although, by the HBC's usual standards the Canadian voyagers received "an immensity of goods," they complained "much" of not finding their "Necessaries in abundance" as they had been led to believe in Montreal. Unless they received their usual equipments, they promised to be impossible to satisfy.⁹⁰ The disastrous winter of 1815-16 revealed that, contrary to Colin Robertson's assertions, not even Canadians would continue singing when surrounded by misery. John Clarke, who commanded them, established Fort Wedderburn on Lake Athabasca and a number of outposts and then dispersed most of his men to fend for themselves, while he set off up the Peace River with five half-loaded canoes to winter near the NWC's Fort Vermilion.

⁸⁷HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to William Williams, 3 Feb. 1819, fo. 70.

⁸⁸HBCA, D.1/3, William Williams to James Sutherland, 11 March 1820, fo. 17.

⁸⁹HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to Donald MacKenzie Jr., 17 Jan. 1816, fo. 115.

⁹⁰HBCA, B.39/a/6, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1815-16, 14 Aug. 1815, fos. 5d.-6.

Clarke had not taken provisions with him, assuming that he could trade for them, but the NWC master had persuaded the Indians to have nothing to do with the HBC. As a result, sixteen of Clarke's men starved to death and a number of the survivors, after finding their way back to Fort Wedderburn, took an oath not to do anything else that winter and, if there were not provisions for them, to desert to the North West Company.⁹¹ The committee would not learn of what transpired during the winter of 1815-16 because the ships carrying the records and furs of that season were unable to leave Hudson Bay in the fall of 1816, but even if they had reached England, the news would have been too late to affect the preparations for the 1816-17 outfit already underway early in 1816.

As always, the committee stressed economy and control and disliked irregularities of any kind. It disliked having to hire Canadians on terms different from the other servants, but, realizing that without them the Athabasca trade could not be established and that "they would only engage on the terms they were accustomed to & understood," the committee agreed to pay them more than Europeans and also charge them more for their purchases.⁹² In fact, the HBC was charging Canadians the same prices as the NWC, even though the committee had urged the Montreal agent to impress upon the recruits "the advantageous terms" upon which they could outfit themselves with clothing and other necessities from the company's warehouse. This benefit was supposed to compensate for the low wages.⁹³ But Canadians turned up their noses at the HBC's goods. They wanted fine cloth such as calico and corduroy and slops, as cheap ready-made clothing was called, made out of good material.⁹⁴ Canadians liked "to flash," reported Peter Fidler, and lived well while they could, "seldom thinking of the time to

⁹¹HBCA, B.39/a/6, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1815-16, 18 Dec. 1815, fo. 35.

⁹²HBCA, A.6/18, London committee to Robert Semple, 27 Mar. 1816, p. 333.

⁹³HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to Maitland, Garden & Auldjo, 24 Jan. 1816, fo. 116; Alexander Lean to Auldjo, Maitland & Co., 1 Jan. 1812, fo. 52d.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.60/a/15, Edmonton House journal, 1815-16, 16 July 1816, fo. 46d.

come,...very much like English Sailors in this Respect."⁹⁵ Another officer observed that Canadians "in general respect money but very little, if they can by any means procure what they want." With respect to provisions, however, they were more easily satisfied than Orcadians, as long as they received a "sufficiency."⁹⁶ Clearly, the committee had been arrogant in its estimation of the quality of its goods and, if it hoped to lure Canadians away from the North West Company, it would have to give as much thought to the articles it offered its workers as it did to those it traded with the natives. It was necessary to abandon, at least temporarily, its tradition of parsimony, but it resisted. It repeatedly reprimanded the Montreal agency for its extravagance and insisted that the men not receive large advances of their wages, since they risked large sums of money which were "too strong a temptation to many minds to desert."⁹⁷ However, the difference between the limits the committee placed on the agent's expenditure and what the agent actually spent was so huge that one suspects the committee had no idea what economic conditions in Lower Canada actually were. In 1817, for example, the committee ordered the agency to organize an expedition of eighty men whose cost was not to exceed £4000 and was most annoyed when it received a bill for £18,056, 18s., 6d., of which it would agree to accept only £5000 until a satisfactory explanation had been received.⁹⁸ It was the company's officers, however, who had to live with the results of the committee's stinginess and in 1819 William Williams, appointed governor in chief the previous year, wrote to the Montreal agent himself, urging that "a few Livres in point of Salary must not be put in competition with the importance of the expedition" and complaining that the previous year's men had been "the refuse of those

⁹⁵HBCA, B.22/a/19, Brandon House journal, 1815-16, 30 July 1814, fo. 2.

⁹⁶HBCA, B.105/e/1, Lac la Pluie report, 1816-18, fo. 9d.

⁹⁷HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to Maitland, Garden & Auldjo, 24 Jan. 1816, fo. 116.

⁹⁸HBCA, A.5/5, Alexander Lean to Maitland, Garden & Auldjo, 18 June 1817, fos. 147d.-150.

rejected from the North West Company."⁹⁹ The committee did, however, open a shop at the depot where expeditions to the interior were fitted out for the Canadian servants to spend their wages and "supply themselves with luxuries."¹⁰⁰

Besides having to meet Canadian expectations with regard to wages, clothing, and provisions, the company also had to bear the burden of transporting the recruits from Montreal to Rupert's Land, the hazards of which were amply illustrated by Roderick McKenzie's journal of 1819-20, a uniquely detailed account of the "trouble & expense" attending the company's "business in Canada." The trip was delayed because the officers "were kept on the Tramp" rounding up the men who were getting drunk in "grog shops" or taking leave of their friends. Even then their drinking did not cease and much persuasion and a few threats were required to get them off. A gale then forced them to land, providing opportunity for more drinking, more visits to friends and taverns, and a few desertions. Once well under way, insolent guides and malingering or worn out steersmen kept the group from traveling as quickly as McKenzie thought necessary. By contrast, the transport of European servants by ship was simple and uncomplicated. After their arrival at Rainy Lake the men objected to having to travel to Rock Depot as "not just" after "so long & harassing a Voyage." Those who went did so with much grumbling. They were so slow repairing canoes for the return trip that McKenzie told them not to "trifle away their time," whereupon one of them observed "very impertinently" that if McKenzie "thought they trifled away the time to substitute others." On the trip, two men "Grumbled" about traveling so late and, after being told by McKenzie that they had no right to complain, observed that "they were not engaged to the Devil to work day & night." They were no more diligent about performing their duties at the post either and evaded work by whatever means they could, pleading exhaustion, broken snowshoes, tired dogs, and ignorance of where to enter the woods. The season concluded with an argument over whether the men were obliged to return to York

⁹⁹HBCA, D.1/1, William Williams to Maitland, Garden & Auldjo, 2 Jan. 1819, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰HBCA, A.6/19, London committee to William Williams, 3 Feb. 1819, fo. 68.

Factory with the furs. Some of them considered their contracts finished early in May, on the dates they had engaged, not at the end of the outfit as was customary in the HBC.

Dissatisfaction with this arrangement prompted one of them to say that he would neither work nor go to Hudson Bay and "that he was not at a loss for his livelihood" and "knew where to apply."

When threatened with forfeiture of the remainder of their wages, one replied that McKenzie "might keep the whole & walked off[f]." ¹⁰¹

McKenzie's journal could only strengthen the image of Canadians as volatile and unruly. Moreover, their misbehaviour was more costly and could be more disruptive than that of their British counterparts. Canadians received higher wages and had to be provided with expensive goods and ample provisions. They represented a greater investment, not only in the value of their remuneration, clothes, and food, but also in the trade goods that might have to be sacrificed to make room for the items they demanded. The journey to Rupert's Land provided ample opportunity for the men to abscond or indulge in behaviour that slowed the brigade's progress. A long delay could mean that the men arrived in Rupert's Land too late in the season to go inland for the winter, depriving the company of their services as well as burdening the bayside posts with extra men. Their skill and experience gave them considerable control over the speed with which they would travel, while their familiarity with the NWC made it easy for them to desert to the rival company whenever they became dissatisfied. As a result, as McKenzie discovered, they were not perturbed by the thought of losing their wages. They had less to lose by their desertion than the HBC did, since they would probably be welcomed by the NWC, to whom they might reveal the HBC's secrets, and encounter no difficulty finding employment in the fur trade either in the interior or in Montreal. Canadians, not unlike the other servants, knew their value and were prepared to take advantage of it when their contracts expired, making what the officers considered "exorbitant" demands, which, unless sufficient replacements were sent, had to be granted. As a result, they would hold off re-engaging until

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.105/a/7, Lac la Pluie journal, 1819-20.

they saw how many or few men arrived from Canada in hopes of extorting "extravagant" wages. So serious was this problem that Colin Robertson, once so enthusiastic about Canadians, proposed that some of them be replaced by Englishmen and boats.¹⁰²

Cautious as ever, however, the committee was not prepared to hire enough Canadians to deprive those already in the service of their power, as its officers recommended. Its order for forty winterers for 1820 did not reflect Governor Williams's plea for at least a hundred to make the company "independent" of the men in the interior and their exorbitant demands.¹⁰³ Williams's complaint that the Northern Department was undermanned met with the response that the 420 European and 350 Canadian servants on the books were quite enough. In fact, the cost of their wages suggested that, unless returns were larger, the workforce should be reduced. In fact, the committee declared, it would send *no* Canadians for the next year and servants whose contracts were up should be engaged to save the expense of bringing new men from Montreal.¹⁰⁴ This was a foolish economy. Any savings would probably be more than matched by the increased wages that old servants, their position strengthened, would demand, not to mention the loss of trade to the NWC which did not skimp on manpower, provisions, or forcefulness. Perhaps a perusal of the company's records made the committee realize that its decision was unwise, since in October of 1820 it directed the Montreal agents to engage 100 men, although still with an emphasis on moderate wages.¹⁰⁵ It must have realized too that it could overpower its servants with an influx of Scots. They were still in the majority. Of the 591 men listed in the 1818/19 servants' list, 51 per cent of the 567 for whom birthplace is recorded came from the Orkneys and just over 18 per cent came from other parts of Scotland. Of the

¹⁰²HBCA, D.1/13, Colin Robertson to William Williams, 25 Jan. 1820, fos. 12d.-13; Colin Robertson to William Williams, 16 Feb. 1820, fos. 21-21d.

¹⁰³HBCA, A.5/6, William Smith to Maitland, Garden, & Auldjo, 29 Oct. 1819, fo. 72d.; D.1/3, Williams to Maitland, Garden & Auldjo, 23 July 1820, fo. 28.

¹⁰⁴HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 25 May 1820, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, A.5/6, William Smith to Maitland & Co., 28 Oct. 1820, fo. 121.

Orcadians, almost 79 per cent had been in the service for five or more years, while of the other Scots only slightly more than 27 per cent had been there as long.¹⁰⁶ Though not conclusive, these statistics suggest that company's favourites were becoming less receptive to its advances. In 1819, the "extraordinary wages being given by Herring curers" lured away potential recruits and the return of many young men "disabled by frost &c" deterred many others. John McDonald suggested that such men be allowed to go to the colony to prevent them from making an "unfortunate impression upon their companions and Country men," that all servants be provided with "facilities to send home good accounts," and old hands be urged to stay in the service.¹⁰⁷ But the merger of 1821 promised to solve all these problems and allow the company to revert to a less expensive mode of business performed by less unruly men even as it gained a commercial empire that stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the coast of Labrador.

It planned to keep only "efficient valuable Servants" and dispose of those "only useful during an opposition." With a view to eliminating Canadians completely, the committee directed that they would be re-engaged for no more than a year.¹⁰⁸ Orcadians, it had learned, were available for £15,¹⁰⁹ which would henceforth be the starting wage for Orcadian labourers, and presumably also other Europeans. Canadian middlemen, i.e. workers who paddled in the middle of the canoe and worked as labourers once at their posts, would start at 400 *livres*, the equivalent of £20. The wage for European steersmen and bowsmen would be £22,10,-, while Canadians would get 600 *livres*, with small additions when work was "more severe" and conditions harsher. Skilled workers would receive no more than £40 and interpreters no more

¹⁰⁶These figures were calculated by analyzing several of the pre-1821 servants' lists: HBCA, A.30/6, 10, 11, 14, 16, Names &c of the Company's Servants at Hudson's Bay, 1794-5, 1800-1, 1811-2, 1814-5, and 1818-19.

¹⁰⁷HBCA, D.1/11, John McDonald to William Williams, 10 June 1819, fo. 24d.

¹⁰⁸HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 26 Feb. 1821, fos. 18-19.

¹⁰⁹HBCA, A.6/6, William Smith to John Rae, 22 Jan. 1820, fo. 87d.

than £50.¹¹⁰ Canadians resented this reduction so fiercely that George Simpson feared "a Mutiny and other serious consequences." As a result, their wages ranged from the equivalent of £30 to £40 for middlemen and £35 to £60 for steersmen and bowsmen, depending on where they were posted. They also continued to receive equipments of blankets, tobacco, beads, cloth, mittens, and knives. British servants were less successful in their resistance, but even their wages remained higher than the committee had planned. Labourers and steersmen received £2 more than specified, but bowsmen received the stipulated £20.¹¹¹ By the summer of 1823, however, after one of his conspicuously strenuous expeditions in which he had managed to reach Cumberland House in record time by means of a boat and a crew of exhausted Orkneymen, Simpson concluded that much of the company's transport could be conducted by boats instead of canoes, a plan that would help deprive the servants of the ability to thwart the company's plans.

Boats could carry more cargo more securely with fewer men than canoes. Simpson introduced boats in the Athabasca district first, with the intention of extending them wherever possible. The use of boats would permit a reduction in the number of servants, particularly of costly Canadian *voyageurs*, and the achievement of a more judicious mix of men. Canadian skill and activity and Orcadian cheapness and steadiness would balance one another, while Irishmen and other Scots, both of whom Simpson condemned as "quarrelsome independent and inclined to form leagues and cabals which might be dangerous to the peace of the Country" would become scarce in the service. Under the impression that the Orkneys were suffering massive unemployment, Simpson urged that a few men under the age of 22 might be procured on five year contracts at £12 a year, thereby facilitating the reduction of wages throughout the service, an important consideration since the old servants still resisted the new terms, although

¹¹⁰HBCA, A.6/20, London committee to George Simpson, 27 Feb. 1822, fo. 16.

¹¹¹HBCA, B.239/b/87^b, Summary of letter, probably George Simpson to London committee, 31 July 1822, fos. 4-5d.

half the Canadians re-engaged that year had agreed to relinquish equipments, a concession that Simpson considered "a great point gained."¹¹² William Williams, governor of the Southern Department, however, thought it better to hire "old hands" even at £20 for three years because they were "seasoned to the Country" and "fit for immediate Service," while "Young Hands" were "inefficient for a long time" and became "serviceable" just as their contracts were up. Like Simpson, however, he wanted Orcadians because, he said, they were "more careful of Craft and Property than Canadians."¹¹³ Now that the competition was over, the company hoped once more to rely on the Orcadian virtues of steadiness and cheapness, the importance of which had, no doubt, been emphasized by their apparent absence from the characters of Canadians, Highlanders, Irishmen, and Norwegians. The committee hoped, in fact, to eliminate Canadians completely and resort again mainly to the Orkneys for men.¹¹⁴ But, times had changed in the Orkneys.

During the next few years, most recruits were former servants who, complained Simpson, could not "shake off their indolent and luxurious habits." He thought it preferable for the company to "mould young men to [its] wishes."¹¹⁵ But, young Orcadians were attracted to the good wages to be earned in the Greenland and Davis Strait fisheries.¹¹⁶ Consequently, the committee had to continue to recruit in Canada, where, however, the HBC was increasingly unpopular. In 1825, McGillivrays, Thain and Co., the Montreal agent since the merger, reported that men returning from the interior were "in such bad humour" that none would consent to return and "they have spread their opinions over the Country." They would "not hear of the wages" and seemed "to have taken an absolute disgust at the Service tout est changé, on est regardé

¹¹²HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 1 Aug. 1823, fos. 14d.-16d., 24d.

¹¹³HBCA, D.1/6, William Williams to London committee, 17 Sept. 1824, fo. 2.

¹¹⁴HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 12 Mar. 1824, fo. 57.

¹¹⁵HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 10 Aug. 1824, fo. 76d.-77.

¹¹⁶HBCA, D.2/1, London committee to William Williams, 11 March 1825, fo. 61.

comm des chiens is in every bodys mouths..." Another "dreadful cause of complaint" was the "system of mulcting them of wages" which they complained made it "uncertain what they have to depend upon."¹¹⁷ Still, the committee remained confident that once the new system was "perfectly understood" and the good treatment of those entering that year eliminated "that unpleasant feeling which seems to prevail with regard to Fines" the agency would have no difficulty finding "Stout Novices"¹¹⁸ There were no grounds for complaint, he declared. Fines were rare and never since the beginning of the fur trade had the men been "so well clothed, so well fed, so lightly wrought, so rarely maimed in maintaining proper discipline and subordination, in short so comfortable and happy in every sense of the word and so peaceable well behaved and well disposed" as now. The "wretched selection of new hands," from the Orkneys and from Canada, was at the root of any recent difficulties. He also blamed the agents for paying no attention to the company's requests and instructions, making promises the company could not keep, and recruiting men totally unfit for the work they had to perform. Obviously, it did not occur to Simpson that, although conditions in the service were better than ever, they were still not as good as what potential recruits could find elsewhere. There was a solution, however: hiring "a few young Half breeds annually at Red River" on three- to five-year contracts to fill vacancies as they occurred. If brought into the service at an early age, Simpson observed, they would become "useful steady men" and prove "the cheapest and best Servants we can get." Indeed, "Red River" would "from hence forward be found the best and cheapest nursery for the Company's Service."¹¹⁹ News from the colony and Simpson's own report after two lots of Red River recruits suggested, however, that he had been overconfident.

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.239/c/1, William McGillivray to J. G. McTavish, 24 Apr. 1825, fo. 186.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.134/c/1, William Smith to McGillivrays, Thain and Co., 6 May 1825, fo. 113d.

¹¹⁹HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, n.d. Aug. 1825, fos. 104d., 158-158d., 177-178.

According to Roderick McKenzie, the settlement had become the home of "old and worn out" former servants, mainly Canadians with "half breed" families, living off the company's "charity" and spending their time hunting and fishing. These had, of course, by the early nineteenth century become the sports of the gentry, perquisites of their social position protected by game and land laws. Among the lower orders, such diversions were distractions from duty. As a result, McKenzie accused the Métis population of living in "idleness" and holding "in contempt the quiet toil of the industrious Colonist." Like Murdoch Mackenzie observing idleness among the Orcadians in 1750, Roderick McKenzie was blinded by a class bias that made it impossible for him to see anything other than constant, regular toil as real work. To this prejudice he added the prevailing view of the Métis as inclined by race to unsteadiness and indolence and concluded that their preference for "a hazardous idle and roaming life" over "independence in a settled and laborious one" meant they would become a "permanent burden" on the company and perhaps even endanger the peace through horse stealing and "other acts of plunder." It was unlikely that they would ever "be brought to support themselves in a stationary industrious course of life" or that they would make good servants because "at the least disgust or slightest hardship they disregard all contracts and desert to their old haunts in the plains -- far beyond the reach of the Companys power."¹²⁰ Simpson was disappointed that Red River men could not be hired for less than the standard £15 to £17, although, since they were already in Rupert's Land, hiring them eliminated the expense of bringing in Europeans or Canadians, whose trip from Montreal also led to "not infrequent" desertions. But, he too thought their "habits of indolence" made it difficult for them to "reconcile themselves" to the "laborious duties" of the service and agreed that their proximity to friends and their ability to travel and live off the land enabled them "to escape" from the company when things were "not exactly to their fancy." Consequently, desertions were frequent. In fact, reported Simpson, "in that way we may calculate on one third of our Red River recruits disappearing when their services are most

¹²⁰HBCA, B.235/e/3, Red River District Report, 1826-7, fos. 6-6d.

required." Their recapture required "great good management and address" or it would lead to "differences with Indian and half breed relatives, which in the present circumstances of the colony would not be politic." Still he did not despair "of making these people useful and in the course of a few years" believed that "every man required to recruit our Establishments may be had from thence."¹²¹ But Simpson was overconfident -- again.

Two years later, Francis Heron, reported that labourers at Red River could earn as much as five shillings a day and voyagers transporting goods to York expected £7 a trip. He had managed to persuade some to work for him at Brandon House, in spite of the measly £10 he had to offer for a nine-month term, by getting the governor of Assiniboia to agree to equip them at the Fort Garry shop from the "Cream" of the goods. They had insisted on large advances at the prices granted to settlers because they considered themselves "still on the footing of Settlers, and not regular servants of the company, by reason of their temporary engagements."¹²² Clearly, these men possessed a sense of independence not strictly appropriate for those consigned to servant status. Of course, they *were* more independent. The HBC may have been the biggest employer in the area, but the local population had other sources of subsistence to which they could resort each time their periods of employment ended. Hiring them for short terms allowed the company to be free of their maintenance during the summers, but each autumn brought new negotiations over agreements in a labour market which did not favour the company. The company's terms seemed to attract mostly men who might "be considered Boys..."¹²³ The colony was, clearly, not the answer to the company's labour problems, which were themselves complicated not simplified by the merger.

Union with the NWC had added the latter's possessions west of the Rockies to the company's territory. The New Caledonia and Columbia districts, consolidated as the Columbia

¹²¹HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 20 Aug. 1826, fos. 247-8.

¹²²HBCA, B.22/a/22, Brandon House journal, 1828-9, p. 2.

¹²³HBCA, B.22/a/23, Brandon House journal, 1829-30, 13 Nov. 1829, fo. 9.

Department in 1826, stretched from the north of what is now Oregon to Alaska. It presented the same challenges the HBC thought it had eliminated in Rupert's Land: competition from other traders, in this case, Russians and Americans, the expense and difficulties of provisioning, and the establishment of good relations with hostile natives. Here the company still had to hire men who were "useful during an opposition." The workforce also became more diverse. Sandwich Islanders, who had been employed aboard ships that plied the Pacific coast and eventually recruited by traders to make up shortfalls in their manpower, now became part of the HBC's workforce. They were considered suited only for rough labour, but their reputation for honesty and submissiveness convinced Simpson that they could be employed as guards or in "common drudgery about the Establishments." Because they were also brave and could be "depended on in cases of danger from the natives," Simpson concluded that they were "valuable in establishing new Countries." In 1824, therefore, he recommended adding fifteen to the 35 Hawaiians already in the service if the trade was extended. Hawaiians had also been very cheap, paid only in food and clothing, until 1823, when Chief Factor John Dugald Cameron allowed them £17 a year, the same as the rest of the servants. This innovation had "occasioned much dissatisfaction" among the Canadians and Europeans. And "very naturally so as they are by no means such serviceable people," commented Simpson, displaying an unusual tolerance for servants who dared question the decisions of their masters. In this case, their protest resulted not in loud denunciations of their insubordination, but a reduction of the Hawaiians' wages to £10, saving the company some money and demonstrating its benevolence.¹²⁴ For more skilled work, Simpson's thoughts turned once more to Canadians, who he thought were "better adapted for Columbia voyaging" than the Orcadians. He now suggested that the former be transferred to the west while the latter served in

¹²⁴Frederick Merk, ed. Fur Trade and Empire: George Simpson's Journal Entitled Remarks Connected with the Fur Trade in the Course of Voyage from York Factory to Fort George and Back to York Factory 1824-25 (Revised ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 91; Alexander Ross, Fur Hunters of the Far West, ed. Kenneth A. Spaulding, (1855; Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 192-3.

the east,¹²⁵ thereby clashing with the committee's intention to hire no more Canadians and overlooking the continuing reluctance of Canadians to engage.

The agency at Lachine could never guarantee a supply of men because Canadians still objected to the reduced wages and the abolition of equipments while new opportunities lured them away. In June of 1830, Francois Boucher reported that three of his four recruits had disappeared and were allegedly working above Montreal as canal labourers.¹²⁶ Another recruiter, John Crebassa, traversing the countryside in search of men, reported his surprise at finding none "but worthless fellows" appearing to sign up at William Henry, in the parish of Sorel, once a major source of labour for the NWC. Crebassa was probably a relative of Henry Crebassa, the notary whom McTavish and Frobisher had hired in 1797 to recruit men for them there. Now the young men of the parish turned to other employments and most of them had left to work in the timber industry, which, Crebassa said, they preferred to wintering in the interior. He thought that higher wages might solve the company's problem.¹²⁷ But the committee refused to raise wages even though the "improved condition of Canada" had increased the price of labour. To do so, it declared, would be tantamount to reverting to the "extravagant wages" of "opposition times."¹²⁸ As a result, the fur trade ceased to be an important part of Lower Canadian life. In 1843, in response to criticisms of the quality of men sent to Columbia Department, Simpson remarked that the recruits had been "fair specimens" of those who had applied and that it was now "quite impossible" to acquire boutes, i.e. bowsmen or steersmen, in Canada "as canoes have long fallen into disuse there." They were now "principally used" in the Columbia Department and it would have to depend for qualified canoemen on those "reared on

¹²⁵HBCA, A.12/12, George Simpson to London committee, 25 July 1827, p. 162.

¹²⁶HBCA, B.134/c/7, Francois Boucher to James Keith, 14 June 1830, fo. 353.

¹²⁷HBCA, B.134/c/7, John Crebassa to James Keith, 18 Jan. 1830, fo. 26; Greer, "Fur Trade Labour and Lower Canadian Agrarian Structures," 200.

¹²⁸HBCA, A.6/23, HBC secretary to James Keith, 11 Dec. 1833, fo. 52d.

the West side the Mountains, which is now the great nursery for canoemen." But, the Columbia Department was difficult to man because it had become "unpopular with Canadians, Orkneymen and Halfbreeds" because of "loud complaints, industriously circulated, of extreme ill-usage, being, as they say, starved, beaten and maimed by the Company's Officers in the Columbia."¹²⁹ Such rumours might well have deprived the HBC of the most hardworking and respectable men and saddled it with those rejected by other employers. In the east the employment of Canadians was also fraught with the same dangers as the employment of men from the Red River Settlement further west. Canadians employed in the Montreal Department were too much at home and, therefore, harder to control. This, combined with their demand for higher wages, prompted Simpson to recommend that Orkneymen replace all the Canadians there,¹³⁰ though by now he should have known better.

The fittest and hardest Orcadian men were taking other employment, particularly in fishing and whaling fleets, leaving the HBC with puny youths and worn out old men who displayed "a great aversion to leave the coast" and when ordered across the mountains feigned sickness and asked to return home. As a result, in 1830, Simpson recommended that the company hire twenty Highlanders from Lewis as labourers for the Northern Department, which was still the source of workers for the Columbia Departments. Simpson still thought their clannishness could be controlled by mixing them with Orcadians and Canadians, though he thought it best to keep them out of the Southern Department, where the proximity of free traders and Canada would tempt them to desert.¹³¹ In 1831, the London Committee accordingly designated the firm of W. and R. Morison as its agent in Stornoway, but received only twelve men that year. The forty supplied the following year proved "exceedingly stubborn and difficult

¹²⁹HBCA, B.223/c/1, George Simpson to John McLoughlin Sr., 21 June 1843, fo. 196.

¹³⁰HBCA, A.12/2, George Simpson to London committee, 7 Feb. 1844, fo. 332d.

¹³¹HBCA, A.12/12, George Simpson to London committee, 5 Sept. 1827, p. 193; A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 31 July 1830, fos. 368--369.

of management, and so clannish that is scarcely possible to deal with them singly" and led to greater effort in the Orkneys. But in 1836 the HBC had to turn to Lewis again,¹³² as young fit Orcadians emigrated to Australia or waited until they knew what wages the whalers were offering before applying to Edward Clouston, the HBC's agent in Stromness. In 1839 Clouston even advertised in Caithness and the Shetlands, but there was full employment in Caithness, while the Shetlanders and the Orcadians thought the HBC's wages too low and the period of its service too long. Once the whaling vessels arrived, Clouston's efforts were doomed. By the end of April, he had hired only six men, all Orcadians. Clouston was puzzled by such "backwardness to engage."¹³³ The committee lashed out in indignation at "those inconsiderate people losing sight of the many advantages the Fur trade holds forth to them," particularly the ability to save most of their wages. If this situation continued, the committee threatened, it would raise wages *and* prices and then see how the ingrates felt about the standard £17 and lower prices. As for the Orcadians, if they continued to be so uncooperative, the company would abandon them and resort to Ireland where labour was cheap.¹³⁴

The situation did not improve, however. Even the failure of the whale fishery and the poor state of the cod and herring fisheries in 1841 did not result in more recruits because "some grumblers" had returned from North America to spread "unfavourable accounts of the service." In Caithness men preferred emigration to the Canadas to joining the HBC. Therefore, Clouston procured only "a miserable muster" of eleven men, of whom three changed their minds at the last minute. Clouston warned the committee that, if this case was "passed over," others

¹³²HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 18 July 1831, fo. 416d.; George Simpson to London committee, 10 Aug. 1832, fo. 419d.; Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," 23, 27.

¹³³HBCA, A.10/8, Edward Clouston to William Smith, 24 June 1839, fo. 405; A.10/10, Edward Clouston to William Smith, 21 March 1840, fos. 225-225d.; Edward Clouston to William Smith, 15 April 1840, fo. 286; Edward Clouston to William Smith, 24 April 1840, fo. 300.

¹³⁴HBCA, B.235/c/1, London committee to Duncan Finlayson, 3 June 1840, fos. 57d.-58.

would follow.¹³⁵ But, the committee did not "deem it expedient" to pursue the matter, but declared itself baffled by the unwillingness of Orkneymen to enter its service, since it had "always heard" that they were "well treated" and the wages were "fully as high as they could obtain in other quarters." It, therefore, decided to teach the Orcadians a lesson by abandoning them for a year or two, by which time they would "feel the loss" and become as eager as ever to join. In the meantime, it turned its attention not to Ireland, but back to Lewis and also to the Shetlands.¹³⁶ As usual, however, the committee had overestimated its control of the situation. The Lewismen proved unsatisfactory. Three of them were completely unfit for the service and were sent back immediately. Of the rest, some were "slender" and "diminutive" and Chief Trader James Hargrave feared they might be "too weak" for the work required of them.¹³⁷ They were not "tractable" enough either and, although the committee engaged John Cowie, a retired HBC surgeon, as its agent in Lerwick, it abandoned its plan to snub the Orkneymen and also sent a selection of Shetlanders in 1842.¹³⁸ These proved as unsatisfactory as the Lewismen, being "sickly" and of "diminutive size."¹³⁹ Both of these new groups became permanent components of the HBC's workforce, however, and Lewismen became the most important source of European

¹³⁵HBCA, A.10/11, Edward Clouston to William Smith, 27 Oct. 1840, fos. 265-265d.; Clouston to Smith, 18 Nov. 1840, fo. 342-342d.; A.10/12, Clouston to George Simpson, 16 Feb. 1841, fos. 124d.-125.; Clouston to William Smith, 1 March 1841, fos. 173-173d.; A.10/12, Gilbert Craigie to Clouston, 10 Feb. 1841, fo. 126; Clouston to Smith, 13 Mar. 1841, fo. 204; Clouston to Smith, 17 April 1841, fo. 314.

¹³⁶HBCA, A.10/12, Edward Clouston to William Smith, 7 May 1841, fo. 374.; B.235/c/1, London committee to Duncan Finlayson and councils of the Northern and Southern Departments, 2 June 1841, fos. 68-68d.

¹³⁷HBCA, B.239/b/94, James Hargrave to W. and R. Morison, 9 Sept. 1841, fo. 18.

¹³⁸HBCA, B.235/c/1, London committee to Duncan Finlayson and councils of the Northern and Southern Departments, 1 Jun. 1842, fo. 101.; Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," 27.

¹³⁹HBCA, B.239/b/103, James Hargrave to Archibald Barclay, 23 Aug. 1850, fo. 65.

servants after the Orcadians, at least 500 men from 1830 to 1890, by Philip Goldring's estimation.¹⁴⁰

That the committee should have sought men in the Outer Hebrides is not surprising. These islands were isolated and marginal and the population was attached to its way of life, which was based on subsistence agriculture supplemented by seasonal wage labour. But, they were much poorer than the Orkneys and the population had been condemned to tiny, infertile plots of land by "improving" landlords in search of cheap labour. By the 1840s, their already bleak situation was deteriorating further. The kelping industry had collapsed and the price of cattle, whose sale had always been an important source of income, plunged. Highlanders continued to find employment in projects designed to put them to work such as the construction of roads and canals. Some traveled south to build railroads, work on farms and in the fishing industries developing in north east Scotland, or joined the navy or the Greenland fishing fleets. But, none of these occupations provided sufficient income to prevent the accumulation of permanent debt. Several years of poor crops and deteriorating conditions culminated in the potato famine of 1846, which hit the western islands the hardest. Those Highlanders who were not evicted in the new flood of clearances found themselves at the mercy of the Central Board of Management of the Fund for the Relief of the Destitute Inhabitants of the Highlands, which had been formed, under government pressure in 1847 by a number of private relief organizations to deal with the crisis. The Board, made up of businessmen and lawyers from Glasgow and Edinburgh, succeeded in making relief "conducive to increased exertion," i.e. meagre for those who worked and almost nonexistent for those who did not. Besides unsuccessful schemes to "improve" the Highlands by turning its population into cheap labour for new industries or small farmers, the Board also encouraged migration by arranging employment and paying travel expenses when necessary. The proprietor of Lewis tried to find work for his tenants until 1848 when, unwilling to carry on, he asked the Board to extend its authority to the island. The Board

¹⁴⁰Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," 26.

ceased its activity when its funds ran out in 1850. Relief now came through the poor rates, introduced in 1846, which it was the goal of both proprietors and poor law authorities to keep as low as possible. They now saw emigration as the solution to Highland poverty and used their influence to ensure the passage of the Emigration Advances Act of 1851, which provided funds to assist landlords in disposing of their no longer profitable tenants.¹⁴¹ For such people, employment with the HBC was a golden opportunity although, as the poor physical condition of the recruits indicates, recruitment from an impoverished population ravaged by disease and famine and shamefully exploited and uprooted by ruthless landowners might not result in a fit and hardy workforce. Still, the company had to make do with whomever it could get, particularly as it was becoming increasingly frequent for those who did sign up not to appear for service. The company was finally to discover how effective a legal weapon the contract was.

In 1844 two Orcadian servants sent home such bad accounts of their experiences on the coast of Labrador that their relatives petitioned for their release from their contracts and blackened the district's reputation sufficiently to persuade five of the nine labourers recruited for it in 1845 to desert before they had even embarked.¹⁴² In 1847, not only could no men be procured for that district, but the demand for labour and good wages in Britain prompted a considerable number of men hired for the Northern and Southern Departments to break their engagements.¹⁴³ Two years later, when two Shetlanders broke their contracts, the committee decided that it could no longer let such incidents pass and ordered John Cowie to prosecute the men for breach of contract. When the culprits were ordered to pay £100 in damages, the committee must have been gratified that it had won its case. But the men were too poor to pay and were committed to debtors' prison, where, as the law required, the company was liable for

¹⁴¹Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 43-87; H. Jones, "Population Patterns and Processes from c.1600," in G. Whittington and I. D. Whyte, eds., *An Historical Geography of Scotland* (London: Academic Press, 1983), 105-6.

¹⁴²HBCA, A.6/26, Alexander Barclay to William Rouse, 19 May 1845, fo. 163d.

¹⁴³HBCA, B.153/c/1, Alexander Barclay to William Nourse, 3 June 1847, fos. 133-133d.

their maintenance, a charge of ten pence a day. The company intended to hold them until they could be forced to fulfill their contracts, but the local sheriff substitute ruled that the petitions submitted for the purpose were incompetent and the matter had to be referred to the sheriff in Edinburgh. He overturned the sheriff substitute's decision, thus setting a good precedent for the future, but the company's ships had sailed for the Bay in the meantime. As a result, though victorious, the company was put to considerable expense and lost its men whom it had to support during the four months of their confinement.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the legal issue remained unsettled.

In 1851 Edward Clouston offered fresh contracts to some men who had broken their engagements, threatening prosecution for breach of contract if they refused. Only one took any notice of this threat and Clouston applied to A. Bain in Kirkwall for legal advice. Bain replied that only proceedings taken when the breach of contract occurred could lead to an order that the guilty parties fulfill their agreements and that, in his opinion, imprisonment was "competent" under their engagements. The only course open to the company was an action for damages, in which case the men could be imprisoned until they had paid, but the company would have to maintain them in jail and derive nothing from the prosecution, "the parties being worth nothing." However, the men could not be proceeded against and punished by fine or imprisonment as for a criminal offence. Had the action been taken immediately, he believed they might have been compelled under a summary application to the sheriff to "find a caution to enter the service" under the terms of their engagements. But, too much time had elapsed for this action to be taken now.¹⁴⁵ The committee decided to go ahead with prosecution and Clouston advised it to wait until late spring when the men were likely to be employed and "would feel their imprisonment to

¹⁴⁴HBCA, A.10/28, John Cowie to Archibald Barclay, 26 Jan. 1850, fos. 232-232d.; A. Duncan to John Cowie, 31 Jan. 1850, fos. 267-268.; John Cowie to Archibald Barclay, 19 March 1850, fo. 370d.; A.5/16, Barclay to Cowie, 26 May 1849, p. 132.; Barclay to Cowie, 22 May 1850, p. 264.

¹⁴⁵HBCA, A.10/30, Edward Clouston to Archibald Barclay, 4 Nov. 1851, fos. 764-764d.; A. Bain to Edward Clouston, 1 Nov. 1851, fos. 766-766d.

be a punishment." At this season, when they are generally idle," they would "feel but little inconvenience" from it. The committee followed his advice and the men ended up serving two months during a time when they might have been "profitably employed."¹⁴⁶ Clearly, the enforcement of the authority which a contract bestowed upon an employer was a complicated and costly affair that might not even achieve the desired end. Thus, the company's major response to its increasing recruitment difficulties was to look for men in more places so that shortages in one area could be made up by hiring somewhere else and during the 1850s the workforce became more diverse than ever.

The situation had become critical. Canadians were attracted by opportunities in "lumbering and public works" and repelled by rumours of "hard treatment, bad fare &c. experienced in the interior." Even Simpson admitted that "the condition of the lower classes in Canada" had "improved so much of late years" that the HBC's rations were "not very inviting." Since increasing wages would lead only to "derangement and inconvenience" and the demand for higher wages from those renewing their contracts, it was better to rely more heavily on European servants.¹⁴⁷ But, the "rage for emigration to Australia" drawing people from all over the northern parts of Britain, even the Hebrides, convinced the committee that the HBC might now have to rely on Canada alone for its labourers.¹⁴⁸ Simpson must have wondered if the committee had been paying attention to his letters. He did, however, suggest an innovation that promised to solve the company's problems, namely, that the HBC get men from Sweden, Norway, or Denmark, where wages were low, and which "a good many years ago" had supplied men "well adapted for the Service, being easy of management, hardy and efficient." He suggested a small selection from the "sea side villages where boating is the principal occupation

¹⁴⁶HBCA, A.10/30, Edward Clouston to Archibald Barclay, 21 Nov. 1851, fos. 803-803d.; A.5/18, Barclay to Clouston, 21 April 1853, p. 96.

¹⁴⁷HBCA, A.12/15, George Simpson to London committee, 1 May 1851, fo. 401; Simpson to London committee, 1 Nov. 1851, fo. 546.

¹⁴⁸HBCA, A.6/30, Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 6 Oct. 1852, fos. 25-25d., 32d.

of the inhabitants."¹⁴⁹ This new direction was entirely in keeping with the HBC's history of recruitment. Mid-nineteenth century Norway, like northern Scotland, was underdeveloped and poor, populated by cottars, who mixed subsistence agriculture with other occupations, working aboard ships and in fishing and lumbering.¹⁵⁰ These characteristics, as well as its proximity to the British Isles, probably helped to persuade the committee to act so quickly in making the necessary arrangements.¹⁵¹ The company had, in fact, consulted with Consul General J. R. Crowe, at Christiania, now Oslo, about the possibility of recruiting from the north of Europe five or six years earlier, but the depression of 1847 and the revolutions of 1848 had resulted in so much unemployment that the HBC had dropped the idea. Now, Simpson requested twenty men to serve on the Pacific coast on five-year terms, sixteen as common labourers at £17 a year and "four superior men" at £20 to £24, who would learn English and serve as leaders of the rest. Simpson doubted, however, that these wages were high enough to attract any Norwegians worth getting and suggested that Swedes might be preferable, although he recommended Finlanders.¹⁵² In 1853 Crowe successfully hired twenty, "as fine a set of young men as the company can desire, most of them having just served their military turn of servitude with excellent characters for subordination and sobriety." Several of them were "accustomed to river boating and shooting, and all to hard work and fatigue." Their number soon doubled and six tradesmen were hired for the Southern Department.¹⁵³

The first group of Norwegian recruits never arrived at their destination, since they were aboard the *Colinda*, whose captain, an uncouth and drunken scoundrel, embezzled the

¹⁴⁹HBCA, A.12/5, George Simpson to Archibald Barclay, 25 Oct. 1852, fos. 244-244d.

¹⁵⁰Drake, Population and Society in Norway 1735-1865, 81-2.

¹⁵¹HBCA, A.6/30, Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 12 Nov. 1852, fo. 36.

¹⁵²HBCA, A.5/17, George Simpson to J. R. Crowe, 6 Nov. 1852, pp. 353-5.

¹⁵³HBCA, A.6/30, Archibald Barclay to George Simpson, 18 Mar. 1853, fo. 75d.; A.5/18, Archibald Barclay to J. R. Crowe, 20 May 1853, pp. 117; Archibald Barclay to Edward Clouston, 16 June 1853, p. 135.

company's stores for his own use and then sought to save himself by goading the passengers to mutiny. His plot failed, although the ship did pull into Valparaiso, Chile, because his behaviour was so intolerable that every one refused to continue with him in charge. Since, however, the *Colinda* was a chartered ship and the captain was one of the owners, he could not be superseded. He was ordered to repay the sums he had received for the sale of the company's property, but he remained in charge of the ship. As a result, 25 of the Norwegians and all the Scottish coal miners destined for Vancouver Island deserted.¹⁵⁴ But, there were hints of future trouble. The Norwegians objected to keeping watch aboard the ship, as all HBC servants were required by their contracts to do. The Norwegians claimed that there was no such clause in the Norwegian version of the contract, but relented when threatened with the loss of pay for every day they did not keep watch and with other unspecified punishments.¹⁵⁵ They also objected to the length of their contracts and complained that their rations did not include tea and sugar.¹⁵⁶ Word of these problems had not yet reached the committee, however, when it optimistically ordered twenty more Norwegians for the following year.¹⁵⁷ In 1855, the situation began to deteriorate. Twenty-one men were hired, brought to England, and put up in the Sailors' Home in Dover to await embarkation at Gravesend. The night before they were to leave, fifteen of them ran off to join the Foreign Legion, forcing the HBC to rely on re-engaging servants and possibly

¹⁵⁴HBCA, A.5/18, W. G. Smith to A. De C. Crowe, 2 May 1854, p. 306.; C.1/242, Log of the *Colinda*, 1853. This log, volume 1 of 2, the second of which is not in the HBC Archives, was kept by Henry William Alexander Coleman, the ship's surgeon and covers the voyage as far as Valparaiso. Coleman was offended by the captain's treatment of him and the other passengers, particularly his lewd and discourteous behaviour towards the women. As a result, Coleman kept his own journal in order to have plenty of incriminating evidence available if he needed to prove the captain's misbehaviour. The captain's log is not in the archives. However, all of Coleman's charges proved true. See: A.5/18, W. G. Smith to David Landale, 23 May 1854, pp. 324-5; A.5/19, Archibald Barclay to John Hay, 18 July 1854, p. 32; 5 Aug. 1854, p. 40.

¹⁵⁵HBCA, C.1/242, Log of the *Colinda*, 1853. 4, Aug., p. 1; 5 Sept., pp. 27-8; 6 Sept., p. 28.

¹⁵⁶HBCA, A.5/19, W. G. Smith to A. de C. Crowe, 13 March 1855, p. 132.

¹⁵⁷HBCA, A.5/18, Archibald Barclay to J. R. Crowe, 14 Mar. 1854, p. 280.

Red River men for the Northern and Southern Departments.¹⁵⁸ Simpson viewed this prospect with alarm, arguing that "the maintenance of order and subordination" required that the servants "should be of different races." He also wanted to avoid having to hire from Red River and end up employing "those whose sympathies are naturally in favor of the free traders."¹⁵⁹ Fortunately, while the "prosperous state of Canada" made the HBC's wages too low to attract Canadians and only nine Orcadians and one Shetlander could be found in the north of Scotland, 39 Norwegians signed up. Unfortunately, some of them deserted on the way to England.¹⁶⁰ A crisis loomed once more.

Simpson considered the company's workforce seriously defective. Men hired from Red River needed to be replaced with Europeans, preferably Orcadians, as soon as possible. Canadians, even if available, would not do because "from similarity of language and habits," they were "prone to unite with the halfbreed population." They also usually married natives and settled at Red River, where they swelled "the numbers of the French Halfcaste community" which, "to a man...opposed...the Company's rule," which they considered "adverse to their best interests -- asserting and feeling that the soil, the trade and the government of the country are their birthrights," beliefs "instilled" by the clergy and American traders.¹⁶¹ "Red River halfbreeds" had in fact become the majority in the Saskatchewan and Swan River districts. Though "active, hardy & well adapted" for the service," they could not be relied upon "when opposed to their own countrymen" and were "frequently found plotting against their employers and playing into the hands of the free traders," whom they "almost invariably" joined when their engagements with the company expired. Moreover, they were "insubordinate and difficult of management" and,

¹⁵⁸HBCA, A.5/19, W. G. Smith to A. de C. Crowe, 12 June 1855, p. 195; B.239/c/8, W. G. Smith to William Mactavish, 21 June 1855, fos. 118d.-119.

¹⁵⁹HBCA, A.12/7, George Simpson to London committee, 29 June 1855, fos. 457d.-458.

¹⁶⁰HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to William Smith, 25 Feb. 1856, fo. 40d.; B.239/c/8, W. G. Smith to William Mactavish, 21 June 1856, fos. 327-327d.

¹⁶¹HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to London committee, 26 June 1856, fos. 125, 130.

without "a preponderance of Europeans" the company was entirely "in their power." Meanwhile, the Norwegians had revealed, like everyone else the company had ever hired, a "disposition to combine together in order to resist the authority of their masters." This judgement reflected Simpson's inability to view behaviour in any terms but ethnicity and an ignorance of the social relations that prevailed in the men's country of origin. In Norway, there was unrest among the lower orders and, after 1848, a radical social movement, which the government crushed. Simpson, however, attributed their misbehaviour to the fact that they appeared to be of "the lowest description, runaway sailors, 'goal'[sic] birds' &c" while, "generally speaking," they were "not physically equal to Orkneymen, Canadians or Halfbreeds." Furthermore, their "mode of life" and their language made it difficult to deal with them,¹⁶² as the continuing dispute over the Norwegians' contracts demonstrated.

The Norwegians stationed at Moose Factory in 1854 were so dissatisfied with their rations and duties that they submitted a petition to H. W. Crowe, their recruiter, informing him that they intended to give notice of their intention to return home in 1855, but had been told that their contracts did not permit them to do so. "We can clearly see," they complained, "that the company does not fulfill its Contracts in any one point, but treats us Foreigners as it likes." Crowe, they charged, had told them they could leave any time after serving two years if they gave a year's notice, as the Norwegian contracts specified.¹⁶³ This misunderstanding resulted from an error in translation. The contract was supposed to stipulate that a man had to give notice of his intention to return home a year before the contract expired. But, the company did nothing to settle the issue and Norwegian discontentment grew until it exploded into a mutiny at Norway House in the summer of 1857. It began with eight Norwegians who, upon their arrival with the

¹⁶²HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to London committee, 30 June 1857, fos. 486-486d.; Drake, Population and Society in Norway 1735-1865, 24-5.

¹⁶³HBCA, A.12/7, "Translated Copy of a Letter from six Norwegian Servants of the Hudson Bay Company to H W Crowe Esq dated Moosefactory Hudson's Bay Sept. 10, 1854", fos. 521-521d.

Saskatchewan brigade, gave notice of their intention to leave, according to the terms of the contract as they understood it. When this request was denied, they refused to work and were joined by eight of their countrymen who, destined for the MacKenzie River district, refused to embark. These were, in turn, supported by the rest of the Saskatchewan servants of all origins, who, Simpson claimed, were motivated by "a mere spirit of opposition, which is quite rife in the service." Faced by 120 determined men, Simpson thought coercion was both dangerous and impossible and promised to refer the disputed clause in the contract to the committee and accept the interpretation of a Norwegian lawyer.¹⁶⁴ No one thought yet of abandoning Norwegian recruitment, however, because if the HBC did so it would have to find another way of avoiding wage increases.

Simpson reported that offering higher wages to attract men "would probably lead to a 'strike' throughout the country for a general advance in the price of labour" and he urged that the company continue to hire Norwegians or Swedes or re-introduce land grants to lure Scots back to the service.¹⁶⁵ The committee followed his suggestion, but land in the Red River Settlement was no longer much of an attraction when land could be had in Australia and Canada with no obligation other than its cultivation.¹⁶⁶ Thinking it "impolitic" to get many men from Canada, the company stuck with Norwegians.¹⁶⁷ But, the complaints of returning Norwegian servants and a widespread impression that the men in the service were not allowed to write to their friends and relatives had damaged the company's reputation.¹⁶⁸ And, as elsewhere, more

¹⁶⁴HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to London committee, 30 June 1857, fos. 490d.-492.

¹⁶⁵HBCA, A.12/8, George Simpson to William Smith, 10 Jan. 1857, fos. 361-361d.

¹⁶⁶NAC, MB 19 A21, Series 1, Hargrave Papers. Edward Clouston to James Hargrave, 23 Mar. 1857, 6189.

¹⁶⁷HBCA, A.5/20, W. G. Smith to Edward Clouston, 28 Jan. 1857, p. 254; A.12/9, George Simpson to William Smith, 22 March 1858, fo. 113d.

¹⁶⁸HBCA, A.11/46, Donald MacKenzie to W. G. Smith, 20 Aug. 1857, fo. 228.; A.5/22, Thomas Fraser to A. de C. Crowe, 4 Nov. 1858, p. 150.

attractive opportunities were drawing men away. Higher wages in the Christiania area and "extensive emigration" led Crowe to suggest looking further north than usual to find sufficient men at the prescribed wages.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, a London notary's translation of the Norwegian contracts supported the men's allegations.¹⁷⁰ But, the committee, like Simpson, attributed most of the trouble to Crowe's failure to investigate the men's backgrounds properly and ordered 25 to 30 men in 1858, increasing that number to 45 when the company's recruitment efforts in Scotland failed completely.¹⁷¹ However, bad news from North America suggested that the company's second Norwegian experiment was no more successful than the first.

The Norwegians hated the service and their dislike translated into what the officers saw as a general "laziness, insolence and disobedience to orders." Such incidents as Lars Gulbransen's assault with a knife on the night guard at York Factory, the theft of a case of cognac, and Gulbransen's fatal attack on another Norwegian further damaged their reputation. Moreover, their unruliness was doing "Much Mischief" in its effect on the Orkney servants who seeing the officers' "total inability effectually to punish such open mutiny" were "already beginning to show some of the same evil spirit."¹⁷² Robert Wilson at Oxford House spoke for many of the officers when he declared the Norwegians to be "the most useless Set of Men I ever Saw" and "a Lazy useless good for Nothing Set of jail Birds for Certainly from thence they

¹⁶⁹HBCA, A.5/20, W. G. Smith to A. de C. Crowe, 24 April 1857, p. 301; Smith to Crowe, 12 May 1857, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰HBCA, A.32/35, Translation of Carl Jacobsen's contract, no date, fo. 5d. The contract mistakenly required a year's notice if a man wanted to leave the service "before the expiration" of his contract instead of "at the expiration". A.5/21, W. G. Smith to A. de C. Crowe, 10 Oct. 1857, p. 132.

¹⁷¹HBCA, A.5/21, W. G. Smith to A. de C. Crowe, 24 March 1858, pp. 237-8.; Smith to Crowe, 8 Apr. 1858, p. 244; Smith to Edward Clouston, 3 May 1858, p. 277; Smith to Crowe, 19 May 1858, pp. 286-7.

¹⁷²HBCA, B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to William Smith, 12 Sept. 1857,, fo. 43d.; James Hargrave to Rev. E. A. Watkins, 1 Dec. 1857, fo. 62; post mortem of Andreas Johannisen, fos. 72-3; James Hargrave to George Simpson, 27 Feb. 1858, fo. 77d.; James R. Clare to George Simpson, 16 Aug. 1858, fo. 103.

are Come and no place else."¹⁷³ It was better, declared Simpson, to be shorthanded than to bring to the country "bodies of disorderly, impracticable men over whom we can experience no controul[sic] and who virtually give us law." He must have been relieved when, in the spring of 1858, 32 Norwegians resigned and only six re-engaged. From now on, Simpson urged, no more than twelve Norwegians should be recruited at a time, and they should be split into two groups to prevent any future difficulties.¹⁷⁴ The new batch was not even allowed to land until James Hargrave boarded the ship and offered them the opportunity to cancel their contracts. Of the 34 men aboard, only seven chose to remain in the service.¹⁷⁵ A drunken brawl at Moose Factory on New Year's Day followed by a petition from eleven Norwegians complaining about their rations and the hostility of the Indians and demanding to be allowed to go home, prompted the committee to decide that not only these men but most of the Norwegians still in the service would be sent home.¹⁷⁶ "The Governor and Committee have had enough of that class," the HBC's secretary informed Crowe in 1859, "and are determined to give higher wages to Scotchmen rather than have recourse again to foreigners."¹⁷⁷

The abandonment of Norwegian recruitment meant that the committee had to "take the whole subject into consideration with a view to...making such an alteration" in the contracts "as might hold out an inducement to the men of Orkney, Shetland, the Western Islands and the Mainland of Scotland to accept engagements with the Company." It, therefore, decided, at long

¹⁷³HBCA, B.239/c/10, Robert Wilson to James Hargrave, 11 March 1858, fo. 34d.

¹⁷⁴HBCA, A.12/9, George Simpson to London committee, 24 June 1858, fos. 154-156d.

¹⁷⁵HBCA, B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 27 Aug. 1858; C.7/132, Miscellaneous Papers - *Prince of Wales* (II), 1866-86. Declaration by Norwegians, 14 Aug. 1858, fo. 1.

¹⁷⁶HBCA, B.3/c/2, J. Mackenzie to Richard Hardisty, 3 Jan. 1859, fo. 333; J. MacKenzie to Richard Hardisty, 9 July 1859, fo. 360d.; A.5/22, Thomas Fraser to A. de C. Crowe, 4 Apr. 1859, pp. 278-9.; A.12/10, Petition from Norwegian Servants, 9 Jan. 1859.

¹⁷⁷HBCA, A.5/22, Thomas Fraser to A. de C. Crowe, 17 Feb. 1859, p. 222.

last, to increase wages and improve provisions and accommodations.¹⁷⁸ New recruitment circulars were prepared with the assistance of James Hargrave and sent to the agents, who now included John Adam at Lochmaddy, North Uist, who provided no recruits, and Duncan McTavish at Inverness.¹⁷⁹ In these advertisements, the company asked for "able-bodied men," no older than thirty, and "of good character and properly recommended" to sign five-year contracts. In the tradesman category, the company wanted boatbuilders, coopers, blacksmiths, and tinsmiths, of whom boatbuilders would receive £30 a year and the others £35. Labourers, of whom sixty or seventy were wanted that year, would receive £22 a year and £23 if sloopers. All men regardless of rank were promised increases of £5 or more if they were employed as steersmen or postmasters. Besides the usual "ample" rations, all employees would receive rations of tea and sugar or £2 in cash if they preferred or were stationed where these goods were unavailable. For each contract they completed, tradesmen could have fifty acres at Red River, while labourers were granted twenty five.¹⁸⁰ The introduction of tea and sugar as part of ordinary men's rations was due to the committee's awareness of their new importance in the popular diet, which had certainly been brought home to it by the Norwegians' repeated objections to being deprived of them and by such petitions as that of Peter Robertson, who in 1853 had made a claim for an allowance of tea and sugar, as well as bedding, based on his understanding of what constituted the maintenance promised by his recruiter. Robertson, engaged in Dundee in 1855, stated that in Dundee, maintenance "invariably" included tea, sugar, bedding and ordinary rations allowed in the country.¹⁸¹ The company's officers themselves believed that an allowance of tea and sugar would "render the people more contented and disposed to remain in the

¹⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/c/11, Thomas Fraser to James R. Clare, 24 June 1859, fo. 95d.

¹⁷⁹Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," 27.

¹⁸⁰HBCA, PP 1859-1, Engagement of Mechanics, 22 Nov. 1859; PP 1859-2, Engagement of Labourers, 22 Nov. 1859.

¹⁸¹HBCA, B.239/b/104^b, William Mactavish to Alexander Barclay, 15 Sept. 1854, fo. 65.

service."¹⁸² Simpson declared that these "liberal wages" and new rations would induce "able-bodied and respectable men" to engage and be "the means of bringing to the country a trustworthy class of servants, having no interests in common with the natives and Halfbreeds."

¹⁸³ Simpson was wrong again.

From Inverness McTavish reported a "stiffness of many to engage," due, he suspected, to the fact that, although the rations and accommodations were satisfactory, the "pecuniary remuneration" was no more than what could be earned at home and, therefore, "not sufficient inducement to serve in a foreign country." There was also widespread interest in emigration to New Zealand and Australia.¹⁸⁴ Even when the "stiffness" to engage had been overcome, a "stiffness" to actually come forward when it was time to leave for North America lingered. McTavish was plagued by desertions. He had to threaten three deserters with legal proceedings before they would appear in Inverness and then spent a day there trying to round up his recruits, some of whom had gone into hiding. Most of the deserters were men recruited early in the season, when, McTavish reported, former HBC men were traveling about the country damaging the company's reputation and they had "prejudiced" some of the men against the service. McTavish was confident, however, that once the men in that part of Scotland became familiar with the company there would be fewer desertions. Although most of the deserters had fled the country, McTavish took legal action against two of them. One, John Mackenzie, was sentenced to 48 hours in prison with hard labour, a punishment McTavish considered too lenient, but the magistrate had never tried such a case before and Mackenzie's representative had managed to persuade him to impose that penalty. With the second man, Peter Macdonald, however, it became apparent again that the contract did not provide for the uncomplicated

¹⁸²HBCA, A.12/10, George Simpson to London committee, 21 June 1859, fo. 175.

¹⁸³HBCA, A.12/10, George Simpson to Thomas Fraser, 10 Jan. 1859, fo. 5d.; George Simpson to Thomas Fraser, 14 Feb. 1859, fos. 52-52d.

¹⁸⁴HBCA, A.10/45, Duncan Mactavish to secretary, 4 March 1859, fos. 181-182d.

enforcement of the committee's authority that the company needed if its contracts were to have any effectiveness at all.

Prior to his trial, all the lawyers debated the authority of the act under which McTavish was proceeding. Before continuing McTavish decided to get a legal opinion on the matter from his solicitors, the Inverness firm of MacPherson and MacAndrew. They informed him that Macdonald's agent had threatened a suspension if they proceeded, on grounds that the Act, 4 George IV c.34, did not apply to the contract. This law was the Master and Servant Act of 1823, which, for most employers was a powerful weapon for the discipline of workers, since, it allowed masters to prosecute employees under criminal law, while they themselves could be prosecuted only in civil law. By the second half of the century, in fact, the law was regarded as "an essential weapon for controlling labour." Macpherson and MacAndrew declared that, if the act did not apply to the company's contract, then there was no way to punish Macdonald unless the HBC had a special act empowering them to enforce their contracts. Otherwise, a "procedure at common law" would be necessary and it was "so tedious and doubtful" that they recommended against it, since "an action for damages would be of no avail as nothing could be recovered." But that seemed to be the only route open to the HBC, since consultation with several of their "professional brethren" had led them to doubt that the act applied to a contract to serve outside the United Kingdom, where the act was not in force, although they had found no legal decision to that effect. The firm, therefore, suggested that, before proceeding, McTavish find out whether the company had a special act or whether it had been proceeding under the Master and Servant Act and with what results. They cautioned, however, that care was necessary, since "these quasi criminal prosecutions are dangerous" and there were always "agents ready to take advantage of the least slip and to bring suspicions." Upon being shown a letter from Edward Clouston regarding the prosecution of deserting recruits in Stromness, they recommended that McDonald might be sued before the Sheriff under the Small Debt Act for any sum not exceeding £12. Upon conviction, the man could be imprisoned, although the company

would have to pay for his maintenance during his incarceration. Clouston had proceeded "at common law" against three defaulting servants and obtained a decret in each case for half a year's wages. One of the men escaped, but two were imprisoned for two months and then released on the committee's orders. This action had gained the company "not a farthing" in damages and it had authorized no further prosecutions. MacPherson and MacAndrew also suggested that the company get a legal opinion regarding the applicability of 4 George IV c.34 to its service, since it was the most "summary and effectual punishment in these cases." The committee decided to drop the charges, a move that McTavish thought prudent. Even if "legal obstacles had not interfered," he observed, to prosecute deserters "with great severity" would "render the service of the Honble Company unpopular" and he had "good reason to believe from communications" which he had that service was "likely to become more popular in this part of the Country" which would prevent desertions in future.¹⁸⁵

The whole affair demonstrated that the company was at a distinct disadvantage compared to other employers when it came to enforcing the terms of its contracts, which might very well not have been worth the paper they were printed on. Desertions continued and the company took no further actions. They were simply "an evil to which the company is frequently subjected and which cannot be remedied."¹⁸⁶ The HBC had to fall back on the attractiveness of its benefits alone to lure and keep recruits, but they had become much harder to charm. While in the past the company's terms would have been considered "liberal", reported Edward Clouston, it was questionable if this was still the case. Moreover, he believed that the offer of a grant of land was no attraction since few Orcadians intended to remain in Rupert's Land and

¹⁸⁵HBCA, A.10/45, Duncan Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, 16 June 1859, fos. 609-609d.; Mactavish to Fraser, 22 June 1859, fo. 641; Mactavish to Fraser, 29 June 1859, fos. 653d.-654A.; Mactavish to Fraser, 11 Aug. 1859, fos. 162-163; MacPherson and MacAndrew to Mactavish, 10 July 1859, fos. 164-165d.; Edward Clouston to Duncan Mactavish, 19 Aug. 1859, fos. 206-206d.; Mactavish to Fraser, 24 Aug. 1859, fos. 222-222d.; Mactavish to Fraser, 22 Sept. 1859, fos. 326-326a; Clive Emsley, Crime and Society in England 1750-1900 (London: New York: Longman, 1987), 115, 157.

¹⁸⁶HBCA, A.6/36, Thomas Fraser to E. M. Hopkins, 20 June 1861, fo. 109.

would only appreciate land there if, rather than having to reside on it, it was "placed at [their] disposal."¹⁸⁷ Clouston proved correct, while reports from Inverness and Stornoway indicated that the company's wages and other benefits were not good enough to attract many men.¹⁸⁸ Sundering its ties with Duncan McTavish in Inverness because of the "generally bad character" of his recruits aroused optimism in the committee.¹⁸⁹ But, an outbreak of typhus at York Factory in 1864 made recruiting difficult that year ¹⁹⁰ and bad reports spread by men sent home in 1865 hindered efforts in 1866. Even a change of agent at Stornoway from the Morisons to Roderick Millar, an "Inspector of the Poor," who would have had a good idea of the state of the population, did not improve. Millar reported that good fishing, high wages, bad reports, and an aversion to leaving home prevented him from getting any men.¹⁹¹ When only ten Scots appeared at York Factory in 1866, William Mactavish reported that many of the officers thought that "men fitted for the Service might be got from Norway." They blamed the "failure of the last trial" on the agent's recruiting men from towns rather than the countryside. Mactavish personally thought that the Norwegians he had met were "tolerable servants" but "unsettled" and "not satisfied to remain long in one place or at one kind of labor." The committee did not take the officers' advice.¹⁹² In 1870, however, the recruits reflected nicely the company's preferences: 28 from the Orkneys, 13

¹⁸⁷NAC, MG19 A21, Series 1, Hargrave Papers. Edward Clouston to James Hargrave, 6 Jan. 1858, 6944-5.

¹⁸⁸HBCA, A.10/47, Duncan Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, 8 Mar. 1860, fos. 431-431d.; Mactavish to Fraser, 22 June 1860, fos. 655-655A; Mactavish to Fraser, 25 June 1860, fo. 664d.; A.10/47, W. and R. Morison to Thomas Fraser, 25 June 1860, fo. 663; A.10/48, Edward Clouston to Thomas Fraser, 3 July 1860, fos. 12d.-12A; A.6/36, Thomas Fraser to Edward M. Hopkins, 20 Feb. 1861, fo. 33; Fraser to Hopkins, 10 Apr. 1861, fo. 52.

¹⁸⁹HBCA, A.6/38, Thomas Fraser to A. G. Dallas, 15 Jan. 1863, fo. 14d.

¹⁹⁰HBCA, A.6/39, Thomas Fraser to James R. Clare, 25 June 1864, fos. 107d.-108.

¹⁹¹HBCA, B,239/c/16, Thomas Fraser to J. W. Wilson, 27 June 1866, fos. 196d.-97.

¹⁹²HBCA, A.12/44, William Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, 16 Oct. 1866, fos. 192d.-193.; A.6/41, Thomas Fraser to William Mactavish, 17 Nov. 1866, fo. 10d.

from Stornoway, and ten from the Shetlands.¹⁹³ But, the majority of the company's workforce had, for a long time, been native-born, and the company's business depended upon the population which its own efforts had created in the hope of its providing a regular supply of cheap labour, but which George Simpson had condemned for its untrustworthiness and which the company's officers found unmanageable and unruly.

"Almost every half breed Servant engaged in Red River for this District," complained William Christie at Edmonton House in 1861, "proves a drunken Scamp, demands Liquor, when refused deserts."¹⁹⁴ Obviously, the temperance society begun by the Catholic bishop in the 1850s had not survived and succeeded in transforming the Red River Settlement into a pool of sober, hard-working, pseudo-Orkneymen. Although their overwhelming presence at the company's posts was troublesome enough, it was their misbehaviour while manning the brigades that was most alarming. Transport was, in the committee's opinion, of the greatest importance and the brigades had become increasingly mutinous, frequently carrying only as much cargo as they considered appropriate, with the result that important supplies and quantities of furs were left at depots instead of reaching their destinations. "Until some means are devised of avoiding the employment of these Red River scoundrels in our transport business," declared one officer, "a ruinous waste and abuse of property must continue."¹⁹⁵ As a result, after years of chaos,¹⁹⁶ in 1870, Donald A. Smith proposed that instead of Red River "halfbreeds" the company rely on steamboats wherever practicable. The committee agreed enthusiastically, hoping to "be made

¹⁹³HBCA, A.10/81, John Stanger to Secretary, 3 July 1870, fo. 12.

¹⁹⁴HBCA, B.239/c/12, William Christie to James Clare, 2 Jan. 1861, fo. 1d.

¹⁹⁵HBCA, B.239/c/13, James A. Graham to Officers of the Northern Department, 26 Dec. 1862, fos. 212d.-213.

¹⁹⁶See: HBCA, B.239/c/15 James A. Graham to Officers of the Northern Department, 21 Dec. 1864, fos. 184-185; B.239/c/16, 1865-6. Clare to Officers of the Northern Department, 12 Dec. 1865, Christie to Officers of the Northern Department, 12 Dec. 1865, fos. 111d.-112; B.239/c/17, 1867. James Stewart to Officers of the Northern Department, Dec. 1867, fos. 236-236d.

quite independent of the services not only of the Halfbreeds but of the Indians in the conducting of the transport service." It also suggested building tramways or cart roads at some of the portages. These methods would reduce the capital tied up in the trade, bring furs to market more quickly, and cut the number of ships sent out.¹⁹⁷

It was rather appropriate that a committee dominated by businessmen interested in the development of other resources besides furs would select a technological innovation to solve a manpower problem. Unlike the paternalistic old guard which had once constituted the HBC's committee, these men were accustomed to the more modern social relations of industrial Britain. Thus, they urged caution upon their recruiters, retained traditional terms, and continued to seek men among marginal populations that possessed the deference, hardiness, and cheapness of the Scots whom Nixon had recommended in 1682, but accepted the fact that not all recruits would turn out well. It should be "borne in mind," their secretary remarked in 1871, "that the number of men sent annually to the Northern Department varies from 40 to 50 and it cannot be wondered at, that a few of them prove unsuitable."¹⁹⁸ This forbearance contrasted sharply with the deep concern with recruitment that the committee had evinced in the past. While its officers still complained about the quality of men they received, the committee had become almost as blasé about hiring men as it had about discipline. For over a century, it had, as Charles McKenzie put it, "overrun the north of Europe..."¹⁹⁹ trying to find men who would serve as well as the Orcadians had until the HBC's expansion revealed their lack of enthusiasm for danger and hardship. Thereafter, the company had engaged in cautious, but nonetheless avid searches for men who were as poor and tough as the Orkneymen but more active, turning to Canadians, Highlanders, Irishmen, and Norwegians, while establishing a settlement that would provide a

¹⁹⁷HBCA, A.6/44, W. G. S. to Donald A. Smith, 1 Nov. 1870, fos. 91-92d.

¹⁹⁸HBCA, A.6/44, W. S. to Donald A. Smith, 13 Jan. 1871, fo. 117.

¹⁹⁹NAC, MG19 A44, Charles McKenzie and Hector Aeneas McKenzie Correspondence, 1828-55. C. McKenzie to H. A. McKenzie, 1 May 1854.

homegrown variety of suitable labour. As each of these groups proved less tractable than the committee hoped, it turned its attention elsewhere. By 1871, it no longer seemed to consider this search necessary or perhaps it had learned that the chances of finding perfect servant material were virtually non-existent. As a result, it tried to meet the challenge of the Red River tripmen not by trying to find deferential men in an as yet uncorrupted pre-industrial society but by resorting to machinery, just as they would have done had they been factory-owners. As for the rest of its operations, it was prepared to accept that no group of recruits was perfect.

TABLE 1

TYPES OF MISBEHAVIOUR IN THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY, 1770/71 TO 1870/71

INCIDENTS	1770-1	1780-1	1790-1	1800-1	1810-1	1820-1	1830-1	1840-1	1850-1	1860-1	1870-1	TOTAL
Refusal to do as ordered	4	1	4	6	3	21	2		6	4	6	57
Negligence	2	4	1	2		18		7	3	2	13	52
Desertion				1		1	2	1	9	6	7	27
Drunkenness		3	1	1	2	4	2	1	1	5	6	26
Refusal to work	1	1		1	3	1		1	3	3	6	20
Theft			1		4	2	3	1			1	12
Absent without leave						2		1	4	2	1	10
Insolence	2	1	1		1	2					1	8
Private trade	1					1			1			3
Combination				1		1	1					3
Other	4	1	1	2	2	15	4	7	1		5	42
TOTAL	14	11	9	14	15	68	14	19	28	22	46	260

These figures were calculated by counting every specific incident of misbehaviour for every outfit every ten years beginning in 1770/71. An outfit, the HBC's year, extended from 1 June of one year until 31 May of the next.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the workforce hired on contracts grew from fewer than 150 to 587 men in 1800. Except for 1810-1, when there were 442 such employees, and 1830-1, when there were 999, the company's labour force usually numbered in the neighbourhood of 700 men. Prior to the merger of 1821, around 20 per cent of these were officers. Their numbers dwindled to fewer than 10 per cent in 1830, but increased to over 17 per cent in 1870. Labourers made up at least 70 per cent of the workforce with tradesmen making up the rest. See A.30 (Servants' Lists) for information on servants until 1819 and B.4 (Post Account Books) for 1820-1 for lists of servants for that outfit. For post-merger period see Goldring, *Papers on the Labour System of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-1900, Volume 1*, Table 2.1, p.33, Table 2.3, p. 45, and Table 3.4, p. 79. Except for Table 2.1, Goldring's information is for the Northern Department only, but, since it was the largest department, these figures give some idea about the make-up of the workforce as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM

John Marwood behaved in insolent & rude manner to my Self & Mr Cocking as obliged me to give him 3 or 4 Cuffs, and when he was out of the Factory, bid me Come & Strike him again & Said with many Oaths if I did he would return the Blows. I told him I should have a fine time of it to fight every rude fellow to his Duty.¹

If Ferdinand Jacobs was indeed so frequently plagued with "rude" fellows reluctant to do their duty that he had neither the time nor the energy to respond to every one of their challenges, managing HBC men must have meant enduring a good deal of impudence from men sworn to subordination. Jacobs could, of course, have been exaggerating, but he was an officer with 31 years of command behind him and his remark might well have reflected the frequency with which he had to deal with cheeky underlings. Indeed, he might have *expected* indolence and impertinence from men who could be classed as "rough." An apprenticeship with the HBC had rescued him from such a fate by setting him on the road to respectability. He had proven himself a "very Sober Deserving Young Man" and was appointed "accomptant" and assistant to the chief of Fort Prince of Wales, whom he succeeded thirteen years later. Jacobs dedicated himself to the promotion of the company's business, the eradication of drunkenness and the inculcation of at least the appearance of piety among his subordinates.² John Marwood was another kind of HBC man entirely, an ordinary labourer, whose brief emergence from obscurity demonstrated that the fur trade was "contested terrain".³

The majority of the company's employees were neither officers nor apprentices, but labourers hired primarily for strength, hardiness, and cheapness to perform the drudgery upon which the fur trade rested. Their work was pre-industrial, its routine dictated by the seasons and necessity, not clocks or machines. Late in the summer, the ships arrived with new men,

¹HBCA, B.239/a/65, York Factory journal, 1770-71, 17 Aug. 1771, fo. 47.

²Shirlee Anne Smith, "Ferdinand Jacobs," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV: 1771 to 1800 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 383-4.

³This phrase comes from Richard Edwards, Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

supplies, and trade goods and left with the proceeds of the outfit's trade and retiring servants. Shiptime was a flurry of activity, with men loading and unloading the vessels as quickly as possible to enable them to get out of the Bay before winter set in. Men and goods were then assigned to their winter posts and dispatched as early as possible to proceed swiftly to their destinations. Winter was an endless round of cutting and hauling wood, both for fuel and for construction or repairs, hunting, fishing, fetching meat and furs from Indian tents, shoveling snow, and taking letters and packages between posts. Tradesmen repaired guns and traps, made clothing, and built boats, canoes, and houses. In the spring, some of the men set off for the Bay with the proceeds of the winter's trade and the retiring servants. Those who stayed behind spent the summer laying in stocks of wood, planting gardens, and repairing the posts. In the fall they harvested their crops and prepared for the winter. How these tasks were carried out depended, however, on the men's skills and inclinations, a situation which did not automatically result in diligence and obedience.

Like other pre-industrial workers, HBC employees exercised considerable control over the pace of work, which they performed according to customary attitudes toward work and leisure. For them, time was not money and labour was carried out in spurts of intense effort alternating with equally intense idleness.⁴ Initially, of course, their superiors had similar views, but the stake they had in the success of the business increasingly led them to advocate the practice of diligence, frugality, and respectability. But, the view from the bottom was different from the view from the top. For servants, overwork led to exhaustion not promotion and the completion of one task only led to another, no less arduous, one. As a result, the relationship between the company and its workers was fraught with tension. Although enmeshed in social relations that emphasized deference, HBC employers had their own interests, as their responses to the company's recruitment efforts demonstrated. Once the men were in the service, they did

⁴E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," in, F. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout, eds., Essays in Social History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 39-77.

not abandon those interests and, since they spent most of their time at some distance from their officers, were not likely to adopt the views of their superiors during the years of their employment. It should not, therefore, be surprising that Ferdinand Jacobs had to endure insolence and insubordination from his men.

In spite of Jacobs's complaint, however, 1770-71 was a quiet outfit at York Factory. Marwood's misbehaviour occurred in August of 1771 and so belonged to the following outfit. Other officers were less fortunate. At Eastmain, William Mitchell, ordered to point stakes, responded by refusing to do anything.⁵ At Churchill, some "very obstropulous" seamen, having come on shore with the master of the *Charlotte*, refused to return to the brig and shammed drunkenness. When Captain Thomas Robinson ordered them back aboard, one of them, James Morrison, pretended to fall, landing between the captain's legs and throwing him down. Several of the ship's officers rushed to Robinson's assistance and one of them struck Morrison, who responded by threatening his life. Moses Norton immediately had Morrison put into irons and posted a guard over him. Norton believed that some of the men were on the verge of mutiny and, since Morrison had threatened Norton's life the previous year for "Compelling him to his Duty," he wanted to take no chances. The next day, however, after Morrison "begged hard to be at Liberty" and signed a certificate promising better behaviour, he was allowed to return to work.⁶ Similar disturbances erupted at Moose Factory, where three seamen and a shipwright, refused to return to the sloop when ordered to do so. One Thomas Foggit went so far as to remove his clothes and "swore by God they Shold[sic] not go till he Pleased." The other two sailors followed suit, promised to support Foggit, and "Chaleng'd the whole Factorys[sic] People." Foggit and Robert Rutland were finally persuaded to return to the sloop, but John Shotton left "and lay amongst the Indians." Ralph Featherstone, the shipwright, refused to leave the post or "Do any

⁵HBCA, B.59/a/40, Eastmain journal, 1770-71, 14 Sept. 1770, fo. 7d.

⁶HBCA, B.42/a/80, Churchill journal, 1770-71, 20-21 Sept. 1770, fos. 5-5d.

more Duty in the Country." Neither Featherstone nor Shotton did any work for a week and then, after giving their "Promise of Good behaviour," were allowed back to work."⁷

When John Garbut served out the Christmas rations at Moose Factory, three men demanded more butter "in a threatening manner". When in March he ordered the men to hunt partridges, they refused and he had to send an Indian in their place. A few days later, one of the men refused to work with the armourer. Attendance at Sunday services was irregular and when men did show up they were not always properly pious. On one Sunday in March, Garbut reported, most of the men came to the service, but "only some that will not be Pleas'd with any thing that I say." On another, he remarked that the mates of the sloops and one of the shipwrights "redicules[sic] what Is read."⁸ At Severn House, Andrew Graham was annoyed that the men had not procured the winter's stock of firewood during the summer, while under the command of Garbut, and, therefore, were felling trees in October.⁹ The men also appear to have engaged in private trade during the outfit. When the *Prince of Wales* arrived in London in October of 1771, a cache of illegal furs was found hidden aboard it. The London committee suggested that the Moose Factory men were most culpable because that post received twice as large a supply of brandy as any other.¹⁰ No specific incidents of private trade were actually mentioned in the journals of that outfit, suggesting that the officers were involved and also making it impossible to determine the number of such transactions for the year.

The incidents of misbehaviour recorded in the journals for the outfit of 1770-71 would be repeated regularly during the next century. As Table 1 indicates, there was a constant level of disobedience that increased slightly as the company grew, peaking sharply in 1820-21,

⁷HBCA, B.135/a/48, Moose Factory journal, 1769-70, 13-20 July, 1770, fos. 34d.-35d.

⁸HBCA, B.135/a/50, Moose Factory journal, 1770-71, 22 Dec. 1770, fo. 14d.; 23 Dec. 1770, fo. 14d.; 12 Mar. 1771, fo. 24; 14 Mar. 1771, fo. 24; 31 Mar. 1771, fo. 55d.; 21 Apr. 1771, fo. 29.

⁹HBCA, B.198/a/14, Severn House journal, 1770-71, 15 Oct. 1770, fo. 6.

¹⁰HBCA, A.6/11, London committee to John Garbut and council, 20 May 1772, fos. 144-144d.

falling back to the pre-merger level in 1830/31 and then rising gradually again. Misconduct was thus an intrinsic part of the history of the HBC and it did not usually constitute an overt challenge to authority. Instead, it was an expression of an essential difference in outlook between the servants on the one hand and their employers and managers on the other. Of course, quantifying information from records as inconsistently kept as the HBC's journals neither reflects the complexity of each incident nor results in an accurate number of cases. Many incidents were combinations of forbidden behaviour. For example, on 5 Dec. 1780, Humphrey Marten, chief at York Factory, found Thomas Dunch, a carpenter, drunk and working at a planing bench which he had set up in a cabin in the men's flanker, contrary to "possitive[sic] orders." Marten reprimanded him for the "wilful disobedience" that could lead to disaster if a spark from the lamp or a coal from the stove ignited the "large parcel of shavings" that Dunch had produced. Dunch responded with "taunting answers" such as "O Sir you are a great man in this part of the world and must be obeyed, you can send me home at Shiptime, I wish you would, I do my duty as well as any man in the Fort, Ned Loutet knows I do, you do not, because you go out a hunting." The next day Dunch claimed intoxication as an excuse for his behaviour, but, when asked if he would mend his ways, replied, "I cannot behave worse." When Marten pressed him for a proper apology, Dunch complained that, other men got drunk, but he was "pointed out more than others." Told that he had got it all wrong, Dunch resumed his derisive tone, saying, "well Sir you to be sure are a great man and know every thing, and I suppose you think I know nothing." Then he asked if the tailor could make him a waistcoat, a wish Marten told him would be granted when his conduct improved. Dunch then "screwed up his nose" and resumed sneering at Marten and his position. "This old man," Marten observed, "is remarkable for a jeering taunting mode of expression, which to me seems much worse than downright abuse." But, Dunch went back to work and next day asked for forgiveness. In September, he was discharged for bad behaviour.¹¹

¹¹HBCA, B.239/a/79, York Factory journal, 1780-81, 5 Dec. 1780, fos. 12d.-13; 18 Dec. 1780, fo. 14d.; 1 Sept. 1781, fo. 54d.

Although guilty of drunkenness and insolence, Dunch's worst crime appears to have been his negligence which endangered the whole factory. This incident was thus counted as negligence.

A similarly complex case was that of William Duffle, the cook at Eastmain in 1790-91. Duffle sneaked out of the post on 28 December and, displaying "all the symptoms of Insanity," could not be lured back. The next day he was discovered with two Europeans and two Indians at a fishing place, hauled home, and put to bed, where he remained, refusing to speak until New Year's Day, when he asked to be pardoned. Because he had been "frequently seized" with "Humours" that cast doubt on his mental health, he was forgiven. This affair was, therefore, not counted as an incident of misbehaviour. A few months later, Duffle's master returned from hunting to discover him drunk from some stolen brandy "and very abusive." A few days later, as soon as all the men could be present, Duffle received a dozen lashes "for breaking open a Liquor Case getting drunk & making use of abusive Language."¹² In this case, Duffle's behaviour was counted as theft, since that led to the rest, but such a label is clearly an oversimplification. His later misconduct suggests that his insanity in December was phony and an excuse to shirk his duty, but without absolute certainty, this incident can not be counted.

Another source of inexactitude is that the quality of a journal depended on the literacy, diligence, and honesty of the officer who kept it. The most dramatic incidents were the least likely to be ignored, particularly if they involved gross insolence or a physical attack on an officer. Events such as the Brandon House mutiny of 1811 and the murder of John McLoughlin Jr. in 1842 resulted in inquiries which generated sizeable files of evidence. Most misbehaviour was not likely to require such investigation since collective action rarely aimed at the overthrow of authority, although whenever they did as they wanted rather than as they were told or used

¹²HBCA, B.59/a/67, Eastmain journal, 1790-91, 28 Dec. 1790-1 Jan. 1791, fos. 10d.-11; 2 Mar. 1791, fo. 17; 5 Mar. 1791, fo. 17d.

language that constituted what Marcus Rediker has called "a kind of verbal mutiny",¹³ the men were challenging the authority of their masters. Most misbehaviour involved one man or a small group engaging in acts of disobedience, defiance, or negligence and many officers may well have overlooked some cases if they were not too serious. For example, on 16 November 1813, Richard Good reported that Charles Beads, a young native servant, should have been sled-making that day, but had done "little or nothing." He had skulked off after some Indians who had traded there that day in order to share their rum. Good had discovered them all together a half a mile from the house and threatened to fine Beads, who remained unmoved and retorted that Good "might make it Fifty Shillings." Although Good had not previously noted any misbehaviour on Beads's part, he now mentioned that this was not the first time that Beads had "been guilty of the like reprehensible Conduct and Reproofs has no avail with him" and recommended he "be Mulct in part of his Wages." In the servants' list included in the annual report for the outfit Good reported that Beads was good, but he drank. Perhaps Good had not reported earlier incidents of misbehaviour because he expected Beads, a native, to be both hard to manage and prone to drunkenness. Or he might have thought that, since, according to his report, the post suffered from a scarcity of fish, bad soil, the proximity of two NWC posts, and bad navigation and all the best Indian hunters and usual visitors were dead, the quality of the servants scarcely mattered. Therefore, it was only when Beads's behaviour had driven Good to the point of exasperation that he felt compelled to report it.¹⁴ Silence on the subject can, therefore, not automatically be taken to mean that every man was an exemplary servant, but, of course, renders it equally impossible to determine how often and how far the men strayed from the paths of virtue.

¹³Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 166.

¹⁴HBCA, B.99/a/15, Kenogamissi journal, 1813-14, 16 Nov. 1813, fo. 3d.; B.99/e/1, Kenogamissi report, 1814-14, fos. 3d.-5.

On the other hand, officers upon whose shoulders the mantle of authority weighed most heavily or who were simply martinets were likely to record in considerable, even excessive, detail the sins of their men. Thus, the journals left by the reform-minded officers at Moose Factory during the 1730s and 1740s portray it as a community full of drunken rowdies commanded by paranoid, often suicidal officers, waging a hopeless campaign against the illicit trade and corruption.¹⁵ The sharp increase in the incidents of misbehaviour in 1820/21 might have reflected the drastic expansion of the workforce required to meet competition with the NWC or the fact that it was the first year of George Simpson's career. He spent it in charge of the Athabasca campaign, whose journals contain 28 of the 68 incidents of misbehaviour counted for that outfit. Simpson approached his assignment with his usual alarming energy and ruthlessness. Determined to introduce economy and order to the service, he decreed an end to extravagance and the maintenance of a "proper and respectable distance" between officers and men. Simpson considered the latter "the very dross and outcast of the human species" and demanded that they be kept constantly at work and not allowed "to remain idle about the House." No transgression would be overlooked. Every disobedience of orders, neglect of duty, dishonesty, or "impertinence" would be severely punished. With both George Simpson and his assistant, William Brown, breathing down the men's necks and leaving detailed journals for the outfit, it is not surprising that Fort Chipewyan appears to have been such a disorderly place.¹⁶ Other officers, less committed to reform than Simpson, might have carried out their record

¹⁵See: Frits Pannekoek, "'Corruption' at Moose," *The Beaver* Outfit 309, no. 4 (Spring 1979): 4-11; Gerhard Ens, "The Political Economy of the 'Private Trade' on the Hudson Bay: The Example of Moose Factory, 1741-1744," in *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger et al (Montreal: St. Louis Historical Society, 1987), 382-410.

¹⁶E. E. Rich, ed. *Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, and Report* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938), 51, 278; HBCA, B.39/a/16, Fort Chipewyan journal, June 1820 to February 1821; B.39/a/17, Fort Chipewyan journal, February 1821 to May 1821.

keeping duties less thoroughly. Likewise, officers who tolerated or participated in prohibited activities themselves were unlikely to leave detailed accounts of them.

Private trade, of which only three incidents appear in the table, is a prime example of just such an activity. It was far more widespread than this number indicates. It was, in fact, a form of disobedience that demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the committee's efforts to exact obedience to orders when only the committee saw the proscribed activities as wrong. By 1770 private trade had become an elaborate system involving everyone.¹⁷ It was a deeply entrenched custom with roots outside the company itself. For the ships' captains, private trade was a traditional perquisite enjoyed by all men in their position, a privilege which the committee had recognized by allowing its captains to carry goods for sale on their own accounts. But, in 1786, the committee abolished this privilege. The captains immediately launched a formal protest, claiming that this measure was "exceeding hard," because it had "been a Custom ever since the Company was established" and "always been thought as a Perquisite" given to the "Commanders as part of their Agreement" with the committee. They failed, however, in their request for permission to continue the practice "like other Commanders of Ships, who all have Liberty to Trade a little in a fair Way."¹⁸ But, they did not, therefore, cease their private enterprise. Some years later, John Richards, one of the three captains politely throwing themselves on the mercy of the committee in 1786, was found to have been smuggling furs into England.¹⁹ The masters of the posts were similarly defiant.

Michael Payne has observed that after 1801 "clandestine trading in furs was not often reported" when departing servants' chests were searched. He, therefore, concludes that it

¹⁷Ens, "The Political Economy of the 'Private Trade' on the Hudson Bay," 387; Andrew Graham, Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91, Glyndwr Williams, ed. (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1969), 282-84.

¹⁸HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to Samuel Hearne and council, 24 May 1786, fo. 19d.; A.1/46, Minutes of Governor and Committee, 12 April 1786. William Christopher, Joshua Tunstall, and John Richards to London committee, 15 March 1786, fo. 82d.

¹⁹HBCA, A.5/4, Alex Lean to David Geddes, 17 Dec. 1800, fo. 66.

had become "unusual" in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Actually, it was probably the searches themselves that had become unusual. That the council of the Northern Department found it necessary in 1822 to condemn the practice of officers' allowing "favourite" servants to trade in provisions, leather, and other unspecified goods²¹ and that in 1840 the London committee expressed surprise that the councils of the Northern and Southern Departments needed to pass resolutions to the effect that all furs gathered by employees were the property of the company²² suggest that officers were, to say the least, lax in their duty. Senior officers did pass regulations to stamp out such illicit trade but these had no effect. In 1824, the council of the Northern Department resolved to allow each departing employee to take no more than two dressed skins or buffalo robes and twenty "Indian shoes." The officers might have been able to enforce such regulations among men going aboard ship, but elsewhere private enterprise blossomed. By the 1840s canoes headed for Canada laden with shoes, leather, robes, and even "madeup furs," some of which officers had themselves presented to their men. Goers and comers, i.e. men hired in Lower Canada to transport goods and men into the west but not to winter there, bartered their supplies for furs with the regular servants and the Red River settlers. Both retiring servants and goers and comers traded their shoes, leather, and fur caps for liquor at Sault Ste Marie and the taverns they passed on their voyage to Montreal, thereby endangering lives and property, "occasioning desertions," and "maiming each other in drunken quarrels." Since the shoe allowance was to supply footwear on the trip, it could not be eliminated, but the council of the Northern Department decided in 1844 that any leather, furs, or robes found in the men's

²⁰Michael Payne, "The Most Respectable Place in the Territory": Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1989), 42.

²¹R. Harvey Fleming, ed., Minutes of the Council of Northern Department of Rupert[sic] Land, 1821-31 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1940), 8 July 1822, p. 25.

²²HBCA, B.39/z/1, Fort Chipewyan Miscellaneous Items, 1815-70. "Mema Notes of Replies to Mr Fortescues letters from York factory 12th & 15th Augt, & 6th Dec:" from Alex Christie, 12 May 1864, fo. 116d.; B.235/c/1, London committee to Duncan Finlayson, 4 Mar. 1840, fo. 40d.

possession would be seized.²³ Nevertheless, the trade in leather continued to flourish, while, according to one officer, the company could not get enough leather for its own business.²⁴ Rules designed to prevent trade in livestock were no more successful. Commissioned gentlemen were each allowed the use of a saddle horse or a train of dogs, while the servants were allowed to purchase animals from the company which would buy them back when the men left. The result was a thriving and profitable trade in horses. In 1855, George Simpson reported that both officers and servants, especially those who were natives or were married to natives, frequently engaged in this business. Some even bred colts for sale, with herds of brood mares maintained at the company's expense and cared for by the company's horsekeepers, sometimes in the company's stables. Accordingly, the council of the Northern Department resolved that any "further infraction" would be punished by a forfeiture of whatever amount had been realized by the sale of such an animal and a fine of £5 for the first offense and £10 for every subsequent "conviction."²⁵ But, officers demonstrated more initiative in seeking out new opportunities for private enterprise than in stamping it out in their subordinates.

Murdoch McPherson, an officer in the Mackenzie River District during the 1830s, sold supplies and packs of playing cards to the servants. When he left, he took away the records of the district to conceal his misdeeds, although they must have been widely known and tolerated. The gossiping Johnson G. King, commenting on McPherson's activities, mentioned that he had a bad reputation, but this might have been due to his being "a most tyrannical[sic] Brute" rather than his illicit trading. King was himself not averse to this, since in the same letter

²³NAC, MG19 A21, Hargrave Family Papers, Series 4. Extract of Letter from George Simpson to Donald Ross, 20 Dec. 1843, pp. 2766-7; Fleming, ed., Minutes of the Council of Northern Department, 10 July 1824, p. 87; 1 July 1825, p. 124; HBCA, B.239/k/28, Standing Rules and Regulations, Northern Department, 1843-75, Nos. 32 and 66.

²⁴HBCA, B.39/b/12, James Anderson to Messrs Shaw and Boucher, circular, 27 Dec. 1850, fo. 75.

²⁵Fleming, ed., Minutes of the Council of Northern Department, 10 July 1824, p. 87; HBCA, B.239/k/28, Standing Rules and Regulations, Northern Department, 1843-75, resolutions, no. 123 and 124.; A.12/7, George Simpson to London committee, 29 June 1855, fo. 452.

he reported that at the auction of a deceased officer's effects, he had "speculated largely intending to sell in the Columbia, where articles fetch an enormous price."²⁶ In 1853, George Simpson clarified the position of the company surgeon at Fort Vancouver. The surgeon, he told the officers, was obliged to serve only the company during working hours and be available for emergencies outside those hours. He might pursue a private practice during his own time, but he would have to pay for any medicines he used. That this subject required explanation suggests that the surgeon had been pursuing his own interests on company time and with the company's own supplies. Other western officers were "devoting a considerable share of their time and attention to the promotion of their private interests by breaking in land and farming, building houses mills &c" and importing items on the HBC's generous terms to procure the goods with which they paid their labourers. They were thus at "one and the same time depriving the Fur Trade of their services for their own pursuits and making it pay part of their outlay by taking goods below their actual cost."²⁷ Perhaps the most spectacular case was that of George Pelly, manager of the company's trade in lumber and fish in Honolulu. In October of 1850 Pelly accused some of his native servants of stealing over \$36,000 from the vault, but Arthur Bates of the office of the solicitor to the Crown became suspicious. He considered native servants too timid to have removed over a tone of specie from a place not twenty feet from Pelly's bed without his noticing. Bates's investigations revealed that on a salary of £400 a year Pelly was living in a style that required £2000 and he advised Pelly to come clean. Pelly agreed to admit that he had spent the money, assume the debt, sell all his property to pay it, and leave the country or else face conviction for embezzlement. Bates then informed Archibald Barclay, the company's secretary, of what had transpired but, unfortunately, could not bring himself to provide

²⁶HBCA, B.218/c/1, Johnson G. King to James Cameron, 1 Sept. 1850, fos. 9, 12d.

²⁷HBCA, B.223/c/2, George Simpson to the Board of Management, 18 June 1853, fos. 66-67d.

"the details of Mr. Pelly's habits & recent outrages upon decency."²⁸ The company's archives do not reveal the outcome of the case or supply the details of Pelly's other transgressions. He might well have been involved in various dealings which, along with his extravagant habits, brought him to the brink of financial ruin and led to his desperate attempt to extricate himself. Most officers had to be content with a larceny far less grand than Pelly's. Whatever its value, however, it was the very existence of illicit trade that really mattered. Officers who engaged in it themselves were not likely to do much to stop it among their subordinates.

By the nineteenth century, both officers and servants imported goods aboard the company's ships expressly for purposes of sale, either to one another or to their Canadian rivals.²⁹ It had even become common for servants to sell part of their rations to officers with families.³⁰ The men had become "shameless," said William Auld, and traded openly with the natives for items they had acquired from the HBC, never considering "that similar conduct in Servants at home subjected them to the most disgraceful punishments." Auld was particularly incensed by the "insolent rapacity" of Gilbert Budge, an Orcadian cooper, who had purchased "for some trifle[sic]" a "fowling-piece" from a "Chief Indian" to whom it had been sent "expressly" as a present.³¹ Budge had successfully combined two prohibited activities: private trade and the acquisition of a gun. Servants were not allowed to possess guns. Officers supplied them when they were required and then recalled them. Their barrels and locks were numbered and the factory mark engraved on them lest they go astray.³² Earlier incidents of servants bartering with the Indians for their weapons had led the committee to issue an order prohibiting such trade

²⁸HBCA, A.11/62, Arthur Bates to Archibald Barclay, 29 Oct. 1850, fos. 520-521d.; Deposition of George Pelly, 29 Oct. 1850, fo. 532; Bates to Barclay, 1 Nov. 1850, fos. 529-529d.

²⁹HBCA, B.42/a/136^a, Churchill journal, "Mr Aulds Memorandum Book," 1810-11, fo. 29d.

³⁰HBCA, B.59/b/30, Thomas Thomas to George Gladman, 20 April 1811, p. 5; A.6/18, London committee to Thomas Thomas, 26 May 1813, p. 98.

³¹HBCA, B.42/b/55, William Auld to James Bird, 8 Mar. 1811, fo. 5.

³²HBCA, A.6/14, London committee to Edward Jarvis and council, 21 May 1788, fo. 29d.

specifically, since it believed that Indians could not "subsist" without their guns.³³ Only Auld seemed to consider Budge's crime worth mentioning, however, since no record of it appeared in either the Edmonton journal or the account book and Budge continued to serve until 1815, when he returned home with a good character.³⁴

James Bird, Budge's master, was a highly respected officer with most of a long and distinguished career behind him³⁵ and, therefore, someone who should have assiduously carried out his employers' instructions. Clearly, it was not only the dishonest and disreputable officers who tolerated private trade among their charges. Indeed, some officers were positively sympathetic. In 1796, James Sutherland, also prominent and successful in the HBC,³⁶ commented that because his men were "badly fitted out" he could not stop them from trading with the Canadians,³⁷ an activity explicitly forbidden in 1793.³⁸ Perhaps, like Ferdinand Jacobs, Bird and Sutherland had learned to live with some misbehaviour as long as it did not disrupt business. Sutherland certainly understood the limitations of his authority. Not only could he not prevent his men from trading with the Canadians, he felt "deprest[sic] on every hand by the discontents of the people" and was "almost afraid" to order them to their ordinary duties lest they run off to join their rivals who were waiting with open arms, having constantly tried to "debauch" the men, "particularly the Ignorant who can't see an Inch before their nose."³⁹ Sutherland had

³³HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to officers at Moose Factory, 29 May 1794, fo. 101d.

³⁴HBCA, B.60/a/9, Edmonton journal, 1810-11; B.60/d/2^a, Edmonton Account Book, 1810-11, fo. 23d.-24. Account books generally recorded the fines imposed for misbehaviour; A.30/14, Servants' List, 1814-15, fos. 5d.-6.

³⁵John E. Foster, "James Bird," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII: 1851 to 1860 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 90-91.

³⁶Shirlee Anne Smith, "James Sutherland," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV: 1771 to 1800 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 727-8.

³⁷HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-7, 20 Nov. 1796, fo. 19d.

³⁸HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to officers at Albany, 30 May 1795, fo. 128d.

³⁹HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-7, 18 Nov. 1796, fo. 19.

entered the service in 1770 and died, still in harness, in April of 1797. He spent most of those years in positions of command and would have had a much better understanding of its limits than the London committee. Moreover, like the other officers of the pre-Retrenchment period, he was accustomed to a degree of autonomy incompatible with what John E. Foster has called "the 'modern' management espoused by the committee."⁴⁰ Foster exaggerates the transformation that occurred in 1810, however. Retrenchment was not so much an innovation as a reorganization designed to impose the regularity that the committee had always wanted. It had always reserved ultimate authority for itself and demanded its officers subordinate themselves to its decisions. Its failure to achieve such subordination not its failure to demand it prior to 1810 had produced the autonomy that Foster observed.

The relationship that existed between the committee and the officers was echoed in the one between the officers and the servants, since the officers were equally unsuccessful in restricting the autonomy of their subordinates. The servants did not limit themselves to trade in which their officers colluded. It was not only company officers and ships' captains who brought with them assumptions about their right to engage in trade on their own accounts. The custom of appropriating some of an employer's goods for one's own profit, generally on a small scale, had a long history and was an important perquisite for many workers. Pilferage in the workplace was so common that many employers adjusted their wages and prices rather than bothering with costly prosecutions.⁴¹ In some cases, such activity appears to have been a continuation of previous bad habits, as in the case of William Paine, a tailor who arrived at Eastmain in 1803. As a Londoner, Paine belonged to a group of workers who a century before had formed "the most militant and effective trade union" in eighteenth-century England, namely, the London society of journeymen tailors. Tailors in general were well represented in labour disputes during

⁴⁰John E. Foster, "William Auld," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VI: 1821 to 1835 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 17.

⁴¹See: Clive Emsley, Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900 (London; New York: Longman, 1987), 103-28.

that century. The extent of Paine's participation in such struggles is impossible to determine, but he was 39 years old and, therefore, an experienced artisan immersed in the culture of his craft, both its noble and base aspects. As he might have done in England, he purloined cloth from the work he was assigned and made clothes to sell to the other men, threatening to "throw himself off duty" if, John Mannall, his chief, dared to mention it. As Mannall asked, "what is to be done with such a Man"? Paine possessed a self-confidence that often overstepped the boundary into insolence. When Mannall rebuked him for repeatedly "idling away his time" in the cook room, he retorted with "a deal of abusive language" that he was "neither thief nor murderer and did not require watching, &c &c." On another occasion Mannall distributed potatoes for which all but Paine were "very thankful." When Mannall suggested he should express his gratitude as well, Paine declared "if you expect that, I've left all my manners in England... 'd---n the Potatoes I would not give a d---n for them..." He then complained that he was not treated as he had been "given to understand," that he was told he would be completely outfitted in the service and never have to wear his own clothes. Instead, he protested, "I find I'm imposed on and d---n me if I stay."

When he actually did any work, he was intolerably slow. On one occasion, after Paine had already spent ten days working on two waistcoats and a jacket, Mannall asked him if it was not time that he had finished, whereupon Paine flew into "a most violent passion, d---d his eyes if he would do any more work and went on at such a rate." Mannall left, followed by Paine who, still "d---n--g & Swearing", threw some of the materials for the aforementioned items on the floor, and proclaimed that he would not finish his task. Mannall, having just conveniently gotten a gun from the armourer, "touched" Paine's shoulder with the butt. Paine then threatened to shoot Mannall and assumed a stance that suggested he was about to strike him, but he turned away, picked up the material and left, promising revenge. Later, when told to finish some other work, Paine replied that he would "see [Mannall] b----d first " and flatly refused to do as he was told. Thereafter, he was assigned to more menial duties such as cutting firewood and hauling

hay. No longer employed as a tailor, Paine demanded that the other tailor make him some clothing. Mannall told him he should be ashamed to ask such a thing, but Paine insisted he had as much right to this service as any other man. Mannall then told him he might make himself a jacket and trousers after he completed his current duties. The next day Paine retired to his cabin to begin making his clothing, refusing to do anything else that day. Therefore, at noon, when Mannall issued grog to the rest of the men who had been working outdoors in the cold weather, he did not give any to Paine. Paine flew into another of his rages, demanding his share of grog, calling Mannall "the most opprobrious names he could think of," and finally took a swing at him. Paine was not popular with his fellow workers either because he did not do a fair share of the work. The day after his battle with Mannall, Paine went back to cutting wood because he was afraid that the others would not let him near the fire otherwise. But his efforts were so desultory that the others refused to work with him, saying he was "of no service whatever." Paine finally deserted to the Canadians, who sent him back to Mannall, who discharged him and sent him home in 1804.⁴²

Paine's private tailoring was only one of his misdemeanours and vastly outnumbered by his other transgressions. However, it and the defiance with which he responded to attempts to curb his independence demonstrated the difficulties that could arise when experienced craftsmen were engaged in subordinate roles incompatible with the status to which they were accustomed. Paine might not have been among the more respectable members of his calling, which, indeed, was reputed to harbour a large number of dissolute individuals. In fact, his very engagement with the HBC might have been the result of his low standing in London's tailoring

⁴²C. R. Dobson, Masters and Journeymen: A Prehistory of Industrial Relations 1771-1800 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 60-73; 154-70; HBCA, B.59/a/81, Eastmain journal, 1803-4, 25 Oct. 1803, fos. 5-5d.; 24 Nov. 1803, fos. 8d.-9; 10 Dec. 1803, fo. 10; 12 Dec. 1803, fo. 10d.; 21 Dec. 1803, fo. 11d.; 7 Feb. 1804, fo. 15; 8 Feb. 1804, fo. 15d.; 10 Feb. 1804, fos. 15d.-16; 15 Feb. 1804, fo. 16; 14 Mar. 1804, fo. 18; 15 Mar. 1804, fos. 18-18d.; 19 Mar. 1804, fo. 18d.; 22 Mar. 1804, fos. 18d.-19; 26 July 1804, fo. 27d.; 26 Aug. 1804, fo. 29; 31 Aug. 1804, fo. 20d.; B.59/f/1, Eastmain Servants' Resolves, 1804, fo. 2d.; B.59/f/2, Eastmain Servants' Resolves, 1805, fos. 3d.-5.

world. But he might still have considered himself an artisan, entitled to the privileges and respect due a man of this rank and, therefore, indignant at his treatment and forward in the assertion of his rights. Craft traditions might have been a factor in Paine's misbehaviour and accounted for the type of illicit trade which he practiced, but the rest of the servants observed similar traditions and they were able to do so because they spent most of their time away from the eyes of their superiors and were frequently entrusted with the company's property. They, therefore, enjoyed extensive opportunities for illicit enterprise. When servants went trapping, which the committee encouraged them to do in their spare time, they traded on their own accounts with the Indians.⁴³ Threats to punish them with the loss of "all Wages and Moneys" due them as well as payment of the "forfeitures" mentioned in the contract had little effect and officers sometimes had to resort to more brutal measures. Thus, in 1773, John Ewing, a labourer at Albany, admitted to trading for a marten skin with an Indian, he was manacled. Because it was his second such offence, his chief decided to make a "Publick example" of him. "...Accordingly he was tyed up and received 18 Lashes with a Cat of nine tails[sic]"⁴⁴ But, the men of the HBC were no more chastened by such a spectacle than were the London crowds by the hangings at Tyburn because they continued to believe, as John Green, an Irish labourer at Edmonton House, declared in 1820, that "...the man is a fool who wont[sic] make a little money for himself."⁴⁵ When in 1840, James Gunn, a servant at York Factory thanked his father, a farmer in the Orkneys, for sending a bundle of goods which he had sold, his matter-of-fact tone indicated that, as far as he was concerned, this breach of contract was simply a business transaction. Moreover, he was exceedingly discontented with the service. "If God spairs me I think I shall be home the next year," he wrote, adding, "if I should go off again, it will not be to this place..." He

⁴³HBCA, B.135/c/1, London committee to officers at Moose Factory, [1771], fo. 93; A.5/1, London committee to Humphrey Marten, 8 May 1770, fos. 105d.-106.

⁴⁴HBCA, B.3/b/7, Orders to Thomas Powell, master at Henley, fos. 3-3d.; B.3/a/65, Albany journal, 1772-3, 2 Jan. and 4 Jan. 1773, fos. 19-19d.

⁴⁵HBCA, B.60/a/18, Edmonton House journal, 1819-20, 13 Jan. 1820, fo. 17.

also urged his parents to put his brother to "a good Trade", the best, in his opinion, being a ship's carpenter. "Without a trade a man is nothing in this country," which, he observed, "is very bad and always getting worse every way."⁴⁶ For James Gunn at least, private trade was compensation for the trials he had to endure in the service. As long as men continued to harbour such sentiments, they would continue to trade for themselves. The extent of such trade is incalculable, however, because of the ease with which it could be hidden. Indeed, it usually came to light when unusual circumstances arose.

Thus, Samuel Taylor, an Orcadian carpenter who joined the HBC in 1804, had an unblemished record until January 1812 when he was suddenly revealed to be "a most wicked Scoundrel, a Thief of the worst Kind, an exciter of Mutiny among the Men..."⁴⁷ He and another man were sent from Churchill to York Factory with a packet on 30 Nov. 1811. By the middle of January, they had still not reappeared and Thomas Topping, the chief at Churchill, concluded that they had perished. Accordingly, he took an inventory of their property in preparation for its disposal, probably by auction.⁴⁸ Among Taylor's possessions Topping found a large quantity of

⁴⁶HBCA, E.31/2, James Gunn to George Gunn, n.d., [1840].

⁴⁷HBCA, B.42/f/3, Churchill Servants' Resolves, 1805, fos. 4d.5. Until 1812, none of these lists record anything other than satisfactory behaviour on Taylor's part. Nor was his transgression mentioned in column set aside for reporting on the men's characters in the large list of 1812, A.30/11, fos. 46d.-7; B.42/f/7, Churchill Servants' Resolves, 1812, fos. 5d.-6

⁴⁸It was customary in the HBC's service to auction off the effects of deceased co-workers and send the proceeds to their families. This practice was also a seafaring tradition and might have derived from the large contingent of seamen in the service during the earliest years and from the maritime experiences of the Orcadians who eventually comprised the majority of the HBC's employees. Such auctions are occasionally mentioned in the company's records. (For example: B.239/a/65, York Factory journal, 1770-71, 26 Dec. 1770, fo. 16d.; B.135/a/113^a, Moose Factory journal, 1816-17, 7 Sept. 1816, fo. 9; B.135/a/116, Moose Factory journal, 1817-18, 3 June 1818, fo. 50d.; B.3/a/129, Albany journal, 1824-5, 8 Mar. 1825, fo. 25; B.218/c/1, Johnson G. King to James Cameron, 1 Sept. 1850; B.46/z/1, Extract of letter from Angus McDonald, Flathead Post, 7 March 1852, fo. 4.) They were not, however, as Frits Pannekoek implies, merely opportunities for greedy and dissolute servants to benefit from the self-inflicted misfortunes of another. Asserting that alcoholism was "the principal social problem of those resident at the Bayside," Pannekoek gives two examples of the drunkenness at Moose Factory. In one case, an inebriated man was so drunk that he fell off the sloop and drowned. "With some regret and much haste," Pannekoek writes, "his mates lost no time in auctioning off the contents of his chest." (Pannekoek, "'Corruption' at Moose," 5) The custom of auctioning off a dead

Canadian clothing and "many articles which...could not have been very honestly come by," an impression strengthened by the fact that Taylor had been entrusted with the charge of a house inland during the summer. The two men turned up just as Topping finished his task and Taylor admitted to trading with the Canadians and confessed to taking an oil stone, a chalk line, and a quarter pint "jappan'd pot" from the houses where he had been stationed, though he claimed to have found the pot on a dunghill. He also asserted that the six and one half pounds of powder and sixteen pounds of shot he had were what his masters had given him for his various journeys. But, since the ammunition was in suspiciously small packages, Topping suggested that Taylor had "plundered" it out of the ammunition intended for the Indians to whose tents he was sent for furs or meat. Taylor surrendered the stolen goods, as ordered, but the chalk line had been cut and some of the ammunition was missing. Volunteering to look for the rest, he departed and was gone so long that Topping went after him and found him hiding his mittens, filled with powder and shot, under a washtub. Hopelessly cornered now, Taylor acknowledged his "gross misconduct" and begged for lenience, which he was denied. Since he had already given notice of his intention to go home when his current contract ended in 1812, sending him home was not much of a penalty. He was, therefore, fined nine pounds and compelled to give a bill of ten

comrade's effects was, in fact, a ritual imbued with much meaning, certainly among seamen. It was, according to Marcus Rediker, "one of the most touching rituals of death" aboard an eighteenth-century merchant vessel. Through it, men both "sought to honor the dead and to provide for his family." As a result, meagre possessions often fetched prices far higher than their actual value. That seamen, "notoriously poor and underpaid," would redistribute their small wealth to help the deceased's family, suggests "a consciousness of kind," an understanding of the difficulties that poor families faced, and a "sense of responsibility" toward each other. It was also an expression of "the incipient collectivism of seafaring culture" and can be seen as "a forerunner" of working-class efforts to ensure that the dead and their survivors received proper care. (Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 197-8.) The HBC's records provide details about neither the auctions that took place in the service nor the views and behaviour of the men with regard to them. One should not, of course, assume that all the servants were completely altruistic. Johnson G. King was certainly not so inclined. However, it would be equally foolish to suggest that, given popular attitudes toward the dead and their proper treatment, the men's behaviour was entirely devoid of sentiments more profound than acquisitiveness. See: Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Markham: Penguin Books, 1988), 3-29.

pounds "to the poor of his Native Parish rather than be sent home and there hanged," a substantial sum for a man earning £26 a year.⁴⁹

Although Topping might have considered hanging justified, dismissal, imprisonment, fines, or corporal punishment would have been Taylor's fate in Britain, unless, as was not uncommon, he was part of a complex network of trade in stolen goods involving a variety of ostensibly upright citizens, in which case he would have nothing to fear at all.⁵⁰ Within the HBC, too, a man might be protected by the silence of his fellows who were equally involved in such illicit dealings. Discord could thus be revealing. As the officers at Albany observed in 1770, "it is a trite addage[sic] that when Rogues fall Out, honest Men come to the Truth."⁵¹ Thus, the aforementioned John Green was betrayed by three fellow servants with whom he had spent the past several months tenting with Indians. Green had traded his own property and the supplies he was supposed to give to the Indians for furs. Some of these he intended to send home to his relatives and the rest he planned to sell at the post. He obviously expected no disapproval from his fellow servants and must have offended his companions or they would not have informed on him. Moreover, they reported, he had "strongly urged" them to follow his bad example, but they had refused to do so, virtuously pointing out that their contracts forbade private trade. Thereupon, Green had cried, "Damn the Contracts," cut the buttons off his coat, and traded them for marten skins.⁵² In 1840, Jacob Corrigan, at Albany House, found a quarrel between two servants highly informative.

⁴⁹HBCA, B.42/a/137, Churchill journal, 1811-12, 15 Jan. 1812, fos. 5-6.

⁵⁰Emsley, Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900, 113.

⁵¹HBCA, A.11/3, Officers to London committee, 3 Sept. 1770, fo. 148d.

⁵²HBCA, B.60/a/18, Edmonton House journal, 1819-20, 13 Jan. 1820, fo. 17; A.30/16, Servants' List, 1818-19, fos. 11d.-12. In this list, Green is reported to have a bad character, but no details are given; B.39/d/216^a, York Factory Account Book, 1820-21. Green was neither dismissed from the service nor fined.

When the son of William Linklater Sr. knocked down and kicked the smaller son of James Morrison and then was insolent when Morrison asked him to explain his actions, Morrison complained to Corrigan. Corrigan confronted young Linklater, who called his father, whereupon a quarrel ensued, in the course of which both Morrison and Linklater Sr. called each other "dishonest." Challenged by Morrison to prove his allegation, Linklater charged that Morrison had made axes "slyly" for the people. Morrison claimed that he had made them for use at work and retorted, "that is not so bad as you did in smuggling about 40 or 50 lbs Feathers to Moose last summer;--and I could tell more of your dishonest ways if I liked," effectively silencing Linklater. When Corrigan later asked Morrison how he had found out about the feathers, the man replied that one of the sloopers had told Morrison that he had found a missing package of feathers at Linklater's bed place. When asked what he had meant by being able to tell more, Morrison replied that Linklater had packed gunpowder in small bags and hidden them in fox skins which he had collected while sawing logs and sent home to his family. With this information, Corrigan was able finally to understand why the Indians had accused him of not giving them full measures of gunpowder when they were being fitted out for the goose hunt, since Linklater had been placed in charge of distributing the gunpowder.⁵³ Such revelations must have made the London committee, and its honest officers, wonder with trepidation how many such cases went undiscovered.

Moreover, the servants were as adept as their officers in taking advantage of new opportunities. In 1867, W. J. Christie complained that the servants of the Saskatchewan District received their supplies in the fall and then proceeded to trade them with miners, large numbers of whom were flooding into the area, "ragged," "penniless," and "clamouring" for work and food. Then, in spring, the servants would inform him they intended to leave, "taking care by every artifice of strategy[sic] to draw all they can from us & generally leave in Debt." One of the men who had misbehaved in this way during the past winter was Alexander Aitkin, a blacksmith, who

⁵³HBCA, B.3/a/145, Albany journal, 1839-40, 5 March 1840, fos. 20d.-21d.

had been particularly well treated. He had received a gun from Red River and permission to send for his wife in Britain, a privilege rarely bestowed upon common servants. Then, in March, Aitkin had given notice, his only grievance being that the price of goods was higher than during his first contract and he could not save. After Aitkin had departed, leaving behind a debt of £10,18,4 and several bills due others, which the company refused to pay, Christie learned that Aitkin had been selling off everything he had, turning "all into cash & Gold Dust & left with a heavy purse." Meanwhile, the "Halfbreed Servants" engaged at Red River for the Saskatchewan Department were "little better than none." They went off drinking with the free traders for days at a time, and when sent with goods to trade, sold it for liquor. Not only did they thus embezzle the company's property, they also wasted it by squandering their time, consuming all their rations, and then eating the food provided for their dogs, which, as a result, starved to death.⁵⁴ The London committee would have been too annoyed to have appreciated that this display of disloyalty and disobedience was also an impressive demonstration of the servants' entrepreneurship. Private trade was more than this, however. It was also a manifestation of the gap between the servants and their superiors.

Gerhard Ens has observed that the formation of "sub households" as servants acquired families and the seasonal presence of ships' captains were "destabilizing influences" that "strained" the "concept of the trading post as a single patriarchal household. Both resulted from "a systematic illegal fur trade."⁵⁵ To these influences one might add the servants' own private trade, which was carried out in defiance of their officers and their contracts and was a clear demonstration of their indifference to authority. Just as servants in Britain were not subsumed in their households, HBC servants were not subsumed in theirs. One should not, of course, exaggerate the amount of disobedience. The majority of the HBC's servants performed their duties *well enough* to ensure the company's survival, but this survival did not require perfect

⁵⁴HBCA, B.239/c/17, W. J. Christie to J. W. Wilson, 1 may 1867, fos. 62d.-63.

⁵⁵Ens, "The Political Economy of the 'Private Trade' on the Hudson Bay," 397-99.

obedience and loyalty from the servants as long as their misbehaviour did not interfere with the two crucial aspects of the HBC's operations: the supply of furs and the transportation system. The former required that the natives be prevented from becoming wage labourers and the latter required that servants perform trips to establish posts, bring down furs, and take back trade goods and supplies. Servants did frequently refuse to do these things because they objected to the hard work and danger they involved. But most of their misbehaviour comprised attempts to create for themselves as comfortable a situation as possible by shirking their duty and indulging in activity which did not accord with the ideal of deference and clashed with the standards the company's officers and the committee increasingly espoused. The servants' behaviour suggests that they had their own "fur trade society" which did not emphasize respectability, sobriety, and forethought. Rather, it was a plebeian culture--rough, rowdy, and profligate--and "seen with a mixture of contempt and fear 'from above'."⁵⁶ Although this culture was also oppositional and provided the basis for acts of defiance and rebellion, it also revealed itself in forms of behaviour that officers found loathsome.

For example, in April of 1803, three men at Hannah Bay, the location of the Moose Factory goose tent, went to the nearby Canadian post and got drunk. Two of them then proceeded to enter a tent inhabited by some old women and "forced them to comply with their lustfull[sic] desire," seriously disabling one of them. David Robertson, in charge there, sent one of the culprits, Peter Pearson, an Orcadian labourer, back to Moose Factory to be fined and sent home "for gross misbehaviour." His companion in crime, however, William Bews, appears to have escaped punishment altogether.⁵⁷ Robertson mentioned that he hoped that a more agreeable replacement would be found for Pearson and may well have had other, though

⁵⁶Hans Medick, "Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Capitalism," in, ed., Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, Culture, Ideology and Politics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 84-6.

⁵⁷HBCA, B.135/a/90, Moose Factory journal, 1802-3, David Robertson to John Thomas, 3 Apr. 1803, p. 72; B.135/f/1, Moose Factory servants' resolves, 1803, fos. 2d.-3.

unreported, incidents in mind when he decided it was time to dispose of this man. Bews might perhaps have appeared less disreputable and his drunkenness a mitigating circumstance. Although rape ought surely to have been unacceptable, perhaps when committed by such inferiors on victims who were themselves not highly respected, it might have been considered less serious and even to be expected from men whose sexual behaviour was viewed as less moral. The case of James Gaddy, an Orcadian seamen, stationed a Moose Factory in 1803-4, sheds light on another aspect of the servants' sexual habits. Gaddy was not a model servant and joined his fellows in fraternizing with the Canadians, refusing to obey orders, and absenting himself from divine service. However, it was the discovery in April 1804 by way of the child on whom he had "twice committed the diabolical act" that Gaddy was "guilty of Sodomical practices" that impelled the chief, John Thomas, to act. He assembled the men and told them what Gaddy had done, but there is no evidence that Thomas's attempt to expose Gaddy to public censure had any effect. Gaddy was not shunned, since he continued to live and work with the others. Nor was he suitably chastened. In July, he was aboard one of two boats setting out for Point of the Marsh. Ordered to take a new route around an island, Gaddy replied, "Damn the Governor's Orders" and took his boat in exactly the opposite direction. His two companions, described by Thomas as "a good man but of weak intellects[sic]" and an Indian, respectively, seemed to have made no attempt to stop him. In August, James Gaddy was dismissed for "practices shocking to human nature" and "Mutinous Conduct" on 23 July and fined the remainder of his wages, £17,12,6.⁵⁸

It is difficult to know what ordinary people considered appropriate or "normal" sexual practices and the HBC's records are clearly not a promising source of such information. However, historians interested in this aspect of life in the fur trade have studied the men's relations with women, probably under the assumption that, deprived of access to women of their

⁵⁸HBCA, B.135/a/91, Moose Fort journal, 1803-4, 30 Dec. 1803, fo. 11; 31 Dec. 1803, fo. 11; 1 April 1804, fo. 20; 4 April 1804, fos. 20-20d.; 23 July 1804; 9 Aug. 1804, fo. 38; B.135/f/2, Moose Fort servants' resolves, 1804, fo. 1.

own society, men would naturally turn to others. It would not be unreasonable, however, to assume that at least some of them might turn to one another. Indeed, perhaps even the London committee thought that they would. B. R. Burg, in an interesting though flawed study, has suggested that until the late eighteenth century homosexuality was popularly seen as a type of sexual activity rather than an unnatural act. Although it was not actually condoned, only Protestant reformers viewed it with alarm and it was rarely punished to the full extent of the law. Moreover, there were groups among whom homosexuality was prevalent: young vagrants; apprentices, particularly those in London where homosexuality was more tolerated than elsewhere; and Caribbean pirates upon whom Burg focuses most of his attention. He suggests that young men from a homosexual milieu on land who went to sea chose ocean-going vessels whose all-male environment they preferred. If they took to piracy, they joined a society with a sexual orientation to which they were already accustomed. Because women were scarce in the Caribbean, homosexuality was widespread and pirates ignored or rejected heterosexuality altogether. Some of Burg's conclusions are shaky. He suggests, for example, that Blackbeard's multiplicity of wives indicates a lack of success with women, though one might see this as *too much* success. Likewise, evidence that mate-swapping was common among pirates might, as Burg suggests, demonstrate an inability to sustain heterosexual relationships. On the other hand, it might indicate that they had rejected conventional marriage practices along with other social constraints when they became pirates.⁵⁹ Burg's focus on marginal groups also contradicts his assertions about society's acceptance of homosexuality, but he has raised some important issues relevant to a discussion of the sexual behaviour of men living in a predominantly male milieu.

What the HBC's servants in general thought about homosexual behaviour is as impossible to determine from the company's records as its extent. It was not a subject that

⁵⁹See: B. R. Burg, Sodomy and the Perception of Evil: English Sea Rovers in the 17th Century Caribbean (New York: New York University Press, 1983)

occupied the London committee and, if Burg is right, one it considered unworthy of attention. The few cases which crop up suggest that the officers considered it a serious offence and inflicted punishment designed to expose the culprit to public disapproval. Two men found guilty of attempting to seduce others at York Factory in December of 1754 and July of 1755 were all struck several times with barrel staves or willow branches by each man at the post.⁶⁰ Fifty years later James Gaddy was subjected only to a public denunciation, which appeared to have little effect. The men's sexual habits were probably as private as their illicit enterprises and only attracted attention when they proved disruptive. Thus, in May of 1840, Thomas Corcoran, master at Fort George on the eastern shore of James Bay, reported that one of the men had complained to him that his roommate, William Dearness, had committed "a filthy act." Dearness was not a model servant, having been banished to Fort George from Moose Factory for refusing to work. Corcoran considered him "a very unfit subject for this Service, as his conduct has no tendency to improve that of others" and thought he was "not altogether in a sound state of mind," since his behaviour "on some occasions" was "if not frantick" then "rediculous[sic] in the extreme," of which he considered the above mentioned incident an example. His mentioning that the two men had separate beds and that the complainant was "one of the most quiet and unassuming men in existence" suggests that Dearness may have made unwelcome advances. Without further detail it is impossible to know for sure. Dearness was not whipped or publicly reprimanded. Corcoran merely told him not to repeat his transgression, whereupon Dearness "abused" his accuser "in the grossest manner" and removed his property from his room, "at the same time swearing horribly" that he would "never sleep another night" there with the other man. He then went off to live in the woods, but returned almost immediately because of bad weather.⁶¹ The penalty which Corcoran inflicted upon Dearness was not particularly severe, but

⁶⁰Michael Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870: A Social History of York Factory and Churchill" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1989), 120-21.

⁶¹HBCA, B.77/a/14, Fort George journal, 1839-40, 7-8 May 1840, pp. 63-5; B.135/a/144, Moose Factory journal, 1839-40, 8-9 Aug. 1839, fos. 10d-11d.

in describing the man's behaviour as "filthy" Corcoran was implying that it was "morally foul".⁶² How widely Corcoran's opinion was echoed among the men is not recorded and no more such incidents were discovered in the records consulted. It is, therefore, impossible to determine whether homosexuality was tolerated or not. However, the servants' sexual behaviour, in general, suggests that they might not have adopted the same standards of sexual propriety that the officers purported to support, particularly as they came increasingly to aspire to middle-class respectability.

Jennifer Brown has suggested that officers were "role models" in "familial" spheres, emphasizing the significance of marriage according to "the custom of the country" and its importance for the establishment of stable unions.⁶³ There is evidence, however, that there was another, less savoury, side to the men's sexual behaviour and not only when it was violent. Not everyone was anxious to meet the responsibilities of fathers and husbands. In 1819, Joseph Beioley told Jacob Corrigan, master at Albany, that one of his men, James Morrison, a blacksmith, had a wife in "distressed Circumstances" because he had neglected to authorize her to receive some of his wages and ordered him to inform the man that it was his duty to "render her some support."⁶⁴ Some men appeared to join the HBC precisely in order to evade such obligations. Alexander Lain, an Orcadian cooper who engaged in 1858 as a labourer, had seduced Catherine Narquay of Flotta with "A hundred Repeated promises" of marriage. "Bein[sic] Deluded by His False vows," she had borne his child, which he refused to acknowledge as his. She then took him to court, but the judgement she gained against him was useless, since

⁶²The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Volume I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 751.

⁶³Jennifer S. H. Brown, Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), xxi, 80, 131.

⁶⁴HBCA, B.3/a/124, Albany journal, 1819-20. Joseph Beioley to Jacob Corrigan, 29 Sept. 1819, fo. 6d.

he ran off and joined the HBC.⁶⁵ In 1869, Robert Reid of Leith, once employed by the HBC on Vancouver Island, abandoned six children and his wife, who asked the company not to allow him on any of their ships.⁶⁶ Indeed, service with the HBC seemed to arouse concern among the men's British relatives that they would succumb to the charms of "the black girls" or "she-Indians" and abandon the children that resulted.⁶⁷ Some men lived up to such expectations.

Some left the post to indulge in "scandalous" or "indecent" behaviour with local Indian women.⁶⁸ Others attempted to smuggle women into the posts,⁶⁹ where sexual licence existed alongside the stable relationships that have been the focus of historians' studies. In 1841, George Barnston at Albany disclosed another custom of the country: there were children of company men around the post and their fathers contributed nothing to their support because, a man had informed him, "the giving of a Handkerchief to the woman suffices to exonerate a man in Law."⁷⁰ This casual attitude to paternal responsibilities was observed several years later by Charles McKenzie who reported that Hugh Folster, a "Product of Old Albany", refused to acknowledge that he was the father of a child recently born to the daughter of George Moar.⁷¹ In 1851, remembering the bad old days, W. J. Christie observed that there used to be "Men lying in

⁶⁵HBCA, A.10/45, Catherine Narquay to HBC, 21 May 1859, fos. 477-477Ad.

⁶⁶HBCA, A.10/79, Margaret Sutherland to HBC, 31 Aug. 1869, fo. 238.

⁶⁷HBCA, E.31/2, B. McCarthy to John Bracebridge, 31 Oct. 1849; Adam Buck to Jonathan Buck, 6 Sept. 1844; John Spence to Joseph Spence, 17 Sept. 1835.

⁶⁸HBCA, B.38/a/1, Fort Chimo journal, 1830-33, 12 Nov. 1831, fo. 38; B.3/c/2, George McPherson to James Watt, 21 Aug. 1856, fo. 259d.

⁶⁹HBCA, B.198/a/60, Severn journal, 1820-21, 22 Sept. 1820, fos. 12-12d.; B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-3, 26 Dec. 1852, fo. 46; E. E. Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series: 1839-44 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1943), McLoughlin to London committee, 7 July 1842, p. 60.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.3/b/66, George Barnston to Joseph Beioley, 4 Jan. 1841, fo. 6d.

⁷¹HBCA, B.3/c/1, Charles McKenzie to Thomas Corcoran, 20 April 1847, fo. 28d.

the same bed openly before all hands with young women."⁷² However, if William Watt's ribald missive from Long Lake is any indication, lewdness was still to be found in the service:

I have not heard any thing (this long time) of Made Boussincau; but last news was she was getting remarkably round in the waist Made Kinosh is again in the breeding [illegible] I hear. She is certainly the Devil at it Young Jack Wife has produced another sweet nut for the Devil to crack that little incident occurred last Spring Isabell (Fathe) Cadreant is completely Stove in, Simpson & that Young Fellow with an unpronounceable name had her 'chacun a son tour' all last Summer; whether it is true or not I cannot Say, but one just hopped over the doorstep and took a turn on the verandah untill Such time as the other was freshed, and then took his turn at 'stretching his boot' Some Say that the Honble Companys Establishment was nothing else than a complete whore Shop, both Yankee and British Women."⁷³

Even when they did select wives, as opposed to short-term companions, the men did not always go about getting them in the approved way. In 1812, William Loutit, stationed at Deers Lake, having been denied permission to have a wife, took one belonging to another man and sent her to live with some Indians until he could join her. Some of these Indians informed J. P. Holmes, master at Nelson House, of Loutit's disobedience and Holmes sent two men to fetch the woman and charged the cost of this mission in provisions and wages to Loutit's account.⁷⁴ In 1868, Jonathan Johnson, having been refused permission to marry two years before because there was no accommodation at Fort George for more married men, told his new master that he had, in fact, been given such permission. When his lie was discovered, he was told either to send the woman away to her father or to leave the service and live as an Indian. Johnson left.⁷⁵ Nor did the possession of one wife necessarily preclude the taking of another. In 1851, John Cromartie informed James Hargrave that, although one John Cooper was willing to re-engage, he would rather "be Cleare[sic] of him" because he was "a man of Rather bad morals and has Rather Corrupted the others this two years." If he stayed any longer he "would turn another

⁷²HBCA, B.239/c/6, W. J. Christie to W. Mactavish, 11 Aug. 1851, fo. 179d.

⁷³HBCA, B.239/c/6, W. H. Watt to W. Mactavish, 4 Mar. 1853, fo. 304.

⁷⁴HBCA, B.141/a/6, Nelson House journal, 1812-13, 6 Sept. 1812, fo. 4d.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.77/c/1, G. J. McTavish to Gilbert Hackland, 3 Jan. 1868, fo. 34d.; McTavish to Hackland, 7 Mar. 1868, fo. 36.

James Knight be wanting another wif[sic] and hase[sic] in his own Country." Cromartie considered Cooper's behaviour "Shamefull for a man in his Situation as well as Sinful."⁷⁶ In 1858 a man at Edmonton House deserted in order to follow a woman in spite of the fact that he was "lawfully married" to a woman in Red River.⁷⁷ Nor did servants always conduct their marriages with complete decorum or ensure that their womenfolk behaved with what their superiors considered appropriate modesty either. Thus, William Shaw at Fort Vermilion felt obliged to speak to the "Lady" of one of his men about "the impropriety of being too often in the Indian Lodges." The woman's husband, however, dismissed Shaw's concern with the comment, "Cest La Facon dans la Rabasca de visiter le Lodge" The visits of both the woman and her daughter continued, however, and Shaw suspected they might have "lovers", since "with Indians /particularly with Beaver Indians/ there is no bounds or restraint on Love Affairs."⁷⁸

Clearly, not all the servants settled into the kind of domesticity favoured by the George Simpsons and James Hargraves, although *their* pre-marital behaviour was hardly chaste. In 1862, George Barnston, reported to James Hargrave that the "scandal" concerning himself and "a certain loose and yet firm Piece of Furniture that came up in the Boats" with him was only half true, but he could not "now enlarge upon it" because he intended it as his "Dish" at their "next Pic Nic Tete a Tete."⁷⁹ Hargrave himself, determined never to marry a native of the country lest he thereby doom himself to spending his old age there, was equally determined not to do without female companionship before marriage. In 1826, the flood prompted the departure of the Canadians and the Swiss, leaving Hargrave to complain that it was "among those" that his "female acquaintance was entirely centred" and now "a willing wench [was] scarcely to be found

⁷⁶HBCA, B.239/c/6, John Cromartie to James Hargrave, 3 Mar. 1851, fo. 17.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 11 Nov. 1858, fo. 8d.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.39/b/11, William Shaw to Alexander Fisher, 24 Sept. 1840, fo. 5d.; William Shaw to Alexander Fisher, 22 Nov. 1840, fo. 7d.

⁷⁹NAC, MB 19 A 21, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 15 March 1926.

for love or money." The women who remained were "completely monopolized by the Righteous," i.e. the "psalm singing Scotch & Blues," who were "so far liberal as to practice a community of such goods," but who punished "with the unrelenting scourge of slander every interloper from among the 'Children of darkness' who dares to poach in their sacred warrens."⁸⁰ Of course, the officers abandoned these wild ways as they climbed the company's hierarchy and, given its increased rigidity, the snobbishness, the status- if not class- consciousness, and the racism which characterized relations within the company and its settlements, it is unlikely that the officers considered it either necessary or possible for their inferiors to achieve the same degree of refinement in their family lives as themselves.

Officers may have rejected Indian wives for themselves, but they might still allow them to their men. By the 1860s, servants were frequently being allowed, and enthusiastically requesting permission, to take "wives from Indian tents."⁸¹ Officers expected to find European wives or marry the educated and carefully reared daughters of their older colleagues. Most servants' marriages were as stable as those of their officers, of course, but their wives' origins constituted a mark of social inferiority. That they were allowed to marry women their officers considered unsuitable reflects their own relegation to the bottom of the social scale. Many of them were native-born, they occupied the lower ranks of the company and had few expectations of promotion, and when they left the HBC they joined the lower ranks of western Canadian society. They could never aspire to the social prominence or influence of their officers. Their wives were not refined enough to grace the drawing rooms of the elite. Indeed, their lives were spent performing varieties of drudgery that the genteel ladies of the fur trade gentry would have considered beneath them. And, unlike company officers and prominent settlers, they would not have sent their daughters to such institutions as Miss Davis's school, where training in deportment and ornamental arts transformed them into the "perfectly accomplished" young

⁸⁰NAC, MB 19 A 21, James Hargrave to Richard Grant, 5 Dec. 1826.

⁸¹HBCA, A.11/46, James Anderson, b, to A. G. Dallas, 8 Sept. 1862, fos. 419d.-420.

ladies.⁸² And, given their lowly place in the social structure of Rupert's Land, their response to the bigotry of the respectable would probably have been: "So what if Mama is an Indian?"⁸³

That servants' private lives should diverge from those of their officers is not surprising. Servants lived and worked with one another. If officers kept a proper distance, they saw the servants chiefly to give orders or inflict punishment. Officers socialized with them only to exchange formal Christmas or New Year's greetings, to join in toasts to the monarch on St. George's Day, and, most importantly, to dispense the festive rum or brandy. Having completed these ceremonial duties, the officers withdrew and the men danced, played games, got drunk and squabbled. The week between Christmas and New Year's Day was usually a holiday with additional days off when carousing rendered the revelers unfit for work.⁸⁴ It was not, of course, only the company's generosity that allowed such celebrations to continue in the service. Its paternalistic tradition would certainly have predisposed it to tolerating them while the paternalism espoused by nineteenth-century industrial employers⁸⁵ would have reinforced this predisposition. But, the force of custom itself was as strong in the HBC as it was elsewhere, where attempts to

⁸²Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1981), 235-6.

⁸³See: Sylvia Van Kirk, "'What if Mama is an Indian?': The Cultural Ambivalence of the Alexander Ross Family," in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, ed., The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 207-217.

⁸⁴HBCA. B.3/a/74, Albany journal, 1777-78, 26 Dec. 1777, fo. 9d.; B.3/a/77^a, Albany journal, 1779-80, 24 Apr. 1780, fo. 20d.; B.3/a/92, Albany journal, 27 Dec. 1790, fo. 10d.; B.59/a/86, Eastmain journal, 1808-9, 29 Apr. 1829, fo. 27d.; B.3/a/134, Albany journal, 1829-30, 25 Dec. 1829, fos. 25-25d., 1 Jan. 1830, fo. 26; B.8/a/1, Assiniboine journal, 1828-29, 23 Jan. 1829, fo. 10; B.45/a/1, Fort Colville journal, 1830-31, 25 Dec. 1830, fo. 27d.; B.117/a/8, Long Lake journal, 1831-32, 1-2 Jan. 1832, fo. 8d.; B.129/a/15, Michipicoten journal, 1830-31, 25 Dec. 1830, fo. 15; B.162/a/3, Pic journal, 1829-30, 1 Jan. 1830, fo. 15; B.159/a/11, Fort Pelly journal, 1829-30, 1 Jan. 1830, fo. 21d.; B.201, Fort Simpson journal, 1838-40, 1 Nov. 1838, fo. 61d.; B.5/a/10, Fort Alexandria journal, 1858-64, 1 Jan. 1861, fo. 51; B.220/a/41, Trout Lake journal, 1870-72, 31 Dec. 1870, fo. 20, 1 Jan. 1871, fo. 20.

⁸⁵See: Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980); H. I. Dutton and J. E. King, "The Limits of Paternalism: the Cotton Tyrants of North Lancashire, 1836-54," Social History Vol. 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1982): 59-74.

eliminate unruly, plebeian rituals and replace them with celebrations that promoted deference and morality encountered strong resistance.⁸⁶ Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, and British holidays such as Guy Fawkes Day and St. George's Day were celebrated in the HBC. All Saints' Day was added as Roman Catholic Canadians swelled the ranks⁸⁷ and in 1859, the Norwegians at Moose Factory were able to arrange a day off work for themselves by telling the officer in charge that it was one of their national holidays. However, when some of them tried it again, the officer decided "the whole [was] a got up scheme between them" and put them off duty as punishment.⁸⁸ Alongside these imported celebrations, the fur trade developed its own rituals, most of which featured the consumption of liquor.

In 1771, the officer at Churchill promised five gallons of rum to the first man to see or hear a black whale blow at the mouth of the river.⁸⁹ At Lac Seul, there was "an old Custom" to give each man a quart of rum when the fish began spawning at Black Island.⁹⁰ At Brandon House men customarily received a "dram" of rum when they went off to fishing or hunting tents and a pint when they returned.⁹¹ On New Year's Day the men received "their Engagement Pint" to celebrate the renewal of their contracts.⁹² Treats of liquor might also mark the arrival of the

⁸⁶See: Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 118-171; Bob Bushaway, By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880 (London: Junction Books, 1982), 231-74; David Underdown, Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 44-72, 239-91.

⁸⁷HBCA, B.39/a/6, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1815-16, 1 Nov. 1815, fo. 26.; B.181/a/2, Fort Resolution journal, 1819-20, 1 Nov. 1819, p. 24; B.201/a/4, Fort Simpson journal, 1 Nov. 1838, fo. 61d.

⁸⁸HBCA, B.135/a/174, Moose Factory journal, 1859-60, 2 June 1859, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁹HBCA, B.42/a/80, Churchill journal, 1770-71, 22 Apr. 1771, fo. 53.

⁹⁰HBCA, B.107/a/9, Lac Seul journal, 1830-31, 13 Oct. 1830, fo. 8.

⁹¹HBCA, B.22/a/10, Brandon House journal, 1802-3, 14 Nov. 1802, fo. 5d.

⁹²HBCA, B.8/a/1, Assiniboine journal, 1828-29, 23 Jan. 1829, fo. 10; B.129/a/22, Michipicoten journal, 1840-41, 1 Jan. 1841, fo. 16.

governor, friends from the interior, or men who had been working away from the post.⁹³ At Fort Edmonton it was customary to celebrate the arrival of sleds and meat from the plains by an issue of drams all round.⁹⁴ The passing of some places required the observation of certain niceties. In 1793, the passage through what Donald MacKay referred to as Berens Lake was marked by three cheers from the men and a present of a pint of grog to each. This, said MacKay, was the "customary fee" in the country, "particularly from a Gentleman of Property for his title & claim to such a place or part of the Country."⁹⁵ Even George Simpson was moved to observe that "ancient voyaging customs" had to be "respected" and gave the men a bottle of rum when he learned that it was the custom for a *bourgeois*, i.e. an officer, on his first visit to the little Rivulet portage to treat the men with "an extra dram" or risk being shaved, as was the custom aboard ship when a man crossed the Equator for the first time.⁹⁶ The undertone of defiance and even subversion that informed such rituals bubbled to the surface in the fall of 1818 among the men en route to Lac la Pluie. Their officer, Robert Jones, a clerk, alienated them almost immediately by informing them that he was going to make them start earlier every morning, stop later in the evening, and get to their destination ten days earlier than last year. Progress was slow, however, and another officer warned him that they would arrive ten days later than ever if he continued to get the men up at two o'clock in the morning and make them travel until sunset. The usual practice was to start at sunrise and stop an hour before sunset while there was still light to cook by. When Jones heard that one of the Canadian servants had been heard saying he intended to

⁹³HBCA, B.129/a/14, Michipicoten journal, 1829-30, 17 May 1830, fo. 21d.; 19 June 1830, fo. 2; B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 27 Oct. 1858, fo. 6d.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 12 Dec. 1859, fo. 87d.

⁹⁵HBCA, B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4, 9 Sept. 1793, fo. 3. See also: B.181/a/1, Fort Resolution journal, 1818-19, 26 Aug. 1818, fo. 5.

⁹⁶ Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, 13 Sept. 1820, p. 37. This "sailor's baptism" was an old tradition among seamen. A rite of passage, it marked a man's initiation into the brotherhood of the sea and was a momentary lapse in the shipboard discipline, of which not all captains approved. (Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 186-89).

shave him upon their arrival at Lac la Pluie, Jones declared that if anyone laid a hand on him, or complained about their rations, "By the eternal God he would blow their braines[sic] out." All the men then assembled and challenged him "if he was brave enough to do that now." They also told him that he was himself responsible for the slow progress of their journey "by chastising them late and early and fining them at different times for Singing after they had put up." Violence did not erupt until a few days later, however, while the party was stopped at Osnaburgh House. One of the men, Hugh Cameron, demanded more rum and threatened to break a window when Jones refused to give it to him. Next morning, Cameron refused to get into the boat because Jones had fined him £22 for his misbehaviour. Jones, who was now drunk, had Cameron forced into the boat, but the man refused to do any work, whereupon Jones hit him on the head and hands with a piece of iron "until Blood painted the Oars and Covering" and he himself fell overboard. The other Lac la Pluie men then jumped out of the boats and declared they would go no further with Jones unless he "used them better." Two of the other officers present advised the men to leave, which they did, and Jones followed later in a canoe. The men were still grumbling when they arrived at Lac la Pluie, where Jones proved as unpopular with the officers as he was with his men.⁹⁷

The drinking that was such an important part of these rituals distressed the London committee and many of its officers, but breaking with tradition was not easy. Thus, in 1829, one officer, though accustomed to issuing rum in drams at Christmas, had to conform to the custom at Fort Albany of serving it in pint "to avoid Singularity."⁹⁸ In 1840, there was a concerted effort across the service to do away with the Christmas spirits, which annoyed the servants⁹⁹ but failed

⁹⁷HBCA, B.64/a/7, Escabitchewan journal, 1818-19, 31 July 1818, fo. 2, 11 Aug. 1818, fos. 2d.-3, 14 Aug. 1818, fo. 3, 15 Aug. 1818, fos. 3-3d.; B.64/e/1, Escabitchewan report, 1819, fos. 1d.2; B.105/a/6, Lac la Pluie journal, 1818-19, 5-6 Nov. 1818, fos. 8-8d.

⁹⁸HBCA, B.3/a/134, Albany journal, 1829-30, 25 Dec. 1829, fo. 25.

⁹⁹HBCA, B.129/a/22, Michipicoten journal, 1840-41, 25 Dec. 1840, fos. 15-15d.; B.123/a/43, Martins Fall journal, 1840-41, 25 Dec. 1840, fo. 14d.

to abolish the customary Yuletide treat. In 1841 the committee abolished regular allowances of liquor, including the usual Saturday night's ration, and decided that in future the men would receive only an occasional dram if they had to work in bad weather.¹⁰⁰ In 1842, George Simpson ordered that no more rations of liquor were to be issued to any men in the service on the west coast and "remonstrances" made "on the ground that the moisture of the climate of the N. W. Coast renders the modest use of Spirituous Liquors necessary to the preservation of health" were "totally unworthy of notice" and to be ignored. John McLoughlin Sr., superintendent of the Columbia District, however, turned to the London committee, explaining to its apparently poorly informed members that the servants received a pint of rum when they engaged, one on New Year's Day, one when they left for their winter quarters or on a long voyage, a pint when they returned, "and now and then a glass." These were "indulgences of long established Custom" and he would "not interfere with them, without...positive instructions." The committee retreated from this drastic measure, declaring, "It would afford us sincere satisfaction if the use of spirituous liquors could be entirely discontinued by the people in the Company's employ, but we are not prepared to advise you to take any steps towards this end that are likely to cause discontent as the quantity distributed is so small and the custom has been of long continuation."¹⁰¹ Liquor, thus, retained its importance. In fact, in 1855, William McNeill noted in the Fort Simpson journal, "our men now get a dram in the morning, and we find that they are always on hand at bell time in the morning."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.3/b/66, Joseph Beioley to George Barnston, 2 Feb. 1841, fo. 31.

¹⁰¹Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series: 1839-44, McLoughlin to London committee, 31 Oct. 1842, p. 71; George Simpson to John McLoughlin, 13 May 1842, fn. p. 72; HBCA, B.223/c/1, London committee to John McLoughlin, 27 Apr. 1843, fo. 216.

¹⁰²HBCA, B.201/a/8, Fort Simpson journal, 1855-59, 20 Nov. 1855, fo. 25.

Individual officers still tried to make the holidays less turbulent by reducing the quantities of liquor served out or even eliminating it altogether.¹⁰³ In 1853, George Simpson suggested that the regales which brigades received when they left York Factory be distributed a few days before departure so that it could be consumed before the men left. It was customary to issue the liquor as the crews were starting out, with the result that they put ashore as soon as they were out of sight of the factory and remained there until they had finished off all the alcohol they had received, carelessly exposing their craft to the elements.¹⁰⁴ A few months later, Simpson saw an opportunity for a more permanent alteration. Some of the Roman Catholic clergy and other concerned people had informed Simpson that a large number of the tripmen hired to man the Portage La Loche brigade were members of the Temperance Society recently established by the late Bishop Provencher and urged him to discontinue issuing rum. Accordingly, Simpson suggested that this brigade receive tea and sugar instead of rum, but he discovered that "their converts refused to be made sober men on compulsion" and he instructed William Mactavish to try to make the change the following year, though only if it could be done through "moral persuasion." He did not want Mactavish to "get into difficulties by compelling sudden change in this particular." John Black, chief trader at Fort Garry, recommended that all the brigades should be deprived of their rum because "the maddening regale" was the cause of "almost every remarkable instance" of "damaged cargoes or of gross misconduct." He intended to insist on such a condition in any agreements he made with freighters or tripmen at Red River, although he did not think it advisable to make it compulsory in the contracts of the regular servants.¹⁰⁵ Regales continued to be issued at York Factory, however. Five years later, George

¹⁰³HBCA, B.145/a/26, New Brunswick journal, 1811-12, 23 May 1812, fo. 14; B.239/a/154, York Factory journal, 1840-41, 1 Jan. 1841, fo. 25; ; B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 2-3 Jan. 1860, fo. 91d.

¹⁰⁴HBCA B.239/c/7, George Simpson to W. Mactavish, 18 June 1853, fo. 103d.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.239/c/7, George Simpson to W. Mactavish, 1 Dec. 1853, fo. 213; John Black to W. Mactavish, 8 Dec. 1853, fos. 221-221d.

Simpson again complained about the "scenes of uproar and annoyance in various ways" caused by the inland brigades after they received rum both when they arrived and when they departed.¹⁰⁶ In 1868, some members of the brigades sold part of their regale to the tripmen employed by Andrew Mowat, a freighter, apparently during a stop at Lower Fort Garry. As a result, the tripmen became so drunk that the officer in charge at the fort had to hire two men to guard the boats and cargoes.¹⁰⁷ Thus, although, as Michael Payne's close examination of the York Factory records has revealed, alcoholism was not nearly as widespread or fatal as has been suggested, specifically by Frits Pannekoek,¹⁰⁸ liquor was an important part of life in the HBC. The consumption of alcohol was an accepted part of life in Britain and the issuing of regular rations and special treats in the HBC continued to legitimize it in Rupert's Land even as missionaries, officers and the London committee, like their British counterparts, sought to encourage temperance. But it was not consumed only on occasions sanctioned, however reluctantly, by higher authority, as is indicated by the fact that of the types of misbehaviour listed in Table 1 drunkenness was one of the most common.

As the company's journals reveal, there were plenty of sottish officers, both on land and aboard company ships, most of whom were demoted or dismissed, because their behaviour set a bad example for their men and rendered them unfit for command.¹⁰⁹ Drinking also

¹⁰⁶HBCA, B.239/c/10, George Simpson to officer in charge of York Factory, 21 June 1858, fo. 106.

¹⁰⁷HBCA, B.303/a/1, Lower Fort Garry journal, 1868-74, 3 Oct. 1868, fo. 1d.

¹⁰⁸Payne, "The Most Respectable Place in the Territory", 98-99.

¹⁰⁹For example: HBCA, A.12/10, Simpson to London committee, 21 June 1859, fos. 180-180d.; B.3/a/77^a, Albany journal, 1779-80, 4 Jan. 1780, fo. 11; B.3/a/105, Albany journal, 1802-3, 19 Oct. 1802, fo. 7d.; B.3/a/110, Albany journal, 1807-08, 16 July 1808, fo. 16; B.3/a/115, Albany journal, 1811-12, 30 Mar. 1812, fo. 7; B.3/a/116, Albany journal, 1812-13, 5 Aug. 1813, fo. 16d.; B.19/a/1, Big Lake journal, 1818-19, 24 Sept. 1818, fo. 4; B.22/a/20, Brandon House journal, 1817-18, 1 Dec. 1817, fo. 23; B.42/a/101, Charlotte Sloop journal, 1779-80, 23 June 1780, fo. 18; B.60, Edmonton journal, 1815-16, James Sutherland to James Bird, 7 Aug. 1816, fo. 51; B.123/b/3, John Davis to Thomas Vincent, no date, 1821, fos. 24d.-25; B.186/e/4, Ruperts River report, 1820-21, fos. 3-4; B.198/a/39, Severn journal, 1789-90, "Particulars respecting the murder of William Appleby late Master of the Moose Shalop at Hannah Bay the 18th Octr 1788,"

rendered some ordinary servants unfit. For example, in August of 1790 John Richards and some other men were sent from Red Lake to Osnaburgh House. During the trip, Richards, a native of Rupert's Land, helped an Indian trading captain drink the brandy he had received from the HBC, "went out of all rule" and refused to proceed the next morning. After he used "very bad language" against them, the other servants left him with the Indians. Though "an excellent boatsteerer," Richards was "so subject to liquor" that he was unfit for any responsibility. He promised to reform, but four years later got drunk and participated in the murder of a women, although he claimed that he had stabbed her only after her husband had cut her throat. His race was not yet a serious barrier to advancement, but his drunkenness was.¹¹⁰ One morning in October of 1817, after a night of drinking and fighting with the Indians, Francois Dechamp, a guide at Lesser Slave Lake, demanded rum from his master, John Lewis. Lewis refused and ordered him to make some sledges as fast as possible. Dechamp, however, replied, "the Sledges might be dam^d and that he wanted some Rum." When Lewis still refused, Dechamp demanded his equipment. When told it was impossible and that anyway Lewis did not have his engagement and did not know what his equipment was, Dechamp said several times that he would soon find it at another place, meaning the nearby NWC post. Lewis, therefore, suggested he had better go and find it where he could and Dechamp went off to join the NWC. But he soon returned, though his conduct was no better.¹¹¹ Archibald Spence, an Orcadian labourer at

fo. 38d.; B.198/a/40, Severn journal, 1790-91, 23 Dec. 1790, fo. 13d.; B.239/a/90, York Factory journal, 1789-90, 26 April 1790, fo. 38d.; B./3/c/2, William Lane to Robert Miles, 24 Mar. 1844, fos. 160-161; Robert Miles to George Gladman, 30 Mar. 1844, fo. 161d.; Miles to Gladman, 31 Mar. 1844, fo. 163; B.226/b/11, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 Jan. 1855, fos. 92d.93; B.226/c/2, L. G. Smith to William F. Tolmie and Board of Management, 21 May 1869, fo. 455; B.239/k/3, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1851-70, 3 July 1870, pp. 450-51; D.1/4, Thomas Vincent, John Davis, Alexander Christie, Joseph Beioley, and Angus Bethune to London committee, 10 Sept. 1822, fos. 26-26d.

¹¹⁰HBCA, B.177/a/1, Red Lake journal, 1790-91, 15 Sept. 1790, fo. 8; B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-94, 18 Nov. 1793, fo. 11d.; B.22/a/2, Brandon House journal, 1794-5, 22 Oct. 1794, fo. 7d., 29 Nov. 1794, fo. 9d.

¹¹¹HBCA, B.115/a/1, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1817-18, 25-30 Oct. 1817, fos. 5-5d.; 3 March 1818, fos. 11-11d.; 14-15 July 1818, fo. 6d. Another of the men at this post, Baptist Bolleau, proved similarly troublesome. See: 15 Mar. 1818, fo. 14.

Severn House, was "ingenious and useful" except when drunk. In September of 1822, he took an Indian woman into the men's house and tried to hit her husband when he came in to fetch her. John Work, master of the post, stopped Spence, who then turned on Work and hurled "abusive language" upon him. Telling him to desist "only made him worse" and Work kicked him. Spence then ran into the woods and returned the next morning, begging forgiveness. Although Spence had apparently behaved badly on other occasions when he was drunk, this was the first time his "abuse was so gross" that it could not be overlooked. Besides, three young men who had never served with Work before had been present and "taking no notice of this would have been a licence for them to behave in the same manner." The day after Christmas, Spence, drunk, no doubt from his holiday liquor, got into a brawl with another servant.¹¹² In May of 1830, Jacques Nance, employed in the Montreal Department, got into "a most beastly state of intoxication" while drinking with some Indians at Weymontachingue. He then tried to force a clerk to give him more rum. When he was refused, he became "enraged" and burst into the gentlemen's house, breaking a door and declaring "that he wished to get intoxicated so as to fight with and clear the house of all the Clerks and Masters and Bourgeois." Nance returned to sobriety, but deserted several days later after being denied additional flour.¹¹³ As for the seamen aboard the company's ships, they lived up to the sailor's reputation for drunkenness.¹¹⁴

¹¹²HBCA, B.198/a/60, Severn House journal, 1820-21, 22 Sept. 1820, fos. 12-12d.; 26 Dec. 1820, fo. 18d.

¹¹³HBCA, B.134/c/8, James Keith to James Keith, 12 Aug. 1830, fos. 95-96d.

¹¹⁴See: B.201/a/3, Fort Simpson journal, 1834-38, 26 Jan. 1838, fos. 166d.-167; C.1/243, Log of the *Columbia*, 1835-37, 19 July 1836, fo. 131d., 25 July 1836, fos. 132d.-33, 26 July 1836, fo. 133d. 24 Dec. 1836, fo. 176, 27-30 Dec., fos. 176-176d., 5-6 Jan. 1837, fos. 177d.-178; C.1/613, Log of the *Norman Morison*, 1849-51, 11 Aug. 1850, fo. 108; C.1/981, Log of the *Princess Royal*, 1859-65, 28 Feb.-14 Mar. 1860, fos. 77d.-80d., 17 Jan. 1861, fo. 205d., 5 Feb. 1861, fo. 211A, 16 Feb. 1861, fo. 211B, 12 Feb. 1861, fo. 211Bd.; C.1/721, Log of the *Prince Arthur*, 1860, 15 Oct. 1860, fo. 55d.; C.1/499, Log of the *Lady Lampson*, 1870-71, 16 Jan. 1871, fo. 28; C.7/44, Miscellaneous Papers - *Eagle*, 1836-8. Declaration of Charles Humphreys and William Barton about events of 27 July 1836, 10 Nov. 1837, fos. 9-9d.

Even when it did not lead to such uproar, drunkenness deprived the company of the labour for which it was paying. In October of 1780, a shipwright, newly arrived at Albany, fell off a flanker while "dead Drunk", broke his leg in two places, and bruised himself so severely that he was still unable to work in January.¹¹⁵ James Hall, a carpenter at York Factory, was good when sober, but, reported his master, "while Liquor is stirring, never can do duty, which is - and has been a great hinderance[sic] to our building." His intemperance had nearly destroyed his eyesight and his company was "disagreeable." His request to go home in 1791 was therefore readily granted.¹¹⁶ In 1809, one of the Eastmain men working in the woods, froze his hands because he had been left alone to cook for his companions, stole liquor, got drunk, wandered out of the tent and was later found "in a stupid state in the snow."¹¹⁷ In 1822 one of the men at Albany could not proceed on a journey because he had fallen out of bed while drunk and hurt his knee.¹¹⁸ At Lesser Slave Lake, in the "drinking match of new years day" two of the men "fought a Battle" in which one bit the other's hand so severely that he would probably lose some of his fingers.¹¹⁹ In October of 1841, the men at Fort Stikine were reported to be "out of their senses" and unable to work after a night of drinking.¹²⁰ Farm labourers attached to Fort Langley on the west coast, where the presence of enterprising settlers provided alternative sources of liquor, spent the Sabbath in dissipation and were unfit for work on Monday.¹²¹ Even approved drinking led to inconvenience. In 1861, New Year's "Convivialities" at Fort Alexandria took the men

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.3/a/79, Abstract of Albany journal, 1780-81, 1 Oct. 1780, fos. 1-1d.; B.198/b/26, Severn House journal, 1780-81. Thomas Hutchins to Matthew Cocking, 12 Jan. 1781, fo. 38d.

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/90, York Factory journal, 1789-90, 4 Jan. 1790, fo. 18, 1 July 1791, fo. 27; B.239/f/1, Servants' Resolves, 1783-95, fo. 53d.

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.59/a/86, Eastmain journal, 1808-9, 10 Mar. 1809, fo. 21d.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.3/a/128, Albany journal, 1822-3, 29 Dec. 1822, fo. 13.

¹¹⁹HBCA, B.115/a/5, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1821-22, 5 Jan. 1822, fo. 17.

¹²⁰HBCA, B.209/a/1, Fort Stikine journal, 5 Oct. 1841, fo. 53d.

¹²¹HBCA, B.113/b/2, Ovid Allard to Board of Management, 1 Sept. 1868, fo. 44.

across the Fraser River where they, "punished themselves accordingly." One of the men, trying to cross back to the fort, "fell down senseless" and was found more than two hours later with his hands and feet "frozen stiff." He was taken inside, rubbed with rum for an hour, given "strong doses of Rhubarb & Peppermint" when he developed cramps, had bottles of hot water rolled over his stomach, and was finally given a mustard poultice. Though apparently on the road to recovery by the next morning, the man suffered a series of fainting fits and was expected to be "useless" for a long time.¹²² Sometimes the loss was permanent. In July of 1819, Andrew McFarlane, intoxicated aboard a boat headed inland, declared he would jump overboard and return to Albany. Since he was an excellent swimmer, one of the officers told him to go ahead and McFarlane swam to shore where he walked along the shore as the boat pulled around a point. The following morning, however, four men sent out to look for him found his body on the beach near where he was last seen.¹²³ In 1850, someone from the Barque *England* sold rum to the men and Indians of Fort Victoria. Riotous drunkenness ensued, particularly among the servants just arrived aboard the *Norman Morison*. Several had to be put in irons and one man drowned after he upset a canoe in a "fit of intoxication."¹²⁴

Drinking also led to negligence. In March of 1801, Adam Birston, an Orcadian tailor, being drunk, slept during his two hours of watch duty.¹²⁵ In July of 1814 the chief of Moose Factory, on his way to visit a nearby Canadian post, chanced upon eight men who had left for their winter stations the previous day, had stopped, and were drinking up the brandy that was supposed to last them the whole journey.¹²⁶ That same year at Henley House, the master forgot

¹²²HBCA, B.5/a/10, Fort Alexandria journal, 1858-64, 1 Jan. 1861, fo. 51.

¹²³HBCA, B.3/a/123, Albany journal, 1818-19, 9 July 1819, fo. 24.

¹²⁴Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51 (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1979), James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 15 May 1850, p. 88.

¹²⁵HBCA, B.135/a/88a, Moose Factory journal, 1800-01, 4 Mar. 1801, fo. 17.

¹²⁶HBCA, B.135/a/104, Moose Factory journal, 1813-14, 17 July 1814, fo. 17.

to lock the door to the warehouse when he went fishing. William Malone, an Irish labourer, took advantage of the opportunity to steal some rum and get drunk, after which he went into the woods and fell asleep. Asked to account for these actions, he responded with "the most abusive language that he could utter."¹²⁷ In May of 1816, John Norn and William Flett, stationed at Neisquiscow, not far from Eastmain, were ordered to make poles for hauling wood. Their master, James Clouston, had gone to set fishing nets the night before and when he returned, he found that Norn and Flett had done nothing and were nowhere to be seen. Clouston and another man, therefore, went to men's house, from which a "strong smell of rum" issued when the door was opened. Flett and Norn were in bed and there was a puddle of vomit before Flett's bed. Both men were asked if they were "badly" and both replied that they were "well enough." Ordered to go and clean fish, the two stumbled off, being hardly able to stand. Clouston then searched the men's house and found a tumbler and some rum. The two men denied that they had been drinking until confronted with the evidence whereupon each blamed the other. Norn, however, had been the one who broke into the desk drawer where the warehouse key was kept. Clouston immediately dismissed them from the service.¹²⁸ In the summer of 1820, at Norway House, where men were being divided into crews destined for posts far in the interior, Canadian servants bartered their shirts and blankets with the European men for their liquor. The ensuing drunkenness not only interfered with the work that had to be done there but also delayed the men's departure, which, because of the distances involved, had to be made early.¹²⁹ In 1870, at Fort Garry, Daniel Budge was discovered drunk and asleep in the store at ten o'clock in the morning of his second day at work, persuading the officers that "he would not suit for Red River".

¹²⁷HBCA, B.86/a/64, Henley House journal, 1814-15, 5 Nov. 1814, pp. 11-12.

¹²⁸HBCA, B.143/a/15, Neisquiscow journal, 1815-16, 24 May 1816, fos. 18d.-20. See also: B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4, 11 Oct. 1793, fo. 8; B.42/a/101, *Charlotte* sloop journal, 1779-80, 6 June 1780, fo. 16, 30 June 1780, fo. 19;

¹²⁹Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, 9 Aug. 1820, p. 7, 13 Aug. 1820, fo. 8.

When they ordered him to go to Fort Alexander, however, he refused and simply left and took up residence in the settlement. "There being no law framed yet regarding contract servant and master" it was impossible to punish him.¹³⁰ It would be misguided to suggest that all intoxication was a sign of rebellion and foolish to see every drunken lout as one of the vanguard of the working class. But drinking to excess, in defiance of company regulations, suggested at least an *indifference* to authority and when such occasions resulted from theft or gave rise to insolence and negligence they became, in effect, subversive. Drinking, even to excess, was more than a sign of mental breakdown, as Frits Pannekoek has suggested.¹³¹ It was an important feature of company celebrations, when even officers might indulge in "perhaps a too liberal quantum of w[ine]", and make themselves ridiculous, as George Barnston felt he had done in fighting a duel with Chief Trader William Todd on New Year's day at York Factory in 1823.¹³² Such occasions were approved breaks in the routine. Illicit drinking was a way of adding more of them. Drinking can, therefore, be considered one of the ways in which servants shirked their duty, opportunities for which abounded because officers and servants led separate lives except during the enforced togetherness of voyages.

Servants carried out their tasks with virtually no supervision. Tradesmen worked at their crafts at their own pace, which could be extremely unhurried, and to standards that did not always reflect the craft pride the skilled artisan was supposed to possess. Thus, in 1779, Walter Bigger, a carpenter at York Factory, was reprimanded for spoiling timber and taking more than five weeks making a shoddy staircase of eighteen steps. Told that not one of his jobs was anything but "a scandal," Bigger replied with "very foul and indecent language." He also refused to take his watch, went to bed drunk, left his lamp on, and ignored demands to put out the light or open his door. When the chief, Humphrey Marten, broke it down, he found Bigger in bed, fully

¹³⁰HBCA, B.239/c/19, J. G. McTavish to Samuel K. Johnson, 12 Dec. 1870, fos. 241-241d.

¹³¹Pannekoek, "'Corruption' at Moose," 5.

¹³²HBCA, B.235/c/1, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 1 Feb. 1823, fo. 4.

dressed and wide awake. He was hauled before the council, which decided to suspend him as house carpenter, demanded that he publicly ask pardon of the officers, promise "a due obedience to all lawful commands," and sign a new contract as sawyer and labourer.¹³³ In 1780 the armourer at Severn House was reported to be "wilfully delatory," "saucy," and guilty of malingering.¹³⁴ At York Factory, the bricklayer, who, Humphrey Marten alleged, had never laid a brick in his life before joining the HBC, built a chimney that had to be pulled down lest it suffocate the men and the following year set a lime kiln "in a very careless manner" even though he had been shown how to do it properly. But, he was "an ignorant saucy proud fellow"¹³⁵ In 1802, the armourer at Eastmain made such a mess of the two guns he was supposed to repair that William Bolland concluded that the man was "making a game" of him and boxed his ears with his "open hand." The armourer held up the butt of one of the guns in question in "a threatening posture" and, after being disarmed, ran to the forge, where he seized a sledgehammer with which he made menacing gestures and then drew a knife. He was sent home on the next ship.¹³⁶ In 1811, Thomas H Marcus, a carpenter at Churchill, deliberately built a boat far in excess of the dimensions specified and, when questioned, he lied that the instructions had been unclear and made use of "very irritating & improper language." He was, therefore, told that he would forfeit part of his wages to compensate for the loss to the company of time, labour, provisions, and timber occasioned by his disobedience. Marcus then withdrew his labour entirely. In his examination by the council, Marcus said he would return to work if he lost only three days' wages and the cost of provisions for the same time. He also thought he should be charged only

¹³³HBCA, B.239/b/40, Walter Bigger to Humphrey Marten, 24 Sept. 1779, fos. 2-2d.; Humphrey Marten to Walter Bigger, 24 Sept. 1779, fos. 3-3d.

¹³⁴HBCA, B.198/a/26, Severn House journal, 1780-81, 26 May 1780, fos. 39d.-40; 27 May 1780, fo. 40; 25 Aug. 1780, fo. 4d.

¹³⁵HBCA, B.239/a/78, York Factory journal, 1779-80, 9 Mar. 1780, fo. 23; B.239/a/79, York Factory journal, 1780-81, 2 June 1781, fo. 36d.; 6 Sept. 1780, fo. 68d.

¹³⁶HBCA, B.59/a/79, Eastmain journal, 1801-2, 24 Aug. 1802, fo. 30d.

for the small piece of wood spoiled in the work. The officers decided, however, to fine him £5, whereupon he again refused to work, and they put him aboard the next ship, declaring he was "unfit" to be employed again.¹³⁷ In 1822, the master of Albany complained that the cooper knew his business, but was "slow beyond comprehension," having taken a whole week to make a few water buckets.¹³⁸ In 1858 a cooper was allowed to retire instead of being offered a new contract because of "his inefficiency as a tradesman and his mischief-making propensities among his fellow servants."¹³⁹ In 1869, the officer in charge at North West River, complained of one of the men: "for Carpenter as he pretend[s] to be I never saw such a botch of a fellow -- the best thing that can be done is to send him home -- the only good that I see he can do is to eat."¹⁴⁰

It is impossible to know, however, whether such men were truly incompetent or whether they were simply uncooperative. Tradesmen could be very troublesome when their sense of their own importance and their expectations of the service were at odds with what was expected of them. In 1837, Charles Marshall, a tinsmith, refused to perform plumber's work because he had engaged as a tinman at £30 a year, after making it clear that he expected £40 to serve as a plumber as well. He had done some plumber's work, but when his request for an appropriate addition to his wages was denied, he restricted himself once more to tinwork.¹⁴¹ One of the complaints of the Norwegian tradesmen at Moose Factory in 1854 was that they had done more work outside of their "profession" than in the workshop. They objected to having to go out cutting timber and sleeping in the open air because it was work to which "Norwaymen" were not accustomed and it prevented their apprentices from learning anything. Simpson actually thought

¹³⁷HBCA, B.42/c/1, Statement regarding Thomas Marcus, 25 June 1811, fos. 3-3d.; B.42/f/6, Churchill servants' resolves, 1811, fos. 3d.-4.

¹³⁸HBCA, B.3/a/127, Albany journal, 7 Dec. 1822, fo. 6d.

¹³⁹HBCA, A.10, James Hargrave to ?, 28 Jan. 1859, fo. 69.

¹⁴⁰HBCA, B.153/a/20, North West River journal, 1868-70, 5 June 1860, fo. 18d.

¹⁴¹HBCA, A.11/118, John Charles to William Smith, 13 Sept. 1837, fo. 56d.; A.10/5, "The Memorial of Charles Marshall of No 5 Philpot Gt Commercial Road," 8 Nov. 1837, fo. 304-305.

they had some justification for this complaint and had directed that they be employed only at their trades. He believed, however, that "the turn of duty" usually taken by mechanics in the woods in the winter and on the boats in the summer was "by them considered in the light of a favour being a relaxation from steady hard work & an agreeable change in other respects." He now directed that the Norwegians be split up, with only one man and his apprentice kept at the same post, so that they would "more readily accommodate themselves to the habits of the country when unable to keep up a national feeling."¹⁴² In 1858, John Moar, the assistant boatbuilder at York Factory, tried to spread disaffection among the servants after their rations were reduced. Because Moar had "repeatedly exhibited this spirit" James Hargrave "reproved" him "for the carelessness and indifference" with which he performed his duty "in comparison with the eagerness with which he urged his claims to better Rations better Cookery and other matters that he considered 'his Right.'" Moar objected that Hargrave had "injured his character as a Tradesman" and said he would work no longer for the company and return to Orkney in the fall even though he had another year to serve. Hargrave then ordered him to Churchill, but Moar said he would not go "unless sent as a prisoner." Several days later, Hargrave pointed out to Moar the terms of his contract and the consequences of his "present mutinous behaviour." Moar replied that "he was perfectly aware of both" and remained off duty for several months. He refused to go to the Saskatchewan district even when Simpson threatened him with the loss of his wages from the date of his initial refusal of duty on 19 March. Since the presence of grumbling Norwegians made the officers hesitate to force him to fulfill his engagement, the officers sent Moar home.¹⁴³

¹⁴²HBCA, A.12/7, Simpson to W. S. Smith, 17 Mar. 1855, fos. 395-395d.; "Translated Copy of a Letter from six Norwegians Servants of the Hudson Bay Company to H W Crowe Esq dated Moosefactory Hudson's Bay Sept 10, 1854," fo. 521.

¹⁴³HBCA, B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 26 May 1858, fos. 91-91d.; James R. Clare to George Simpson, 16 Aug. 1858, fo. 102.

Of course, the way in which tradesmen were treated tended to reinforce whatever high-flown notions they might entertain. During the company's early years, senior tradesmen had sat on post councils and been encouraged "with a small complement of furs" to promote good behaviour and prevent private trade.¹⁴⁴ The company also gave them larger land grants than ordinary labourers. By the mid-nineteenth century, tradesmen were exempt from working in the boats whenever they were traveled, although this obligation had never actually been abolished.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, some of the HBC's tradesmen were bringing with them the aspirations toward respectability that increasingly characterized some segments of the British working class.¹⁴⁶ In 1858, James Fitz Hams, a "Master Mason" at Fort Yale, complained that he did not think he was supposed "to serve Mr Ovid Allord as a servant or Slush for Indian Squaws" and had removed himself to Fort Hope until "Some alterations" could be made.¹⁴⁷ This trend was most visible when the HBC began to hire engineers for service aboard its steam vessels on the west coast. Men in the engineering trade, particularly in marine engineering, enjoyed high status,¹⁴⁸ which the HBC recognized. In 1839, Joseph Carless, hired as engineer for the *Beaver*, received a salary of £150, free passage for himself and his wife both out and home, £200 a year if he remained in the country after his five year contract expired, and maintenance of his family as long as he was in the country. Carless had been employed by Boulton, Watt and Co. for six years, bore "an excellent private character for steadiness and sobriety" and was "perfectly master of his business." The committee considered itself fortunate in acquiring him because

¹⁴⁴Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870," 68-69; HBCA, A.11/14, Moses Norton to London committee, 5 Sept. 1770, fo. 129.

¹⁴⁵HBCA, B.154/c/1, James Anderson to George Barnston, 27 Nov. 1857, fo. 141d.

¹⁴⁶See: Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 134-64; Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian-Edinburgh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 91-143.

¹⁴⁷HBCA, B.113/c/1, James Fitz Hams to James M. Yale, 22 Aug. 1858, fo. 133.

¹⁴⁸Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880, 77-81

"respectable" engineers were in short supply.¹⁴⁹ That the men of this profession were a cut above the usual run of HBC servants is further suggested by the secretary's description of one of the two engineers sent in 1858 to Victoria to serve aboard the company's steamer, *Laboucher*. The man was the son of a member of "a highly respectable firm in the City of London" and that he was "a gentleman by birth and education."¹⁵⁰ The vast majority of the company's artisans did not enjoy such elevated status, but even if they had, they would still have been expected to do whatever they were told. In 1862, in consequence of the frequent refusals of tradesmen to work on the trips between posts, the Council of the Northern Department urged, successfully, that their obligation "to work their passages" be specifically mentioned in their contracts and the recruitment agents be careful to ensure that the men engaged as tradesmen be competent.¹⁵¹

Tradesmen were, however, no more disobedient than their more humble comrades. All the men supervised themselves both when working around the post and when sent off, sometimes for weeks at a time, to hunt, fish, chop wood, fetch meat or furs, take packets to other posts, or stay with Indians. Some of them turned out to be "eye servants," as John Euson, the master at Henley House in 1809-10, called the two men who returned four days after embarking on a five-week hunting expedition claiming that they could find no rabbits or partridges.¹⁵² Men pretended to be ill or too weak or the conditions too harsh to undertake journeys or to work, particularly when the latter involved heavy labour such as cutting or hauling wood.¹⁵³ Some

¹⁴⁹HBCA, B.223/c/1, London committee to John McLoughlin, 31 Dec. 1839, fos. 137-137d.

¹⁵⁰HBCA, A.6/33, W. S. Smith to Board of Management, Victoria, 11 Oct. 1858, fo. 170d.

¹⁵¹HBCA, B.239/k/3, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1851-70, 23 June. 1862, p. 239; A.6/38, London committee to A. G. Dallas and councils of the Northern and Southern Departments, 15 April 1863, fo. 74.

¹⁵²HBCA, B.86/a/61, Henley House journal, 1809-10, 31 Sept. 1809, fo. 6.

¹⁵³See: HBCA, A.11/118, Declaration by James Anderson (a) and Alexander Mackenzie (c) witnessed by James Grahame at Norway House, 17 Aug. 1864, fo. 462; B.3/a/99, Albany journal, 1794-97, 20 June 1795, fo. 12; B.3/a/102, Albany journal, 1798-99, 10 Sept. 1799, fo. 33; B.3/a/117^a, Albany journal, 1813-14, 18 Aug. 1813, fo. 1; B.22/a/19, Brandon House journal, 1815-16, 16 Mar. 1816, fo. 22; B.35/a/17, Fort Chipewyan, 1821, 28 Mar. 1821, fo. 12;

were prepared to go to extremes to avoid work. In 1819 one of the men at Lac La Pluie cut himself so that he would not have to go out to gather birch for sledges.¹⁵⁴ Others went to their assigned duties, but worked carelessly or slowly and frequently responded insolently when their negligence was pointed out to them.¹⁵⁵ Tasks that took the men any distance from the post provided the best opportunities for negligence because, as with private trade, their transgressions could be easily concealed. In December of 1778 one of the men of Albany was sent off to fetch some things left about three miles away. He did not come back and the next morning two men went to look for him. They found him "Setting in an Indian Tent very heartily not having yet been for the Things." When the culprit finally returned at sunset, he was clapped

B.42/a/140, Churchill journal, 1813-14, 29 June 1814, fo. 29; B.59/a/83, Eastmain journal, 1805-6, 22 Sept. 1805, fo. 2d.; B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 11 Nov. 1858, fo. 8d.; B.77/a/3, Fort George journal, 1816-17, 20 Sept. 1816, fo. 1d.; B.117/a/4, Long Lake journal, 1818-19, 28 Nov. 1818, fo. 13; B.123/b/2, John James Smith to John Davis, 27 Mar. 1820, fo. 16; B.135/b/26, John Mannall to George Gladman, 2 Feb. 1801, fo. 13d.; B.135/a/94, Moose Factory journal, 1806-07, 19 Jan. 1807, fo. 19; B.135/a/108, Moose Factory journal, 1815, 12 June 1815, fo. 33; B.145/b/2, John Murphy to Thomas Vincent, 27 Mar. 1818, p. 47; B.145/a/15, New Brunswick journal, 1800-01, 28 Oct. 1800, fo. 4d.; B.149/a/23, Nipigon journal, 1870-76, 18 Feb. 1871, fo. 7d.; B.155/a/27, Osnaburgh House journal, 1814-15, 25 Mar. 1815, fo. 8d.; B.155/a/52, Osnaburgh House journal, 1840-41, 21 Jan. 1841, fo. 17d.; B.162/a/11, Pic journal, 1840-41, 3 June 1840, fo. 2; B.188/a/19, Fort St. James journal, 1840-46, 5 Dec. 1840, fo. 10, 5 Apr. 1841, fo. 33; B.180/a/20, Fort St. James journal, 1846-51, 27 May 1850, fo. 100; B.190/a/1, Fort St. Mary journal, 1818-19, 23 Feb. 1819, fo. 41; B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-3, 25 Mar. 1853, fo. 59; B.239/b/93, Report on Donald Smith, fos. 26d.-27; B.239/b/108, J. W. Wilson to Thomas Fraser, 25 Sept. 1866, fo. 585; E.61/12, McMurray Correspondence, 1866, 15 Dec. 1866, fo. 33.

¹⁵⁴HBCA, B.105/a/7, Lac La Pluie journal, 1819-20, 17 Nov. 1819, fo. 49.

¹⁵⁵See, for example: HBCA, B.10/a/2, Attawapiscat journal, 1814-15, 6 Jan. 1815, fo. 11d.; B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4, 8 Dec. 1793, fo. 12d.; B.22/a/19, Brandon House journal, 1815-16, 23 Feb. 1816, fo. 18d.; B.39/a/16, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1820-21, 13 Nov. 1820, fo. 38; B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, William Walker to Mitchel Oman, 11 Dec. 1789, fo. 32; B.78/a/24, Gloucester journal, 1815-16, 1 Dec. 1815, fo. 9; B.93/a/1, Island Lake journal, 1818-19, 24 Mar. 1819, fo. 19d.; B.122/e/1, Manitoba District report, 1818-19, fo. 2; B.123/a/86, Martins Fall journal, 1869-70, 22-232 June 1870, fos. 22d.-23; B.135/a/94, Moose Factory journal, 1806-7, 8-9 Dec. 1806, fo. 12d., 10 Mar. 1807, fo. 28d.; B.135/b/41, John Murphy to Thomas Vincent, 3 July 1821, pp. 53-4; B.145/a/41, New Brunswick journal, 1819-20, 13 Jan. 1820, fo. 11; B.155/a/29, Osnaburgh House journal, 1816-17, 20 Mar. 1817, fo. 20d.; B.155/a/79, Osnaburgh House journal, 1870-71, 22 Sept. 1870, fo. 8; B.188/a/19, Fort St. James journal, 1840-41, 6 Dec. 1840, fo. 10d.; B.190/a/1, Fort St Marys journal, 1818-19, 1 April 1819, fo. 45d.; B.209/a/1, Fort Stikine journal, 1840-42, 13 Jan. 1841, fo. 24d.; B.224/a/7, Fort Vermilion journal, 1840, 27 June 1840, fo. 1; B.240/a/4, Fort Yukon journal, 1850-51, 28 Aug. 1850, fo. 8d.

into irons "As an Example to others."¹⁵⁶ In August of 1818, George Gladman went to see how things were going at the hay marsh near Eastmain and found the men in their tent sitting around the fire. Naturally he did not give them the treat of rum he had brought for their "encouragement," but ordered them back to work. When the men returned to the post the next day, he fined the two he considered "most culpable" ten shillings each for neglect of duty and threatened the rest with a fine in the event of further misbehaviour. To teach everyone a lesson, Gladman posted a notice in the guard room regarding the fines, although its disappearance during his absence suggests that not everyone was properly impressed.¹⁵⁷ Such tasks were amenable to pre-industrial work patterns, namely, alternate periods of slackness and spurts to make up for slow times. Had Gladman, who clearly considered a steady pace more appropriate, not appeared when he did, the men might well have completed their work to his satisfaction and without any loss to themselves. What an officer considered negligence might simply have been a traditional use of time and, given the nature of the work the servants did, haste did not necessarily make sense. For example, in October of 1859, two servants at Edmonton House, clearing away a pile of earth, simply stopped working and decided to go for a ride. Their officer had already reprimanded them for "idle ing[sic] away their time and not working as men ought to do" and he now talked them into going back to work. "The way in which the half breeds of this Dist (especially those from Lake St Annes) work is truly[sic] miserable," he complained, "and tries the patience of any one who has to be over them, to see men idle ing over a job for 2 or 3 weeks which a couple of good men would do in as many days."¹⁵⁸ The master at Martins Fall, observing the leisurely pace at which the men were sawing beams, commented "they wont[sic]

¹⁵⁶HBCA, B.3/a/75, Albany journal, 1778-79, 30 Dec. 1778, fo. 9.

¹⁵⁷HBCA, B.59/a/101, Eastmain journal, 1818-19, 14-15 Aug. 1818, fos. 1-1d.; B.59/e/6, Eastmain report, 1819, fo. 3d.

¹⁵⁸HBCA, B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 31 Oct. 1859, fos. 78-78d.

hurt themselves not them."¹⁵⁹ But why should they rush to complete a task when another, perhaps more onerous, was in the offing?

Long absences from the post provided the best opportunities for indolence. In 1820, men sent off from Lesser Slave Lake to Great Slave Lake returned after an absence of ten days, claiming that the Indian who was supposed to meet them had not turned up. Had they "not been amusing their time," their master commented, they could have been to their destination by now.¹⁶⁰ Dawdling while on errands was not uncommon¹⁶¹ and sometimes orders were simply not carried out at all.¹⁶² Without evidence, however, a master could prove nothing, but when the men's efforts seemed too unproductive his suspicions were aroused. Thus, John Murphy, the master of New Brunswick House in 1820-21, considered the "laziness" of his men to be "unparalleled." In August of 1820 two men came home with only four kegs of salt fish, telling him that fish had been scarce, but Murphy assumed that they had simply not exerted themselves sufficiently. In December two other men came in from a week of hunting with only eight rabbits when they should have brought at least eighty. Parties of men sent to outposts dallied and slept away their time instead of proceeding quickly to their stations. In March another pair of servants, hunting to replenish the post's stock of provisions, returned nine days early, empty handed,

¹⁵⁹HBCA, B.123/a/86, Martins Fall journal, 1869-70, 29 April 1869, fo. 14.

¹⁶⁰HBCA, B.115/a/4, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1820-21, 23 June 1820, fo. 5d.

¹⁶¹See, for example: B.3/a/99, Albany journal, 1794-7, 8 June 1795, fo. 10; B.188/a/14, Fort St. James journal, 1829-30, 8 April 1829, fo. 13d.; B.188/a/16, Fort St. James journal, 19 April 1831, fo. 22, 20 April 1830, fo. 22; B.188/a/19, Fort St. James journal, 1840-46, 4 Mar. 1841, fo. 24d.; B.198/a/114, Severn journal, 1860-61, 19 July 1860, fo. 6d.

¹⁶²See, for example: B.10/a/2, Attawapiscat journal, 1814-15, 6 Jan. 1815, fo. 11d.; B.27/a/8, Carlton House journal, 1818-19, 14 Jan. 1819, fo. 20; B.39/a/3, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1803-4, Thomas Swain to Peter Fidler, 10 April 1804, fo. 18; B.49/a/32^a, Cumberland House journal, 1802-3, 5 Mar. 1802, fo. 24d.; B.60/a/31, Edmonton journal, 1860-61, 1 Feb. 1861, fo. 63; B.108/a/1, Lac Travers journal, 1819-20, *passim*; B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1 July 1790, fo. 60d.; B.133/a/24, Mistassini journal, 1840-41, 10 Mar. 1841, fo. 20; B.135/a/61, Moose Factory journal, 1779-80, 25 Feb. 1780, fo. 17d.; B.181/a/2, Fort Resolution journal, 1819-20, 7 Jan. 1820, p. 60; B.190/a/3, Fort St Marys journal, 1820-21, 29 Oct. 1820, fo. 6; B.239/a/79, York Factory journal, 5 Dec. 1780, fo. 12d.; B.39/c/1, George Simpson to Edward Smith, 8 Feb. 1823, fo. 2; B.239/c/10, R. Wilson to James R. Clare, 29 Aug. 1858, fo. 220.

having eaten all their supplies and, as one confessed, the game they had caught. In April, George Monin, sent to fetch some Indians' furs, returned with only some of them, claiming the rest were two days' march further. Murphy went himself with an apprentice boy and discovered that the furs in question were only an hour's walk away, that Monin had refused to go get them, and that whenever he sent Monin off he got drunk on the rum intended for the Indians.¹⁶³

Some servants' dissatisfaction expressed itself in more than merely shirking their duty. They sometimes left completely. Indeed, desertion was the third most common type of misbehaviour appearing in Table 1. During the years of competition with the NWC, HBC men generally deserted to the nearest posts of their rivals, with whom they were probably already acquainted from the occasions when they disobeyed the orders against fraternization. For the HBC's Canadian servants, whose language, origins, religion, and, in many cases, previous work experience linked them to the NWC, it was not difficult to make the transition, but non-Canadians also crossed over.¹⁶⁴ As the fur trade rivalry heated up in the 1790s, both sides built hundreds of new posts, frequently within sight of one another, providing convenient refuges for deserters and making the enforcement of discipline difficult. More than one officer was afraid to ask his men to do anything lest they desert. The Canadians, reported James Sutherland in 1797, were "gaping with open mouths to receive any...discontented Servants" and he could "scarcely get the domestic duties of the place done by the people in general all casting up that the Canadian Service [was] become preferable." For the past year, he had, in fact, had considerable difficulty

¹⁶³HBCA, B.145/a/42, New Brunswick journal, 1820-21, 23 Aug. 1820, fo. 6; 25 Aug. 1820, fo. 6d.; 2 Dec. 1820, fo. 19d.; 13 Dec. 1820, fo. 20d.; 5 Feb. 1821, fos. 28, 29; 30 Mar. 1821, fos. 37-37d.; 2 April 1821, fos. 37d.-38.

¹⁶⁴See, for example: HBCA, B.59/a/81, Eastmain journal, 1803-4, 26 July 1804, fo. 27d.; B.3/b/46, John Eunson to John Hodgson, 20 Jan. 1810, fos. 14d.-15; B.3/a/116, Albany journal, 1812-13, 23 Jan. 1813, fo. 7d.; B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 14 Nov. 1796, fo. 17d.; B.39/a/3, Fort Chipewyan, 1803-4, Thomas Swain to Peter Fidler, 10 April 1804, fo. 18; B.42/a/136^b, Churchill journal, 1810-11, 4 July 1811, fo. 6; B.84/a/2, Green Lake journal, 1801-2, 27 July 1801, fo. 1d., 13-19 Sept. 1801, fo. 3; B.135/a/91, Moose Factory journal, 1803-4, David Robertson to John Thomas, 5 June 1804, fo. 29d.

hanging onto his men.¹⁶⁵ Although the data in Table 1 do not reflect it, the desertions appear to have increased as the HBC sent its men further inland, where, starving and freezing, they were tempted to escape. Also, many of those recruited to establish a stronghold in the interior were Canadians, attracted to the better food and pay of the NWC.¹⁶⁶ In 1816, Thomas Vincent, governor of the Southern Department, observed that there had been an "unprecedented Number" of desertions during the past season and he attributed it to officers neglecting their orders to prevent "communication" between their men and the Canadians, "therefore affording frequent opportunities to the Canadian Traders of tampering with the men, and rendering them dissatisfied with their situation."¹⁶⁷ Desertion had been common enough prior to 1816 and Vincent's judgement may have been clouded, since he, like the London committee and most of his fellow officers, preferred to think that the HBC was such a fair and humane employer that no servant would leave it unless he was led astray. But, desertion may have increased because disgruntled servants now had more places to go. They deserted for the same reasons, namely poor provisions and bad treatment, which intense competition worsened at the same time as it provided more refuges.¹⁶⁸ The merger of 1821 probably raised hopes that desertion, like all other forms of disobedience, would be greatly reduced now that the HBC was the only large employer in Rupert's Land. But, unhappy servants continued to throw up their contracts.

¹⁶⁵HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-7, 20 Apr. 1797, fo. 35d.; 14, 16, and 19 Nov. 1796, fos. 17d.-19d.

¹⁶⁶HBCA, B.39/a/6, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1815-16, 13 Dec. 1815, fo. 35; 21 Dec. 1815, fo. 35d.; B.89/a/3, Ile a la Crosse journal, 1815-16, 28 Dec. 1815, fo. 10, 15 April 1816, fo. 18.

¹⁶⁷HBCA, B.145/b/1, Thomas Vincent to William Thomas, 17 Sept. 1816, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸See, for example: HBCA, B.49/a/35, Cumberland House journal, 1819-20, 7 July 1819, fo. 12; B.49/a/36, Cumberland House journal, 1820-21, 14 June 1820, fo. 3; B.105/a/6, Lac La Pluie journal, 1818-19, 19 May 1819, fo. 27; B.105/a/7, Lac La Pluie journal, 1819-20, 18 May 1819, fo. 4; B.115/a/2, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1818-19, 24 Aug. 1818, fo. 10; B.117/a/1, Long Lake journal, 1815-16, 29 Aug. 1815, fo. 1d., 23 Dec. 1815, fos. 13-13d.; B.133/a/1, Mistassini journal, 1814-15, 19-20 Jan. 1815, fos. 6-6d., 30 Jan. 1815, fo. 7.

The general disregard for the company's authority and, according to Robert Campbell, the "rascally lawless state of things now in the Country," meant that deserters could find refuge anywhere in Rupert's Land, including the Red River Settlement through which they were easily able to pass to the United States.¹⁶⁹ In the east the labour market lured away not only potential recruits but also contracted servants. In 1844 Andrew Brazeau at Grand Lac broke into the store, stole some provisions, and then headed out for the shanties on the Gatineau or its tributaries.¹⁷⁰ Two newly landed servants from Britain deserted in Montreal in 1858 before the company had gotten any service from them at all.¹⁷¹ On the west coast, deserters, many of whom were seamen on the company's ships, were able to disappear to Oregon or California or sign on aboard other vessels putting into company ports.¹⁷² Not surprisingly, members of the crews of company ships were particularly prone to deserting in Honolulu¹⁷³ and they too ran off when infected by gold fever.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, according to Captain Weynton of the *Cowlitz*, vessels in Honolulu had been burned by their crews so that they might be free to go to California where wages were much higher than in England.¹⁷⁵

The lure of gold also proved strong for servants in the western interior. In 1849, it was necessary to give some servants six months' leave of absence "to visit the Californian Ei

¹⁶⁹HBCA, B.239/c/1, Robert Campbell to Joseph Fortescue, 9 Feb. 1867, fo. 20d.; A.12/42, Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, 20 Nov. 1861, fo. 162; B.239/c/17, W. J. Christie to J. W. Wilson, 1 May 1867, fo. 62d.

¹⁷⁰HBCA, B.218/c/1, James Cameron to John Siveright, 19 Jan. 1844, fos. 1-2.

¹⁷¹HBCA, A.11/28, Duncan Finlayson to W. S. Smith, 24 May 1858, fo. 776.

¹⁷²Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 Sept. 1849, pp. 47-48; James Douglas to London committee, 27 Oct. 1849, p. 34.

¹⁷³Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 April 1850, p. 76;

¹⁷⁴Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 13 June 1850, p. 100.

¹⁷⁵HBCA, A.10/28, Alexander John Weynton to Archibald Barclay, 21 Jan. 1850, fo. 226.

Dorado" or there would have been a general desertion.¹⁷⁶ In September of 1850, Johnson G. King reported from Edmonton that fifty men had "bolted" and gone to the mines.¹⁷⁷ Ten years later, John Saunders at Fort Alexandria, informed the officers in charge of the department that a gold strike at Antler Creek had caused discontentment among the men, especially because their rations consisted almost completely of flour, and they readily succumbed to the blandishments of the miners and packers who were offering as much as \$30 a month with board and clothing to hire on as packers.¹⁷⁸ The company's only legal course of action was to produce evidence of a man's desertion and then have imprisoned for from one to three months with a reduction in wages during that term or dismissal from the service. Neither was much of a penalty and the latter he likened to "plunging a man under water to avoid a shower of rain." Convinced that the company "had no means of punishing deserters", men were not afraid to run away and Saunders feared that if men at Red River got the same idea into their heads, they would sign up in order to be transported free to the "Gold Country" and desert as soon as they arrived. He attributed the readiness of the men to desert to the fact that they received "an indifferent scale of rations" and had not lived well the past winter. Nevertheless, he believed they were better off than the packers, who, unfortunately, loafed around the men and sneered at them for keeping their contracts when they might have better wages elsewhere.¹⁷⁹ Sinister packers had replaced the blackguard Canadians as the villain, but, the company's servants did not need outsiders to lead them astray.

They had joined the HBC with their own motives and their behaviour reflected not only their characters but also their view of the world. Though conservative, since it challenged

¹⁷⁶HBCA, A.12/4/, Simpson to London committee, 30 June 1849, fo. 542d.

¹⁷⁷HBCA, B.218/c/1, Johnson G. King to James Cameron, 1 Sept. 1850, fo. 12d.

¹⁷⁸HBCA, B.5/b/1, John Saunders to Board of Management, 2 April 1861, fo. 9d.

¹⁷⁹HBCA, B.5/b/1, John Saunders to P. S. Ogden, 6 Mar. 1861, fo. 8d.; John Saunders to P. H. Rind, 27 April 1861, fos. 10d.-11d.

neither the social hierarchy nor the authority of the elite, it was based on "preferences and priorities which were profoundly different from those which the moralizing, mercantilist advocates of thrift and industry sought to impose."¹⁸⁰ Work and the accumulation of money were not the purpose of life and relations between masters and servants were more than the sale of labour power. As a result, HBC servants, whether Métis or European, tried to control the conditions of work to accord with their own interests. They insisted on the observance of holidays and time-honoured traditions and avoided overwork by labouring at a reasonable pace or through malingering and negligence. If they found their situation intolerable they might simply abscond. Neither changing recruitment strategies nor re-organization could eliminate these habits because the servants did not have the respect for authority which men of their position and background were, erroneously, supposed to possess. They were not subsumed in the organizations which they joined. In fact, the nature of service itself increased the distance between the servants and their superiors and allowed the habits that annoyed Ferdinand Jacobs and Moses Norton in 1770 to flourish and continue to annoy their successors a century later.

¹⁸⁰Medick, "Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Capitalism," 90.

CHAPTER 5

THE DENIAL OF DUTY

Your Honor's Servants now a days takes great Libertys to what they used to do When I first know'd this country they was more under Subjection and was afraid of denighing any duty their Superior thought fit to put them to and now they think nothing of it but will denigh with a face of brass...They tell you if you dont use them well that they never will come with you again...has for my part I never desired men that was under me to work Longer then 3 or 4 hours in the day Except when they was Occasion for it such as buildings &c. For I know their passages up and Down is very hard and trying to what it is staying below...¹

Thus William Walker bewailed the loss of subordination among the HBC's servants in 1789. One would think he had been reading E. E. Rich. In fact, when he wrote these words he had been with the company for 21 years, long enough to have known that servants had never been afraid of "denighing" duty. The London committee and its officers seem to have envisioned the company as a kind of one-sided partnership in furs, in which, as H. Clare Pentland put it, "the Company's dependence on its men was great: but the dependence of the men, in their isolated posts, upon the good faith and wisdom of the Company, was still greater."² This conception presumes that the men in question were as deferential and submissive as individuals from pre-industrial societies were supposed to be. In fact, of course, paternalistic relations, both in general and in the HBC, were negotiated and, therefore, not free of conflict. Such discord did not, however, usually lead to an attack on the relations of authority themselves. It usually manifested itself in the kinds of misbehaviour discussed in the previous chapter: private trade, negligence, malingering, insolence, and laziness. But it also appeared in the men's outright refusal to do what they were told.

Walker's belief that indiscipline was increasing probably derived from his own difficulties, although his journals of 1789/90 and 1790/91 do not contain a startling amount of disobedience. In October of 1789, he had difficulty persuading some men to winter among the

¹HBCA, B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, 22 Oct. 1789, fo. 17.

²H. Clare Pentland, Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860, edited and with an Introduction by Paul Phillips, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1981), 31.

natives and in December he complained about the servants' indolence in gathering bark to make canoes. In April of 1790, a man refused to turn canoe timbers, saying that he was not paid to do so, and on 4 May 1790, only three men were at work, while the rest were "doing as they pleased." In June, on the way back to the Bay, some of his canoes went on in the night without anyone telling him where and he grumbled, "a Master upon this Road is regarded as Nothing." When one of the canoes was wrecked, he attributed it to the fact that "a great many of your honor's Servants...will not obey a Master when he does order him." In March 1791, Walker complained that George Short had twice declared that he that he would do only what he thought "requisit" unless everyone else did it too and another man announced that it was not in Walker's "Power for to hurt him, and he did not Care a dam" for him. "I think a master is come to afine pass when inferior persons is to take command to himself and upBraid a master in that manner," Walker muttered and warned, "It still will be Wors[sic] and Worse untill such time there is an example made of one or two, and then their ambition might be Lowered."³ Walker was not a contented officer, since Humphrey Marten and the York council had overruled his promotion to assistant to the chief at York Factory because they disliked him.⁴ Such slights probably made Walker over-sensitive and prone to seeing his men's misbehaviour as a sign of growing insubordination. In fact, whatever Walker's current difficulties led him to believe, there were no good old days.

Only a few years after the HBC's founding, the council at Fort Albany found John Cartwright and William Filpt guilty of "stirring up Mutiny and Rebellion" aimed at "the utter destruction of the Government and Countrey[sic]." Cartwright had been spreading rumours that two members of the council were preparing to demand that the chief hand over the ship and take

³HBCA, B.121/a/4, Manchester House journal, 1789-90, 19 Oct. 1789, fo. 23d.; 21 Oct. 1789, fo. 24; William Walker to Mitchel Oman, 11 Dec. 1789, fo. 32; 19 April 1790, fo. 51; 4 May 1790, fo. 52d.; 22 June 1790, fo. 59d.; 1 July 1790, fo. 60d.; B.121/a/6, Manchester House journal, 1790-91, William Walker to Thomas Stayner, 2 March 1791, fos. 26d.-27.

⁴See: Shirlee Anne Smith, "William Walker," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume IV: 1771 to 1800 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 760-761.

everyone home and had even declared his willingness to do so himself if no supplies arrived from England that year. Filpt had tried to "stirr up a party" to join him in breaking into the storehouse to steal the contents. The council found this burglary particularly shocking because no ship had arrived for two years. Unbeknownst to the officers in Rupert's Land, the London committee, not wanting any furs because the war with France had ruined the market and assuming in its blissful ignorance that the men on the Bay required nothing, had sent no ship the previous year. As a result, provisions which Filpt wanted to steal, and probably consume as quickly as possible, had to be carefully husbanded in case no ship arrived that year. Cartwright was sentenced to thirty lashes, Filpt to 39, and both men were imprisoned and kept in irons until they could be sent home.⁵ How ready their comrades were to follow them is not recorded, but over the years more men would brazenly refuse to obey the orders they were given. Unlike Cartwright and Filpt, however, they did not usually try to instigate mutinies or act in large groups. Of the 77 refusals in Table 1, 49 involved only one individual; 24 involved three or more men.

The refusal to obey orders constituted a more overt challenge to authority than more passive forms of disobedience such negligence or drunkenness. It also caused more inconvenience and could seriously damage the business, particularly since the duties to which the servants objected most strenuously were those upon which the fortunes of the company depended. Of all the duties which servants were obliged to perform, venturing inland to establish or occupy posts was the most unpopular. In 5 of the 57 incidents counted as refusals to obey orders in Table 1, the men were objecting to going inland and in 11 cases they were refusing to go to specific posts. In another 6 cases men were refusing to proceed on journeys until certain demands had been met. The annals of the fur trade may celebrate the travels of Henry Kelsey, Samuel Heame, and David Thompson, but such men were vastly outnumbered by servants with no desire to become explorers. It was their unwillingness to undertake expeditions into the

⁵HBCA, B.3/z/2, Decisions of council regarding John Cartwright and William Filpt, August 1696. Arthur S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71, sec. ed., edited by Lewis G. Thomas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 116-117.

interior as much as the HBC's own lack of interest that led to that much maligned coma by the frozen sea.⁶ The need to meet competition from rival trades wrenched the HBC out of its sluggishness, but efforts to establish a foothold in the interior were stymied by the servants' reluctance to give up the security and comforts of such lethargy. Even as modest a project as the establishment of Henley House demonstrated that even allegedly obedient Orkneymen were not "afraid of denighing any duty their Superior thought fit to put them to" if obedience meant extreme hardship.

Henley House was built in 1743 to display the company's wares and lure the natives and their furs down the river to Fort Albany. The first master's incompetence and insensitive relations with the Indians prompted several of them to ransack the house and kill five men during the winter of 1754-5, whereupon many of the Fort Albany men declared they would never go there again "on any account." Even when the post council solemnly called them one by one before it and read out their contracts and the London committee's orders to rebuild Henley House, twenty of the 25 men refused to go, although one offered to assist in getting the boats up. Eighteen said they were afraid of being killed, while two declared that they would go to Henley House, but not under the command of George Rushworth, the officer in charge of the expedition. When, a few days later, the council again summoned the men to ask them their intentions, their replies suggest that, rather than being cowed into submission, they had spent the intervening time discussing the situation and combining to turn it to their advantage. Three men agreed to obey orders, one said he would go if five others went too, and Guy Hardwick repeated his offer to help get the boats there. One of the men who had already survived a stint at Henley House refused to return there and several objected to going with Rushworth who had declared that "he would Shoot a man as soon as look at him in case of cowardice." Twelve men, however, said

⁶Great Britain. Parliament. Journals of the House of Commons, XXV. "Report from the Committee appointed to inquire into the State and Condition of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay and of the Trade carried on there (24 April 1749," London committee to Henry Sargeant, 22 May 1685, p. 274; Henry Sargeant to London committee, 24 Aug. 1685, p. 274.

they would go if their wages were raised to £20, a sum that Rushworth himself appears to have suggested when he declared that "a foremasthand Good God that went under .20.L P annum ought to be hang'd upon a Tree." Six of these men also demanded £60 be given to their families in the event of their deaths.

The post council did not feel empowered to grant any financial concessions, but it replaced Rushworth as master. The servants would not concede, however, and three months later when the time for departure was drawing dangerously nigh, the matter remained unsettled. The post council once more called the men before it and advised them to go to Henley House and appeal to the London committee for a gratuity. When such matters were left to the committee, the council assured the servants, their honours always "considered and rewarded handsomely." But only two of the men changed their minds and *they* had decided to go home. A few sloopers and three men from the ship were recruited to accompany the four men of the factory willing to go. But, there was only one sawyer and the council considered it "impracticable" to settle a post without proper sawyers and the water was too low both in 1757 and 1758 to get boats up the river. In consequence, Henley House was not rebuilt until 1759 and almost immediately destroyed by hostile Indians. This time four men were killed, including George Clark, George Rushworth's replacement. Even fewer men were willing to go now and Humphrey Marten tried to awe them into obedience by pointing out that by disobeying orders they were committing a breach of contract. He read a contract to them, emphasizing both the duties and penalties it prescribed, and assured them of the London committee's determination to reward and punish according to each man's merits. He was even reduced to groveling, telling them it was "greatly in their Power to continue [him] in [the London committee's] Esteem" and that if his "well being had any sway with them" it would raise his "Gratitude to such a pitche[sic]" as would induce him to "pinch" himself rather than allowing them to "want for anything" and promising that each man who went to Henley would get a blanket, a pair of cloth stockings, and a

leather toggie. But, only two of the 23 men at Albany House would agree and the rest made no attempt to bargain for higher wages or other benefits.

Safety was their only concern. Charles Sinclair declared that he would not go "to run his head into the hands of the Enemy", while James Thomson said "that you may as well tie him to a post and Shoot him." Thomas Tate observed that "the last Corps[sic] that came from thence...was enough to frighten any Man from going to Henly[sic]." Joseph Down, pointing out that he had already escaped with his life twice, said that he would "be ware[sic] of the Third time" and John Spence, who had been with Clark when he was killed and was himself shot through the thigh swore "that no Money in England should cause him to go to Henly." John Cromartie objected that he "had enought[sic] of it already" and that his life was "dearer to him than all the Money in the Country." William Isbister said that if he had known he was to go to Henley House he would not have come to the country at all. Marten was reduced to throwing himself "humbly" on the "Humanity" of the "Gentlemen" of the London committee, begging that they not "be angry with [him] for the Falts[sic] of others," and having the other officers submitting a declaration that Marten had tried by "Persuation[sic], by Entreaty, and by Threats" to get the men to go to Henley House, but had failed.⁷ Low water levels combined with the servants' instincts for self-preservation to prevent Henley House from being re-established until 1766. These instincts remained a serious obstacle to the company's subsequent expansion.

Over the next decade, the London committee urged its men to emulate their Canadian counterparts by exploring the country, acquainting themselves with the natives and their languages, establishing trade relations, living off the resources of the country instead of imported provisions, and building at least temporary posts. Although it achieved some success

⁷HBCA, A.11/3/, Council, Albany, to London committee, 30 May 1757, fos. 17-18; council, Albany, to London committee, 6 June 1757, fos. 18-19d.; council, Albany, to London committee, 15 Aug. 1757, fo. 20; council, Albany, to London committee, 18 Aug. 1757, fo. 21; council, Albany, to London committee, 19 Aug. 1757, fo. 21; Robert Temple to London committee, August 1763, fos. 65-66; Robert Temple, John Horner, William Richards to London committee, 15 Aug. 1764, fo. 67; Humphrey Marten to London committee, 17 Aug. 1764, fo. 68.

with the establishment of Cumberland House in 1774, the company's prosecution of this policy was so inept that it is not surprising that the servants resisted it. While the Pedlars, as the traders based in Montreal were called by the HBC, journeyed inland in large well equipped parties and established trading posts from which men would sometimes take an assortment of goods to the Indians' tents, the HBC's expeditions were usually individuals sent out to live with groups of natives, find out what their competitors were doing, and return to the Bayside posts with plenty of Indians and furs.⁸ This mode of exploration may have supplied the company with knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, but the committee's stinginess, due to the same ignorance that had led it to believe that no supplies needed to be sent to the Bay in 1695, meant that its men were exposed to hardship and deprivation beyond what they considered reasonable. Of course, provisions were not always ample at the well established Bayside posts either, but scarcity there did not seem to excite the same clamour as elsewhere, particularly if the provisions served were European. Living off the land was highly unpopular. In March of 1771, John Garbut, chief at Moose Factory, found that none of his men would agree to go hunt ptarmigan and he had to send an Indian for the purpose.⁹ Their desire to avoid both catching and consuming native wildlife appears to have been stronger than their desire for a well stocked larder. Fort Albany faced an even worse situation that winter, since there was no game around at all, but, when in February Humphrey Marten put all the men on half allowance, no one objected.¹⁰ Four years later, Thomas Hutchins reported that, when the scarcity of provisions made it necessary to reduce the rations, the men themselves offered to accept lower allowances two days of the week. Such behaviour, he observed, merited 'the greatest commendation.'¹¹

⁸Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71, 272-290.

⁹HBCA, B.135/a/50, Moose Factory journal, 1770-71, 12 Mar. 1771, fo. 24.

¹⁰HBCA, B.3/a/63, Fort Albany journal, 1770-71, 16 Feb. 1771, fo. 21.

¹¹HBCA, B.3/a/68, Fort Albany journal, 1774-75, 1 April 1775, fo. 17d.

Venturing inland, however, deprived the servants of their customary cuisine, small though the amounts might be, and exposed them to exceptional suffering.

In 1777, the men at Gloucester House were reduced to eating tree bark in the summertime when the living should have been easy. In October, the Indians informed John Kipling, the master of the outpost, that they could not stay for the winter because there were no victuals and offered to guide the Europeans to Henley House. Since, as was the case with most of the company's posts, it was the Indians who were supposed to keep Gloucester House provisioned, the men begged Kipling to accept the offer, declaring that "they had suffered Enough in the Summer to undergo the same as in all Likelihood they will if they stay for there is not any thing to be got by Englishmen." Kipling felt obliged to give in. When, the following June, Thomas Hutchins selected the men destined for Gloucester House, three of them refused to go without a wage increase and were not swayed even when Hutchins pointed out that disobeying his orders would make them subject to penalty specified by their contracts, one of which was prominently displayed in the Fort Albany guard room.¹² A few years later the return of George Sutherland from his disastrous expedition caused widespread alarm. Sutherland was not inexperienced, having recently spent 1777/78 tenting with Indians.¹³ His assignment to do likewise in 1779-80 was almost fatal. After traveling inland with some Canadians because the Indians had no room for him, Sutherland and his clerk were cast on their own meagre resources because the natives could not support them and all but one of the Canadians went off to join their countrymen nearby. Sutherland and his two companions built themselves a house and settled in for a winter of "unparalleled distress." They could catch no fish and, because they had not been adequately provisioned, under the assumption that the Indians would feed them, they

¹²HBCA, B.3/a/71, Fort Albany journal, 1776-77, 13 Aug. 1777, fo. 27d.; B.78/a/3, Gloucester House journal, Aug. to Dec. 1777, 12-13 Nov. 1777, fo. 7d.; B.3/a/74, Fort Albany journal, 1777-8, 16 June 1778, fo. 24d.

¹³HBCA, B.3/a/73, Fort Albany journal, 1777-78, "Tenting with the Indians", 20 June 1777 - 27 June 1778.

could not, as they had been told, go to Gloucester House if they were in difficulty because they had nothing to travel on and no one to accompany them. Sutherland resorted to the nearby Canadian post for company and whatever assistance it could render, but that was so little that Sutherland ended up eating dogs, mice, his leather breeches, shoes, and mittens and returning to Albany, "reduced...from one of the most sprightly Men to a perfect Cripple," unable to "stand upright nor walk without a stick."¹⁴

As a result, the most capable canoeists left or declared their intention to return home the following year. As for the men just landed at Fort Albany, Thomas Hutchins reported, "they have been crying... that they may not be sent Inland, they declare they will die first..." To allay these fears, Hutchins stored up eight months worth of provisions to prevent such misery in future, but somebody, he reported, "had infused into their Minds" that, although there might be plenty of provisions that year, "it was only a trick to get them to go" and next year there would again be nothing. Some of the men declared they would "rather go on board a Man of War and die at once, than suffer a lingering Death inland." "...Your Honours will perceive from hence," observed Hutchins, "that the Men remember they have been often at short allowance and how absolutely necessary it is to send an ample supply of Provisions," a lesson reinforced no doubt by news that John Buchan, wintering inland with the Indians, had starved to death in January.¹⁵ At Henley House, Germain Maugenest encountered similar opposition. Six men would not go inland, one of them refusing to go "at the peril of losing his Wages and going on board a Man of War." One man agreed to go if his wages were raised to £15 a year.¹⁶ The committee's perennial mania for economy, as well as its fear of private trade, ensured, however, that it would

¹⁴HBCA, B.211/a/1, Sturgeon Lake journal, 1779-80, 31 July 1779, fo. 1d., 2 Oct. 1779, fo. 15d., 31 Dec. 1779, fos. 22-22d.; A.11/4, Thomas Hutchins to London committee, 14 Sept. 1780, fo. 121d.; B.3/a/77, Albany journal, 1779-80, 21 June 1781, fo. 27d.

¹⁵HBCA, B.3/a/79, Abstract of Fort Albany journal, 1780-81, May 1781, fos. 3-3d.; B.59/a/56, Eastmain journal, 1780-81, 27 May 1781, fo. 28d

¹⁶HBCA, B.3/b/18, Germain Maugenest to Thomas Hutchins, 9 June 1781, fo. 32.

heed no demands for higher wages or better provisions or the advice of experienced officers like Eusebius Bacchus Kitchen, who warned in 1779 that its settlements would never grow "advantageous" unless it first set about "satisfying" the servants.¹⁷ Instead, the committee insisted on low wages and reprimanded the officers for requesting too many goods and medicines and reminding them to order no more than what was "absolutely needed."¹⁸ At the same time, it asked its officers what luxury goods the servants might want to purchase. The council at Churchill replied that it was fine to furnish "menial servants" with good slops, but there was no market for tea, chocolate, and coffee at the prices suggested.¹⁹ Probably both officers and servants would have been happier if the committee had agreed to send more provisions, but these were simply consumed. Treats like tea or chocolate had to be purchased, thereby providing the company with profits from their sales and reducing the sums servants collected when they left the service. This is not to say that the committee was callously plotting to deprive its servants of the necessities of life in the interests of profit. On the contrary, it probably thought itself marvelously generous and exceedingly paternalistic. After all, the gentlemen of the committee had no personal experience of what their employees faced, whether camping with Indians, hauling logs out of the woods, paddling down rivers, or eking out an existence on an Orcadian farm. Besides, had not the committee ensured that its servants were drawn from populations accustomed to poverty and endowed with a native hardiness that fitted them for the duties required of them? Still, the committee did not want its servants to suffer needlessly. It paid bounties to those going inland and in 1799 sent a "digester" to make "portable soup," i.e. a pot that reduced soup to cakes which could be carried on journeys and diluted with water for consumption.²⁰ One of the few technological innovations the HBC adopted, the digester does not

¹⁷HBCA, A.11/44, E. B. Kitchen to London committee, 19 Sept. 1779, fo. 93.

¹⁸HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to Samuel Heame and council, 19 May 1784, fo. 6.

¹⁹HBCA, B.42/b/44, Council to London committee, August 1786, fo. 22d.

²⁰HBCA, B.42/b/44, London committee to council, 31 May 1799, fo. 68.

appear to have been a hit. Nevertheless, during the 1790s, the company's efforts were producing results, but the servants' dislike of what was asked of them did not diminish.

The company considered sending men to live with Indians a good way of securing their furs, not to mention freeing the posts of a few mouths to feed, but many servants felt like James Houston who declared in 1796 that he would "rather stay home and starve like a dog."²¹ Nor could an officer be certain that when men did go off with the Indians they would remain where they were sent. Thus, in January of 1803, a group of natives arrived at Nipigon House with only one of the two men sent out with them. James Corston had gone with Thomas Richards to the latter's father in law's tent where he had met two Canadians whom he had accompanied to their house. Corston reappeared almost a month later, having spent his time tracking down Indians for the Canadians, because, he said, he did not want to suffer the "fortig" of returning to the Canadian post. He also said that starvation had driven him to the Canadians, but William Corrigan, master at Nipigon House, did not believe him, since the Indians had apparently taken the two HBC men to a good fishing place and helped them set up their tent. Also, since Corston had left a blanket and a shirt at the Canadian house, he probably intended to return there. Nor was his response to Corrigan's reprimand that of a dutiful servant forced by circumstance to disobey his orders. He said, reported Corrigan, "I might doo[sic] my worst, and helpe[sic] my self and be d---d."²² In 1819 one of the servants at Point Meuron went so far as to declare that "no servant could be obliged to remain along with the Indians," a logical observation since one of his fellow workers had already returned twice from thence, without suffering any

²¹HBCA, B.14/a/1, Bedford House journal, 1796-7, 20 Nov. 1796, fo. 16d. See also: HBCA, B.39/a/4, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1804-05, T. Swain to Peter Fidler, 23 Mar. 1805, fo. 14d.; B.44/a/1, Fort Colville journal, 1818-19, 29 Nov. 1818, fo. 12d., 12 Jan. 1819, fo. 14, 4 Feb. 1819, fo. 15, 9 Feb. 1819, fo. 15d.; B.122/a/2, Manitoba District journal, 1818-19, 19 Dec. 1818, fo. 6d.

²²HBCA, B.149/a/9, Nipigon House journal, 1802-03, 30 Jan. 1803, fo. 5 d.; 25 Feb. 1803, fo. 5; 27 Feb. 1803, fos. 5 d.-6.

punishment. Indeed, none of the men who misbehaved at Point Meuron during that outfit appear to have been penalized at all.²³

A closely related duty that was equally unpopular was wintering inland. Almost every year when ordered to their winter stations, whether to establish new posts, re-establish old ones, or embark upon exploratory expeditions, some men refused to go.²⁴ Some preferred to leave the service, thereby causing great inconvenience. In August of 1800, John Hodgson found that none of the men whose times were up would agree to return inland, which constituted "a very great check to" his plans. Not only had he not received any new men the previous year, but thirteen servants were now departing while only a carpenter and three labourers had arrived. Moreover, the factory had no tracking line with which to pull boats through shallow places and the ship had brought none. Therefore, when the men set off for Martins Fall, about three hundred miles upriver, there was much "Grumbling...even almost to Refusing the Journey" because they had no line "they can trust their Lives to among the Falls and Strong Currents." The following year the contracts of more than thirty men expired. Several could be engaged only at increased wages, while 24 refused to stay on any terms because they were "obliged to be on Foot all the Winter sometimes Night and Day, and obliged frequently to live with the Indians

²³HBCA, B.231/a/4, Point Meuron journal, 1818-19, 8 Jan. 1819, fo. 17; 16 Jan. 1819, fo. 18; 13 Feb. 1819, fo. 21.

²⁴See, for example: B.3/a/101, Fort Albany journal, 1797-98, 21 Oct. 1797, fo. 4d.; B.3/a/101, Fort Albany journal, 1797-98, 3 July 1798, fo. 38; B.3/a/113, Fort Albany journal, 1809-10, 14 July 1810, fo. 15; B.10/a/2, Attawapiscat journal, 1814-15, 24 June 1815, fo. 23d.; B.42/a/122, Churchill journal, 1795-96, 30 June, 1-3 July 1796, fos. 14d.-15; B.59/a/94, Eastmain journal, 1815-16, 21 Aug. 1815, fo. 6; B.104/a/1, Lac la Biche journal, 1799-1800, 6 Oct. 1799, fo. 15; B.135/a/88, Moose Factory journal, 1800-01, John Mannall to George Gladman, 2 Feb. 1801, fo. 59d.; B.155/a/22, Osnaburgh House journal, 1810, 24 June 1810, fo. 14d.; B.155/a/33, Osnaburgh House journal, 1820-21, 21 June 1820, fo. 1d.; B.239/b/63, J Rowse, Peter Fidler, James Bird and Henry Hallet, to John Ballenden, 5 Aug. 1799, fo. 13; B.226/b/18, Dugald Mactavish to Peter Ogden, 27 July 1860, fo. 86.; B.239/b/107, James R. Clare to Thomas Fraser, 6 Sept. 1860, fos. 88-88d.; B.239/b/108, J. W. Wilson to Thomas Fraser, 23 Sept. 1865, fos. 450-452; B.239/c/11, William Sinclair to James R. Clare, 21 June 1860, fos. 388d.-389; B.239/c/15, J. A. Grahame to James R. Clare, 23 July 1864, fos. 108d.-109; B.239/c/16, J. W. Wilson to officers of the Northern Department, 1 Dec. 1865, fos. 106d.-107.

and many times their living is very miserable."²⁵ Traveling in the company's service was no picnic, contrary to Robert Ballantyne, who described the way in which the "light-hearted voyageurs seemed quite in their element, and laughed and joked while they toiled along, playing tricks with each other" while engaged in tracking a boat, work Ballantyne considered "disagreeable and tiresome."²⁶ Not that one should assume that the *voyageurs* hated their work. There is no reason to believe that they were not proud of their abilities and their toughness and that they did not carry on as Ballantyne described. However, they probably also swore a lot and might even have grumbled to each other that they were slogging through the mud while the young gentleman did nothing but sit in the boat. One should not, however, assume that everyone found a 500 mile journey into the interior as "pleasing" or the "mode of traveling and the nightly encampments in the open air" as "exciting" as Robert Clouston, who, retired in Honolulu, lamented that the "life of a Fur Trader in the present degenerate days, when there is not much danger of losing one's scalp, cannot have much romance in it."²⁷ Clouston's wild west image of life in the HBC is as flawed as the assumption that his subordinates were as interested in risking their scalps as he was.

Some men *were*, of course, drawn to the HBC by a thirst for adventure. Officers retiring to Britain or spending their furloughs there appear to have been responsible for imbuing the fur trade with a romantic image. Robert Campbell, who joined the HBC in 1830 as the "sub-manager" of the experimental farm at Red River, had had the "whole current" of his life changed when his cousin, Chief Factor James McMillan, spent his leave in Scotland. From him, Campbell recalled, he "heard for the first time of the Great North-West and the free and active

²⁵HBCA, B.3/a/103, Fort Albany journal, 1799-1800, 29 Aug. 1800, fos. 32d.-33; 20 Sept. 1800, fo. 35; 25-27 Sept. 1800, fos. 35d.-36; B.3/a/104, Fort Albany journal, 1800-01, 28 Sept. 1800, fo. 1; 7 July 1801, fo. 44.

²⁶Robert Ballantyne, Hudson Bay; or, Everyday Life in the Wilds of North America, during Six Years' Residence in the Territories of The Hon. Hudson Bay Company (London: Edinburgh; New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1879; New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1971), 105.

²⁷Ontario Archives, (OA), MU 840, Diary of Robert Clouston 1838-1856 (Photocopy), p. 1.

life that awaited one there." Tales of "boundless Prairies roamed by tribes of Indians and herds of Buffalo, the vast Lakes and giant Streams, the sublime majesty of the Rocky Mountains, the impenetrable forests, the abundance of game of all kinds" inspired in him "an irresistible longing to go to that land of romance and adventure."²⁸ Others were also inspired by misconceptions about the realities of life in the HBC to offer their services as hunters and trappers. As qualifications, they tended to mention their ability to shoot and ride and their desire to see the world and experience the rigours of life in the wilderness.²⁹ In 1870, after being told the company did not engage trappers in Britain, three young men of Nigg declared their willingness to engage as labourers.³⁰ In 1871, D. K. Murray of Edinburgh asked to be sent to one of the "most distant Forts," since he was "very fond of 'roughing it'." To do so, he was willing to give up his clerical post to join the HBC "at the lowest grade" among the apprentices, since he had some money of his own and was not "quite dependant on a salary." He knew William G. Rae and Robert Ballantyne personally, though "slightly," and they had advised him to write.³¹ The company's officers do not seem to have thought as highly of Ballantyne. John Siveright thought Hudson Bay was "a caricature and a misrepresentation throughout." James Anderson found that it did not reflect his own experiences. "His Every day life in Hudsons Bay was easy enough--" Anderson remarked, "I wish he had seen some of my every day life for many Years---"³²

²⁸NAC, MG 19 A25, Robert Campbell Papers. "Journal of Robert Campbell," p. 1.

²⁹See, for example: HBCA, A.10/26, A. S. Ferguson to secretary, 15 Mar. 1849, fo. 167; A.10/46, David Connor to secretary, 16 Jan. 1860, fos. 53-53d.; A.10/78, Joseph Smyth to HBC, 1 June 1869, fo. 370; A.10/83, W. M. Webb Bowen to William G. Smith, 4 Feb. 1871, fos. 161-161d.; Charles Fruen to secretary, June 1871, fo. 511.

³⁰HBCA, A.10/79, William Calder to HBC, 16 Dec. 1869, fo. 653; A.10/80, Donald McGillivray, James Angus, and Tavish Cameron to Alexander Matheson, 26 Jan. 1870, fos. 143-144; same to William Armit, 5 Feb. 1870, fo. 184.

³¹HBCA, A.10/83, D. Keith Murray to W. G. Smith, 5 Jan. 1871, fos. 51-51d.

³²Quoted in Margaret MacLeod, ed., The Letters of Letitia Hargrave (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1947), fn. lxi.

Men inspired to join the HBC by such tales were not suitable. The company wanted men who were hardy and tough but not those who thought that service in the fur trade was a camping trip. Those who did were bound to be disappointed. Robert Campbell became anxious to leave the experimental farm for the "stirring life" depicted in stories he had heard, while Robert Clouston found himself leading the life of "a quiet country house clerk", a "quill driver," and hankering for "removal to a more stirring and wilder part of the country."³³ Both men got their wishes, but, since they were officers, they were often able to avoid the hardships that the service imposed. Their subordinates, on the other hand, had no need to fear confinement in offices and had ample opportunities for "roughing it." Indeed, it was their *duty* to rough it, but they, ironically, were not always as enthusiastic about the idea as those deluded readers of adventure stories. For officers, traveling meant sitting in a boat, while someone else paddled and tracked, while snowshoeing and hunting were a Sunday afternoon's diversion. For servants, traveling meant backbreaking labour. Thus, in the spring of 1831, eleven men arrived at Sault Ste. Marie from La Cloche after an exceedingly hard voyage: They had faced strong winds and their officers had kept them at their oars for two nights in a row without rest, promising them that they would get the remainder of the day upon which they got to Sault Ste. Marie to recuperate. When they arrived, however, they were commanded to proceed on their trip. The men protested that the wind was too strong for them to make any progress against it and that they had been promised a rest. They do not appear to have used improper language or made any threats and they promised to be ready to go the next morning. The officer in charge immediately told them "that their services were no further required" and one of the officers who had accompanied them expressed his "disapproval" of the men's behaviour by discharging from the service the three he considered "most conspicuous in opposing the orders given them."³⁴ In 1850, Robert Gunn

³³NAC, MG 19 A25, "Journal of Robert Campbell," p. 44; OA, MU 840, "Diary of Robert Clouston 1838-1856," p. 1.

³⁴HBCA, B.109/a/4, La Cloche journal, 1830-31. John McBean to George Simpson, 5 May 1831, pp. 25-26.

declared that he would "rather forfeit every penny he is worth to return to his native country" than go to Martins Fall, though he did eventually change his mind.³⁵ Another servant who failed to realize that he was engaging in an adventure that made him the envy of the quill pushers was Murdo Macleod, a Lewisman who recounted his experiences to the London committee in 1857.

Macleod, a Lewisman, joined the HBC in 1849 and, after six months at York Factory, was ordered to Oxford House. To make the journey, he and his companions were equipped with snowshoes and strapped to a train carrying their clothing and provisions, which they had to drag through the snow, while only their guide had a team of dogs, although there was an ample supply of dogs and sleighs at York Factory. Since the men were all new recruits, they were unaccustomed to snowshoeing and their legs became "much swollen," but, on their arrival at Oxford House, they were put to right to work. Indeed, they were hardly ever allowed any rest. Men who did not complete the tasks they were assigned each day had to work on Sunday and, during the month he spent at Oxford House, Macleod was sent on trips to "the fur Stations" on Saturday evenings, thereby requiring him to work Sundays as well. He spent the following two months at Norway House, under the "charge of a Lunatic." There he was forced to purchase provisions, which consisted of flour and frozen fish, although his engagement promised "board and lodgings." In spite of Maclean's belief to the contrary, the company was supplying what it promised. The problem was that the HBC and its recruits did not always interpret "board and lodgings" in the same way. After a fortnight at York Factory, Macleod was sent to New Caledonia, where he was thrashed by Donald Maclean, a clerk at Fort Alexandria and Robert Todd, in charge at Stuart's Lake, and starved and forced to work with a sore foot and a broken arm by Chief Factor Donald Manson.³⁶ Sensible HBC servants had always tried to avoid such situations.

³⁵HBCA, B.3/a/160, Fort Albany journal, 1850-51, 2 July 1850, fo. 4d.; 16 July 1850, fo. 5d.; B.3/b/81, Thomas Corcoran to Robert Miles, 29 June 1850, p. 11.

³⁶HBCA, A.67/1, Statement of Murdo Macleod, 30 Nov. 1857, fos. 398-399.

Some men did not refuse completely but set limits to where they would go. In August of 1799, David Sanderson complained that it was the second year he had been detained at Osnaburgh House by men refusing to proceed to Sandy Lake, also known as Lake Saunders and Sandy Narrows. That year three men refused to go on and the following year another man refused to go past Osnaburgh House. John Hodgson, who commanded the district from Fort Albany, was alarmed at the number of such refusals that had occurred in the last few years and was determined to put a stop to them by making "an example" of those who dared to defy their orders. To ensure that everyone knew of this increased discipline a "publick notice" would "be given" at Martins Fall and Osnaburgh House. It did not, however, appear to have the desired effect. Lake Saunders provided only a meagre subsistence and the journey there was difficult and, threats of retribution notwithstanding, men continued to refuse to go there.³⁷ In 1811, five of the men who had come from Brandon House at the end of the 1810-11 outfit refused to go anywhere but back to that post. The fact they had been in a state of mutiny from the end of February until the middle of May no doubt made their defiance even more objectionable than it already was. William Auld was able to persuade three of the men to go where they were told, but two remained firm and were sent to York Factory to await the ship.³⁸ In 1870 a fisherman in the Montreal Department insisted, successfully, on serving only at Mingan on the St. Lawrence River.³⁹

Others, though willing to go where they were told, tried to use the company's need of their services to gain higher wages or gratuities. In 1780 the men at York Factory were able to extort a wage increase in excess of what the rules permitted, or there would have been no

³⁷HBCA, B.192/a/2, Sandy Lake journal, 1799-1800, David Sanderson to John Hodgson, 8 Aug. 1799, fo. 17; B.192/a/3, Sandy Lake journal, 1800-01, David Sanderson to John Hodgson 21 July 1800, fo. 14d.; John Hodgson to David Sanderson, 12 May 1801, fo. 15.; B.193/a/1, Sandy Narrows journal, 1807-08, William Thomas to chief, 5 Aug. 1807, fos. 2-2d.

³⁸HBCA, B.156/a/4, Oxford House journal, 1810-11, 21 June 1811, fo. 8d.; 30 June 1811, fo. 10d.

³⁹HBCA, B.183/a/23, Rigolet journal, 1870-72, 25 Aug. 1870, fo. 3d.

inland expeditions.⁴⁰ In 1790, when Malcolm Ross offered to undertake expeditions to the north from York Factory if he had a capable man to accompany him, all the men declared that they would rather go home than go on "so dangerous an Expedition," without a gratuity "beyond the common wages allowed" by the company. The Canadians, reported Joseph Colen, had "made it public that they are often driven to great extremities, wintering so far to the Northward; which has deterred the principal part of your Honors Servants from venturing."⁴¹ In fact, Colen reported the next year, the men sent inland from York Factory "made an Oath" that they would not return inland without an advance in wages.⁴² The men's attempts to use such occasions to gain higher wages were distressingly frequent,⁴³ but money was not everything. More of it might benefit them once they left the service and enabled them to purchase more clothing or rum, but the company was neither willing nor equipped to sell its men unlimited quantities of either. In the middle of nowhere at a post stocked with modest supplies of trade goods and few imported provisions, what was there to buy? A servant might have a large sum entered to his credit in the company ledger, but that neither released him from arduous duties nor kept him from starvation. Thomas Saunders, on his way from Fort Albany to Lac la Pluie in July of 1818, certainly entertained such thoughts. Threatened with a fine for taking rum from the cargo, he replied, "I dont velou what youle fine me what is the goud[sic] of money to me I am only starving while I Serve you and if you fine me by god I shall leave you at OH and perhaps before." His equally disgruntled companions complained that they could not work as hard as they were expected to

⁴⁰HBCA, B.239/a/38, York Factory journal, 1779-80, 5 July 1780, fo. 38.

⁴¹HBCA, B.239/a/90, York Factory journal, 1789-90, 12 July 1790, fo. 55.

⁴²HBCA, B.239/a/91, York Factory journal, 1790-91, 23 July 1791, fo. 31d.

⁴³See, for example: B.3/a/74, Fort Albany journal, 1777-78, 16 June 1778, fo. 24d.; B.3/a/102, Fort Albany journal, 1798-99, 8 July 1799, fo. 43; B.3/a/103, Fort Albany journal, 1799-1800, 9 July 1800, fo. 43d.; B.49/a/31, Cumberland House journal, 1801-2, William Tomison to John Ballenden, 18 July 1801, fo. 2.

because they were starving.⁴⁴ Therefore, when men refused to go where they were sent, they might make demands which, if granted, would mitigate somewhat the hardships of the service. In July of 1791, for example, when the men assigned to Swan River found out how far from the house their supplies would be left, there was "a universal discontent and Murmuring" and they demanded, without success, that the goods be transported for them over the portage.⁴⁵ In 1802 William Bolland ordered a group of men to leave Eastmain for a voyage to the north aboard the shallop. Sam Irvine, an Orcadian sailor, whose contract was up that year, demurred, "saying, in his dirty offensive language before all the people, he would be B----^d before he step'd on board her." Shocked by such language, Bolland immediately put him off duty and on half allowance. The rest of the men refused to go until Bolland promised them "the proper encouragement," presumably bounties, and gave them clothes to replace those they had damaged working with oil.⁴⁶

Nor would they follow officers whose management added to the hardships of the service. Thus, Donald Mackay, a former Nor'wester, found that, although his "spirited Efforts" pleased the London committee, his subordinates defied him constantly. It would, he lamented, "require the philosophy of Sir Isaac Newton to deal with those men." When, in 1796, some of the men at Fort Albany learned that they were to accompany Mackay to Brandon House, they refused to go because he had beaten some of them "without occasion" when they had wintered with him before. They remained "inflexible" even after John McNab called them before the council and pointed out the consequences of their actions. Five men, of whom one had served with Mackay before, finally set off with him in September and made Mackay's life miserable on the journey, even, according to Mackay, trying to drown him twice. Mackay did not make it to his

⁴⁴HBCA, B.64/e/1, Escabitchewan District Report, 1819, fos. 1-1d.

⁴⁵HBCA, B.239/a/91, York Factory journal, 1790-91, 24 July 1791, fo. 32.

⁴⁶HBCA, B.59/a/79, Eastmain journal, 1801-2, fo. 27d.; A.30/10, Servants' list, 1800, fos. 19d.-20.

destination because his men would not go past Osnaburgh House, although this refusal was in obedience to orders from McNab who wanted to sabotage Mackay's plans. However, in the spring of 1797 Mackay headed off to York Factory alone because none of the men appointed to go with him would do so, "on account they said, of his Violent Disposition, and bad will towards them." ⁴⁷

In July of 1798, one of the men who did not want to spend another winter with John Charles threatened him with an axe, calling to the rest to assist him. None of them accepted his invitation, but William Auld had to find others to go in their place. Some years later, George Simpson, in his famous "Character Book", described Charles as so "irritable and violent at times, that 'tis feared he will some Day get into trouble" with the Indians. As usual, Simpson did not consider how the servants might have responded to such irascibility.⁴⁸ John McKay, probably Donald's brother, appears to have had similar tendencies, although his biographer saw in his journals "a man of even temperament and humane disposition, with a sound understanding of the men who opposed him and the Indians with whom he traded." Predictably, the views of the servants are absent from the historical assessment. *They* might not have considered McKay so even tempered. In May of 1801, Jasper Corrigan, employed as cooper and sawyer, arrived probably Martins Fall bearing evidence of "a most severe Beating" including two black eyes. McKay's violent temper "had rendered the man desperate" and he had refused to stay with him, although McKay had apparently sent him down for misbehaviour. There is no Martins Fall journal for 1800/01 in the HBC Archives to clarify this situation, but, according

⁴⁷HBCA, A.6/15, London committee to council at Albany Factory, 29 May 1794.; B.22/a/1, Brandon House journal, 1793-4, *passim*; B.3/a99, Fort Albany journal, 1794-97, 1 and 3 July 1796, fo. 25d.; B.3/a/100, Fort Albany journal, 1796-97; B.155/a/12, Osnaburgh House, 1796-97, 11 June 1797, fos. 37d.-38.

⁴⁸HBCA, B.42/a/124, Fort Churchill journal, 1797-98, 5 July 1798, fo. 19d.; Glyndwr Williams, ed., Hudson Bay Miscellany 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1975), p. 173. In 1840, Letitia Hargrave commented that Charles was an "old horror" who "growls at everyone till I tremble to speak to him." (MacLeod, ed., The Letters of Letitia Hargrave, 71)

to John Hodgson, the animosity between McKay and Corrigan originated from "an old dispute" when they were both at Osnaburgh House. That post's journal for the year 1798/99 reveals that Corrigan's behaviour, though less than perfect, had not been particularly bad. While tenting, presumably in his capacity as sawyer, Corrigan had proved a "Great...Gormandizer", consuming as many as forty rabbits, eight pounds of pork, and twelve pounds of flour a week. He also neglected to come home when ordered, although when he finally arrived McKay appears neither to have reprimanded nor punished him. The journal contains no evidence of a dispute. In 1801, McKay took command of Brandon House and, except for 1806-7, remained in charge of it until his death in July of 1810. That interruption was due to the men's refusal in July of 1806 to return inland with McKay as their master. They gave no reason and McKay's journals shed no light on the situation, but their intransigence forced the master of Martins Fall to put Thomas Vincent in charge that year.⁴⁹

The case of Owen Keveny demonstrated even more dramatically the wages of cruelty. Keveny came to Rupert's Land in 1812 aboard the *Robert Taylor* with the second group of Selkirk settlers whom he had helped to recruit. The mutiny aboard the vessel hinted at what was to come. J. P. Pritchett attributed it to the machinations of one Andrew Langston, who spread discontentment by telling the passengers that Keveny was a tyrant whose treatment of them was contrary to Selkirk's instructions. Several of the passengers and the crew planned to seize the ship, sail to some country at war with Britain, sell the ship and cargo, and divide the proceeds. Investigation of the case revealed that Keveny would clap men in irons for the smallest offences and make them run the gauntlet for more serious ones. He had punished Langston in this way several times.⁵⁰ On his journey from Fort Albany to Red River in 1816,

⁴⁹T. R. McLoy, "John McKay," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume V: 1801 to 1820 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 534-5; HBCA, B.3/a/104, 14 May 1801, fo. 15; B.155/a/15, Osnaburgh House journal, 1799-1800, 1 Dec. 1799, fo. 13d., 24 Dec. 1799, fo. 15, 25-27 Dec. 1799, fo. 15; B.123/a/10, Martins Fall journal, 23 July 1806, fo. 15d.

⁵⁰J. P. Pritchett, The Red River Valley 1811-1849: A Regional Study (New York: Russell & Russell, 1942), 93-98. Pritchett discusses the mutiny in typically ethnic terms. He describes

Keveny was so harsh that two men, Patrick Cavinough, or Cavinor, and James Corrigan deserted at Osnaburgh House. Keveny left without them after ordering the master of the post to bring the deserters to him when they were found. After the two men were delivered to Keveny, they ran the gauntlet while he stood by with loaded pistols in his hands and a sword by his side. After their beating, Cavinough and Corrigan were put into irons and obliged to work. Cavinough deserted again soon after and the group continued without him. Keveny's regular resort to whipping with willow branches for the smallest and, according to one of the men, imaginary offences, resulted in regular desertions, until in a fit of rage, he ordered the four remaining men to go to a nearby North West Company post, which they did. The Canadians took advantage of the opportunity to arrest Keveny and carry him off to Fort William for trial, although he was murdered along the way.⁵¹

The men's refusal to tolerate such masters and their resort to corporal punishment became particularly troublesome as the company expanded across the continent. Service in the Mackenzie River District and the Western Department, made up of the Columbia and New Caledonia districts, became exceedingly unpopular because discipline there amounted to

Keveny as a "hotheaded Irishman." Langston and the other chief conspirators were Irishmen, too, and presumably also hotheaded. (Are there any other kind?) He does not consider that mutiny might be the result of specific circumstances and an understandable desire not to be tyrannized over because of a shortsighted assumption that obedience and submission are either natural or always desirable. The behaviour of the men aboard the *Robert Taylor* was not so unusual as to be the result of any inborn hotheadedness. Their response was entirely in keeping with the egalitarian traditions of seamen who refused to endure injustice and cruelty and sometimes responded by becoming pirates, which is what they would have been if their plot had succeeded. Nor should it be seen as something peculiar to the establishment of the Red River settlement or to the difficulties of managing the fur trade. Mutinies were forms of resistance to oppression and bad working conditions. They developed out of common complaints which led a small group of crewmen to band together to enlist support among the rest of the men. Usually, a particularly daring crew member, often a minor officer, became the leader. See Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 205-253. To focus on individual motives and national stereotypes without giving due consideration to the dynamics of the relations of power and authority is to view the incident from the top and indulge in antiquarianism. The event becomes a historical curiosity, provides no insight into the past, and has no relevance to anything outside itself.

⁵¹HBCA, B.27/a/6, Carlton House (Saskatchewan) journal, 1816-7, "Deposition of Thomas Costello," 8 Jan. 1817, fos. 11d.-15; B.155/a/29, Osnaburgh House journal, 1816-17, fos. 2-9.

"knocking the men down, kicking them until they got up, and knocking them down again until they could not get up any more, when they finished them off with a few kicks."⁵² The servants did not suffer in silence, however. In 1836, William Brown, a seaman serving aboard the company's barque *Columbia*, protested that mariners in the HBC were treated differently from those on other vessels and, "being promised that our Vessel will be made a Hell of," appealed to the London committee for "deliverance." Brown objected to serving under a man "who damns the Law, and says there is none here he will make Law himself." Brown did not name the individual, but there were several likely candidates. William Heath, the chief officer, had recently challenged a man to a fight, not caring that latter had been flogged and his back was a sight "which would make humanity shudder." But Heath had been "drunk as a Beast." This, remarked Brown, "is what they call due subordination and we are compelled to put up with it, I suppose they think we have no better understanding." Moreover, unlike Heath, the men were not receiving much grog. "We have signed to defend Your Property with bravery," Brown wrote, "how can we do so with cheerfulness or in fact at all, when instead of encouragement we get discouragement[sic], such as stopping our Grog and telling us that we have signed for no Grog." Captain Home, who would face a mutiny aboard the *Nereide* in 1838, had reduced the ration to "a glass to a man once in a week", a measure which, complained Brown, "is making either fools or children of us." Home had also ignored Brown's agreement with the HBC to work as cook aboard the *Beaver* and made him a steward. Brown had already sent details about other instances of cruelty, including the whipping of two men, one of whom was the unfortunate man harassed by Heath. Captain Home had "made himself a flagilator...to Messrs Finlayson & McLouglin." He had also wielded a sword, cutting one man on the forehead and stabbing

⁵²Quoted in Mary Cullen, "Outfitting New Caledonia 1821-58," in Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray, eds., Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 239.

another "clean thro' the Shoulders." Brown sent another petition to the London committee in September.⁵³

More than a year later the London committee demanded an explanation from Captain Home. It also insisted that in all cases where it was necessary "to inflict summary punishment either afloat or ashore," a formal report "duly authenticated be prepared and transmitted" for its information. Such incidents should be kept to a minimum, however, lest they "involve the Company in difficulties and lead to investigations" and "expose the concern to much inconvenience." Soon after composing this reprimand, the committee received a letter from Edward Clouston, their agent in Stromness, apprising it of further developments in the Brown case, incidents which, it was annoyed to note, were not mentioned in McLoughlin's correspondence.⁵⁴ Brown was still in the service and had informed his father that, although his time was up in 1837, he had not been allowed to leave and when he refused to go back where he had been stationed, he was imprisoned, then tied to a cannon and flogged and forced back to his duty. He asked his father to seek assistance from the Rev. Clouston, Edward Clouston's son in law. Brown's story was corroborated by one of the company's blacksmiths. "Such an occurrence as this if passed over unnoticed," Edward Clouston warned, "I am afraid will be very detrimental to the...Service."⁵⁵ John McLoughlin Sr. claimed that Brown had agreed to stay for an additional £3 a year and the flogging had been applied because he had refused to return to Fort Langley to retrieve his child, who McLoughlin thought was in danger of death because it was not properly cared for. James Douglas said that Brown had wanted to leave the service, but, because his child was less than a year old and, therefore, unable to make such a trip, he was asked to stay on his former terms until the child could be safely removed. But Brown resisted every argument "for voluntary compliance." This case, replied the committee, "lays our management open to

⁵³HBCA, B.223/c/1, William Brown to William Smith, 9 June 1836, fos. 100-101.

⁵⁴HBCA, B.223/c/1, London committee to James Douglas, 15 Nov. 1837, fos. 95d.-96.

⁵⁵HBCA, B.223/c/1, 1826-50, Edward Clouston to London committee, 8 Nov. 1837, fo. 102.

vexatious inquiries" and if it had gone into court would have caused "disagreeable exposure." The correct procedure would have been to discharge Brown immediately and simply not give him a passage home "which would have brought him to his senses." But, the "corporal punishment inflicted was decidedly illegal" and, to "guard against the consequences that might have arisen from an investigation of the case in a Court of Law," Simpson, "acting privately," gave Brown "a pecuniary consideration of £20, in full of all claims and demands whatsoever."⁵⁶ By the time this matter had been settled, however, Brown had already returned to the Orkneys, after serving again as steward aboard the company's steamer, the *Beaver*, where, in January of 1838, he had joined in a mutiny.⁵⁷

The Brown case, serious as it was, would have attracted little of the London committee's attention if Brown had not appealed to it directly, if its own agent had not considered it a serious matter, and if the Reverend Herbert Beaver had not pounced on it to help discredit the HBC officers he had come to hate. Beaver had arrived at Fort Vancouver in 1836, and, like the rest of the Anglican missionaries who came to the company's territories, spent more time social climbing, complaining about his accommodations, and condemning the unsanctified unions of the company's men than he did carrying out his pastoral duties. His obsession with sexual irregularities, however, led him to cast one aspersion too many and earned him a beating from John McLoughlin Sr., whose wife he had defamed. Beaver, thus, had no reason to feel any affection for the HBC and he gathered information with which he could damage its reputation. He reported to the Aborigines' Protection Society that the company had corrupted the natives by

⁵⁶E. E. Rich, ed. The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1943). McLoughlin to London committee, 8 July 1839, pp. 1-3; excerpt from letter from Douglas to London committee, 16 Oct. 1838 (B.223/b/21, fos. 14-15), fn. p. 2; excerpt from letter from London committee to Douglas, 15 Nov. 1840 (A.6/25, fo. 99d.), fn. p.2; HBCA, A.10/10, "Unto the Governor and Directors of the Hnble Hudsons Bay Company the Petition of William Brown in Sandwich Orkney," 1840. fos. 124-124d.

⁵⁷HBCA, B.201/a/3, Fort Simpson journal, 1834-38, 30-31 Jan. 1838, fos. 168- 170. This incident will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

encouraging its disease-ridden and heathenish men to consort with the women. Although he clearly had little regard for the servants, he also set out to expose the tyranny of the company's officers, sending sensational letters to Benjamin Harrison, a member of the London committee and of the Clapham Sect which advocated moral reform, the abolition of slavery and the establishment of foreign missions. "I have seen more real slavery in the short time I have been here," he wrote, "than in the eight years and a half I was in the West Indies..." Discipline, he said, was maintained "by the use of the lash and the cutlass, supported by the presence of the pistol." He provided Harrison with a lurid description of William Brown's whipping, an account of a Sandwich Islander flogged and then kept in irons for five months and four days, and reports of trouble among the seamen, always making sure to point out the poor quality of the officers involved. He also ensured that James Logie, a labourer at Fort Vancouver, submitted a statement describing the beating William Rae gave him for not feeding Rae's cat. Beaver witnessed the declaration and testified to Logie's "remarkable peaceable, meek and Christian disposition" with which he had become familiar during the many evenings they had spent together preparing Logie for his baptism. After his return to Britain in 1838, Beaver continued to collect evidence for a book with which he planned to expose all the "atrocities and inequities" of which he had learned while at Fort Vancouver. He wrote to Logie and Brown asking for information about others who had suffered as they had and urging them to "Speak very freely upon all these things that they may be known throughout the Orkneys, and others may be deterred from entering such a vile service."⁵⁸ This was, of course, precisely what the London committee feared, and a few years later the murder of John McLoughlin Jr. at Fort Stikine provided even greater reason for alarm.

⁵⁸Barry Cooper, Alexander Kennedy Isbister: A Respectable Critic of the Honourable Company (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), 111-114; Thomas E. Jessett, Reports and Letters of Herbert Beaver, 1836-1838 (Portland: Champoege Press, 1959), Beaver to Harrison, 15 Nov. 1836, p. 20; Beaver to Harrison, 10 Mar. 1837, pp. 36-37; Beaver to Harrison, 19 Mar. 1838, p. 86-7; Beaver to Harrison, 19 Mar. 1838, pp. 87-8; HBCA, A.11/69, Declaration by James Logie and statement by Herbert Beaver, 19 Nov. 1836, fos. 35d.-36; A.10/10, Beaver to William Brown, 5 Feb. 1840, fos. 127-128d.

McLoughlin, the son of one of the company's chief factors, had, in 1836, after a misspent youth, joined James Dickson's expedition to set up an Indian kingdom in California. George Simpson had lured him away from it with an engagement in the HBC and in 1840 he became assistant to William Glen Rae at Fort Stikine. When Rae left in March 1841, McLoughlin took over with Roderick Finlayson to assist him. According to W. Kaye Lamb, McLoughlin was left in charge of this post and "its turbulent staff of twenty men" because he had a "reputation for being a good disciplinarian."⁵⁹ Not only did Lamb give no evidence for this judgement, but the relevant records contradict it. When, for example, McLoughlin found a man in possession of some salted salmon, he "used means which soon made him confess" that he had been stealing it regularly from the casks. Another servant, having helped himself "rather too plentifully" to some spirits, received a "few well merited cuffs from Mr John." McLoughlin reported few other incidents, but he complained that, since Rae's departure, it was "impossible" to get anything done if the men were left on their own.⁶⁰ Finlayson's departure for Fort Simpson in September of 1841 left McLoughlin despondent and feeling "destitute." He did not trust his subordinates, feared the Indians who had threatened to kill him and his men if he did not reduce his prices, and was sure that if another man had been in charge of the post it would not have been so neglected.⁶¹ McLoughlin's career came to an abrupt end early on the morning of 21 April when one of his men shot him. According to the last entries of the Fort Stikine journal, now kept by Thomas McPherson and George Blenkinsop, McLoughlin and his men spent the day drinking, with McLoughlin getting the most intoxicated. At one o'clock the next morning, alleging that one of the men had threatened him, McLoughlin took his rifle and went to look for him and

⁵⁹W. Kaye Lamb, Introduction to The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38, E. E. Rich, ed., (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1841), xxv-xxx.

⁶⁰HBCA, B.209/a/1, Fort Stikine journal, 1840-42, 17 Mar. 1841, fos. 29d.-30; 29 Mar. 1841, fo. 31; 4 Sept. 1841, fo. 49.

⁶¹HBCA, B.201/c/1, John McLoughlin Jr. to Roderick Finlayson, 2 Dec. 1841, fo. 1; McLoughlin to Finlayson, 14 Feb. 1842, fos. 3-3d; McLoughlin to Finlayson, 26 Feb. 1842, fo. 5d.

another man. McPherson reported that he rushed out, heard three shots, and found McLoughlin dead. The two clerks may have had something to hide though, since the page before their entry was torn out.⁶² Simpson arrived on 25 April, questioned the men, who informed him that McLoughlin frequently got drunk and flogged them mercilessly. Since McLoughlin had joined the company under a cloud and was a "half breed," Simpson was probably inclined to believe the worst and, for this reason, quickly concluded that the officer "had become a slave to licentiousness and dissipation, that his treatment of the people was exceedingly cruel in the extreme and that the business entrusted to his charge was entirely neglected." He, therefore, declared that the men had acted "under the influence of Terror as a measure of self preservation" and if the case were tried the verdict would be "Justifiable Homicide."⁶³

McLoughlin Sr. believed that his son had been murdered in cold blood and thought he had proof when Pierre Kanaquassé, one of the Fort Stikine men, voluntarily told all to James Douglas in July of 1842. Kanaquassé testified that all but one of the men had signed an agreement to murder their officer because he would not allow them to have anything to do with the Indian women or go out of the fort at night and he had flogged two men for giving their clothing to some women. Simpson had refused to question Kanaquassé because he considered him a "worthless character" upon whose testimony "no reliance could be placed." But, McLoughlin believed the confession and dispatched Chief Trader Donald Manson to take new depositions and collect evidence of this conspiracy, which, however, only added to the confusion. Thomas McPherson said he knew nothing of an agreement to murder McLoughlin but testified that he had drawn up a petition to present to Simpson, "representing Mr John's misconduct & his ill usage of the men & begging that he might be removed." Everyone had signed or put his mark

⁶²HBCA, B.209/a/1, Fort Stikine journal, 1840-42, 20-21 April 1842, fos. 17d.-18.

⁶³Glyndwr Williams, ed. London Correspondence Inward from Sir George Simpson 1841-42 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1973), Simpson to London committee, 6 July 1842, pp. 161-62; Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44, John McLoughlin Sr. to London committee, 24 June 1842, p. 43.

on the document, but it was "so badly written" that he had destroyed it out of embarrassment. The Sandwich Islanders, who could neither read nor write English, said they had signed a paper they believed had something to do with advances in wages. Another man declared that Kanaquassé had suggested that they shoot McLoughlin, but no one would agree to do it.⁶⁴ Despite the lack of corroboration, McLoughlin Sr. was convinced that the alleged petition was really the agreement mentioned by Kanaquassé and McPherson had destroyed it to eliminate incriminating evidence. Simpson remained certain that McLoughlin Jr. and his men had been drunk and they had turned on him because of his cruelty.

In the absence of the crucial piece of evidence, it is impossible to know who was telling the truth.⁶⁵ McLoughlin Jr. had indeed refused to permit his men to take Indian wives or bring Indian women into the post, no doubt to improve security, but this prohibition clashed with the permission to take Indian wives that George Simpson himself had given to more than twelve of the men while at Fort Stikine late in 1841. Simpson thought these alliances would cement

⁶⁴Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44, McLoughlin to London committee, 7 July 1842, pp. 60-61; HBCA, A.12/2, Simpson to London committee, 28 July 1843, fo. 211; E.31/1, John McLoughlin Jr. Papers, 1842-3. Deposition of Thomas McPherson, 20 Aug. 1842, fos. 2-4; Deposition of Kananui, 24 Aug. 1842, fo. 7; Deposition of Powhow, Aug. 1842, fo. 9; Deposition of Louis Leclaire, Aug. 1842, fo. 12.

⁶⁵W. Kaye Lamb concluded that the conspiracy existed because, although only Kanaquassé claimed there was a plot, he had apparently tried to shoot McLoughlin Jr. before. Moreover, Lamb thought that McLoughlin Sr. knew the men involved better than Simpson did and, therefore, was in a better position to judge. Lamb, therefore, believed Kanaquassé's testimony and the depositions of August 1842 and concluded that all punishments were deserved. He failed, however, to take into account the fact that McLoughlin Sr. was, naturally enough, determined to clear his son's name and that, if Kanaquassé was the scoundrel that everyone said he was, his testimony might have been worthless. Nor did those depositions provide unequivocal support for Kanaquassé's allegations. There were neither neutral witnesses nor neutral interrogators. It is impossible to determine what actually happened, but, given the tendency of fur trade historians to adopt the views of the officers, it is not surprising that Lamb would come down on McLoughlin Sr.'s side. (See: Lamb, "Introduction," to The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38, xxxiv-xli.) But at least Lamb did not, as Peter C. Newman did, describe how Pierre Kanaquassé "produced a written pact, signed by all but one of Fort Stikine's staff members, swearing to murder McLoughlin and cover up the crime." (Peter C. Newman, Caesars of the Wilderness, Company of Adventurers Volume II (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books Canada, 1987), 294) Although perhaps a minor point, Newman's error is an example of the sloppiness which characterizes his history of the HBC and can give popular history in general a bad name.

relations with the Tsimshian Indians.⁶⁶ The men would, therefore, have had a reason to dislike McLoughlin Jr., although this alone hardly seems a motive for murder. There is evidence, however, beyond the testimony of the Fort Stikine men that McLoughlin Jr. had a violent temper and was quick with his fists. McLoughlin Sr. himself did not have a very good record in this regard, having placed the London committee in the awkward position of having to pay off a former servant seeking compensation for punishment McLoughlin had administered.⁶⁷ It is not unlikely that the son would emulate his father in his dealings with his subordinates. William Glen Rae declared that he had seen him intoxicated only once on Christmas night, on which occasion he had, however, struck one of the men with his fists, not with a stick as the servants had alleged. He also admitted that McLoughlin had become "very violent" and was held in his room for a short time by two men. Rae had stayed alone with him until McLoughlin was better and asked to go out. He then asked to speak to the two guards and, although he had promised he would only ask a few questions, he "began to ask them how they dared to hold him" and "got so excited" that he forgot his promise and hit each of them once. He immediately regained control of himself and "was extremely sorry for what he had done." As a mitigating circumstance, Rae observed that they had been obliged to be "very strict" with the men there because they "were great scamps generally." Still, he thought that McLoughlin was no more severe than he had been himself and never, except on the night mentioned, punished the men unless they deserved it. Roderick Finlayson said that McLoughlin rarely got drunk, but that he been "frequently" so "excited by anger" that he appeared drunk and mentioned three occasions upon which he had struck or flogged a man.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer, 1981), 31.

⁶⁷HBCA, A.5/13, W. Smith to Edward Clouston, 20 Feb. 1840, p. 28.

⁶⁸HBCA, B.223/c/1, William Glen Rae to John McLoughlin, 18 Apr. 1843, fos. 190-190d.; Rae to McLoughlin, 20 April 1843, fo. 194; E.13/a/1, John McLoughlin Jr. Papers, 1842-3, "Questions put to Mr Rodk Finlayson."

Nevertheless, McLoughlin Sr. swayed the committee in his favour, no doubt because it felt more sympathy for gentlemen than for common, ill-bred workers, whom it considered fully capable of such treachery. Learning of this change of opinion "by a few private lines" from the committee's secretary, George Simpson quickly had prepared "an Analysis of the Depositions" taken by Manson, demonstrating that they contradicted the story told by Kanaquassé, whose character rendered him completely untrustworthy, and urged the committee to drop the affair, since any proceedings taken against the implicated men "would fall to the ground" and be "attended with much serious expence & inconvenience to the business." The committee, though still sympathetic to McLoughlin's version of the events, knew that, without the written agreement proving a conspiracy, legal action would prove costly and fruitless. It, therefore, declined to take the matter any further.⁶⁹ The affair appears to have had repercussions throughout the service. The officers were divided in their opinion over who was to blame⁷⁰ and at least one servant was inspired to contemplate emulating the men of Fort Stikine. In the summer of 1842, Narcisse Mousette, stationed at Cowlitz Farm, near what is today Toledo, Washington, mentioned McLoughlin's death to his two companions and said that "if his comrades would agree" to support him, "he would assist in murdering" Charles Forrest, the clerk in charge of the farm. One of the men present, Hilair Gibeault, "rejected the proposal with horror and reproved" Mousette "for his wicked designs". He also reported the incident to Charles Forrest. According to McLoughlin, Forrest had scolded Mousette and two other men for failing to perform what he considered a full day's work. When questioned, Mousette said that he had "meant it only as a joke." McLoughlin

⁶⁹HBCA, A.6/26, Committee to George Simpson, 1 June 1843, fo. 67; A.12/2, Simpson to London committee, 28 July 1843, fos. 210d.-211d.; Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44, London committee to John McLoughlin Sr., 27 Sept. 1843, pp. 310-312.

⁷⁰MacLeod, ed., The Letters of Letitia Hargrave, Letitia Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish Sr., 9 Sept. 1843, p. 149.

Sr. told him "it was not language to be used," confined him, and sent him back to Canada "to go about his business" because it would not be worthwhile sending evidence to prosecute him.⁷¹

Mousette's joke confirmed John McLoughlin Sr.'s fear that the company's failure to punish his son's killers would encourage other servants to do likewise, a thought that occurred to other officers as well. At York Factory, Letitia Hargrave wrote her mother that, since McLoughlin Jr. had been "in the condition of a maniac" when he was killed, the murderers would be "acquitted" because their crime would be judged "justifiable homicide." But, "how are ignorant men to be taught the distinction between that and murder," she wondered and reported, "it is now feared that in every petty quarrel the servant will think himself justified in killing his master." The "gentlemen here are too apt to thrash & indeed point their guns at their men," she observed. One of the officers who came from Vancouver in 1842 was "so detested" that the men "confessed that if he had fallen into the river not one w^d have held out a stick to him." A less fortunate gentleman was drowned "when he might easily have been saved without a man wetting his foot." It was "a hideous country for man to live," she lamented, "&...it is yearly getting worse...I pity every gentleman in it."⁷² It is not surprising that the snooty Letitia Hargrave, who commented with such condescension on those she considered her social inferiors, would give little thought to what grubby labourers might have to endure. The London committee and its officers, however, could not dismiss the subject so easily.

When complaints of "extreme ill-usage" and of "being...starved, beaten and maimed by the Company's Officers in the Columbia" made it difficult to recruit men,⁷³ even George Simpson became, as John McLoughlin Sr. remarked, "all at once very sensitive about striking

⁷¹HBCA, B.47/z/1, Depositions of Hilair Gibeault and Narcisse Forcier, 30 July 1842, fos. 1-2; Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44, 19 Aug. 1842, pp. 66-67.

⁷²MacLeod, ed., The Letters of Letitia Hargrave, Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald Mactavish, 10 Apr. 1843, pp. 145-46.

⁷³HBCA, B.223/c/1, George Simpson to John McLoughlin Sr., 21 June 1843, fo. 196.

the men," a transformation McLoughlin emphasized by recounting some of Simpson's exploits: the time he had "tickled" a guide's shoulders "with a canoe pole"; his flogging of a man coming up the Grand River in 1830; and Simpson's knocking a man down at Fort Vancouver. "I never saw a man get a neater blow," McLoughlin commented, "the wall of the house, gave the mans head another, and he bled from his nose & mouth, as if he had been struck with a knife."⁷⁴ Of course, Simpson had not really abandoned his belief in the salutary effect of a good thrashing. When in 1850, Johnson G. King, on the voyage to Edmonton, felt "obliged to give one of the Men a good hiding for refusing to do what he was told & for general Lazyness," Simpson "fully approved" although he had ordered King not to beat his crewmen so that they would "write a good account of the north to their friends."⁷⁵ Moreover, Simpson thought corporal punishment was particularly effective in disciplining Canadians. Europeans, he believed, could be controlled only by the threat of fines because they were unaccustomed to "corporal chastisement" and "it would not be proper to introduce it." Canadians, on the other hand, stood "more in awe of a blow than a fine" and, therefore, Simpson sanctimoniously informed the committee, "altho' we reprobate this mode of discipline generally and discountenance it as much as possible it is nonetheless highly necessary on extraordinary occasions."⁷⁶

⁷⁴Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin From Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1839-44, McLoughlin to London committee, 18 Nov. 1843, pp. 175-176.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.218/c/1, Johnson G. King to James Cameron, 1 Sept. 1850, fo. 5d.

⁷⁶HBCA, A.12/1, George Simpson to London committee, 1 Aug. 1823, fo. 25d. Historians have tended to accept Simpson's view. See, for example: John E. Foster, "The Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West," in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds., The Prairie West: Historical Readings (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, Pica Pica Press, 1985), 92. Foster assumes that European servants, joining the HBC for strictly economic motives, could be disciplined by fines, but that for Mixed Blood servants the "social aspects of work were of greater importance" and "physical coercion seemed to be the effective means of discipline." This conclusion, based on a few incidents at Brandon House and the opinions of a few officers, stems from the assumption that the HBC's European servants had modern economic motives and reflects the racially biased views of the company's officers.

Simpson was, of course, lying. There had always been and always would be officers who, when confronted by insolence, intransigence, or carelessness, in the heat of the moment, give a servant a swift kick or a box on the ears or whack him with whatever weapon was at hand.⁷⁷ Moreover, corporal punishment had long been an acceptable penalty for a variety of misdemeanours, including larceny. Its effectiveness derived not only from the physical pain, but from the fact that it was usually carried out in public to humiliate the criminal and deter others from committing the same crime. It was considered an especially appropriate punishment for the vulgar,⁷⁸ among whom the employees of the HBC would surely have been numbered. HBC employees were whipped when the crime seemed to merit it.⁷⁹ As in Europe, however, the incidence of severe corporal punishment decreased toward the end of the eighteenth century, as Michael Payne noted in his study of York Factory. The last flogging administered there for theft occurred in 1797.⁸⁰ It did not disappear, however. It continued for a few years, at least, to be applied to apprentices,⁸¹ whose age and position rendered them inferior and, thus, vulnerable to such humiliating treatment. Others, considered inferior by virtue of their culture or race also

⁷⁷See, for example: B.59/a/79, Eastmain journal, 1801-2, 25 June 1802, fo. 24, 24 Aug. 1802, fo. 30d.; B.86/a/62, Henley House journal, 1812-13, 13 May 1813, p. 13; B.99/e/2, Kenogamissi report, 1814-15, fo. 1d; B.105/a/7, Lac la Pluie journal, 1819-20, 11 Jan. 1820, fo. 60; B.116/a/8, Fort Liard journal, 1829-30, 10 June 1829, fo. 1d.; B.133/a/2, Mistassini journal, 1820-21, 29 Jan. 1821, fo. 11d.; B.239/a/65, York Factory journal, 17 Aug. 1771, fo. 47; B.239/a/68, York Factory journal, 1772-3, 22 Feb. 1773, fo. 25d.; B.239/c/1, George Simpson to George McTavish, 1 Jan. 1822, fo. 66; B.239/c/6, William H. Watt to William McTavish, 4 Mar. 1852, fos. 304-305.

⁷⁸J. M. Beattie, Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 461-464, 614.

⁷⁹See: HBCA, B.3/z/2, Decisions of council regarding John Cartwright and William Filpt, August 169; B.3/a/65, Fort Albany journal, 1772-3, 4 Jan. 1773, fo. 19d.; B.59/a/67, Eastmain journal, 1790-91, 5 Mar. 1791, fo. 17d.; B.42/a/124, Churchill journal, 1797-8, 12 Aug. 1798, fo. 22d.

⁸⁰Michael Payne, 'The Most Respectable Place in the Territory': Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989), 38-39.

⁸¹See: HBCA, B.117/a/4, Long Lake journal, 1818-19, 19 Aug. 1818, p. 5; B.145/e/11, New Brunswick report, 1820-21, fo. 11.

remained subject to such indignities. In 1812, two of the recently recruited Irishmen were punished by running the gauntlet, one for theft and the other for "impertinent language." Running the gauntlet was a form of flogging, carried out not by an officer or his deputy but by all the men, and was an expression of communal disapproval of certain crimes, usually theft. The men might, therefore, not have objected to punishing the Irish thief, since he had stolen some of their provisions. Impertinence was not, however, a crime against the community, but there is no indication that the servants objected to beating the other Irishman. They might well have considered it an opportunity to exact retribution for the beating the Irishmen had inflicted on some Orcadian servants on New Year's Day and to express their dislike of the Irish in general. However, William Auld, feared the effects of "this new trial of punishment without the sanction of the law or authority" and commented that he would not be surprised if every old servant "positively" objected and refused to serve "under those who can outrage every right however they might be justified had they legal sanction for their proceedings." At the same time, however, he did not seem to consider it inappropriate to subject the newcomers to such treatment, remarking that "from perpetual thefts which running the Gantlet and severe flogging repeatedly inflicted had no influence in preventing -- one would rather have thought them intended for Botany than for Hudsons Bay." Such bad characters obviously required such punishments, but, he observed, "we must use all our own influence over the old hands who will confide in us sufficiently to screen them...from that summary mode of treatment so new and discouraging."⁸² This form of punishment was not repeated and corporal punishment became less common in the east. The west was a different matter.

This was at least partly due to the characters of the officers themselves. For example, Peter Skene Ogden was so violent that he had been excluded from the new HBC in 1821 and finally allowed in only because his opposition could do more damage than his

⁸²N. A. M. Rodgers, The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons, Fontana Press, 1986), 227; HBCA, B.154/a/5, Norway House journal, 1812-13, 5-6 Oct. 1812, fo. 3; William Auld to William Sinclair, 28 Jan. 1813, fos. 17-17d.

presence. He was then dispatched to the Snake River country to trap the country bare of furs and fight American opposition and hostile Indians. In 1830 he was transferred to the Fort Simpson on the northwest coast, where his bad temper could be vented on competing Russians and Americans. In 1835 he took charge of the New Caledonia district and ten years later became a member of the board of management for the Columbia district. His associate, Donald Manson, who spent the last thirteen years of his career in New Caledonia, blighted his chances for promotion to chief factor by acquiring an equally bad reputation. Complaints of ill treatment at their hands prompted George Simpson to caution the officers that, true or not, such charges increased the unpopularity of service in the New Caledonia district and provided "ample evidence of the existence of a system of 'club law'," which Simpson declared, "must not be allowed to prevail." Discipline and obedience could not be enforced "by a display of violent passion and the infliction of severe & arbitrary punishment in hot blood." Disobedient or refractory servants were to receive a proper hearing and, if found guilty, subjected to arrest or short rations, "in fact almost any punishment rather than knocking about or flogging." Individual officers did not even have the authority to inflict fines on servants. When they believed such were deserved, officers had to report the case to the Board of Management of the Western Department.⁸³ Nevertheless, the London committee continued to receive sworn statements from former servants describing the starvation, beatings, and overwork they had to endure in the service.⁸⁴ Of course, the officers submitted accounts demonstrating that the complainants were

⁸³HBCA, B.188/c/1, George Simpson to Donald Manson, 18 June 1853, fo. 1d.-2d.; Glyndwr Williams, "Peter Skene Ogden," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Volume VII: 1851 to 1860 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 660-662; Kenneth L. Holmes, "Donald Manson," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Volume X: 1871 to 1880 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 495-196.

⁸⁴See, for example: HBCA, A.67/1, Statement of Murdo Macleod, 26 Nov. 1857, fos. 397-399d.; Statement of John McIvor, 16 Dec. 1857, fo. 400; Statement of Murdo Macdonald, n.d. Dec. 1857, fo. 400d.; A.6/38, Thomas Fraser to A. G. Dallas, 24 Oct. 1863, fo. 186; William Christie to Thomas Fraser, 20 Feb. 1864, fo. 3; Statement of Malcolm Groat, steward at Edmonton House, 14 Mar. 1864, fo. 6; Deposition of Donald McDonald, clerk, 8 Mar. 1864, fos. 7-7d.; Deposition of Peter C. Pambrun, clerk, 4 Mar. 1864, fos. 8-8d.; Deposition of Louis Chastellain, clerk, 21 Mar. 1864, fos. 9-9d.; Statement of William Christie, 24 Feb. 1864, fos.

all scoundrels, that their own conduct was as good as could be expected under such trying circumstances, and that their fellow officers were all even tempered and universally respected. Regardless of where the truth lay, however, it is clear that there was a gap between what officers and servants considered proper treatment and discipline and this gap was one reason for the company's failure to recruit sufficient men and their continuing refusal to go where they were told and not only in the west either.

In 1864, several servants refused to return to the English River district, east of Lake Winnipeg, because their rations consisted chiefly of fish. They wanted to be fed what they had been promised by the company's agents, namely, a pound of flour a day, beef, pork, potatoes, etc. However, fish was the "common" food at posts in the interior. Samuel McKenzie, an officer at York Factory, was determined to dismiss them for their insubordination, even though they said they would serve anywhere else, lest granting their request encourage all the other servants to try to select where they would go.⁸⁵ Of course, if McKenzie had appointed them to another district, they would probably have had to eat fish there as well and would have raised the same objections again. Servants had always complained when they considered their allowances to meagre or otherwise unacceptable,⁸⁶ but now there might be conflict over the interpretation of what board and lodging meant. In 1859 J. C. Arnesen, having been allowed to leave the service before his time was up, appealed to the London committee for repayment of the sums he had to spend on "the necessities of Life." He had been forced to buy these because, although the contract promised free board and lodging, these were "in such bad style" that they were "equal to

10-12; A.11/118, William J. Christie to James R. Clare, 28 June 1864, fos. 458-61; A.12/43, Roderick McKenzie to A. G. Dallas, 18 Jan. 1864, fos. 191-191d.

⁸⁵HBCA, A.11/18, Samuel McKenzie to Thomas Fraser, 31 July 1864, fos. 451-451d.

⁸⁶See, for example: B.115/a/3, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1819-20, June-July 1819, fos. 2-4d.; B.135/a/84, Moose Factory journal, 1796-97, 11 Feb. 1797, fo. 16, 25 Feb. 1797, fo. 17d.; Moose Factory journal, 1811-12, 19 Oct. 1811, fo. 2, 2 Dec. 1811, fo. 7d.; B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-53, 4 July 1853, fo. 74d.; B.235/a/3, Winnipeg journal, 1814-15, 8 Aug. 1814, fo. 2; B.239/a/66, York Factory journal, 1772-73, 27 May 1773, fo. 39d.; B.239/c/2, Thomas Spence to James Hargrave, 2 Mar. 1835, fo. 98.

nothing." Seven pounds of flour, three and a half of pork, and seven ounces of grease in seven days were not "to be called good Board."⁸⁷ Sometimes men refused to proceed anywhere as soon as they discovered their rations were not going to be what they believed they had been promised. In 1860, five of the new hands destined for the Mackenzie River district "rebelled" and William Sinclair decided to punish them by sending them to posts where European provisions would be unavailable.⁸⁸ Several years later, three new servants refused to go inland, seven old servants refused to return there, and none of those who did go "went without difficulty."⁸⁹ Thus, a century after the company began to expand into the interior, the servants were still objecting to carrying out this policy. The work had not become easier and, although the provisions were probably more ample, their quality no longer met the servants' expectations because these expectations were based on standards that applied elsewhere. Nor had their refusal to be knocked about or overworked by abusive officers wavered.

Equally constant was the servants dislike of performing duties that required absences from their posts: taking packets or goods from one post to another, living at fishing tents or in wooders' camps, and hauling home wood, fish, meat, furs, and other items. Of the 57 refusals to do as ordered, fourteen were refusals to perform such jobs. These tasks were important because they ensured that posts had sufficient food and wood and remained in communication with one another, but they exposed men to greater hardships than they faced at the posts. They were, therefore, unpopular and men regularly refused to carry them out. The men's failure to fetch furs from Indian tents could harm the business to some extent, but the natives usually brought their pelts themselves. What the men endangered by refusing to go on such errands was their own welfare. At Fort Churchill, in January of 1796, Halcrow Smith, a

⁸⁷HBCA, A.11/46, J. C. Arnesen to W. G. Smith, Sept. 1859, fos. 315-316.

⁸⁸HBCA, B.239/c/11, William Sinclair to James R. Clare, 21 June 1860, fos. 388d.-389.

⁸⁹HBCA, B.239/c/16, J. W. Wilson to officers of the Northern Department, 1 Dec. 1865, fo. 106d.; A.67/8, Characters of Servants Retiring to Europe P. Ships, 1865, fos. 44-45.

seaman from the Shetlands, refused to haul a sled of provisions to "Eastern Creeks", probably a fishing or hunting tent, and "gave very insolent language" for which he was fined. Smith did not care and on the following day he left the factory "and was as good as his word in not hauling a sled."⁹⁰ In 1799, one of the men stationed at Martin's Fall would not transport some goods to Osnaburgh House, saying he would "neither go for Gov' [John Best, the master], or any officer in the Country..."⁹¹ When in January of 1812, only a few men would agree to transport goods requested by the master of Eastmain, only "very little" was taken, leaving the people of Eastmain somewhat in the lurch. Moreover, the trip itself reinforced the men's aversion. When the party returned a couple of days later, two of the men had frozen feet because they had refused to proceed, been left along the way and, unable to start a fire, had spent the night freezing at -43 degrees.⁹² If men with expertise in voyaging refused to go on such trips, they were even more dangerous. Thus, late in 1817, John Daniel, a steersman, refused to conduct John Malcolm to Gloucester House. Malcolm went alone, lost his way, and froze his feet, which had to be amputated. Daniel was fined £10. The fact that Daniel was a native of Rupert's Land while Malcolm, a labourer, was from the Shetlands might account for Daniel's indifference to Malcolm's situation.⁹³ Such disasters not only crippled some men for life, they also helped to strengthen others' determination not to tempt fate. Robert Dudley probably spoke for many of his fellows when he refused to accompany one of the officers to trade with some Indians when he declared, "that he was not going to be worked about all the Year lik[sic] a pack Horse - He

⁹⁰HBCA, B.42/a/122, Churchill journal, 1795-96, 28-29 Jan. 1796, fos. 6d.-7; A.30/6, Servants' List, 1795, fos. 90d.-91; A.30/10, Servants' List, 1800, fos. 46d.-47; B.42/f/1, Churchill Servants' Resolves, 1803, fo. 5.

⁹¹HBCA, B.123/a/6, Martins Fall journal, 1799-1800, 23 June 1799, fo. 5.

⁹²HBCA, B.135/a/100, Moose Factory journal, 1811-12, 16-18 Jan. 1812, fo. 11.

⁹³HBCA, B.78/e/7, Gloucester House report, 1817-18, fo. 2d.; A.30/16, Servants' List, fos. 53d.-54, 54d.-55.

was not paid for it and he would be damned if he should do it any longer."⁹⁴ Clearly, not all servants welcomed such trips as opportunities for private trade or negligence.⁹⁵

Hard work did not necessarily have to be accompanied by an absence from the post for men to object to it. In 1771, John Miles refused to help bring some newly brewed beer into Moose Factory, though he would presumably benefit from its presence there.⁹⁶ At Brandon House in 1796, Jacob Henderson refused to get his watch wood and "dam'd" James Sutherland to boot.⁹⁷ At Moose Factory in August of 1799, Edward Clouston would not go to get stones and, because he gave no "good reason" for refusing, he was put off duty, placed on half-allowance, fined £5 and sent home.⁹⁸ At Eastmain in June of 1802, Caesar Linklater, ordered to boil seal blubber, at first objected and then deliberately overfilled the kettle causing it to boil over. When told to take some of the blubber out because fat running into the fire endangered the post, Linklater refused and continued to allow the kettle to overflow. William Bolland then told him to take the fire away and when Linklater would not do this either, Bolland ran down the stairs, "gave him a kick on the breech" and did the job himself. Linklater was then ordered off to do something else, but declined, saying that he had not come out "to be used like a dog &c." Bolland put him on half allowance and Linklater continued to refuse duty for the next five days.

⁹⁴HBCA, B.105/a/6, Lac la Pluie journal, 1818-19, 20 April 1819, fo. 24.

⁹⁵See, also: HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-7, 19 Dec. 1796, fo. 23d.; B.28/a/1, Carlton House, 1795-96, 10 Jan. 1796, fo. 14; B.39/a/5, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1805-06, 8 Dec. 1805, fo. 8; B.39/a/16, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1820-21, 29 June 1820, fo. 5d., 18 Aug. 1820, fo. 16d., 8 Sept. 1820, fo. 22d.; E. E. Rich, ed. Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, and Report (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938), 16 Oct. 1820, p. 82; 15 Nov. 1820, p. 109; 13 April 1821, p. 319; B.39/a/17, Fort Chipewyan journal, 1821, 16 Feb. 1821, fo. 3d.; B.42/a/134, Churchill journal, 1808-09, 19 July 1809, fo. 11; B.59/a/82, Eastmain journal, 1804-05, 13 June 1805, fo. 17d.; B.155/a/33, Osnaburgh House journal, 13 April 1821, fo. 17.

⁹⁶HBCA, B.135/a/50, Moose Factory journal, 1770-71, 27 July 1771, fo. 41.

⁹⁷HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-97, 12 Nov. 1797, fo. 17d.

⁹⁸HBCA, B.135/a/86, Moose Factory journal, 1798-99, 26 Aug. 1799, fo. 38d.; 3 Sept. 1799, fo. 40.

Bolland considered it necessary to fine him £3 "by way of example to others."⁹⁹ In March of 1815, James Folster, an Orcadian labourer with drunken tendencies, refused to help unload the hay sledge, declaring "he would be damned if he would go for anyone." The following day he was discovered, tipsy, sitting by the fire in the men's house and when ordered to cut firewood became "very abusive." He was fined £3 and sent home.¹⁰⁰ In June of 1817, Hendrich Swainson, probably a Scandinavian named Svenson, ordered to haul the seine, replied that he was unable to do so because he had "been at work all night and all week."¹⁰¹ At Northwest River, in August of 1840, one of the men enlarging the sawpit with another man refused to work again after the noon meal.¹⁰² In May of 1860, Robert Saunderson, a servant at Mistassini, refused to set nets, observing that the other men set nets as well as he did. Told that this was irrelevant and he was supposed to do whatever he was told, he repeated his refusal and was threatened with dismissal, which persuaded him to obey, but the next morning, he refused to visit the nets and said he would work no more, whereupon he was dismissed. Two weeks later he was back, begging to be readmitted, which he was.¹⁰³ In 1870 one of the men at Fort Chimo refused to haul home some wood, complaining that some of it was to be burned by Indian women who were dressing deer skins for the company and that he was "not obliged to work for Indians."¹⁰⁴ At Edmonton, two of the men refused to work "at the carts" and spent a day doing virtually nothing.¹⁰⁵ At Osnaburgh House on 27 Dec. 1870 one of the men refused to go with the

⁹⁹HBCA, B.59/a/79, Eastmain journal, 1801-02, 25 June 1802, fos. 23d.-24; 28 June 1802, fo. 24; 30 June 1802, fo. 24d.

¹⁰⁰HBCA, B.59/a/92, Eastmain journal, 1814-15, 15 Mar. 1815, fo. 29d.

¹⁰¹HBCA, B.125/a/116, Moose Factory journal, 1817-18, 27 June 1817, fo. 1d.

¹⁰²HBCA, B.153/a/4, North West River journal, 1840-41, 5 Aug. 1840, fo. 3.

¹⁰³HBCA, B.133/a/42, Mistassini journal, 1859-60, 18 May 1860, fos. 25-25d.; 2 June 1860, fo. 27.

¹⁰⁴HBCA, B.38/a/11, Fort Chimo journal, 1869-73, 9 Mar. 1870, fo. 10d.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.60/a/37, Edmonton journal, 1869-71, 17 Aug. 1871, fo. 77.

packet to Albany, giving no reason other than that he did "not choose to go," but he agreed a few days later. Perhaps he did not want to miss any holiday festivities.¹⁰⁶

Men might also refuse to work if it was Sunday,¹⁰⁷ although piety had little to do with it. In August of 1810, some of the crew of the schooner at Albany virtuously declined to help unload the vessel because it was Sunday, "though at the same time they thought it no sin to curse and swear during the day most heartily against the irreligion of others."¹⁰⁸ In 1819, at Lesser Slave Lake Pierre Mouras would not repair a hearth because, he said, he worked "enough on the week Days without working on a Sunday."¹⁰⁹ Sabbatarianism was not widespread in the HBC. The men's attendance at the required divine services was always highly irregular and by the 1840s the officers were negligent in holding them.¹¹⁰ A man of a truly pious bent probably felt out of place. Certainly Laurence Bain, having attended revival meetings in Scotland, was driven to "insanity" when "his religious sensibilities" were "wounded by what he regarded as the very wicked conduct of some of the men among whom he was placed in Hudsons Bay."¹¹¹ The issue of Sunday labour was not, however, quite as significant as Ron Bourgeault has suggested.

¹⁰⁶HBCA, B.155/a/79, Osnaburgh House journal, 1870-71, 27 Dec. 1870, fo. 17; 31 Dec. 1870, fo. 17.

¹⁰⁷See, for example: HBCA, B.28/a/1, Carlton House journal, 1795-96, 10 Jan. 1796, fo. 14; B.42/a/126, Churchill journal, 1801-02, 13 June 1802, fo. 5d., 7 July 1802, fo. 6d.; B.135/a/92, Moose Factory journal, 1804-05, 26 April 1805, fo. 31; B.135/a/114, Moose Factory journal, 1817, 15 Jun. 1817, fo. 16; B.154/c/1, Robert Cummings to George Barnston, 16 Mar. 1852, fo. 107; C.1/998, Log of the *Princess Royal*, 1870, 3-4 July 1870, fos. 52-52d.

¹⁰⁸HBCA, B.3/a/113, Albany journal, 1809-10, 26 Aug. 1810, fo. 19d.

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.115/a/2, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1818-19, 7 Mar. 1819, fo. 26d.

¹¹⁰See, for example: HBCA, B. 135/a/50, Moose Factory journal, 1770-71, 23 Dec. 1770, fo. 14d., 31 Mar. 1771, fo. 55d., 21 Apr. 1771, fo. 29; B.135/a/89, Moose Factory journal, 1801-02, 3 Jan. 1802, fo. 7d.; B.135/a/91, Moose Factory journal, 1803-04, *passim*; B.135/a/92, Moose Factory journal, 1804-05, 24 Mar. 1805, fo. 25; B.135/a/100, Moose Factory journal, 1811-12, 1 Dec. 1811, fo. 7d.; B.135/a/128, Moose Factory journal, 1825-26, 5 Feb. 1826, fo. 26d., 6 Aug. 1826, fo. 47; B.166/a/1, Portage de L'Île journal, 2 Mar. 1794, fo. 16; B.239/a/66, York Factory journal, 1771-72, 19 Apr. 1772, fos. 42d.-43; B.239/c/3, George Simpson to James Hargrave, 18 June 1841, fo. 225.

¹¹¹HBCA, A.10/79, R. Cowie to W. Armit, 24 Nov. 1869, fo. 547d.

He maintains that during the 1840s the "class interests of the Half-Breed working class" were "taking form" and the *voyageurs* fought for, among other things, a day of rest on Sunday. As a result, "many a strike and mutiny occurred over this issue." Unfortunately, his evidence consists of only one such incident in the summer of 1846 at Portage La Loche.¹¹² Sunday was traditionally a holiday in the service, except when traveling, a situation that the servants seemed to accept. When, in 1802, for example, Francois Snoddy, appointed to go inland from Churchill, declared that he would not work in the boats on Sundays, rather than supporting him, the other men threatened to abandon him along the way. Snoddy then refused to work at all and he was replaced.¹¹³ Former servants making formal complaints to the committee did include working on Sunday among their grievances¹¹⁴ and disputes erupted when Methodist missionaries urged their mostly native flocks not to voyage on the Sabbath,¹¹⁵ but for most servants, Sunday remained a day of rest and recreation and was recognized as such by their superiors, thereby endowing their disobedience with a tinge of legitimacy. When men refused to work on Sunday, they were justifying their misbehaviour by referring to a firmly established custom, not necessarily expressing a new class consciousness.

Servants also justified their refusal to obey an order by claiming that what they were being asked to do was not their job. Seamen could be particularly troublesome in this regard. In 1812 John Thomas found it impossible to get sailors to do anything "but what they please

¹¹²Ron G. Bourgeault, "The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from 'Communism' to Capitalism," Studies in Political Economy, 12 (Fall 1983): 69.

¹¹³HBCA, B.42/a/126, Churchill journal, 1801-02, 7 July 1802, fo. 6d.

¹¹⁴HBCA, A.10/41, "Deposition of John MacIver," 16 Dec. 1857, fo. 8; A.67/1, Statement of Murdo Macleod, 30 Nov. 1857, fo. 398d.

¹¹⁵HBCA, B.135/c/2, George Barnley to Robert Miles, 19 Jan. 1847; B.154/c/1, Robert Cummings to George Barnston, 16 Mar. 1852, fo. 107. See: Frits Pannekoek, "The Rev. James Evans and the Social Antagonisms of the Fur Trade Society, 1840-1846," in Richard Allen, ed., Canadian Plains Studies 3: Religion and Society in the Prairie West (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1974), 9-12.

themselves." They refused to work before breakfast, as everyone else did, and their notion of what constituted a full day's work fell far short of Thomas's. One day their labours were limited to helping the shallopmaster get some sails out to dry and later assisting in taking them in again.¹¹⁶ In May of 1837, three of the seamen aboard the company's steamer *Beaver* refused to stow wood in the coal boxes because, they said, this was stokers' work. Led by William Wilson, "a great forecastle lawyer" with "a great deal to say," they declared they would stow wood, but not coal boxes, unless they got extra pay, an offer which aroused suspicions that they were actually trying to extort a wage increase. Moreover, since the sails, rigging, and spars had all been landed, there was little seaman's work to be done aboard the vessel and unless the men performed whatever duties they were assigned, they would be idle. Also, if the officers conceded that the men could reject duties they considered outside their sphere, they might soon find something else that was not part of their duty as seamen and "finally have little or nothing to do on board the vessel." The conflict ended in an impasse, with McNeill vowing that, next time, they would be made to obey. The men also seemed to have a particular dislike for the chief engineer, apparently because he was able to explain to McNeill what duties the men were accustomed to performing, which prompted Wilson to call him a liar. Wilson was clapped into irons and removed to Fort Simpson, from which he was released when he promised to behave himself.¹¹⁷ In 1862, James Brown, refused to do labourer's work because he was engaged as a sailor and informed his master that "God Almighty woudnt persuade him" to change his mind.¹¹⁸ Regular servants raised similar objections. On 16 January of 1808, at Trout Lake, Jasper Corrigan, having produced only four one gallon kegs since New Year's day, was reproved for his

¹¹⁶HBCA, B.135/a/100, Moose Factory journal, 1811-12, 6 Mar. 1812, fo. 16; 9 Mar. 1812, fo. 16d.; 30 Mar. 1812, fo. 18d.; 8 April 1812, fo. 19d.

¹¹⁷HBCA, B.201/a/3, Fort Simpson journal, 1834-38, 31 May 1837, fos. 108-108d.; 3 June 1837, fo. 110d.

¹¹⁸HBCA, B.5/b/1, John Saunders to Peter Ogden, 11 March 1862, fo. 18.

"dilatatory conduct" and replied "that he was not paid for making Kegs Inland."¹¹⁹ In April of 1815, John, actually Johannes, Smith, stationed at Moose Factory, refused to work "at the New Vessel" on the grounds that, like "all of his countrymen (except 2 or 3 engaged as Sailors)," he had been hired exclusively to fell timber for the sawmill. He offered, however, to do anything other than work at the vessel. Smith had misunderstood his status. Apart from the fact that the Norwegian seamen were also expected to do whatever they were assigned, Smith himself had been hired for the Moose Factory general service. Joseph Beioley told Smith that he could not choose his own employment and that he would lose his wages. Also, since he had removed himself from the company's service by refusing to obey orders, he had lost his right to maintenance. Smith simply left and Beioley immediately directed that the rations he had received on Saturday be confiscated, but Smith managed to hang on to his provisions. On the next day Beioley told Smith that, as long as he persisted in his obstinacy, he would be charged an additional three shillings and four pence a day, with the result that he would be thrown into debtors' prison when he returned to England. Smith, however, said, that as long as Beioley "did not take his life away he did not much mind about a Prison" and that he knew the company could not keep him there for long anyway. He held out until 6 May when his supply of flour ran out and he returned to work. The ships were trapped in Hudson Bay that fall, placing a great strain on the posts' resources, and Smith perished "from Fatigue & want of Sustenance" on a trip between Rupert's House and Hannah Bay in December.¹²⁰ In June of 1837, Charles Marshall, engaged as a tinman in 1835, refused to do plumber's work as well until he received an increase in wages.¹²¹

¹¹⁹HBCA, B.220/a/1, Trout Lake journal, 1807-08, 16 Jan. 1808, fo. 30d.

¹²⁰HBCA, B.135/a/108, Moose Factory journal, 1815, 24-25 April 1815, fos. 23-23d.; April 1815, fo. 25d.; 6 May 1815, fo. 27; B.135/a/111, Moose Factory journal, 1815-16, 15 Dec. 1815, fo. 9; A.30/14, Servants' List, 1814-15, fos. 51d.-52; A.6/18, London Committee to Thomas Thomas, 9 April 1814, p. 164.

¹²¹HBCA, A.10/5, "The Memorial of Charles Marshall of No 5 Philpot Gt Commercial Road," 8 Nov. 1837, fos. 304d.-305. Marshall was petitioning for payment of wages from 2 June until 15 Sept. since he had continued to perform his tin work.

In 1855, the blacksmith at Fort Simpson objected to working because he had not *engaged* as a blacksmith. He spent several days working as a labourer and agreed to return to smithing once he was promised a wage increase.¹²² Such incidents constituted a form of bargaining over the control of the work process, which might receive some consideration from a paternalistic employer. But servants also resorted to sneakier attempts to exercise some autonomy.

For example, William Garrioch, a carpenter employed at Fort Simpson in 1802, wanted to become an agricultural labourer instead of continuing as carpenter. He got his wish and was duly ordered to hoe potatoes.¹²³ Garrioch seemed to be exchanging an interesting job for boring drudgery, but, apart from the fact that carpentry might have involved heavy work, toiling in the fields probably removed him from constant supervision, allowing him to work more slowly and irregularly. Similarly, Honeyman Hay, a carpenter at Martins Fall in 1818, refused to continue making kegs, although he gave no reason for doing so. His aversion to keg-making was not necessarily an aversion to all work, however, because the next day he was peeling bark off logs and, after a few days of illness, he was employed repairing a boat.¹²⁴ In 1814, at Red River, Peter Fidler suspected Archibald Curry of plotting to conceal his indolence when he refused to dig sod by himself, but insisted on working with another man, thereby making it impossible to know how much labour each had done. Fidler put Curry off duty for his insolence.¹²⁵ This struggle for control sometimes became a running battle, like the one between Peter Fidler and his men over the number of sledges each should take when he went to get meat. In January of 1816, Fidler ordered Richard Cunningham and John Flett to take three sledges of dogs. Since it was not unusual for one man to take two sledges by himself, Fidler did

¹²²HBCA, B.201/a/8, Fort Simpson journal, 1855-59, 23 Nov. 1855, fo. 25d.; 26 Nov. 1855, fo. 25d.

¹²³HBCA, B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-53, 2 June 1852, fo. 25.

¹²⁴HBCA, B.123/a/18, Martins Fall journal, 1819-20, 3-4 Aug. 1819, fo. 3d.; 6 Aug. 1819, fo. 3d.; 9-11 Aug. 1819, fos. 4-4d.

¹²⁵HBCA, B.235/a/3, Winnipeg journal, 1814-15, 20 Sept. 1814, fo. 8d.

not consider his request unreasonable, but Cunningham refused to take more than one, for which transgression Fidler fined him ten shillings. In February, Cunningham brought home two sledges carrying only the amount of meat normally carried on one. This time Fidler only lamented that Cunningham was a "very refractory fellow." The next day, John Favel refused to take more than one sledge, while another man, ordered to go off with two sledges, simply left for the Qu'appelle River without saying anything.¹²⁶ Likewise, in 1818/19 John Peter Pruden found the men at Carlton House determined to thwart him at every turn.

These men were not happy to begin with and Pruden's management did nothing to alter their mood. When they complained that they did not have enough to eat, Pruden was unsympathetic. He believed that six pounds of fresh buffalo meat a day were enough, though he had to admit it was not of the best quality. He further annoyed them by not selling them rum on New Year's Eve. He had sold a quart of rum to each man on Christmas Eve and the ensuing dissipation had rendered them unfit for work the day after Christmas. Of course, the men would have argued that this should have been a holiday anyway. To prevent similar intemperance at New Year's, Pruden decided to give them only the customary dram in the morning and a pint in the evening. All but two of the men were so offended they refused to come for the morning treat and Pruden retaliated by withholding the evening one. Relations subsequently deteriorated. When sent out to get meat, the men repeatedly refused to haul home a whole animal on each sled, as Pruden said was customary. He finally threatened them with five shilling fines if they continued, whereupon one man replied "that if he was fined he would shoot is[sic] dogs." Although this threat appears to have convinced the men to drag home the requisite carcasses, they now refused to perform other tasks. On 8 February, some of the men would not haul home firewood and sat around doing nothing while three boys performed the work. A few weeks later some men hauling wood quit work early and, when ordered to get what they had left behind, they

¹²⁶HBCA, B.22/a/19, Brandon House journal, 1815-16, 15-16 Jan. 1816, fos. 14-14d.; 23 Feb. 1816, fo. 19; 24 Feb. 1816, fo. 19.

refused, saying it was too heavy, although, observed Pruden, any one of them could have carried any of the pieces on his shoulder. On 19 March, Pruden ordered a man, who had apparently not worked for a week because his friends were visiting, to go and cut firewood. He refused and insolently remarked that he "was not hired to be Mr Pruden's woodcutter." The following day, however, the man was carrying out the duty he had refused.¹²⁷ Pruden's problems, no doubt, arose at least in part from his failings as an officer. His refusal to increase the meat ration and failure to allow proper celebrations and leisure at Christmas and New Years' was sure to alienate his men, who would now feel little inclination to obey him. They could not stop their work altogether, of course, because they needed the meat and wood to survive, but they could bring back less than Pruden demanded. Taking it easy while the three boys, two of whom were Pruden's sons, dragged wood had the added benefit of driving Pruden crazy. It was not only cruelty which undermined an officer's ability to command. An HBC servant could be highly sensitive to slights from his master.

In 1853, John Smith, gatekeeper at Fort Simpson, abandoned his post to chat with some men near the Indian shop door. His master tracked him down, asked why he was not in his place, and gave him "a slight tap...over the Shoulders" with his cane. This tap, which was probably less slight than the officer wanted the London committee to believe, aroused resentment rather than obedience. Smith returned to the gate, but several hours later declared he would no longer act as gatekeeper. He was manacled and confined in the bastion. That evening he refused to be released and spent the night locked up and in irons, emerging several days later when he agreed to do whatever he was told. To ensure that the incident was seen entirely from his own perspective, the officer pointed out that Smith was "an old offender" who had already run away twice and had been "Transported" to Fort Simpson where he had been of

¹²⁷HBCA, B.27/a/8, Carlton District journal, 1818-19, 1 Dec. 1818, fo. 14d.; 26 Dec. 1818, fo. 18; 1 Jan. 1819, fo. 19; 14 Jan. 1819, fos. 20-20d.; 25-26 Jan. 1819, fos. 21d.-22; 8 Feb. 1819, fo. 27; 27 Feb. 1819, fo. 27; 19-20 Mar. 1819, fo. 29d.

little use because he had "the Venereal."¹²⁸ In 1858, at York Factory, James Hargrave reprimanded John Moar, an assistant boatbuilder, for "the carelessness and indifference with which he performed his duty to the Company in comparison with the eagerness with which he urged his claims to better Rations better Cookery and other matters he considered 'his Right.'" Affronted, Moar replied that, since Hargrave had "injured his character as a Tradesman he would work no longer for the company" and would return to the Orkneys in the autumn. The following day, ordered to Churchill to repair boats, Moar said "he would not go unless sent as a prisoner." Hargrave hoped to sway him by referring to the contents of his contract and explaining the consequences of such "mutinous behaviour," but Moar said that "he was perfectly well aware of both" and remained off duty. George Simpson therefore ordered him to the Saskatchewan department and threatened him with the loss of his wages from the date of his first refusal if he did not go. Moar refused, but in the meantime York Factory had been inundated by disgruntled Norwegians and it was thought unwise to try to force him to obey. He was, therefore, sent home in the fall.¹²⁹ In 1866, one of the men at Osnaburgh House, reprimanded for his increasing laziness, responded by declaring he would work there no longer and would leave, which he did early one morning before his master was up.¹³⁰ Such incidents can be seen as struggles for control and fair treatment, even if the servants involved were not the most dedicated workers. One should not, however, forget that some men simply did not want to do anything and even the most sympathetic observer could not see some incidents as anything other than sheer disobedience.

In October of 1796, for example, Charles Seymour, a joiner at Churchill, refused to remove a ladder from the side of the house, hardly an arduous task. When William Auld

¹²⁸HBCA, B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-53, 13 April 1853, fo. 62d.; 15 April 1853, fo. 63; 17 April 1853, fo. 63d.

¹²⁹HBCA, B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 26 May 1858, fos. 91-91d.; James R. Clare to George Simpson, 16 August 1858, fo. 102.

¹³⁰HBCA, B.3/c/3, Charles Savage to Alex MacDonald, 30 June 1866, fo. 254d.

insisted, Seymour used "insolent language" and Auld punished him by assigning him to keep the first watch for the rest of the week, which Seymour would not do either. The council, therefore, fined him £1,10,0, but with little effect. A month and a half later, Seymour declared he would not grind two hatchets "for all the Devils in Hell." This time he was fined £3. A few months later he split the joints and broke the back of a chair he was supposed to repair and announced that it was now stronger than ever. Strangely enough, Seymour was not dismissed from the service and in the fall was fined £3 for "maliciously & wantonly" ruining a new sled.¹³¹ In August of 1812, Samuel Flaws, a labourer at Moose Factory, was appointed cook, a station he refused to accept, even after being twice hauled before the council and threatened with a heavy fine. Flaws declared "himself...assured" that any fine imposed there would be remitted in England. Considering him in breach of his contract and his conduct subversive of discipline, the council argued that he had forfeited all moneys due him, as, of course, the contract itself stipulated. But, the following day, Flaws returned to duty and "expressed much Contrition for his Offence". As a result, the council, deciding that the above penalty was now excessive though still considering it vital that Flaws be punished "for the Support of due Subordination," fined him twenty shillings.¹³²

Palm Saunders, sent to spend the spring of 1847 at Oxford House, proved to be a disagreeable addition. A few weeks after his arrival he struck an inoffensive lad with his fist and threatened "murder & vengeance" against some men who would not agree to return home from cutting wood at an "unlawful hour of the forenoon." When not pretending to be sick, Saunders spent his work hours urging his companions to "lay down & sleep" as he did, calling them a "parcel of fools" for being afraid that the company might dismiss them. "Look at me," he said, "I dont work & I shant work, I dont mind no Master or the Governor or Company a damn." He also began "sending to the Tents & collected Indian Wives at an unlawful hour at night...for unlawful

¹³¹HBCA, B.42/a/123, Churchill journal, 1796-97, 26 Oct. 1796, fo. 4d.; 9 Dec. 1796, fo. 6d.; 3 April 1797, fo. 9d.; B.42/a/124, Churchill journal, 1797-98, 24 Oct. 1797, fo. 5d.

¹³²HBCA, B.60/z/3, "Report of the Disobedience of Samuel Flaws, Laborer, at Moose Factory," 24 Aug. 1812 and 25 Aug. 1812, fos. 231-231d.

purposes." Laurence Robertson, the officer in charge, put up with Saunders's behaviour because he would be leaving, but found that his "sayings & examples" were influencing the other servants and the Indians. Saunders did not actually refuse to work until he was denied some powder and shot. "I am going off," he threatened, "I will see you McTavish Governor & Company at Hell, I dont mind the Company or their work...I'll work no more I'll obey no more orders I am intending to be off." Robertson told him he could go where he liked, but if he stayed, he had to obey orders and work. Saunders remained and, since it was Saturday night, the question of work did not arise again until Monday morning when Saunders would not get out of bed. Robertson threatened punishment if he did not work and Saunders replied, "I do not mind you or any master the Governor can go to hell I do not mind him he cannot kill men, he never did much good for me." Robertson left and returned a few hours later when he was able to persuade Saunders to go to work by promising he would not report his conduct if he obeyed. But, Saunders did not mend his ways. He tried to lead his fellows astray and even deliberately damaged the seed potatoes. When another servant chided him, Saunders replied, "That is the way I will work I will be nothing the better for doing the work well." After once more finding Saunders in bed after the others had gone to work, Robertson observed that if all the Oxford House servants were like him the place would be "in a fine Mess" and left. Unchagrined, Saunders followed Robertson outside, saying, "You the Oxford Servants & the Company's work, can go to hell I dont value any of you." Robertson told him to get to work and "give no insolence," to which Saunders replied, "Damn your soul to hell, say one word & I will come & Knock your bloody brains out." But Robertson only "reasoned" with him and Saunders returned to duty. By the following Saturday, however, he was up to his old tricks, quitting early in the morning and going to bed and calling the obedient servants "fools" when they returned to the house at the proper hour. After Saunders spent Monday sleeping on the pickets he was supposed to be pointing, Robertson ejected him from the post.¹³³

¹³³HBCA, B.239/c/4, Laurence Robertson to William Mactavish, 1 June 1847, fos. 12-14d.

At Fort Yukon in August of 1850 the man assigned to cook for the officers, having been "told times without number to Keep the dishes clean and sweep the Kitchen floor," in response to yet another demand that he tidy up the "abominable mess," did as he was told, but declared that he would cook no more. He also told A. H. Murray, the master of the fort, that, "as a clerk [he] had no right to have a cook & that all cooks had to receive £3 extra wages &c. &c." Murray, therefore, put him "to other and harder work" and on the following day appointed John Ewing, whom he considered "unfit for general work," to replace him. Ewing refused with "some very insolent language without the slightest provocation." When Murray reminded him that, if he disobeyed, his wages would be stopped and he would be put on half rations, Ewing told him he could not do so and he *would* have his regular rations. Ewing spent the day at leisure. The next morning, Murray appointed another cook and the man selected again rejected the assignment. Murray now discovered, although he did not record his source of information, that the three men's misbehaviour was an "arrangement amongst themselves" and that the first cook had instigated it. The issue was now rapidly settled, although nobody was punished. Ewing agreed to assume the culinary responsibilities on the following Monday.¹³⁴ In May of 1851, at Fort St. James, one of the men, having repeatedly disobeyed orders and been "generally backward & apparently not willing work," refused to reform and, after his officer "had some words" with him, he simply left.¹³⁵

As far as the London committee and its officers were concerned, of course, disobedience was disobedience. As contracted servants, HBC workers had no right to decide what they would or would not do. It was not their place to chose their posts, their officers, or their duties. The committee abhorred cruelty in its service, but could not allow the men to believe that they might take matters into their own hands, although their acceptance of George Simpson's

¹³⁴HBCA, B.240/a/4, Yukon journal, 1850-51, 28 Aug. 1850, fos. 8d.-9; 29 Aug. 1850, fo. 9; 31 Aug. 1850, fo. 9d.

¹³⁵HBCA, B.188/a/20, Fort St. James journal, 1846-51, 16 May 1851, fo. 137d.

judgement in the McLoughlin case and their failure to punish anyone for the murder suggests that it really preferred not to have to confront such an issue at all. It might also indicate, however, that it understood that even servants were not as deferential as they should have been. Certainly, by the 1840s it should have been clear enough that HBC workers were no more willing to endure bad treatment than any others. Though recruited from marginal, hierarchical societies, the men of the HBC were not particularly deferential and submissive. They negotiated not only the terms upon which they would enter the company but also the conditions under which they would remain. After all, they joined the service for their own benefit, which was not always best served by unquestioning obedience. Their loyalty was conditional. They engaged in private trade, shirked their duty if they did not feel like working, and rejected work that was too hard or too dangerous. That they moved from mere indifference to authority to the positive refusal of orders should not, therefore, be surprising. Paternalism might have emphasized that the duty of the lower orders was deference, but it also obligated the elite to protect those under it from the "impersonal assault" of economic and natural calamities. Paternalism was not imposed from the top, but depended on the "negotiated acceptance" of those at the bottom. Failure to carry out this obligation could result in "social, even overtly class, conflict."¹³⁶ There was plenty of room within this relationship to allow for defiance and independence that, to some extent, made each HBC servant a "lawyer," i.e., a man "who discusses the propriety of an order before he obeys it."¹³⁷

¹³⁶Bryan D. Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 42, 47.

¹³⁷HBCA, B.135/b/41, John Murphy to Thomas Vincent, 3 July 1821, p. 54.

CHAPTER 6

COMBINATION AND RESISTANCE

Thies comes to let you Knou our complent in Bad Wesage...the men all Decleares that ther is not wons Neam marked Hiear that will hever go allong with Robert Longmoar a day nor an ovr for him to be master for thear is nothing But Noking pipeal about and put to short alouns by His falt and not your Orders Sir When farder inqurie is mead you may Knou mor about it sir Morover ther is not a man in sefety that goes wher he is when Indens Comes for He was allwies Drunk sir you aer our master and to you we are mead our Complent first For Either he or Els won or all of us Never comes from the Factray for him to be master for we all wies thought that He Head mend but in pleas of Better it is wors¹

Thus fifteen of the 21 men of Hudson House, on the North Saskatchewan River demonstrated that paternalism was a double-edged sword. Although questioning neither the existence of hierarchy nor their subordinate rank within it, these servants were reminding their superiors that the price of submission was justice. They were expressing views consistent with what E. P. Thompson has called the "moral economy of the poor,"² in which all social relations were imbued with morality. They were not demanding a revolution. Indeed, a petition was a recognition of authority and a common means of seeking redress, which, even when followed by a riot or a mutiny, implied "a belief in the natural order of society protecting the interests of rich and poor alike."³ They were asking for fair treatment, which their employers certainly intended to provide, although, as always, their notion of what was fair did not necessarily accord with that of the petitioners. Nevertheless, the submission of such a letter conjured up the image of a "combination," a term commonly used to refer to what would later be called a strike. But it also

¹HBCA, A.11/116, Robert Davey, William Lewtit, Mitchell Oman, Magnus Twatt, Nicol Wishart, James Sandison, James Tate, Magnus Annal, Charles Isham, James Spence, Edward Wishart, Thomas Johnston, William Folster, Thomas Tate, and John Irvine to William Tomison, 23 May 1781, fo. 83.

²E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 50 (Feb. 1871): 79.

³See: David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 116-19; N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Glasgow: William Collins, Fontana Press, 1986), 229-235; G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobree, *Mutiny: The Floating Republic* (London: Century Hutchinson, The Cresset Library, 1935), 8-11.

implied illegality and subversion. Even before the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 prohibited all workers from attempting to improve wages and working conditions by striking, a number of such acts applied to workers in specified trades.⁴ A combination was a conspiracy, no matter how respectful the petition or just the cause.

The officers at York Factory were, thus in an awkward position. They did not want to encourage the servants' impudence, but Longmoor's presence could only hurt the business. Their solution was to replace him, conclude that the dispute was the result of "a misunderstanding" between Longmoor and his men, and declare their firm belief in his innocence.⁵ The servants probably interpreted this decision as a confirmation of their right to protest. Indeed, combinations were not uncommon in the HBC and they occurred everywhere in the service. Michael Payne has observed that "it would be unwise to make too much of" the "ability of company servants to organize themselves to protect their interests and to preserve a degree of autonomy" because "'Combinations' of servants and even individual resistance to orders were relatively rare." Moreover, the officers' belief that discipline was breaking down in the 1790s "owed more to the anxieties of the time than to any evidence that company employees planned to overturn established authority." The men of the HBC, he says, were not influenced by the ideals of the American and French revolutions and a large proportion of them found their employment "satisfactory enough" to re-engage. Nevertheless, it is equally unwise to make too little of the servants' ability to organize themselves to protect their interests. It is true that "there was little or no overt questioning of social distinctions" within the HBC, but the assumption, which he shares with other historians, that company servants might sometimes resist unfair treatment

⁴John Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850 (London; New York: Longman, 1986), 259.

⁵HBCA, A.11/116, Humphrey Marten and council to London committee, 1 Sept. 1781, fo. 92.

and "even" to organize "to press for higher wages and better living conditions" *in spite* of their acceptance of a hierarchy of ranks rests on Peter Laslett's faulty model of pre-industrial society.⁶

Combinations were explicit and forceful expressions of a desire for fair treatment which servants also demonstrated when they negotiated the terms of their employment and engaged in such behaviour as drunkenness, malingering, the rejection of bad officers, and the refusal to do as they were told. Although their aims were conservative, neither the men's ability to combine nor the challenge to authority which such action constituted should be underestimated. Even a petition could be an expression of insolence. The one the men of Osnaburgh House sent to John Hodgson in October of 1809 certainly was:

We are sorry to inform you, the situation of Mr Sutherland is very bad; it is ridiculous to see him; he drinks 'till he is not able to walk nor set, and there he lies on the Floor, which it is pitifull to see, and if it was not for his Wife he would set the place on Fire, never blows out his Candle, lies in Bed, and drinks 'till he looses his Senses entirely; Sunday morning, Beastly drunk, Cursing and Blasphemy, for every person, and for you Sir in particular.--The Company must be good indeed to him.⁷

The letter began respectfully enough, but its concluding sentence could be taken as a simple statement of wonder at the company's indulgence or as a sly dig at its wasteful negligence.

Pre-industrial workers did not possess the class-consciousness of nineteenth-century proletarians, but they did have a common outlook that enabled them to act together. They did not need the experience of factory work to tell them who they were or give them a basis for collective action. Paternalism may have, as Bryan Palmer has put it, "undermined the collectivity of the oppressed by linking them to their 'social superiors'",⁸ but it did not eliminate it. Moreover, HBC servants were organized in a way that made collective action possible, though

⁶Michael Payne, 'The Most Respectable Place in the Territory': Everyday Life in Hudson's Bay Company Service York Factory, 1788 to 1870 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1989), 61-62, 30.

⁷HBCA, B.3/b/46, George Budge, George Grot, and Samuel Harvey to John Hodgson, 8 Oct. 1809, fo. 9d.; John Hodgson to John Sutherland, 9 Jan. 1810, fo. 9d. Sutherland was relieved of his command.

⁸Bryan D. Palmer, Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 42.

on a small scale. They lived in groups and always outnumbered their officers with whom they had little in common and with whom they spent little time, unless the post was very small. It should, therefore, not be surprising that they were able to join with one another to bargain for higher wages or better provisions or resist what they considered unfair treatment. The addition of tripmen, sailors, and coal miners to the company's traditional workforce increased the likelihood of collective action by introducing men who brought their own bases for combination, but the goals of such action remained the same. Michael Payne's detailed study of York Factory and Churchill has led him to conclude that beginning in the 1780s wages and work responsibilities became the major issues over which conflicts erupted though the right to leave the service before the expiration of the contract remained a "source of friction." He also observed that the men resorted less to letters of protest, spontaneous rioting, or refusals to work, but adopted new tactics that required organization, "forethought," and collective action. Indeed, "individual manifestations of conflict and grievance" became rarer after 1800, perhaps, he suggests, because the officers were less willing to try to control their men. The servants were also more likely to justify their actions by invoking the provisions of their contracts rather than referring to custom and tradition and wages assumed increased importance as an issue.⁹ In other words, the servants' behaviour was becoming more "modern", engaging in collective bargaining over economic benefits in a capitalist system which they had come to accept. Actually, it is not so easy to see this transformation in the behaviour of HBC workers or even of workers in general.

Neither individual protest nor the refusal to obey orders or to work declined. Payne's observation that servants increasingly justified their actions by referring to their contracts rests on the company's dispute with the Norwegians over their duties and provisions. They did refer to their contracts when they made their complaints, but most servants did not. Likewise, the right to leave before one's contract expired was never important except in the case of the Norwegians

⁹Michael Payne, "Daily Life on Western Hudson Bay 1714 to 1870: A Social History of York Factory and Churchill." (Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 1989), 179-8, 192.

whose contracts had been incorrectly translated. Most conflicts over contracts occurred before men signed them when prospective recruits either refused to engage, refused to embark, or tried, often successfully, to negotiate special terms that were added to the standard contracts.¹⁰ Tradesmen occasionally insisted that they were not obliged to do anything but work at the crafts specified in their contracts.¹¹ Other servants sometimes refused to do as ordered on the grounds that they had made special agreements which exempted them from doing certain things or working at particular places.¹² By the 1860s newly arrived servants were refusing to go anywhere unless the company provided them with the provisions they believed their contracts guaranteed.¹³ But, the major issues over which battle was joined were wages and working conditions, but one should not assume that these concerns were signs of either modernity or tradition.

The humble members of pre-industrial society may have accepted their place, but they insisted that lowliness not be synonymous with destitution. The price of labour and of food had to be fair and determined by the worker's needs, not the laws of supply and demand, even in

¹⁰For example: HBCA, A.32/39, Contract of Johan Edvard Lønnman, 1860, fo. 13; A.32/43, Contract of Donald McLeod A, 1858, fos. 59-59d.; A.32/45, Contract of William Miller, 1869, fo. 139; A.32/51, Contract of John Rowland, 1863, fo. 353; A.32/55, Contract of Frederick Swedson, 1823, fo. 273.

¹¹See, for example: HBCA, A.11/118, John Charles to William Smith, 13 Sept. 1837, fo. 56d.; A.10/5, "The Memorial of Charles Marshall of No 5 Philpot Gt Commercial Road," 8 Nov. 1837, fo. 304-305; A.12/7, Simpson to W. S. Smith, 17 Mar. 1855, fos. 395-395d.; "Translated Copy of a Letter from six Norwegians Servants of the Hudson Bay Company to H W Crowe Esq dated Moosefactory Hudson's Bay Sept 10, 1854," fo. 521; B.154/c/1, James Anderson to George Barnston, 27 Nov. 1857, fo. 141d.; B.113/c/1, James Fitz Hams to James M. Yale, 22 Aug. 1858, fo. 133; B.239/k/3, Minutes of the Council of the Northern Department, 1851-70, 23 June. 1862, p. 239; A.6/38, London committee to A. G. Dallas and councils of the Northern and Southern Departments, 15 April 1863, fo. 74.

¹²See for example: HBCA, B.105/a/14, Lac la Pluie journal, 1829-30, 11 July 1829, fos. 8d.-9; B.145/b/2, John Murphy to Thomas Vincent, 27 Mar. 1818, p. 47.

¹³See, for example: HBCA, A.11/18, Samuel McKenzie to Thomas Fraser, 31 July 1864, fos. 451-451d.; B.239/c/11, William Sinclair to James R. Clare, 21 June 1860, fos. 388d.-389; B.239/c/16, J. W. Wilson to officers of the Northern Department, 1 Dec. 1865, fo. 106d.; A.67/8, Characters of Servants Retiring to Europe P. Ships, 1865, fos. 44-45.

the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Had they been more in tune with market forces, the men of Hudson House would have demanded higher wages in return for continued service under Robert Longmoor. Instead they asked for an officer who would exercise his authority in the proper manner. The fact that they appealed to Longmoor's superiors for redress suggests that they expected that paternalist sympathy which the elite traditionally showed for the lower orders. Murdo Macleod entertained that same expectation 76 years later when he blamed his sufferings in new Caledonia on "subordinates at a distance from the Seat of Government."¹⁵ Macleod might simply have been trying to ingratiate himself with the committee, but the fact that former servants submitted such petitions, when they probably knew that the officers would discredit them, suggests that they continued to operate according to traditional paternalistic ideals. These ideals tied servants to their employers, but they also provided a basis for protest when employers failed to fulfill their obligations. Still, the acceptance of paternalism did not mean that workers were entirely innocent and naïve in their dealings with their employers. As Glen Makahonuk has observed, about HBC servants, pre-industrial workers did possess "an understanding of the operation of the labour market."¹⁶ As a result, they tried to take advantage of the company's need for their services to extract higher wages, better provisions, and greater control over the conditions of their work. Moreover, these goals remained constant, but, contrary to Michael Payne's conclusions, wages did not remain one of the major causes of conflict. Provisions were

¹⁴See: E. J. Hobsbawm, "Custom, Wages, and Work-Load in Nineteenth-Century Industry," in Essays in Labour History, eds. Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: Macmillan & Co., 1960), 113-120; K. D. M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10-14.

¹⁵HBCA, A.67/1, Statement of Murdo Macleod, 26 Nov. 1857, fo. 397d. In 1859 J. C. Amesén, complaining that the company's board and lodging did not meet the standards of the time, declared that he was not complaining of the company. "No," he wrote, "I hope you do not understand me in that light." It was his belief that the company in London did not know what was "passing in their Territory in North America" and it was his "purpose to inform [them] of some it." And his request for compensation for his expenditures was "a Request, which is corresponding to all Rights of Law or Equity." (HBCA, A.11/46, J. C. Amesén to W. G. Smith, Sept. 1859, fo. 315)

¹⁶Glen Makahonuk, "Wage-labour in the Northwest Fur Trade Economy, 1760-1849," Saskatchewan History Vol. XLI, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 8.

far more important. Work responsibilities were, as Payne suggested, a significant cause of discord. But, all these must be seen as part of one overarching issue, namely, the question of fair treatment. Indeed, it was when that issue was clearly discernible that conflict was most severe.

The men's attempts to manipulate the labour market and impose wage increases bore the closest resemblance to so-called modern collective action. The men knew that, although the HBC preferred that new contracts be for five years and renewals for three, it had to agree to shorter terms or be short of men. When the servants tried to impose wage increases, they knew when to make their demands: when it was time to inform their officers whether they were going to renew their contracts and after their arrival at the Bay to meet the ships when their officers begged them to stay on because too few replacements had arrived. Their tactics were not always successful, of course. The Cumberland House men who combined to raise their wages from the normal £6 to £15 in 1777 were discharged.¹⁷ Still, though determined not to submit to such insolence, the London committee could not send home everyone who demanded higher wages, particularly during wartime when the army and navy were absorbing all available manpower. Thus, in 1779, most of the men whose times were up were able to negotiate pay increases and in 1780, the men of York Factory were able to force their officer to raise their wages or abandon all hope of sending anyone inland that year. Even then, faced with a general shortage of labour, he had to recruit some Indians to transport goods to Cumberland House, who, he complained, were "exceedingly exorbitant...in their demands."¹⁸ Clearly, the natives knew something about labour markets too.

Combinations became almost annual affairs. Officers reported them in 1787 and 1788. In 1791 Joseph Colen reported that the men had not only sworn an oath to hold out for higher wages, but had agreed to re-engage "for two years only" so that their contracts would all

¹⁷HBCA, A.6/12, London committee to Humphrey Marten, 13 May 1778, fo. 107d.

¹⁸HBCA, B.239/a/38, York Factory journal, 1779-80, 5-6 July 1780, fo. 38.

expire at the same time. They had confidence in their ability to carry out their plot because most of them were steersmen and, therefore, crucial to the company's inland operations.¹⁹ Indeed, competition with the NWC strengthened the servants' hands. In 1799 most of the steersmen ordered to Beaver River refused to go and the rest, recognizing a golden opportunity, demanded higher wages before they would proceed. These men were committing a breach of contract because their demands were not being made while negotiating their contracts, but after they had already signed. Eventually, six canoes and two boats were dispatched. The three ringleaders were sent to York Factory, where, their master hoped, they would be fined as an example to others, a particularly important consideration since Bird had discovered a "combination" not to go "higher" than Edmonton House. The council at York factory fined them £10 each, but the London committee reduced the penalty to £4 because, it declared, "excessive Punishments as well as too lenient ones have their Evils."²⁰ Such lenience did nothing to improve the situation. In 1800, combinations were reported at Martins Fall, York Factory, and Churchill.²¹ The following year, William Tomison reported that, when he tried to re-engage men for Cumberland House for three years at £10 for the first year and £12 for each of the last two, they "looked upon" him "with disdain" and said they would go home first. They insisted on £14. He refused to give in and ordered them to assist in getting the boats to Cumberland House and then return to York Factory. They, however, objected to this "imposition" and they refused to go without assurance that they would be back in time to catch the ship. Tomison told them it was up to

¹⁹HBCA, A.11/116, William Tomison to London committee, 16 July 1787, fo. 187; A.11/117, William Tomison to London committee, 10 July 1788, fo. 21d.; B.239/a/91, York Factory journal, 1790-91, 7 July 1791, fo. 28; 23 July 1791, fo. 31d.

²⁰HBCA, B.60/a/5, Edmonton House journal, 1799-1800, in Alice M. Johnson, ed., Saskatchewan Journals and Correspondence: Edmonton House, 1800-1902 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1967), 1 Aug. 1799, pp. 196-7; 3 Aug. 1799, p. 197; 5 Aug. 1799, p. 197; 6 Aug. 1799, pp. 197-199; 18 Aug. 1799, pp. 203-4; James Bird to Peter Fidler, 30 Aug. 1799, p. 206; fn. p. 204. B.239/b/63, James Bird to James Bird, 4 Aug. 1799, fos. 17-17d.

²¹HBCA, B.3/a/103, Fort Albany journal, 1799-1800, 9 July 1800; B.42/b/42, John Ballenden to Thomas Stayner, 4 Mar. 1800, pp. 19-22; Thomas Stayner to John Ballenden, 18 Mar. 1800, pp. 26-27.

"providence" and their own activity. Fifteen of them agreed to go, but only one accepted Tomison's terms to stay in the service, thus leaving him with too few men to undertake all the necessary errands.²²

In the spring of 1803, Peter Fidler found that none of the seven men he selected to man the new post on Lake Athabasca for the summer would agree to stay without higher wages. They had objected to going there in the first place because of the fish diet, the distances they had to travel, and the number of carrying places. Moreover, the previous year they had all renewed their engagements for only one year. Now they demanded wage increases and were willing to stay only for another year. Finally, only three held out for an increase and, rather than lose them, Fidler granted them an additional £2 each and asked the London committee, if his decision displeased it, to charge the sums to his account. Fidler already knew that he would have to pay for this increase if the committee did not approve it, since the officers had authorization only to "represent" to the committee "the qualifications" of those who expected or were considered worthy of advances in wages. But it alone decided whether such advances would be granted because it did not consider the officers knowledgeable enough about the price of provisions and labour to determine how much the servants should be paid. Officers who gave increases without the committee's approval would have to pay for them.²³ This measure had no effect on the servants and only made life more difficult for the officers. In 1804, John Hodgson, at Fort Albany, complained that none of the men would re-engage on "reasonable" terms because of the "fatigue" they suffered from "running after" the Indians and the hunger they endured if their fishing failed, while the "half-Breed or Creole" servants gave the "greatest trouble" because they believed that, as steersmen, they deserved higher wages than ordinary

²²HBCA, B.49/a/31, Cumberland House journal, 1801-2. William Tomison to John Ballenden, 18 July 1801, fos. 2-2d.; 8 Aug. 1801, fos. 5-5d.

²³HBCA, B.39/a/1 Fort Chipewyan journal, 1802-03, 7 Aug. 1802, fo. 1; 16 Mar. 1803, fo. 24; B.123/a/4, Martins Fall journal, 1797-98. "Extract from General Letter," 31 May 1797, fo. 18; B.42/b44, London committee to council at Churchill, 31 May 1799, fos. 68-68d.

labourers.²⁴ By 1805, the situation had become critical. A combination of current servants and retired servants, friends, and relatives in the Orkneys was plotting to prevent the company from acquiring a supply of men until the wages of those in the service were increased.²⁵ The extent or effect of this conspiracy can not be determined from information available in the HBC's records, but, no doubt, the London committee hoped to be immune to such machinations after the "Retrenching System" introduced in 1810 had had the proper effect. But, this was not to be.

Retrenchment did not succeed in replacing old demanding servants with new submissive ones. Continuing competition along with the failure of the company's new recruitment policy left the servants in as strong a position as ever. In 1811 letters from the Orkneys apparently led to such dissatisfaction among the inland servants belonging to Churchill that they insisted on "extravagant" wage increases. Even when William Auld sought to "divest" them "of the prejudice which had been planted among them," they continued to insist on high wages, although all but three eventually agreed to Auld's terms.²⁶ In 1816, the destruction of the Red River Settlement aggravated the labour problem by making everyone "disgusted with the Country altogether." With so many determined to leave, some of those who stayed shrewdly "set a higher value on their services" and "extraordinary Wages" had to be given or some posts would have had to be abandoned. James Bird suggested that the solution lay in sending out 150 men as soon as possible on five year contracts. The current practice of hiring only the same number of servants as were leaving and on three year contracts meant that experienced steersmen and bowsmen were always in demand and these had it in their power to set the price of their services.²⁷ In 1818 John Lewis was forced to re-engage men at "uncommon high wages"

²⁴HBCA, B.3/a/106, Fort Albany journal, 1803-04, 5 Sept. 1803, fo. 1; 18 July 1804, fo. 43d.-44.

²⁵HBCA, B.123/a/10, Martins Fall journal, 1805-06. Letter from John Hodgson, 11 Sept. 1805, fos. 1d.-2d.

²⁶HBCA, B.42/a/136^b, Churchill journal, 1811, 5-8 July 1811, fos. 6d.-7d.

²⁷HBCA, B.60/a/15, Fort Edmonton journal, 1815-16, 1 Aug. 1816, fos. 49-49d.

or do without.²⁸ In 1820, at Fort St. Mary's most of the men whose contracts were expiring that year were "keeping aloof" in the hope that "necessity" would lead to the officers "to acquiesce in their extravagant demands" when the Canadian winterers failed to arrive.²⁹ At Churchill, James Bird, acting as governor, authorized high wages to persuade some servants to re-engage.³⁰

George Simpson, re-engaging servants in Montreal in the summer of 1820, thought they were able to exact "exorbitant Wages" because they could "take advantage of their market" and the company's need for their service and naïvely urged that servants be re-engaged inland.³¹ His was clearly the voice of inexperience. The men inland were quite as able to "take advantage of their market" and years of success had, as Francis Heron observed in his report on the Edmonton District for the outfit 1820-21, had made them "overvalue their services" and rendered them "disinterested and refractory." Unless the men who wished to go home that year be allowed to do so, he warned, there would "be no managing of them" because they thought the scarcity of men made their presence vital. The men whose contracts were now expiring had entered into a combination not to re-engage unless they got even more "enormous" wage increases than the year before.³² Simpson was to discover for himself how he had misjudged the situation when, at the end of his first year in the service, he found that the Peace River men would not renew their contracts without huge raises because "their late sufferings" had apparently "sickened them of the country."³³ The merger of 1821 promised to put an end to this problem once and for all, though Canadian resistance prevented the immediate reduction of

²⁸HBCA, B.118/a/2, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1818-19, 30 June-1 July 1818, fo. 5.

²⁹HBCA, D.1/13, Colin Robertson to Williams, 16 Feb. 1820, fos. 21-21d.

³⁰HBCA, B.42/a/145, Churchill journal, 1819-20, 1 July 1820, p. 7.

³¹E. E. Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, and Report (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1938), 1-2.

³²HBCA, B.60/e/4, Fort Edmonton report, 1820-21, fos. 2d.-3.

³³Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, 18 May 1821, p. 340.

wages.³⁴ In 1830 the men of the Sault Ste. Marie district demanded increases ranging from £8 to £13 and when they did not get them, they departed, leaving John McBean without servants to man La Cloche.³⁵ Such combinations became rare, however. Conflict over wages between the HBC and its servants now tended to occur outside the service, at the point of recruitment, when men expressed their desire for better wages by going to work for someone else. Once in the service, men acted together to ensure fair treatment.

One of the most contentious issues was, and always had been, provisions. HBC men, like armies, traveled on their stomachs, a situation that prompted Donald Mackay to complain to Edward Jarvis, "You know Sir the custom of the men, if their Belly is not full they can do nothing."³⁶ Indeed, collective action was sometimes collective grumbling about the quality or quantity of provisions.³⁷ Nor did the men limit themselves to "murmuring and disagreeable mopings"³⁸ Sometimes they refused to accept the food their officers served out either because it was something they disliked, such as potatoes or fish, or it was of such poor quality that they

³⁴HBCA, D.1/10, William Williams to London committee, 10 Sept. 1823, fo. 11d.

³⁵HBCA, B.109/a/4, La Cloche journal, 1830-31. John McBean to George Simpson, 8 Sept. 1830, n.p.

³⁶HBCA, B.3/b/28, Donald Mackay to Edward Jarvis, 4 April 1791, fo. 33.

³⁷See, for example: HBCA, B.59/a/78, Eastmain journal, 1800-01, 11 Oct. 1800, fos. 2d.-3; B.105/a/5, Lac la Pluie journal, 1817-18, 30 Mar. 1818, fo. 19; B.113/c/1, James Douglas to J. M. Yale, 27 June 1850, fos. 12d.-13; B.115/a/3, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1819-20, B.132/c/1, William Gladman to Joseph LaRoque, 8 Mar. 1830, fo. 9d.; B.135/a/84, Moose Factory journal, 1796-7, 11 Feb. 1797, fo. 16, 25 Feb. 1797, fo. 17d.; B.135/b/25, H. Moze to J. Thomas, 10 Apr. 1800, fo. 61d.; B.135/b/26, R. Good to J. Thomas, 11 Jul. 1802, fo. 83; B.159/a/2, Fort Pelly journal, 1795-6, 12 Oct. 1795, fo. 5; B.166/a/1, Portage de L'Ile journal, 1793-94, 20 Apr. 1793, fo. 1d., 26 Oct. 1793, fo. 8, 21 Feb. 1794, fo. 15d.; B.198/a/122, Fort Severn journal, 1869-71, 7 June 1869, fo. 1d.; B.227/a/1, Waswanipi journal, 1820-21, John Walford to Richard Hardisty, 16 Oct. 1820, fos. 9d.-10; B.239/a/67, York Factory journal, 1772-73, 27 May 1773, fo. 39d.; B.239/a/90, York Factory journal, 1789-90, 16 Oct. 1789, fo. 7d.; 18 Feb. 1790, fo. 23d.; 14 Mar. 1790, fos. 27d.-28; B.239/a/104, York Factory journal, 30 June 1800, fo. 46; B.239/a/105, York Factory journal, 1800-01, 7 Mar. 1801, fo. 32; B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to George Simpson, 26 May 1858, fo. 91; B.239/c/2, Thomas Spence to "James Halgrieve", 2 Mar. 1835, fo. 98. (Spence, in charge of the sawing tent, also had to put up with the sawyers' grumbling about the "howers" he made them work.)

³⁸HBCA, B.3/a/101, Fort Albany journal, 4 July 1798, fo. 38.

considered it inedible.³⁹ Officers found such occasions trying, but they were not always unsympathetic. In 1789, Joseph Colen, at York Factory, faced with a scarcity of provisions and recognizing that "examples are far beyond precepts when driven to extremities," reduced his own rations after Christmas "in order to prevent murmurs."⁴⁰ In 1802, William Tomison commented that experience had taught him that "if their[sic] be anything bad at York its[sic] good enough for the Inlanders." The cheese and bacon he had received there were so bad they had put him off these victuals altogether and his inspection of the oatmeal at York Factory had confirmed the servants' charges that it was nothing but husks. When he informed the chief of the state of the meal, he was told not to complain because he "was not served with such." Tomison replied that since he was "a fellow servant and working as they did" his "wish was that they should be served with as good provisions" as he had. Otherwise, he asked, "how could I expect they would obey my orders in taking care of the Company's property?"⁴¹ This was also the servants' view.

In August of 1819 the men of Lesser Slave Lake, weak from hunger, apologized for raising the subject, but asked William Smith, their master, either to show them how they were supposed to survive there or allow them to go where they could subsist. Ten days later Smith sent three of them to Lac La Biche and at the end of the month he followed with the remaining three men.⁴² In 1830, at Fort Halkett, on the Liard River, John Hutchinson put his men on half-allowance and equipped them with rabbit and cat snares so that they could fend for themselves. They had been almost reduced to "absolute want," there was no prospect of getting any provisions, and there was not enough firewood. Under these circumstances, Hutchinson decided

³⁹See, for example: HBCA, B.59/a/79, Eastmain journal, 1801-02, 27 Feb. 1802, fo. 14; B.135/a/95, Moose Factory journal, 1807-08, 17 Oct. 1807, fo. 2d.; B.135/a/100, Moose Factory journal, 1811-12, 19 Oct. 1811, fo. 3, 2-3 Dec. 1811, fos. 7d.-8; 25 Apr. 1812, fo. 21d.; B.235/a/3, Winnipeg journal, 1814-15, 8 Aug. 1814, fo. 2; 9 Aug. 1814, fo. 2.

⁴⁰HBCA, B.42/b/32, Joseph Colen to Churchill, 12 April 1790, fo. 4d.

⁴¹HBCA, B.49/a/31, Cumberland House journal, 1801-02, 12 Nov. 1802, fos. 14d.-15.

⁴²HBCA, B.115/a/3, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 10 Aug. 1819, fo. 4d.; 20 Aug. 1819, fo. 5; 30 Aug. 1819, fo. 5.

he would "exact no duty" from his men.⁴³ In March of 1841 James Hargrave was sympathetic to complaints about the paucity of some of the men's rations and was prepared to authorize an increase as long as the men genuinely needed them. If they were really only after provisions to give to Indian women or to trade with the natives, they would be charged for whatever they had received.⁴⁴ In August of 1867 some men from the Portage La Loche brigades asked William L. Hardisty to request that they be allowed some warm clothing over and above their wages because if winter set in before they got home, they would need protection from the cold. Hardisty was sympathetic because they were setting off so late and he recommended that their wishes "be favorably considered."⁴⁵ In November of 1867 Robert Campbell was concerned that the company's determination to prevent the servants' becoming indebted had resulted in unreasonable deprivation. Because servants were not permitted advances in excess of two thirds of their wages, their orders, particularly those of the inland men, had been reduced "so indiscriminately" the past season that most of them were "far short of their requirements for winter" and had to be supplied out of the trade goods. The situation had caused expense and "much discontent."⁴⁶ The men did not, however, limit themselves to respectful entreaties.

In September of 1780, as their officers were closing the packet at Fort Albany, the men assembled to demand something to make up for their short allowance of flour. Only one of them threatened to "deny Duty," however, and he was immediately discharged. The others went back to work.⁴⁷ In July of 1790, some of the men at Gloucester House, ordered to take cargo to Osnaburgh House, refused to go until they received some cloth and duffel they claimed had been promised to them. Without orders to this effect, the officer in charge declined to comply

⁴³HBCA, B.85/a/2, Fort Halkett journal, 1830-31, 28 Dec. 1830, fo. 12.

⁴⁴HBCA, B.239/b/93, James Hargrave to John Cromartie, 16 Mar. 1841, fo. 81.

⁴⁵HBCA, B.239/c/17, W. L. Hardisty to J. W. Wilson, 18 Aug. 1867, fos. 199-199d.

⁴⁶HBCA, B.239/c/17, Robert Campbell to J. W. Wilson, 11 Nov. 1867, fo. 221d.

⁴⁷HBCA, B.3/a/78, Fort Albany journal, 1780-81, 15 Sept. 1780, fo. 2.

with "this Insolent demand" but had to promise them that if they went, they would be get those items. Even then he was "obliged to Correct some of them before they would Go out of the House."⁴⁸ In April of 1796, at Carlton House, the men returned their ration of fish because it was unaccompanied by fat and the following day refused to work until they received it. But, their tactics failed and they returned to duty on the third day.⁴⁹ In December of 1796, the master of Brandon House tried to adopt the standard of allowances laid out for the inland posts belonging to York Factory. The men refused to accept this reduction in their meat rations and were prepared to withdraw their labour until the old standard was restored, forcing James Sutherland to abandon his plan.⁵⁰ In October of 1799, Peter Fidler, on the expedition that resulted in the establishment of Greenwich House on Lac La Biche, wanted to follow a group of Canadians to the mouth of the Lesser Slave River, but he had no provisions for such an undertaking and his men refused to go. Indeed, he complained, "of late they have become nearly their own Masters" and unless steps were taken to cut them down to size the company's business would suffer. The men "nearly already" would go only where they thought "Proper", namely, the Saskatchewan River. They would not go where they had to live on fish.⁵¹ In August of 1804, the Brandon House men refused to work until they received meat.⁵² In August of 1808 the crew of the grass boats at Moose Factory refused to set off until they received flour as part of their provisions.⁵³ In April of 1812, the men at Brandon House demanded fat to eat with their meat and refused to work until they got it, complaining that they were "used worse than Slaves" and that "it was not

⁴⁸HBCA, B.78/a/19, Gloucester House journal, 11 July 1790, fo. 29d.

⁴⁹HBCA, B.23/a/1, Carlton House journal, 1795-6, 28-30 April, fo. 25d.

⁵⁰HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1797-7, 6 Dec. 1796, fo. 22d.

⁵¹HBCA, B.104/a/1, Lac La Biche journal, 1799-1800, 6 Oct. 1799, fo. 15.

⁵²HBCA, B.22/a/12, Brandon House journal, 2 Aug. 1804, fo. 3.

⁵³HBCA, B.135/a/97, Moose Factory journal, 1808-09, 28 Aug. 1808, fo. 26d.

the company's orders." Their master agreed to give them fat, but insisted that they would have to pay for it. Most of the men agreed to do so.⁵⁴

In the fall of 1815, the company's ships, *Eddystone* and *Hadlow* were trapped in Hudson's Bay, thereby adding the seamen and the departing servants to the complement of men to be supported in the country. The returned passengers were divided among the Bayside posts and maintained as best as the meagre resources of the country would allow. The ships' crews were kept together on Charlton Island under deplorable conditions, confined for most of the day in a house that was much too small, without exercise or the opportunity to clean themselves or their dwelling. Dirtiness and inactivity being considered the primary causes of scurvy, Thomas Vincent, the governor of the Southern Department, was not surprised that the disease "soon began its dreadful ravages." The surgeons did what they could, but, Vincent complained, none of the ships' officers tried to force the men to take the advice offered and their "want of Energy and firmness" resulted in the deaths of twelve sailors. But the seamen's insubordination ensured that they received little sympathy. In November they took matters into their own hands and instituted their own biscuit ration of four pounds a week. In January, their officers reduced it to three and the men's objections prompted James Russell, the master of *Eastmain*, to order the captains to use arms if necessary if the men tried to take anything by force. Russell considered them "a reprobate refractory set" who did "not deserve any pity than what extends to humanity." Fortunately, no confrontation ensued.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, the detention of the *Emerald* and *Prince of Wales* that fall led to an even worse situation because the posts' resources had been exhausted.

⁵⁴HBCA, B.22/a/18^b, Brandon House, 1812-12, 16 Apr. 1812, fos. 14-14d.

⁵⁵HBCA, B.59/a/94, *Eastmain* journal, 1815-16, 22 Oct. 1815, fo. 12d.; 31 Sept. 1815, fos. 13d.-14; 8 Nov. 1815, fos. 16-16d.; 12 Jan. 1816, fo. 21d.; 13 Jan. 1816, fo. 22; 21 Jan. 1816, fo. 22d.; 25 Jan. 1816, fos. 23-23d.; 28 Jan. 1816, fos. 23d.-24; 3 Feb. 1816, fo. 24d; 16 Feb. 1816, fo. 26; 6 April 1816, fo. 30d.; V.59/e/3, *Eastmain* Report, 1815-16, 18 Jan. 1816, fo. 1d.; B.145/b/1, Thomas Vincent to Lord Selkirk, 22 Oct. 1816, p. 8.

At Eastmain, the arrival of forty returned passengers led the people of Eastmain to "put on a look of Despair" and by January the men had had enough. They could not, they complained, do their work on the four barrels of flour a week and a piece of pork for ten days. They also thought it unfair that the servants at other Bayside posts received better provisions and they had been forced to work harder than the men at other posts the previous year. Russell admitted that they had indeed worked particularly hard. Some of them had made 21 trips to the ships, hauling loaded sledges. Because of their "irreproachable good behaviour on all occasions" since his arrival there, Russell granted them a half pint of flour per day with their half allowance of meat. At Fort Albany, trouble erupted among the returned passengers. With the addition of 31 people from the ships, there were 67 people at the post. Jacob Corrigan sent 29 passengers to Capusco to support themselves by hunting geese in the marsh. Geese were few and far between and the rations so meagre that the men threatened all winter to return to the fort and take food by force, but it was not until April that their discontentment reached critical proportions. Corrigan, therefore, summoned everyone but the sick to the factory and sent John Cromartie and William Saunders with flour and beef for those starving at the goose tent. The day after the two men left they encountered the people returning to Fort Albany, gave them the supplies to take back to Capusco, and headed back to Albany for more provisions. When Cromartie and Saunders came to where they had left their earlier load, they found that all the men were still there and that they had eaten everything but two pieces of beef, which they consumed that night. Grain was sent off to Capusco the next morning. Shared suffering had clearly not bred solidarity. Meanwhile, the sailors aboard the *Prince of Wales* were also showing signs of discontent.

In April, they complained to Captain Hanwell that they could not "exist" on three pieces of meat and eighteen pounds of flour a week for five men. Hanwell, who had been ordered by Joseph Beioley to share his stock of meat with the posts, appealed to Eastmain for some geese and explained his disobedience of Beioley's order by declaring that the sailors would

mutiny if they saw provisions being sent away. Russell was not convinced and he remarked that Hanwell cared only for those under his immediate command and lived "in Luxury and Affluence" while others starved. However, the captain of the *Emerald* reported that he too had been forced to increase his crew's weekly allowance. Serious trouble finally erupted on 19 August when the men of the *Prince of Wales* refused to weigh anchor. The next day they went to Moose Factory to demand more provisions for the voyage home, declaring themselves to be in a "State of Mutiny." But, the officers had seen them coming and closed the gate. Some hours later seven of the seamen took a letter to Hanwell and four came back with a letter from Hanwell asking for provisions, which were delivered into the charge of his gunner. A few hours later all the sailors returned to the ship.⁵⁶

In March of 1816, the sawyers and wooders belonging to Great Whale River, on the east coast of Hudson Bay, came from home from their labours and presented their master, Thomas Alder, with a petition. They had not received their usual allowances during the past week and complained that they were not fed enough to work on. They, therefore, requested the usual allowance of half a pint of oatmeal per day per man or flour instead. The petition itself has not survived and Alder did not copy it into his journal. Therefore, one must take his word that the letter suggested that Alder's compliance would "preserve tranquillity" while his refusal would "breed discontent." Alder could not comply, however, because the stocks of flour and oatmeal were too low and the men appear to have dropped the issue, though only temporarily. In April they complained again that their allowances were inadequate. This time Alder was able to give each man two pounds of flour to make up for the bad meat and lack of oatmeal and continued to augment their rations with an extra pound of flour a week. Great Whale River was a bad place

⁵⁶HBCA, B.59/a/96, Eastmain journal, 1816-17, 23 Oct. 1816, fo. 11d.; 25 Jan. 1817, fos. 25d.-26; 29 April 1817, fos. 43-44; B.3/a/120, Fort Albany journal, 1816-17, Jacob Corrigan to Joseph Beioley, 16 Nov. 1816, fos. 9-9d.; 20 Nov. 1816, fo. 10; 5 Dec. 1816, fo. 12; Mark Prince to Jacob Corrigan, 20 April 1817, fo. 30d. 18 May 1817, fos. 34-34d.; B.135/a/113^a, Moose Factory journal, 1816-17, 29 Oct. 1816, fo. 15; B.135/a/116, Moose Factory journal, 1817-18, 19 Aug. 1817, fo. 11d.; 20 Aug. 1817, fo. 12

for provisions and almost no fresh food was available over the winter. The men had to subsist on flour, oatmeal, and preserved meat, which they and Alder considered inedible, with exceedingly rare additions of fresh fish. This diet took its toll and in July scurvy appeared, with two men badly afflicted. One of them was unable to get out of bed and his legs were so swollen his clothes had to be cut open so that they could be removed. Another man was suffering severe pain in his legs and his teeth were all loose. Fortunately, two Indians brought fish and fresh venison, which appear to have saved the day.⁵⁷

When John Lewes arrived at Lesser Slave Lake on 3 June 1818 he learned that the men, dissatisfied with the rations, had taken a bag of pemmican by force and consumed it. The next day, when Lewes ordered the men to put the canoes into the water and load them in readiness for proceeding to Cumberland House, they refused "in one Voice" unless he gave them more provisions. They insisted on two bags of pemmican per canoe instead of the one which Lewes had provided and threatened to go elsewhere if their demand was not met. Lewes spoke to them about their disobedience, but they said they did not care and remained firm. Lewes gave in, but told them he was going to report their misbehaviour to the governor. The men said they did not care and, moreover, "were not going to pay for Provisions to work down the Companys Craft."⁵⁸ In 1820 the men destined for the Peace River District were "mutinous" because their allowances were so meagre and even George Simpson thought it necessary to submit to their misconduct and "try to coax them" into a better mood. When, however, "a ringleader" refused to go off to his post, Simpson decided that he could not risk the consequences of permitting "flagrant misconduct." He, therefore, gave one of the officers "a hint" and he gave the culprit "a shaking he is not likely to forget", dragged him into the canoe, and fined him 300 *livres*. But the men of the district did not cease their grumbling because there

⁵⁷HBCA, B.372/a/3, Great Whale River journal, 1815-16, 9 Mar. 1816, fos. 12-12d.; 19-20 Apr. 1816, fo. 15d.; 29 June 1816, fo. 20d.; 5 July 1816, fos. 22d.-23.

⁵⁸HBCA, B.115/a/2, Lesser Slave Lake journal, 1818-19, 3-4 June 1818, fos. 3-3d.

were almost no provisions at Fort Chipewyan and the fishery was a failure.⁵⁹ In February of 1821, the men of Carlton House on the Saskatchewan River refused to work because they received no fat with their meat and J. P. Pruden sent them off to the hunting tent in frustration.⁶⁰

In 1831 four men belonging the Montreal Department abandoned their officer while traveling because, they said, he half starved them.⁶¹ In June of 1850 a party of men encamped at Lac La Pluie refused to proceed if they had to continue living on dried sturgeon, which they said weakened them. A promise of sugar and grease to eat with the fish persuaded them to continue and left them in a humour good enough to survive even the consequences of a feast of wild strawberries a few days later.⁶² In 1852 most of the men at Fort Simpson plotted to "strike work" if their allowances were not doubled, but one of the men not involved informed the master, who "made preparations," perhaps for the application of corporal punishment, which apparently "intimidated" the conspirators sufficiently to stop them carrying out their plans.⁶³ In July of 1853, eleven of the men demanded more salt pork and flour, threatening to appeal the captain of the H.M.S. *Virago* currently undergoing repairs on the beach. The officers consulted the captain himself and followed his advice to give additional rations.⁶⁴ At Fort Alexandria in November of 1860 the men objected to eating a dead horse and refused to work until they had received a full ration of flour, which was in short supply. Their master told them to suit themselves and when a new stock of flour arrived he punished the men who had not worked by giving them half

⁵⁹Rich, ed., Journal of Occurrences in the Athabaska Department by George Simpson, 1820-21, 27 Sept. 1820, p. 60; 29 Sept. 1820, p. 6; Simpson to William Williams, 30 Nov. 1820, pp. 119-20.

⁶⁰HBCA, B.27/a/10, Carlton House journal, 1820-21, 26 Feb. 1821, fo. 22d.

⁶¹HBCA, B.134/c/9, Montreal correspondence inward, 1830-31. C. Cumming to James Keith, 12 Jan. 1831, fo. 24.

⁶²HBCA, E.37/1, Chief Factory James Anderson (a) Papers - journey, 1850, 25 June - 2 July 1850, fos. 8-8d.

⁶³HBCA, B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-53, 20 Nov. 1852, fo. 42.

⁶⁴HBCA, B.201/a/7, Fort Simpson journal, 1852-53, 4 July 1853, fos. 74d.-75.

rations.⁶⁵ In 1862 the men at Fort Edmonton went "on strike" as appeared "to be the Custom" when they could not be supplied with full rations.⁶⁶ Being properly fed was vital if the men were to survive their stint in the service, but ensuring that they were well provisioned was also an obligation that they expected their employer to fulfill as part of the bargain they had made when they engaged. When men complained about the insufficiency or poor quality of their rations, they were also complaining about the failure of their masters to keep their promises. The most serious disorders, therefore, arose out of situations when men believed themselves so unjustly treated that they mutinied.

These occasions were rare but exceedingly disturbing because, unlike ordinary strikes, they were rebellions. The first such incident occurred at Brandon House in the spring of 1811 after the introduction of the "Retrenching System," which raised the prices of goods purchased by the servants. At Brandon House the combination of higher prices and the arrival of Hugh Heney, formerly in the Canadian service, to succeed John Mackay in the fall of 1810 proved explosive, although William Auld blamed the mutiny on Archibald Mason, "the Rascal" who had "stimulated & directed the brutal men there to disobedience, insolence & mutiny."⁶⁷ But, problems began even before Heney got to Brandon House. On 30 Oct. 1810, as ordered, Thomas Mason met Heney near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers with horses and carts to transport him and his belongings to Brandon House. Heney wanted Mason to wait there for William Auld, but Mason said he could not stay since he had neither the provisions nor the clothes for such a sojourn. Heney claimed later that he had ordered that Mason be equipped with fifteen days worth of supplies. That these had not been provided might, therefore, explain Heney's angry dismissal of Mason from the service, but he insisted that, since he had brought the horses, he would take them back again. According to Mason, Heney then armed himself with

⁶⁵HBCA, B.5/a/10, Fort Alexandria journal, 1858-60, 18-19 Nov. 1858, fos. 46d.-47.

⁶⁶HBCA, A.12/43, A. G. Dallas to London committee, 18 Oct. 1862, fo. 27d.

⁶⁷HBCA, B.42/a/136^a, "Mr Aulds Memorandum Book," 1810-11, fo. 31.

pistols and they all set off for Brandon House. A few days after Heney's arrival, the men threatened to stop work until the price of slops was reduced to the old scale. Heney replied that anyone who refused duty would receive no victuals and could take to the plains to support himself. The men pointed out that they were not refusing duty, that they were simply asking for the old prices, which Heney finally allowed on goods they had purchased before he got there. Relations between Heney and the men did not improve. William Yorston reported that Heney "imposed on" the men, "put extravagant prices on all goods & went amongst them always with his arms on, which they were not accustomed to." Moreover, he never spoke to them, although he must have done so at least once, since he called the men "Orkney Hogs." It was not until 24 February 1811, however, that the crisis occurred.

Heney, of course, depicted himself as the innocent victim of unscrupulous villains. He testified that he had just returned from Pembina with Archibald Mason to find that Yorston, whom he had left in charge, had disobeyed orders not to sell the men anything from the warehouse. He, therefore, took the keys from Yorston who departed with angry words. Mason, who appears to have been hired for his knowledge of agriculture but not assigned any particular occupation, then set about turning all the men against Heney by masquerading as an agent of the London committee sent to spy on the officers. On the evening of the 24 February, Mason invited Heney to join him and two other gentlemen for a friendly drink. Heney accepted and the conversation soon turned to the men's misbehaviour and then to William Yorston, whom Mason defended. Suddenly, Mason jumped up, opened the door, and challenged Heney who took him by the arm and turned him out of the room, whereupon Mason ran down the stairs, calling for help. When Heney went to investigate, one of his drinking companions and another man urged him to return to his room. Heney told them that, unless they chose to support him, they should "Hold their tongues" and he threatened to blow out the brains of the first man who got in his way. He then went to his room, but left shortly after in search of Mason, coming eventually upon the men gathered in "a grand Council." They told him Mason was asleep, then they "jumped" on

him, disarmed him, abused him, took his keys, robbed his room, and finally released him. He fled to some nearby freemen's tents and then headed for Pembina when he learned that the mutineers intended to go there. But they arrived first, turned everyone against him, and took his gun, though not without a struggle. Mason then heaped "vulgar" abuse on Heney, the London committee, and the company's officers and Heney approached him, intending to knock him down. Realizing that he was outnumbered, however, he changed his mind. The mob then left, though three of them returned to guard him all night. The next day Heney confronted Mason before all the men, calling him an impostor and them "a set of fools" for believing him when he had shown them no proof of his authority. He grabbed Mason's lapels, but the men made him withdraw.

According to the servants, both Heney and Mason were drunk the night of 24 February, they quarreled, and Heney, armed with pistols and a cutlass, searched the men's houses for Mason. The men then disarmed him and Archibald Mason, declaring himself an agent of the company, took Heney's keys, but William Yorston took command the next morning. The men who raced Heney to Pembina, were, according to John Isbister, going to make sure that Heney did not avenge himself on the men there with the old gun he had gotten from a Canadian. Some of the others said the party had gone to Pembina to fetch two kegs of salt. Mason and Yorston, however, sent a letter to Pembina, in which they reported that Heney was up to "some curious Capers...with regard to Prices of Goods, &c." and that he had gotten drunk to lift his spirits after the failure of his plan to marry the late John Mackay's daughter in order to get his hands on the deceased's money for the purpose of which he had sent off his "Wedded Wife." They wanted Heney seized and held so that he could be taken to London. When he arrived, Heney refused to surrender his gun and claimed that he had come to overhaul the warehouse. In the ensuing quarrel, Mason did, indeed, hurl abuse at Heney, declaring that he would make him go "in his Indian Coat & Britch Cloath as he had done before at the Rocky Mountains." Heney said, "you Cannot prove that" to which Mason replied, "I can and plenty more." When

Heney referred to the London committee and the rest of the company, Mason retorted that "they were a "parcel of Damnd Raskals together" and "that the Company was aparcel[sic] of Jack Asses for agreeing such Damnd Raskals." He continued in the same manner until Heney could take no more, asked for a place to sleep, and left the room. The next few days were peaceful, but on 9 March Heney demanded to know the basis of Mason's authority, to which Mason replied, "what the Devel is Your Business you damnd Scavenger" and "so on." Heney then struck Mason once and the men from Brandon House grabbed Heney and told him he would not strike Mason. Heney and the men then talked for short time, though the deponent, William Plowman gave no details, and then Heney left the room. Later he found refuge among some Canadians.

Whichever version of the mutiny is the more accurate, the fact remains that Heney had been overthrown. When William Kennedy arrived on 13 May to escort the men to York Factory where they were to answer Heney's charges, William Yorston was master. Yorston had the men in the palm of his hand and they would pay no attention to Kennedy, but Yorston would not cooperate because Kennedy had hurt his feelings by not presenting him with the company's papers. Yorston declared "that he was looked upon as nobody," but that he would answer to the HBC alone, that no man in the country was his master, and that he would go to Fort Albany. He changed his mind, however, and assured Kennedy that the men would go wherever they were ordered, although four of them had to go to Albany to act as witnesses for Mason. He was himself willing to go, but preferred to stay inland. Kennedy, therefore, got three boat crews organized to go to York Factory, but the mutiny was not by any means over. Kennedy tried flattery, telling them he was "glad to see them so far come to a sense of their duty" and would "interest" himself on their behalf. But, George Henderson, a labourer, spoke for all of the men, declaring that they would answer for themselves. They also insisted that they would go to York Factory on the condition that they received the same allowances as at Fort Albany and would return to Brandon House. They also vowed that they would never serve under Heney again.

Kennedy replied that it was only his superiors who could grant their requests. He was finally able to get off on 23 June and arrived at Red River five days later. Heney arrived on 5 July.

William Auld expressed surprise that any HBC servants "should take upon themselves to act without any authority from their superiors or to resist the orders of those appointed by the Honble Committee themselves" and concern that Orcadians, "hitherto so remarkable for propriety of conduct & faithfull obedience to whosoever was placed over them," would participate in such a shocking affair. He had also heard that Archibald Mason had misrepresented himself to the servants and told them that the increase in prices was the "fabrication" of Auld, Heney, and Thomas Vincent. Still, the men had acted "in direct opposition to their own solemn engagements by which they bound themselves to obey all orders from their Chief Factor and from such Officers as he shall appoint to direct them." As "faithful Servants" they should have "quietly and obediently submitted to" Heney's commands for the duration of their contracts or at least for a year, after which they would "have it in their power to state their grievances if they had any in a becoming manner to the Chief." The men must be "convinced," Auld wrote to Yorston, "that to reject or even hesitate to accept for their Master such person or persons as the Chief appoints must be productive of the most awful consequences for which yourselves will have to answer in this world as well as the next."⁶⁸ Auld should not really have been so surprised. William Yorston and the men of the Red River District had already demonstrated their readiness to usurp authority.

Yorston had joined the HBC in 1796 and in the fall of 1797 had been among the men refusing to journey up the Red River with a Canadian master, saying that they did not know him and could not understand French. John Mackay pointed out that John Richards, a native of the country who understood French, would be second in command and, therefore, giving them their orders. The men could not be swayed. Mackay, knowing that ordering was "out of the question,"

⁶⁸HBCA, B.22/a/18^a, Brandon House journal, 1810-11, 5-6 Nov. 1810, fo. 7d.; B.22/z/1, "Papers relating to the mutiny at Brandon House, 1811, fos: 1-15; B.156/c/1, Oxford House correspondence inward, 1811-70. Hugh Heney to William Sinclair, 21 June 1811, fos. 1-3.

asked them to reconsider, but finally had to appoint Richards as their master, a poor choice. In October, after weeks of drinking and badmouthing the HBC, he ran off to the Canadians. The men wrote to Mackay, describing Richards's drunkenness and carelessness, and complained that they were badly off "for want of a head." They then, according to Yorston, met, all the oldest servants being present, and chose a new master for themselves. It is not clear who this was. It might have been Magnus Murray, an Orcadian labourer, in the service since 1791, since he composed two of the three letters the men sent to Mackay. The five men who signed the first letter and who may well have been the leaders of the group, were all labourers. Four of them were Orcadians, three of them in the service since 1793. The senior member of the group was John Easter, an "Esquemaux" who had joined the company in 1784 and whose expiry date was recorded in the servants' list as "Life." Easter, described by James Sutherland, master of Brandon House in 1796-97, as "the Company Slave," had been very unhappy the year before because he received no wages and was "used lik[sic] a Slave &c." He had even gone so far as to refuse to work for two days in April of 1797. Sutherland believed that "The People, together with the Canadians" were "Poisoning the morals of this simple fellow." Fearing that Easter would desert, Sutherland gave him a present and bribed him back to work. Mackay was not much more sympathetic to the concerns of John Richards's subordinates. He sent Thomas Miller to take charge and, in spite of Richards's record of intoxication and disobedience and the evidence Miller discovered of Richards's wastefulness, Mackay believed that it was not as serious as the "rascally men" charged and that, in fact, "if the truth was known" it would prove that "his Men was the cause of his leaving his Post." Yorston presented this incident as one in which the men's responsible actions contrasted sharply with their leader's dereliction of duty. Likewise the mutiny of 1811 was justified by the drunkenness and irresponsibility of the master. Heney, he declared, had left the Canadians because he had quarreled with them and was "more Tyrannical" at Brandon House than he had been before.⁶⁹

⁶⁹HBCA, B.22/a/4, Brandon House journal, 1796-97, 19-20 Nov. 1796, fos. 19-19d., 20 April

Archibald Mason, judged the ringleader, was dismissed from the service and fined the full amount of his wages. William Auld regarded this punishment as "astonishing forgiveness" and decided that if the "Principal in a ruinous Mutiny joined with a capital felony" escaped "the Gallows" William Yorston, "who was only the Second" could not be punished according to the "unanimous resolutions" of the officers, who had recommended sending Yorston home in irons.⁷⁰ Yorston's record might also have saved him. He had been praised by John Mackay as the "most usefull[sic] Hand he had" and had even acted as summer master at Brandon House for several years.⁷¹ He and all the mutineers who renewed their engagements returned to Brandon House, where things were quiet until January of 1812 when "another revolution" almost broke. William Kennedy, now the master of the post, suspected that Yorston was trying to "throw obstacles" in the way of a proposed trading expedition without actually refusing to go. He did, however, use "insulting" language and Kennedy "gave him a slap or two" in the face, which Yorston tried to return. After a scuffle, Kennedy demanded to know whether Yorston would go or not so that Kennedy could take the necessary measures if Yorston refused duty. Yorston replied that Kennedy had prevented him from going by disabling him. Kennedy told him this was an unsatisfactory answer and invited him outdoors. Yorston said he would neither give a more satisfactory answer nor go outdoors until he wanted to. Kennedy then ran to the next room, got a pair of tongs, returned to Yorston, and told him to go the men's house where he would remain on half allowance until spring and if he did not he would "break his head." Yorston remained "as obstinate as a mule" and Kennedy hit him on the arm with the tongs. Yorston then tried to hit Kennedy and take the tongs away from him. At this point Thomas Favel

1797, fos. 35d.-36, 22 Apr. 1797, fo. 36; B.22/a/5, Brandon House journal, 1797-98, 1-2 Sept. 1797, fos. 4d.-5d., 4-5 Nov. 1797, fos. 15d.-17, 23 Nov. 1797, fos. 19-20; A.10/1, "Copies of Certificates and other Documents referred to in the Petition of William Yorston To the Honble Directors of the Hudsons Bay Comp'y," fos. 111A-111Dd.; A.30/6, Servants' List, 1794-5, fos. 47d.-48, 52d.-53, 54d.-55, 56d.-57, 57d.-58.

⁷⁰HBCA, B.239/b/83, William Auld to Hugh Heney, Jan. 1813, fo. 8d.

⁷¹HBCA, B.3/f/4, Albany River Servants' Resolves, 1806, fo. 3; B.3/6/6, Albany River Servants Resolves, 1808, fo. 2.

entered the room. Favel, a native of Rupert's Land, had begged forgiveness for his part in the mutiny with tears in his eyes and "most pathetically promised" that, since he had been "born & brought up in the Service he would spend the remainder of his life in the discharge of his duty & in Support of the authority of such officers as were placed over him." Instead of fulfilling this pledge, Favel took the tongs away, enabling Yorston to knock Kennedy down, sit on him, pound him for ten minutes, and twist a handkerchief around his neck until he was almost strangled. Kennedy called for help, but all the men ran away, saying they would have nothing to do with the situation. Kennedy was not surprised at such behaviour from the "rascals who served Mr Heney so ill last winter notwithstanding some of them had made very fair promises last summer." Finally, Yorston let Kennedy up and while the latter ran to arm himself in order "to enforce obedience," Yorston ran to the NWC fort for help against Kennedy. The Canadian master then came over, but refused to help put Yorston in irons. From his sanctuary, Yorston sent word that he would go on the expedition that had caused the dispute in the first place. Since he was the only one who knew the way and the natives' language, his offer was accepted and he escaped punishment.⁷²

Yorston, however, claimed that Kennedy was always intent on harassing him and that he asked him to go on a hazardous journey, for which service he had not been engaged. When Yorston protested that the trip was too dangerous and the goods with which he was supposed to initiate trade with some American Indians were unsuitable, Kennedy beat him. In spite of this "outrageous conduct" Yorston went on the journey, which turned out just as he had predicted. After spending some time as master because the Indians disliked Kennedy, Yorston decided he wanted to return to Britain to seek redress for his injuries. Kennedy would not let Yorston take his property with him and when he arrived at York Factory in July, William Auld informed him that he and all the other officers "had resolved to make him an Example." Yorston

⁷²HBCA, B.22/a/18^b, Brandon House journal, 1811-12, 5 Jan. 1812, fos. 7d.-8; 8 Jan. 1812, fo. 8; B.22/z/1, "Papers relating to the mutiny at Brandon House, 1811, fo. 8.

was then banished six miles into the woods for fifteen days, with only two gills of unsifted oatmeal and a quarter pound of rotten bacon per day. Upon his return to York Factory, having contracted a "distemper" from which he still suffered, Yorston asked to be "bled." But, Auld, a surgeon himself, would not perform this procedure or let another surgeon do so and Yorston had to bleed himself. Yorston considered his departure aboard the *King George* an escape from his "prosecutors." He put his case before the committee, protesting the treatment he had received from Heney and Kennedy and the cruelty he had suffered at the hands of Auld, which "no Master appointed by the Company had a right to inflict, without Trial, even on the basest Criminal," certainly not upon "a most meritorious Servant of the Company who had constantly laboured in their Service for Sixteen Years." Should he not receive redress, Yorston warned, the company's reputation would suffer and Orcadians would shun it. The London committee did not agree that Yorston was "a good Servant worthy of reward," but judged him "most unruly and mutinous, and rather deserving of Punishment than of any remuneration" and could not take his word against that of their officers.⁷³ Clearly, years of faithful service and a record of responsibility were not enough to redeem a man who had so grossly subverted the natural order.

As for the rest of the Brandon House men, Kennedy considered them "such a set of dam'd, careless, uninterested fellows" that he had "never met before in the Country," an outburst prompted by their return in April of 1812 from the hunting tent with only part of the meat they were supposed to fetch. They said there was no more. Kennedy did not believe them and observed that they were utterly indifferent to the company's interests and would not improve until they were dispersed and "some examples made of them." They had been "so long accustomed to do & say as they please" that they had "entirely forgot (that is to say if were they even possessed of the properties) that belong to good Servants." Moreover, a complaint from another master alerted him to the fact that signs of "the infection" that "began or rather broke out" at

⁷³HBCA, A.10/1, "Copies of Certificates and other Documents referred to In the Petition of William Yorston To the Honble Directors of the Hudsons Bay Compny, " fos. 111Dd.-111G, 111Jd.

Brandon House had appeared in the Swan River area.⁷⁴ Kennedy's fears must have been further heightened by news of the trouble at the Nelson River encampment near York Factory, where fourteen of the men assigned to Miles Macdonell, the first governor of the Red River Settlement, had mutinied in February. Four of the men, including their leader, William Finlay, were Orcadians, one was a Shetlander, and the rest came from the vicinity of Glasgow, but William Auld, Superintendent of the Northern Department, refused to acknowledge that Orcadians in the group were anything other than "simple thoughtless boys" led astray by their Glaswegian comrades.⁷⁵ It might, therefore, have been Auld who dubbed the renegades the "Glasgow Insurgents."

Early in February William Finlay, a clerk, refused to drink a concoction made from pine needles which Macdonell had ordered everyone to take as an antiscorbutic. Macdonell immediately put Finlay off duty and, when he ordered him back to work several days later, Finlay declared that he would do nothing. A week later, Macdonell took him before William Hillier, master of the other group spending the winter at the encampment, who, acting as magistrate, found Finlay guilty of being "a refractory servant" and sentenced him to confinement in a hut constructed for the purpose. On the evening of Finlay's incarceration, thirteen men, a "party he had formed among the people," gathered and burned the hut to the ground, "triumphantly shouting in the most audacious manner when they had got it in flames." Macdonell and Hillier then dragged the whole lot before them, but the men refused "to submit" to their authority, "walked away," and took up residence in the woods. Macdonell, unwilling to provide these miscreants with supplies, warned William Hemmings Cook at York Factory that the mutineers would probably come there for provisions. And, because he suspected that the insurgents had "private advisors & abettors" among the rest of the men, he cautioned Cook against allowing any

⁷⁴HBCA, B.22/a/18b, Brandon House journal, 1811-12, 1 Apr. 1812, fo. 13d.; 8 Jan. 1812, fo. 9.

⁷⁵HBCA, B.42/b/57, Remarks on letters from William Hillier and Miles Macdonell, fos. 20d.-21.

of Macdonell's men to have access to their boxes at York Factory without an officer present because they had "Pistols &c" in them.⁷⁶ Cook was alarmed because the reduction in rations imposed the previous fall had "occasioned a general ferment" and he believed that there was "nothing wanting but time & strength of Party to ripen it into open Rebellion." He had "long expected something of this kind" and the "daily murmurings & discontent" prevalent among all the men led him to wonder what might happen come spring. Not surprisingly, he wanted Macdonell to look after the insurgents by himself. He also urged that Macdonell give them sufficient provisions, "for Hunger is a strong incentive to moral turpitude" and if the culprits visited the factory "in an irritated state of Mind," who knew "what Mischiefs might not ensue"?⁷⁷ Macdonell accordingly supplied the men with the usual half allowances given men who were off duty, but he did not prevent them from visiting the factory.⁷⁸ There, of course, they could buy whatever they needed. Therefore, in March, at Auld's direction, Macdonell ordered that the men be allowed no more purchases, no matter what might "be their necessities."⁷⁹

The insurgents refused to give in. They maintained that putting Finlay into a hut at that season of the year was "inhuman" and complained of their allowance of oatmeal, bacon, and fat. William Auld thought that "a more determined set of mutinous insolent miscreants at no time has appeared any where" and remarked that Finlay would have been better off in his hut than many of the company's servants who had to travel with no shelter at all. Had "humanity" actually been "so abundant in their bosoms," the gratitude and respect they felt for their master would have made sure that they remembered that his "zeal for their comfort" entitled him to "a petition" asking for "the liberation of their guilty companion." Had such a petition been refused,

⁷⁶HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 27 Feb. 1812, fo. 20; B.239/b/82, Miles Macdonell to William Hemmings Cook, 14 Feb. 1812, fos. 18d.-19.

⁷⁷HBCA, B.239/b/82, William Hemmings Cook to Miles Macdonell, 15 Feb. 1812, fo. 19d.

⁷⁸HBCA, B.239/b/82, Miles Macdonell to William Hemmings Cook, 15 Feb. 1812, fo. 20; Cook to Macdonell, 16 Feb. 1812, fo. 20.

⁷⁹HBCA, B.239/b/82, Miles Macdonell to William Hemmings Cook, 31 Mar. 1812, fo. 28.

"still no hidden attribute of humanity required their setting the hut on fire" or "such demonstrations of respect as the loud huzzas & cheerings" with which they concluded the "scene." Still less, did humanity require "them in agitation of their plan to propose rising on their Officer," as a witness had sworn. No, it was the "republican & levelling disposition" for which the inhabitants of "Glasgow & its neighbourhood have long been notorious" that had produced this uprising. As for their complaints about their rations, they were better fed than the men at York Factory who were surviving on "Rusty Bacon." Indeed, Macdonell's other people were feasting on venison, which was in very short supply that year, and he and his officers "were like a Committee of Common council-men, sleek & shining in all the splendours of Rubicundity."⁸⁰

To make matters worse, disloyal clerks were regularly visiting the insurgents and keeping them informed of everything their superiors were doing and saying and someone, probably the same clerks, had supplied guns and ammunition so that they could hunt,⁸¹ thereby making it impossible to bring the rebels to heel. Finally, in May Macdonell suggested that the insurgents be transferred to the HBC. Although assigned to the Red River Settlement, Macdonell's subordinates were at the same time also servants of the HBC, an arrangement intended to ensure that they were subject to the company's authority. Now Macdonell proposed that they be incorporated into the company's regular service. Auld agreed, but feared that their presence at York Factory would "only fan the half-smothered discontent which glows more or less in every European bosom." Indeed, all was not quiet at York Factory, where the men had recently refused to drink the table beer brewed "as a preservative to health." It appeared to William Hemmings Cook that they were "determined to resist the adoption of every new regulation...however salutary or advisable" and he feared that there would be no end to the "Murmurings & Dissatisfaction" until all the old hands had been replaced. The insurgents,

⁸⁰HBCA, B.42/b/57, Auld to Miles Macdonell, 30 April 1812, fos. 35-35d.; William Auld's remarks, fos. 38d.-39.

⁸¹HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld, to Miles Macdonell, 30 April 1812, fo. 35d.; remarks by William Auld, fo. 38; Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 3 May 1812, fo. 39d.

however, refused to do anything until they were assured that they would receive wages for the time they were off duty and not be fined. Auld insisted they return to the fold entirely on the company's terms, but not as "eye sores" at York Factory. They were going to cut firewood outside the post.⁸² After several meetings between Macdonell and the insurgents, the latter submitted a letter, which has not survived. It set terms that Auld judged "so inadmissible that nothing is or can be meant by them but to continue to defy us" and sent Macdonell into a tirade against the "miscreants" who had "spurned" his and Auld's "good intentions." Macdonell told the messengers that their conditions were denied and they would have to "take their chance & strive to conduct themselves in a manner to merit forgiveness," but they would "acknowledge no fault."⁸³

Finally, on 13 May Auld ordered Macdonell and Hillier to summon all the officers and servants and have a message read to the insurgents who would be compelled to decide on the spot whether they would submit to terms or "take the consequences." Before the insurgents were allowed to leave, "a most strict search" was to be made for all guns, ostensibly as a precaution against accidents such as one a few days earlier when one of Macdonell's men had blown his hand off. All firearms and ammunition, especially those belonging to the clerks, were to be secured and "strictly " accounted for with no distinction made between "public & private" articles. All the clerks who had been visiting the insurgents were to be threatened with demotion if they continued this practice.⁸⁴ Auld's letter to the insurgents reprimanded them for "their obstinate refusal to return to their duty" after Macdonell and Auld had taken "so much pains" to "lead them to a proper line of conduct." Now, "finally" here was an ultimatum. If they returned to work

⁸²HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld to Miles Macdonell, 10 May 1812, fos. 41d.-42; B.239/a/118, York Factory journal, 1811-12, 30 April 1812, fos. 11d.-12.

⁸³HBCA, B.42/b/57, Remarks by William Auld, fo. 43; Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 12 May 1812, fos. 42d.-43.

⁸⁴HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld to Miles Macdonell and William Hillier, 13 May 1812, fos. 44-44d.

immediately, they would be taken on the books and their punishment would be left to the company, although they would lose the wages for time they "continued in defiance of their chief factor's authority." If they refused these terms, they would go home as prisoners aboard the company's ship to be turned over to "the civil power" or kept aboard a royal ship until demanded for trial.⁸⁵

The men duly assembled on 15 May and the document was read and presented to them. The insurgents "absolutely rejected" its terms. One of them, William Brown, refused even to hear the paper read and he left, passing three officers on their way to seize the arms at the insurgents' camp. As soon as the rest of the insurgents left, Macdonell, Hillier, and some of the other gentlemen armed themselves and followed "to prevent insult being offered" to the first three officers, but they were too late. They trio was returning, having confiscated no weapons "& having suffered gross abuse with threats of violence." All the officers then proceeded to the insurgents' house only to find that the guns had all been hidden in the woods. The insurgents were then ordered to surrender their arms immediately, Auld's edict to that effect was read, and the consequences of refusal were described. The rebels remained "inflexible" and one of them, John Walker, "went so far as to say that the country did not belong to the HBC but to the French." Such intransigence was alarming and these men, Macdonell and Hillier declared, "must be treated as people in open hostility who set all order at defiance."⁸⁶ The insurgents saw things differently. Their response to the events of 15 May was a letter to William Auld, describing "the most cowardly usage" which they had received from "the Chiefs" according to Auld's orders. They had been "decoyed up" by "the Chiefs" who, as soon as the men had arrived, sent three officers "to rob the house in a most dastardly manner." Fortunately, the insurgents had "timely interposed and prevented an action so base that no Gentleman who had any feelings of honour

⁸⁵HBCA, B.42/b/57, Notification to be read to insurgents, 15 May 1812, fo. 44d.

⁸⁶HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell and William Hillier to William Auld, 15 May 1812, fos. 46-46d.

would ever have countenanced." "We are happy Sir to find you all out in your tru[sic] colours," they declared, "this shews us what kind of men you are and we tell you once for all that we will never come to your terms." As for Auld's threat to send them home for trial or imprisonment, they considered this "a menace so silly that we scarce think it worth the trouble of writing." They were right too. Macdonell had urged that the insurgents be sent home for trial, but Auld had informed him that an earlier attempt to try a Canadian servant for robbery in England had failed because Rupert's Land fell under the jurisdiction of Canadian courts and the London committee had dropped the case rather than pursue it through "such a circuitous route." Besides, Auld did not want to send the culprits home at all, lest they harm the "cause" of the colony in Scotland, a fear that seemed to be justified when the insurgents declared themselves "happy to get home in any form where as Britons" they had "a right to an impartial trial by the laws of [their] Country." They signed themselves "the highly injured and unjustly styled Insurgents." It was signed by thirteen men, three of them with X's. None of them was William Finlay.⁸⁷

The mutiny now entered its final stage. Hillier and Macdonell blamed the failure of negotiations on the baneful influence of three of their clerks, one of whom had dined with the insurgents a few days before and who Macdonell suspected of composing their letter because he thought it resembled "his diction." The "countenance" given by this constant fraternization had,

⁸⁷HBCA, B.42/b/57, "From the Men off Duty to Mr Auld, Nelson River 15th May 1812," signed Andrew Mcfarlane, James Robertson, Daniel Campbell, John Chambers, William Brown, John Macintyre, George Merriman, Murdoch Rosie, Peter Barr, William Anderson, James Urie, John Walker, fos. 47-47d.; Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 10 Apr. 1812, fo. 31; Auld to Macdonell, 30 Apr. 1812, fos. 34d.-35; Remarks by William Auld, fos. 58-58d. All the insurgents, including William Finlay, are listed in the list of passengers aboard the HBC's vessels in 1811, destined for the Red River Settlement. See: J. M. Bumsted, The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1982), Appendix B. Passenger List XVII, Red River Settlers, 1811, 281. The first group of settlers was not made up of families. It was a group of men recruited to begin building the settlement in anticipation of its colonization of families. Whether these men were recruited specifically for the colony, however, is unclear, since all of them were hired as company clerks and servants and it was not until after their arrival at York Factory that Miles Macdonell and William Hillier selected their men, leading to complaints from the latter that Macdonell had left him with "a parcel of the rubbish" and from William Auld that Macdonell's requirements deprived the HBC of manpower. (HBCA, B.42/b/57, Auld to Macdonell, 16 Oct. 1811, fos. 2-2d.; Auld to William Hemmings Cook, 19 Nov. 1811, fo. 11.)

he believed, been "the means of keeping them hitherto closely linked together." Two of these clerks would now be sent off to camp by themselves and one was going to remain with Hillier. The rest would be subdued with "Army or Navy discipline," which Macdonell considered "the only thing fit to manage such fierce spirits." He would issue no more orders for their provisions. The insurgents had "gone too far to be yielded to now" unless they were "very submissive." Macdonell forwarded their letter to Auld, claiming that he had not even deigned to read it, although one might wonder how he was able to determine who had written it if he had not read it.⁸⁸ Auld was also determined to get tough. As long as the insurgents refused to surrender their arms, he considered it "justified" to withhold all provisions, although he entertained doubts about the loyalty of the servants at York Factory if the insurgents attempted to take supplies by force, in which case he thought he could count on three officers and several Indians over whom he believed he exercised influence.⁸⁹

On 22 May the insurgents came to Macdonell for provisions, which he denied them because they had not surrendered their arms to him. They declared that they had returned them to their owners and no longer had any in their possession, but Macdonell wanted to know their exact whereabouts.⁹⁰ The next day the insurgents set off for York Factory, though Macdonell kept Finlay with him, prompting Auld to engage in one of his diatribes against Macdonell. The governor was, he suspected, planning to subject Finlay to "a species of punishment" so "dreadful" that it "was almost certain the poor creature would either be murdered or driven to madness," namely, locking him up with the "Irish felons" responsible for the New Year's attack on the Orkneymen. Auld had already "in the strongest manner reprobated verbally" this plan when Macdonell had proposed it. When the insurgents arrived at the factory, Auld refused to give

⁸⁸HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Hillier to William Auld, 15 May 1812, fo. 45; Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 15 May 1812, fo. 45d.

⁸⁹HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld to Miles Macdonell and William Hillier, 16 May 1812, fos. 46d.-48.

⁹⁰HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 22 May 1812, fo. 51d.

them provisions until they surrendered their arms. They said they had no firearms, but would not reveal who now had them or who had given them the guns in the first place. Auld, therefore, ordered them off to tent in the woods without provisions. Even then, they would not tell, saying they wanted "to prevent mischief as they said to the innocent." However, "one of the best servants ever in the service," who had been away erecting a beacon, now came and told him that he had sold his two guns to the insurgents because he was going home and no longer needed them. He was very sorry, but no one had told him that "such bargaining" was forbidden. Auld was also able to determine that one of the insurgents' guns had burst and another had been confiscated, leaving one to be accounted for. He believed that it had probably been returned and the next day gave the insurgents three quarters of the allowance given the people at the factory.⁹¹ Several days later, Auld informed them that they would get rations only if they worked. On 13 June the insurgents gave in. Having been, as Cook said about one, "scowered into obedience by a Regimen of Bacon & Oatmeal & not a little chastized by the muskitoos" while leading "a Sylvan life," they petitioned to be taken back in and promised "exemplary behaviour in future."⁹² The insurgents were then dispersed among the company's posts, where they demonstrated no more of that "levelling" disposition which had so distressed Auld. Seven insurgents, four of them Orcadians, and Hugh Carswell, one of the treasonous clerks, were still in the service three years later. In fact, in 1816 James Bird described Carswell as "the most promising young man" in the Edmonton district.⁹³

⁹¹HBCA, B.42/b/57, Miles Macdonell to William Auld, 24 May, 1812, fo. 52d; Remarks by William Auld on Macdonell's letter, fos. 52d.-53; B.239/a/118, York Factory journal, 1811-12, 24-25 May, 1812, fo. 14.

⁹²HBCA, B.239/b/82, William Hemmings Cook to Mr. Swain, 20 July 1812, fo. 36d.; B.239/a/118, York Factory journal, 1811-12, 13 June 1812, fo. 16.

⁹³HBCA, A.30/14, Servants' List, 1814-15. Andrew McFarlin, fos. 2d.-3; Hugh Carswell, fos. 5d.-6; John McIntyre, Murdoch Rossie, fos. 7d.-8; Peter Spence, George Merriman, fos. 14d.-15; James Robertson, fos. 25d.-26; William Brown, fos. 30d.-31: Brown was now a trader. B.60/a/15, Edmonton journal, 1815-16, 7 Aug. 1816, fo. 51.

Auld opposed sending the men home not only because he wanted to spare the company inconvenience but because he disliked Macdonell and the colony. He went so far as to remark that it was not fair to punish young men for faults caused by the mismanagement of their officers, in this case the favouritism which Macdonell showed towards his Catholic subordinates, thereby alienating everyone else.⁹⁴ Auld, thus, deliberately underestimated the depths of disaffection in the service. Certainly William Hemmings Cook, who considered Macdonell "a spoony fellow" and "a flat",⁹⁵ saw that there was more to the situation than incompetent leadership. The ships that had arrived so late in 1811 had been obliged to spend the winter in the Bay. York Factory, therefore, was burdened with the new arrivals and disgruntled retiring servants unable to leave. Scurvy appeared in October and, by January, the men were very dissatisfied, but there was no disorder until they refused to drink the table beer in April, and that was minimal.⁹⁶ It was when alterations to provisions were administered by masters who behaved badly that men were moved to do more than grumble. At Brandon House Hugh Heney had been harsh and abrupt and his men suspected that he was lying to them about the new prices. Miles Macdonell may, indeed, have played favourites and, as a result, alienated some of his clerks who may have spread disaffection among the men. But the tactics to which the officers resorted in their attempt to defeat the rebellion had so offended the insurgents that they held out as long as they could. The peace of the company was never again disturbed by such an uprising at one of its posts, although the murder of John McLoughlin Jr. in 1842 might have led the committee and many of its officers to believe that another mutiny had occurred. The evidence does not, however, conclusively support this conclusion. But, the company was not free of disorder in other quarters. Newer groups of employees, difficult to incorporate into the HBC's organization,

⁹⁴HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Auld to Thomas Thomas, 10 June 1812, fos. 57-57d.; Remarks by William Auld, fos. 58-58d.

⁹⁵HBCA, B.42/b/57, William Hemmings Cook to William Auld, 23 Dec. 1811, fo. 14.

⁹⁶HBCA, B.239/a/118, York Factory journal, 1811-12, 25 Oct. 1811, fo. 3, 30 Apr. 1812, fos. 11d.-12.

were the source of other combinations. Tripmen, sailors, and miners all proved disruptive elements.

In the transport service, the company became dependent on tripmen, hired for less than annual terms mainly from the colony's non-Indian population, which, far from being a reliable source of cheap labour, behaved more like "free" labour than the company wanted. HBC servants disliked traveling so much that by the 1830s it had become common to hire Indians to assist the men coming to the Bay from the Athabasca and the McKenzie River districts, a practice which Simpson wanted to stamp out because of its cost and the danger that servants in other districts would want to do likewise.⁹⁷ He soon reconsidered, however, because Indians were willing to work for "very moderate pay,"⁹⁸ but they did not like the work any more than the company's servants, and could not be acquired in large enough numbers.⁹⁹ Natives and servants continued to be employed in transport brigades, of course, but Red River tripmen made up the Portage La Loche Brigade which became central to the company's operations. It was this centrality that made the insubordination of the tripmen so serious. The Brigade transported cargoes between York Factory and Norway House and Norway House and the interior. Men were engaged for the Brigade in the winter. During the first week of June they set off for Norway House, picked up the supplies stored there for the MacKenzie River district, and traveled to Lake La Loche where brigades of district servants, carrying the results of the winter's trade, met them. The two groups exchanged cargo, the inland brigades carrying their supplies to their respective posts and the Portage La Loche Brigade heading for York Factory, where it was supposed to arrive in time for the furs to be loaded onto the ships. The men then returned to Red River with

⁹⁷HBCA, B.39/c/1, George Simpson to Edward Smith, 1 June 1835, fo. 9.

⁹⁸HBCA, B.3/b/65, George Simpson to George Barnston, 1 Mar. 1840, fo. 2.

⁹⁹See: HBCA, A.12/6, George Simpson to London committee, 19 Sept. 1853, fo. 442d.; B.39/b/14, Robert Campbell to William Mactavish, 9 July 1857, p. 11; B.60/a/30, Edmonton journal, 1858-60, 17 Oct. 1858, fos. 4-4d.; B.227/a/19, Waswanipi journal, 1840-41, 16 June 1840, fo. 1d.; B.239/c/5, William McKay to James Hargrave, 11 Feb. 1849, fos. 8-8d.

the supplies for that area, pausing to deposit next year's inland cargo at Norway House. The whole trip was supposed to take about four months. To ensure a smooth flow of goods, the Council of the Northern Department ruled in 1843 that boats carry 65 pieces from Norway House, leave five at Oxford House, and deliver sixty to York Factory. In years of very low water, the loadings might be reduced, with 55 pieces to be delivered at the factory. In 1849 it established the office of superintendent of transport to regulate this traffic and decided that crews were to number one man for every 10 or 12 pieces, with 9 down and 11 up being the minimum loading, these to be allowed when water was low. A crew of eight had to carry at least 75 pieces of cargo, while a crew of seven could carry no less than 70. No inland boat was to have a crew of more than 7 men, except with the superintendent's special authorization. Such was the procedure -- at least when the system was "in perfect working order." By 1870 the Brigade comprised eighteen boats divided into three smaller brigades, each with its own guide, and seeming possessed by an "increasing spirit of mutiny."¹⁰⁰ As with the rest of the company's servants, however, wages were not usually at the root of disaffection.

As with European recruits by the 1840s, disapproval over wages was usually expressed outside the service during the recruitment process. In 1858 the people of the colony went so far as to combine to raise the wages for transporting goods from York Factory to Red River, provoking Simpson to persuade some soldiers to man the boats.¹⁰¹ Once the men signed on, their so-called mutinies erupted over the conditions of their work. An exception to this rule occurred in 1870, when the "French halfbreed" tripmen, engaged at Edmonton House to bring out the returns, refused "in a body" to embark unless their wages were raised from £3 to £4 a month, though they had not objected to them when they signed on. Since they had to depart the

¹⁰⁰HBCA, A.11/51, Donald A. Smith to London committee, 1 Aug. 1870, fos. 87d.-91; B.239/k/28, Standing Rules and Regulations, 1843-75, #52, #89, #90. A piece, actually *pièce*, weighed ninety pounds.

¹⁰¹HBCA, A.12/9, Simpson to London committee, 24 June 1858, fo. 146.

following day, William J. Christie was forced to concede.¹⁰² The root of even this incident was, however, a widespread dislike of the work itself, which, by the 1850s had created a dilemma. Since "much of the dissatisfaction" prevailing among the company's servants "at inland districts" was due to the "hardships" of the voyage to and from York Factory, being "relieved of that duty" helped make the service more attractive to potential new recruits and those whose contracts were expiring, but the "Red River halfbreeds" on whom the company had "of late years mainly relied for tripmen" had "also conceived a distaste for such employment."¹⁰³ Indeed, observed William Christie in 1864, "The ole hardy Voyageur is an article not to be found now a days and other means of transport must be...devised or we will be in a fix."¹⁰⁴ The situation had already been critical for almost a decade.

In 1855 two brigades of Portage La Loche boats refused to wait at York Factory for the ship, which was late, because, they said, they had been engaged to remain only as long as it took to have their boats repaired.¹⁰⁵ In 1856, the men refused to leave Norway House because each boat was short a man, since there had been desertions along the way. Each boat was accordingly granted an additional sum equal to the pay of a middleman for a trip to and from the Portage, which money was to be divided among the boatmen.¹⁰⁶ In 1857 when the officers tried to decrease the consumption of pemmican by giving the brigades flour instead, the men simply helped themselves to pemmican from the cargo and when told they might be charged for it, the men replied that, in that case "they would return with empty boats to the place from whence they

¹⁰²HBCA, B.239/c/19, W. J. Christie to officers of the Northern Department, 12 July 1870, fo. 129.

¹⁰³HBCA, A.12/9, George Simpson to Thomas Fraser, 20 Oct. 1858, fos. 281d.-282.

¹⁰⁴HBCA, E.61/10, McGowan Collection. William McMurray Correspondence, 1864. W. I. Christie to William McMurray, 27 Dec. 1864, fo. 29.

¹⁰⁵HBCA, B.239/b/104^b, William Mactavish to George Simpson, 5 Sept. 1855, fo. 89d.

¹⁰⁶HBCA, B.239/c/16, J. A. Grahame to J. W. Wilson, 23 Aug. 1856, fo. 90.

had come."¹⁰⁷ That year George Barnston proposed to one of the brigades that each boat carry 20 extra pieces besides the fifty required by their contract from York Factory for which service each man would receive an addition to his wages. The men declined because the additional cargo would slow their return and perhaps prevent their getting to the plains to procure winter provisions. When he made the same offer to another brigade, the voyagers refused to commit themselves until they had seen the state of the water.¹⁰⁸ Employment in the brigades was only one of the ways in which they supported themselves and they could not permit it to jeopardize their ability to survive over the winter.

In 1862 one of the brigades would carry only 30 pieces per boat.¹⁰⁹ In 1863, the crews of the boats from Red River refused to complete a fall voyage to York Factory because their long journey on Lake Winnipeg had delayed their arrival at Norway House so seriously that they were afraid that they would be "set fast" on their homeward trip if they went to the Bay.¹¹⁰ In 1865 James A. Grahame complained that as soon as the Portage brigade arrived at Norway House from Red River, the men showed "the cloven hoof." From the "numberless applications" made to him to be sent back "on account of all sorts of ailments," he observed, "one would suppose the Brigades were manned by hospital patients." They were also always requesting advances in the form of blankets, shirts, or trousers and some of them refused to proceed until they got them. Others would not embark at all and, as a result, 131 packs had to be left at Norway House. Those who did proceed to York Factory refused to carry away more than 30

¹⁰⁷HBCA, B.239/b/105, James Hargrave to George Barnston, 17 Aug. 1857, fo. 41d.

¹⁰⁸HBCA, B.239/c/9, George Barnston to James Hargrave, 15 Aug. 1857, fo. 261; Barnston to Hargrave, 22 Aug. 1857, fo. 265.

¹⁰⁹HBCA, B.239/b/107, James R. Clare to William Mactavish, 29 Aug. 1862, fo. 144d.

¹¹⁰HBCA, B.239/c/14, William Mactavish to officers of the Northern Department, 9 Dec. 1863, fo. 322d.

packs per boat, although their contract stipulated 45.¹¹¹ 1866 was a particularly bad year. One of the boats of the Portage brigades was made up of men so unfit they did not make it further than Norway House in the spring. In the fall two of the brigades refused to carry more than 45 pieces per boat from York Factory and some of the other crews returned to Red River without going to York Factory at all.¹¹²

In 1867, most of the crews of the Portage La Loche brigade refused to make the trip to the coast,. Most of the Mackenzie River returns, thus, remained inland and of the four boats that did make the trip, two did not arrive at York Factory until after the ship had left for England. Six members of one of the brigades refused go further than Norway House because of the lateness of the season, the bad summer they had endured, a scarcity of provisions, and their own weakness. James Stewart considered their refusal the result of a combination entered into at Portage La Loche. He believed that the problem lay not only in the brigade's late departure from Red River, but the fact that it was composed of "the worst set of men" he had ever seen. Many of them, he claimed, were mere boys, easily led astray by the "proposers of the affair." He did concede, though, that the brigade had received few supplies at Cumberland House and Isle a la Crosse and those were of such poor quality that they were on "short rations" most of the way. Still, he suggested not only that the brigades leave earlier in the season, but that they be made up of men "who do care something for their Character" and that the guides and steersmen be made "more responsible" for what occurred on the trip. However, the fact that the brigades behaved much better the following year after leaving Red River earlier in the season suggests that the men really were concerned about the dangers of traveling too late in the year and they were not the scoundrels that Steward considered them. Peace might also have prevailed

¹¹¹HBCA, A.12/44, Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, 19 Sept. 1865, fos. 67-67d.; B.239/b/108, J. W. Wilson to James R. Clare, 13 Sept. 1865, fo. 441; B.239/c/16, James A. Graham to officers of the Northern Department, 24 Dec. 1865, fo. 116d.

¹¹²HBCA, B.239/b/108, J. W. Wilson to officers of the Northern Dept., 1 Dec. 1867, fo. 783; B.154/c/1, J. W. Wilson to J. A. Grahame, 7 Sept. 1866, fo. 164; B.239/c/16, William Mactavish to officers of the Northern Department, 8 Dec. 1866, fos. 267d., 270.

because not all the crews had contracted to travel all the way to the factory.¹¹³ Likewise, the following year one of the Portage La Loche brigades was engaged to return to Red River after coming back from the Portage to Norway House. Only the other two would continue to York Factory. Presumably, the officers hoped that this arrangement would ensure that those who did not want to go to the factory were in the other brigade.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, the "spirit of insubordination" continued to spread and the brigades behaved very badly in 1870. Recruitment was difficult, but five boats were finally manned by members of the "French halfbreed population lately in arms" and four by "English halfbreeds" and Swampy Indians from the Christianized settlement of St. Peter's. Three of them returned from Norway House, pleading illness, and the rest set off, accompanied by five supplementary boats manned by Indians engaged at Norway House. At Grand Rapid on the Saskatchewan River, there was a "general mutiny" among the men from Red River, the crews of four of the boats abandoned their cargoes, returned to Red River, keeping the boats. The remaining two Red River boats and the five from Norway House continued on their way. But, the officers had to make complicated arrangements to get supplies to the Mackenzie River district. Some of the tripmen added to the usual disorder by getting drunk on stolen liquor at Norway House and when they arrived at York Factory they demanded a regale of rum because they had traveled to Portage La Loche. Since they did not belong to that brigade, their request was denied, whereupon they refused to take any new hands aboard their boats, claiming that they were acting in accordance with a promise made them at Norway House. Finally, William Parson had to bribe them to take the newly arrived recruits by giving each man 6 shillings on account at Norway House. They would not, however, take another 6 to take ten extra pieces of cargo. If Parson thought things had been settled, he was sadly mistaken, however. Just after loading their boats,

¹¹³HBCA, B.239/c/17, James Stewart to J. W. Wilson, 26 Aug. 1867, fo. 206; James Stewart to officers of the Northern Department, December 1867, fos. 236-236d.; B.239/c/18, Stewart to officers of the Northern Dept., 7 Dec. 1868, fo. 186.

¹¹⁴HBCA, B.239/c/18, William Cowan to Samuel K. Parsons, 10 Dec. 1868, fo. 188d.

one of the crews threatened to remove five pieces from each of the boats belonging to their brigade unless they received an extra glass of grog. Parson refused, although he had recently granted the same request to another brigade, whereupon the men unloaded the pieces and left.¹¹⁵ Donald A. Smith and the London committee considered steam the answer to this problem and by the 1880s steamboats reduced the company's dependence on tripmen.¹¹⁶

On the west coast the company had difficulties with another type of transport worker, whose motives for protest nevertheless were much like those of the rest of the company's workers although the context was entirely different, namely, seamen. Forts Vancouver and Victoria rapidly became bustling ports visited by ships that neither belonged to nor were chartered by the HBC. The company's own maritime operations involved transporting goods and men to, from, and along the coast. Although it hired its sailors in England, as soon as they docked at Honolulu, San Francisco, or Vancouver Island, the HBC was perforce exposed to the forces of a labour market which definitely favoured the seamen. The wages offered in the ports of the Pacific Northwest were among the highest in North America¹¹⁷ and ships going to California were popular at any wage because men signed on in order to desert and head for the gold fields when they got there.¹¹⁸ Since jumping ship or otherwise escaping from the area was easy, when the HBC's sailors bargained over pay they frequently did so with their feet, thereby enhancing the ability of those who remained to impose terms. In May of 1849, James Douglas agreed to give the seamen of the *Columbia* double pay when they demanded their discharge a

¹¹⁵HBCA, A.11/51, Donald A. Smith to W. G. Smith, 1 Aug. 1870, fos. 88d.-89d.; B.239/b/110, W. Parson to Robert Hamilton, 8 Sept. 1870, fo. 78; Parson to Hamilton, 10 Sept. 1870, fo. 79; Parson to Hamilton, 11 Sept. 1870, fo. 80; B.239/c/19, J. Fortescue to officers of the Northern Dept., 26 Dec. 1870, fo. 248.

¹¹⁶Arthur J. Ray, The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 18-19.

¹¹⁷Eric Sager, Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914 (Kingston; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 156.

¹¹⁸HBCA, A.10/28, Capt. Alexander John Weynton to Archibald Barclay, 29 Jan. 1850, fo. 248.

few days after arriving at Fort Vancouver. The second officer and eight seamen deserted anyway and to hold on to the rest, who were also planning to run away, Douglas gave each an additional \$100 and hired some Sandwich Islanders to replace the deserters who had left for California with some Americans.¹¹⁹ In September of 1849, a few days after the arrival of the steamer and the *Mary Dare* eight seamen and one stoker deserted from the two vessels and could not be found. They had probably run off to one of the other ships in port. "We live," wrote Douglas, "in hourly apprehension of seeing the Company's vessels altogether deserted in consequence of the enormous pay given to seamen, in Calefornia[sic]." While the HBC had raised seamen's wages to £4, they could get \$140.00 a month in San Francisco.¹²⁰

In January of 1850 most of the crew of the *Cowlitz* deserted when it docked in Honolulu and the ten remaining seamen and three apprentices refused to work until their pay was raised to £4 a month. When that was granted, they all demanded a month's pay in advance, which was refused because they were suspected of planning to desert as soon as they had the cash, whereupon they refused to work. The case was referred to the British Consul General who, inflicting the only penalty available, imprisoned the apprentices aboard the ship and the seamen at the fort ashore, where they were to be confined at the company's expense, thus leaving the ship without a crew and putting the company to additional expense. Six of them were finally persuaded to go aboard the *Mary Dare*, which had lost most of its crew at Honolulu, but they deserted while the ship was in the Columbia River, making it necessary to hire more men at a rate of £25 a month in Victoria.¹²¹ The *Cowlitz* remained undermanned and two men were

¹¹⁹Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51 (Winnipeg: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1979) James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 27 Oct. 1849, pp. 66-67.

¹²⁰Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 Sept. 1849, pp. 47-48.

¹²¹Bowsfield, ed., Fort Victoria Letters, 1846-51, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 April 1850, pp. 76-78. For details see: HBCA, A.11/62, London correspondence inward from Sandwich Islands, 1843-52, fos. 448, 451-57, 472-73d.; Capt. A. J. Weynton to Archibald Barclay, 24 June 1850, fo. 466.

transferred from the *Norman Morison*, which had itself been rather turbulent. Its boatswain, Edward Edwards, having been reprimanded for carelessness and accused of incompetence, had refused to do any more duty and demanded his discharge. Captain Wishart disrated him and sent him to work as a common seaman. Edwards refused to comply and demanded to go ashore and present his case to Governor Blanshard, a foolish and naïve request, as it turned out, because Blanshard, upon due consideration, had him locked up. During the next few weeks, four sailors ran off to Nisqually and seven "landsmen" were added to the crew. When Wishart ordered the men to weigh anchor and head out of the harbour, ten of the crew refused, demanding four more seamen be hired to replace the deserters. Wishart told them that he had no intention of going to sea four hands short, but it was necessary to get out of the harbour while conditions permitted. Moreover, he reminded them that their disobedience meant they had broken their articles and forfeited all money due to them. Anyway, he observed, thirty men were enough to man the ship, but they remained obstinate. Wishart informed James Douglas, who came aboard and tried twice, unsuccessfully, to persuade the men to return to duty. He, therefore, imprisoned them in the forecastle, intending to transfer them ashore as soon as he found a place to put them. Meanwhile, because the ship was now in "a state of mutiny," the officers armed themselves. Several days later, four seamen joined the crew, the ten prisoners were satisfied, and returned to work. Douglas generously told them that their misbehaviour would be overlooked if they behaved better in future and promised them double wages from 20 April 1850 to the termination of the voyage and a gratuity of £25 to each. The London committee considered this excessive, since only four of the men had actually deserted and the boatswain, "the active person in exciting the men to such misconduct," had been punished. Moreover, according to decisions in previous cases where "extravagant wages had been extorted," the men had no legal claim to the wages and gratuities they had been promised. The *Norman Morison* men themselves had actually agreed with this interpretation, but pressed their case anyway since Douglas had made the offer "voluntarily." The committee reluctantly kept

Douglas's promise, complaining that it would increase expenses, but thinking "it best not to throw any doubt on the faith which might be safely reposed in Mr Douglas's promises." In future, however, it suggested, the company's officer should leave the settlement of conflicts to the captain and his crew who would appeal to him only as a last resort if they could not arrange matters themselves.¹²²

Douglas probably believed he was doing what the committee wanted, since it had ordered him to keep the ships in an "efficient" state especially with regard to men, observing that, "while wages continue high the Company must submit as others do to the additional expence in the hope that a supply of seamen equal to the demand may soon take place."¹²³ But, the committee must have thought that an experienced ship's master might know better how to keep a vessel properly manned without making unnecessary promises. In January of 1852, however, Douglas made similar concessions. Seven men deserted from the *Norman Morison* and four others refused to work until they received "high wages for the homeward voyage." Douglas kept a "well manned canoe" circling the ship at night to prevent further desertions and was forced to secure "the fidelity" of the remaining men, by increasing wages by £2 a month for able seamen and £1,10 for ordinary seamen, the latter term being the common designation for sailors with less than two years' experience. These wages would be retroactive to the date of the ship's arrival. To compensate them for the ship's being shorthanded on the way home, each man was promised a gratuity of £12,10. Douglas pointed out that the sum of the gratuities for the fifteen men was less than the cost of the wages of the eleven missing men would have been and fewer men also meant a reduction in provisions.¹²⁴ A dangerous precedent had been set,

¹²²HBCA, C.1/613, Log of the *Norman Morison*, 1849-51, 9-10 Apr. 1850, fos. 80-80d.; 8 May 1850, fo. 83; 11 May 1850, fo. 83; 13 May 1850, fo. 84; 14 May 1850, fo. 84; B.223/c/2, Archibald Barclay to P. S. Ogden, James Douglas, and John Work, 1 Mar. 1851, fos. 4-4d.

¹²³HBCA, B.226/c/1, Archibald Barclay to James Douglas, 15 Nov. 1850, fo. 108d.

¹²⁴Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, 26; HBCA, B.226/b/6, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 15 Jan. 1852, pp. 2-3.

however. The following year the men of the *Norman Morison* "came to a strike" at the last moment and "in the most shameless manner demanded" the same gratuity that had been granted in 1852 before they would move the ship, which was aground in the entrance of the harbour. Douglas had no alternative but to submit to their demands because he could not replace them and he did not want to risk delaying the ship's departure.¹²⁵ Double pay while at anchor at Vancouver Island became the rule.¹²⁶ This practice was abolished in 1864, when the committee also limited the men's advances to one month's wages and eliminated monthly payments, thereby making it possible to carry out its determination that deserters would forfeit all wages owed to them, as the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 allowed.¹²⁷

Although wages were important factors in these conflicts, money was not and never had been the main cause of discontentment among the company's seamen. The crews of the ships that made the voyages to and from North America, as distinct from the sloopers and shallopers attached to the Bayside posts, were different from the rest of the company's workers. They signed on for the duration of the voyages, which lasted a few months if their destination was Hudson Bay and several years if it was the Pacific. Unlike the ordinary servants, the company's seamen were recruited in London, where the navy and merchant marine acquired their men. They, therefore, comprised a far more mixed bag of nationalities than were present elsewhere in the HBC.¹²⁸ They were a distinctive element in the HBC, viewed by the officers as

¹²⁵HBCA, B.226/b/6, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 15 Mar. 1853, p. 192.

¹²⁶HBCA, A.10/45, Capt. J. T. Trivett to W. G. Smith, 8 March 1859, fos. 212-212d.

¹²⁷HBCA, A.6/39, Thomas Fraser to William Fraser Tolmie and board of management of the Western Department, 30 Sept. 1864, fo. 154d.-55.

¹²⁸See: HBCA, C.1/293, Log of the *Eddystone*, 1810. "List of officers and men on board"; C.1/312, Log of the *Eddystone*, 1820. "List of the Ship Eddystones Crew"; C.1/408, Log of the *King George II*, 1800. "Ship's Company"; C./981, Log of the *Princess Royal*, 1859-65. Crew's list; C.7/32, *Colinda* - miscellaneous papers, 1835-50. Agreement, 24 Aug. 1835.

turbulent, improvident creatures of little use on land.¹²⁹ Their separateness occasionally manifested itself in an unwillingness to perform the same work as the company's ordinary servants.¹³⁰ But when they acted collectively their behaviour was motivated by the same desire for fair treatment that motivated the rest of the company's employees. James Douglas was not far wrong when he declared that among seamen, obedience proceeded "from a high degree of respect for their Officers," although he also suggested, unfairly, that they were indifferent to "upright principle."¹³¹ In fact, a captain bereft of "upright principle" received no respect. Unfairness far more than low wages led to insolence and mutiny.

Thus, on 15 May 1837 the men of *Nereide* sent John McLoughlin Sr. a letter accusing Captain David Home of severity and assigning excessive duty, apparently regulating watches not in accordance with custom. Aboard ships the day was divided into six watches of four hours each. At the beginning of a voyage, the crew was divided into two groups, also called watches, which took their names from the side of the ship where they bunked. The details of Home's system of watches remains unknown, but they required more hours of work than the men considered fair. McLoughlin ignored both that letter and the one that arrived three days later. Finally on 31 May the crew arrived in person. He told them to return to the ship and promised to come next morning to hear them, which he did. He concluded that they should obey Home and, although the captain objected to McLoughlin's interference, the two officers thought the matter was settled and McLoughlin ordered the ship to be off. But the men refused to weigh anchor and remained adamant even after being read the ship's articles and being asked individually what

¹²⁹See for example: HBCA, B.22/a/19, Brandon House journal, 1815-16, 30 July 1815, fo. 2; B.59/e/4, Eastmain report, 1816-17, fo. 2; B.239/c/3, Robert Harding to John Charles, 27 Mar. 1837, fo. 21d.; A.11/70, Peter Skene Ogden and James Douglas to London committee, 28 July 1846, fo. 214.

¹³⁰See for example: HBCA, B.42/a/140, Churchill journal, 1813-14, 13-14 Sept. 1813, fo. 8; B.239/b/92, John Charles to William Smith, 30 Oct. 1836, fo. 63.

¹³¹E. E. Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series: 1825-38 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1941), James Douglas to London committee, 10 Oct. 1838, p. 247.

they would do. McLoughlin then had them cuffed, confined, and fed on bread and water. Five days later the prisoners informed McLoughlin that they would not serve under Home. McLoughlin made no concessions and reduced their grog ration to a glass a day. He also threatened punishment, presumably of the corporal variety. The crew's unity began to dissolve. Several days later only two, John Lucas and John Jarvis, still held out. McLoughlin had each given a dozen lashes, but they still refused to return to duty. He returned the next morning and called all the men on deck. They asked him "in a way between pleading and menacing" if he was going to flog the men again. McLoughlin told them they were here to see what was done and sanctimoniously informed them that the HBC did not bring men to the country to flog them but to have them perform certain duties, and if "fair means" did not persuade them to perform them, "other means" would have to be tried. Meanwhile, the captain and two officers were taking Lucas and Jarvis to the rigging. When they saw that they were about to be tied up, they immediately agreed to return to duty and gave no more trouble. McLoughlin, wanting to get the ship off as quickly as possible, ordered it to go and agreed that the watches aboard the *Nereide* would be arranged like those aboard the rest of the company's ships. But, the crew refused to sail with Home. McLoughlin was now convinced that the men's real intention had been "to Dictate who should be their commander." Of course, he was correct. The men objected to a master whose arrangements broke with a tradition that ensured a fair division of labour. They also objected to physical abuse, for which Captain Home had already been criticized by William Brown in 1836. The boatswain had refused to make a cat o'nine tails when the chief mate ordered him to, saying that he had never done such a thing and never would, for which disobedience McLoughlin demoted him. McLoughlin had no objections to corporal punishment and made use of it to persuade the men finally to weigh anchor.¹³²

¹³²Rich, ed., The Letters of John McLoughlin from Fort Vancouver to the Governor and Committee, First Series, 1825-38, McLoughlin to London committee, 26 Oct. 1837, pp. 190-93; James Douglas to George Simpson, 18 Mar. 1838, pp. 274-76.

Another officer to whom men objected was Captain William Henry McNeill, master of the steamer *Beaver*. McNeill had joined the HBC in 1832 and was, like John McKay, one of those officers more beloved by his biographer than his men. McNeill did indeed enjoy a "long and distinguished career," succeeding in overcoming "tricky navigational problems" and establishing profitable trading relationships with the Indians in the vicinity of Fort Simpson. But, the mutiny on the *Beaver* needs to be seen as more than merely an incident that "marred his record" and his relations with his subordinates at Fort Simpson can not be seen as problems arising from the fact that his men were "difficult to manage," particularly if he was the "Monster" and "Vile Wretch" with "a terrible account to settle for so Torturing Mankind" mentioned in a letter of commiseration to George Gordon, one of the crew.¹³³ Of course, one must allow for exaggeration on Gordon's part. After all, William Bligh was not an especially harsh disciplinarian, given the standards of his time. Even a man as distressed by flogging and as sympathetic to common seamen as Richard Henry Dana Jr. considered it vital that the captain's power be not "diminished an iota" and thought that the seaman's best defence against tyranny was an improvement in his "intellectual and religious character." Then his captain would respect him and his testimony, if a master was prosecuted for cruelty, would "carry that weight which an intelligent and respectable man of the lower class almost always does with a jury."¹³⁴ McNeill would, probably, have concurred with Dana, a fellow New Englander whose stint as sailor began the same year John McLoughlin Sr. received the London committee's approval of McNeill's appointment. Dana's shipmates, however, had a strong tradition of resistance to authority

¹³³G. R. Newell, "William Henry McNeill," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume X: 1871-1880 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 484-5; HBCA, E.31/2, A. Randall to George Gordon, 22 Oct. 1838.

¹³⁴Milton Rugoff, Afterword to William Bligh, The Mutiny on Board the H.M.S. *Bounty* (New York: Signet, New American Library, 1961), 228, 231, 233; Richard Henry Dana Jr., Two Years before the Mast and Twenty-Four Years After, The Harvard Classics (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), 104-9, 374-7.

behind them¹³⁵ and a long-term commitment to the sea which he, a Harvard University student taking a two year break to allow his eyesight to recover from the effects of measles, could not have. They might have entertained a different view of things. McNeill's men certainly found his brand of discipline objectionable and appear to have decided to rid themselves of him.

In January of 1838 William Wilson and James Starling, while filling small casks with rum, took advantage of the opportunity to get drunk. McNeill, therefore, stopped their grog for a month and when they persisted in behaving "like all drunken Sailors" and talked back, he gave them a caning, telling them they had brought it on themselves for not being off when told. Several days later McNeill ordered everyone to carry wood to the water's edge for loading aboard the steamer. The four stokers, however, refused, declaring that it was not their duty. Two relented, but two remained firm and McNeill tied them up and gave each two dozen lashes, which, though sufficient to reduce their backs to ribbons, was not an unusual number, but the other men objected. The next morning the sailors sent a petition to John Work, the master of Fort Simpson, stating the "illegality" of having a foreigner in command of a British vessel, enclosing what they called an "Abstract of an act of Parliament to that effect," and pointing out that the vessel was liable to seizure. Considering this concern none of their business and realizing that their raising of the issue was an attempt to have McNeill "unshipped," Work declined to send the reply the men had requested. The next day, the seamen and the stokers, now united, refused duty and sent a letter repeating their demands. This time Work told them that it was their duty to obey whoever was set over them and the legal issues were not their affair. He also asked how, "if they Knew the laws so well," they had come "to overlook that relative to Mutiny" and commanded them to return to their duty, adding that their request would not be granted. The men immediately sent another letter repeating their demands and the engineers now submitted a note of their own, wherein they stated that they "could not continue"

¹³⁵Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700-1750 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 205-53.

their duty under McNeill. Work took Donald Manson and went aboard to confront the mutineers in person. The seven seamen, "man by man absolutely refused" to sail under McNeill. The engineers also refused and it was their refusal that Work considered the obstacle, since without them the vessel was "at a stand still." He therefore focused his attention on them, bringing them ashore and trying unsuccessfully to sway them. He then requested them to submit a written reply informing him whether they would work the engines under McNeill if the rest of the men returned to duty. They replied that they would not work under McNeill, though without referring to his citizenship. Work considered himself in a bind, with all but the mate, the carpenter, the cook, and six woodcutters on strike. Although he thought it possible to overwhelm them and get them into irons, he feared such a move would lead to bloodshed without restoring the vessel to service. Since it was vital that Fort Simpson communicate with Fort Vancouver before the York Factory express left there, Work thought it prudent to take command of the steamer himself and keep McNeill aboard as a passenger in which capacity his expertise would be available.¹³⁶

It was not until later that Work and McNeill had evidence that two of the engineers, Peter Arthur and John Donald, were the instigators, although neither of them wondered how Arthur was able to exercise influence over men who had harboured such great dislike for him several months earlier when he had been called "a liar" by William Willson for telling McNeill what the duties of the men were. Apparently Arthur had been overheard saying to the seamen, "Now men stick to your Text and we will gain the day, I have given them my final answer or, words to that effect." The engineers *did* prove the key to breaking the strike. After the ship docked at Nisqually and the officers had taken care of business at Fort Vancouver, Work told the crew that McNeill was going to be reinstated. There was immediate resistance from the seamen and three stokers, but the engineers remained quiet because, while at Fort Vancouver, Arthur had been promised complete authority in the engine room. But, the cooperation of the crew was

¹³⁶HBCA, B.201/a/3, Fort Simpson journal, 1834-38, 26-31 Jan. 1838, fos. 166d.-70; Rugoff, Afterword to The Mutiny on Board the H.M.S. *Bounty*, 223

necessary for the steamer to proceed and Work isolated three of the seamen, presumably the least determined, and advised them to return to duty, warning them of the consequences of "being led into a Mutiny by Scoundrels." They agreed, but the others held out, going so far as to tell Arthur that "he had got them into the scrape and backed out himself, but that they meant to stick to what he and themselves had agreed to at first." Arthur then confessed that the mutiny was a conspiracy of all the men and First Officer James Scarborough to get rid of McNeill so that Scarborough could replace him and alleged that it was all Scarborough's idea. Peter Duncan, the carpenter, attested to the truth of Arthur's confession, relating that he had heard Scarborough declare that he would replace McNeill and then "work up" the deposed master as McNeill "had often worked him up." He also knew that Arthur had furnished the men with the book, Ship Master's Assistant, out of which they got the law to which they referred in their petition. Three seamen and William Brown, the steward, refused to give in and were replaced.¹³⁷

To see the mutiny as the manipulation by an ambitious officer and a member of the labour aristocracy of foolish and naturally unruly seamen is to view it through the eyes of the officers. Scarborough and Arthur, like Archibald Mason and William Finlay, may have had ulterior motives, but their plot required them to tap into a disaffection that already existed, as the steadfastness of James Starling, George Gordon, William Wilson, and William Brown in the face of Arthur's betrayal suggests. These four all appealed directly to the London committee. Brown's petition and the compensation he received from the London committee have been discussed in Chapter 5. Starling, Gordon, and Wilson, sent home aboard the *Columbia* later that year, petitioned the London committee together, declaring that they had been "very much oppressed and tyrannized over" in the service, "most especially under Captain McNeill." He, they claimed, "has often wished that he should like to see a bloody Row fore and aft so that he might blow some of our brains out." For "not the slightest reason" he had "constantly advised"

¹³⁷HBCA, B.201/a/3, Fort Simpson journal, 1834-38, 31 May 1837, fos. 108-108d; 3 June 1837, fo. 110d.; B.201/z/1, Deposition of Capt. W. H. McNeill, 19 Aug. 1839, fos. 2d-4; Deposition of Peter Duncan, fos. 7-7d.

Scarborough to knock their "bloody brains out" with a handspike if they looked "black."

Moreover, he had beaten Wilson and Starling "in a most brutal manner." For this reason, they were "obliged to refuse his Command for the safety of [their] lives." They were, therefore, put off duty, imprisoned, and sent home. They then called on the company's secretary for their wages and he told them he was not empowered to pay them, but advised them to lay the matter before the committee. It was good advice. The committee, sensitive to criticism and already alarmed by reports of cruelty in its western territories, appears to have been sympathetic. Instead of fining them the whole of their wages, as had been decided by the company's officers in Victoria, the company decided that, because they expressed "great contrition" and it was their first offence, they would only lose the wages for the time they were off duty. McLoughlin was told, however, to let all the seamen know clearly that such lenity would not be repeated. Arthur's punishment amounted to a refusal of his rather cheeky, under the circumstances, request for a wage increase and his dismissal when he refused to accept this decision.¹³⁸

Captain McNeill was not the only unpopular officer in the company's marine department. In 1845, when the barque, *Vancouver*, arrived at Fort Vancouver in March, the crew refused to work until they received a new second mate. Considering their complaints "frivolous", George Simpson removed the men from the ship and order was soon restored.¹³⁹ In June of 1847 after their arrival at Fort Vancouver, the men of the *Mary Dare* objected to the man appointed to replace the chief officer who had been dismissed for drunkenness and neglect of duty and refused to work. Although the captain and the company's officers were able to restore discipline, they determined to send both of the defective officers home the next year, the old one being disqualified by his "unfortunate habits" and his successor by his "unhappy temper" which

¹³⁸HBCA, A.10/8, James Starling, George Gordon and William Willson to London committee, no date, but received 13 May 1839, fos. 309-309d.; A.6/25, London committee to James Douglas, 31 Oct. 1838, fo. 11; B.223/c/1, London committee to John McLoughlin Sr., 14 Sept. 1839, fo. 131.

¹³⁹HBCA, A.12/2, Simpson to London committee, 20 June 1845, fos. 532-532d.

had "driven every Ships Company with which he served in this Country into a state of mutiny."¹⁴⁰ In 1855 seven of the crew of the *Princess Royal*, which had lost six others to desertion, were imprisoned at Fort Victoria for refusing to obey the "lawful commands" of their master, but four of them managed to escape into the woods. The remaining three were sent back aboard and the ship sailed. The four fugitives were not recovered until later. Douglas believed that one of the causes of the trouble was Mr. Gale whose "very disagreeable manner of carrying on the duty of the ship, arising probably from an excess of zeal, which however ought to be more temperately exercised."¹⁴¹ A ship's crew may have been hierarchical and the ship's master ensconced at its top with the authority of a despot, but both the laws, however much they were intended to enforce discipline, and custom recognized the right to fair treatment. Defending this right was part of maritime culture. When it hired mariners, the HBC was dealing with a group with its own history and customs that could not be incorporated easily into the service. The same difficulties arose in the company's mining operations.

These began in 1848 with the arrival on Vancouver Island of John Muir, his wife, their four sons, and a daughter, Muir's two nephews, one of whom brought his family, and John Smith and his family. They had been recruited in Ayrshire. Scottish coal miners, though serfs until 1799, regarded themselves as "independent colliers" not "company hands." Hewers, i.e., the men who worked at the coal face, considered themselves skilled tradesmen, exercising control over the pace of their work, free of intrusive supervision from capitalists or managers. Moreover, their earnings were based on piece-work, which reinforced their "sense of skill."¹⁴² But the company did not take these factors into consideration when it arranged for their recruitment,

¹⁴⁰HBCA, A.11/70, Peter Skene Ogden and James Douglas to London committee, 20 Sept. 1847, fos. 268d.-69.

¹⁴¹HBCA, B.226/b/13, James Douglas to W. G. Smith, 27 Dec. 1855, fo. 35d.; Douglas to Smith, 14 Feb. 1856, fos. 41-41d.

¹⁴²Alan Campbell and Fred Reid, "The Independent Collier in Scotland," in Independent Collier: The Coal Miner as Archetypical Proletarian Reconsidered, Royden Harrison, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 55-59.

although it took the advice of its agent, David Landale, a mining engineer, to base their pay on the "darg", i.e., what a man could produce in a day and also to allow a bonus of 2 shillings and 6 pence for every ton of coal over thirty produced in a month. The resulting contracts promised the miners £50 in wages plus the bonus, and materials and assistance to build dwellings.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, as Keith Ralston has pointed out, the London committee appears to have assumed that the miners would be on the same footing as the rest of the company's tradesmen, but the contradiction between this status and the special terms in their contracts led to conflict.¹⁴⁴ The company's ignorance of the men it had hired is aptly demonstrated by the sole surviving and undated indenture in the HBC Archives.

It bound a man to serve as "Working Collier or Labourer", a term which was meaningless in the coal industry and stipulated a ten-hour work day, whether below or above ground, contrary to the miners' customary eight-hour work day when at the coal face. The contract also required them to work as labourers if the coal turned out to be not worth the mining.¹⁴⁵ Had the miners been able to begin immediately to practice their occupations, these stipulations might not have caused trouble. However, after their arrival at Fort Victoria, the miners were employed for three months at the dockyard at Esquimalt and once at Fort Rupert they were required to build dwellings for themselves. Unskilled in this work, they required assistance, which was grudgingly granted. They also feared the Indians who resented their presence because they had hitherto gathered coal for their own trade. Worst of all, there was no workable seam of coal for them to mine. They were soon guaranteed an eight-hour work day if they toiled underground, but their first work at the site of the mine was sinking a shaft, a situation

¹⁴³Lynne Bowen, "Independent Colliers at Fort Rupert: Labour Unrest on the West Coast, 1849," The Beaver Vol. 69, no. 2 (March 1989): 28.

¹⁴⁴H. Keith Ralston, "Miners and Managers: The Organization of Coal Production on Vancouver Island by the Hudson's Bay Company, 1848-1862," in The Company on the Coast, ed. E. Blanche Norcross (Nanaimo: Nanaimo Historical Society, 1983), 45.

¹⁴⁵HBCA, A.67/1, Colliers' indenture, 1850s.

that displeased everyone. The pit filled with water every night and it took until nearly 10 a.m. to drain it every morning. Therefore, in order for the miners to have their eight-hour day, the regular servants had to empty the pit with a winch and buckets. The company's officers disliked having to use the labour of their other servants for the task. The servants might well have resented it too, but no one asked them.¹⁴⁶ The miners resented having to dig shafts at all.

They had engaged under the impression that they were going to a fully functioning mine where they would extract coal. Instead they were set to digging pits, which they declared was "neither connected with coal digging as a branch, nor with labourers work, but stands by itself." Moreover, the 2s.6d. bonus, which, they declared, was "the only inducement" that lured them from their "comfortable home to this comfortless place" could not be earned if they were digging shafts. They, therefore, petitioned for that sum per day in compensation. Unless they received it, they were determined to stop mining and work out their contracts as labourers. Landale thought their demand excessive because he believed that sinking was less productive than coal working and therefore should be less remunerative. He also believed that if they were too well paid for sinking pits they would continue to do so even after they found a workable seam of coal if that seam did not provide enough coal beyond their quota to earn them a bonus as great as they could get by sinking shafts. He recommended that they be paid a bonus for every fathom they dug, with progressively higher bonuses as they went deeper. He believed that such an agreement would be acceptable to the miners and that it should be worked out between the company's officer and John Muir. But, he warned, the officer should be made aware that "Colliers are as a class selfish & lazy" and their emoluments should depend on the quantity of work performed "not on days wages alone."¹⁴⁷ If Landale had so little understanding of the

¹⁴⁶Bowen, "Independent Colliers at Fort Rupert," 29; HBCA, A.11/72, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 3 Apr. 1850, fo. 221-221d.

¹⁴⁷HBCA, A.11/72, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 8 Apr. 1850, fo. 222; John Muir Jr., Archibald Muir, John McGregor, John Smith, Robert Muir, Andrew Muir, and Michael Muir to James Douglas, 27 Mar. 1850, fo. 222d.; A.10/28, David Landale to Archibald Barclay, 17 June 1850, fos. 696-97.

significance of piece work among miners and could see it only as a way of ensuring that slackers were kept at work, it is not surprising that the HBC did not fully understand just whom it was recruiting. Nevertheless, the company granted them 2 shillings a day in compensation.

While their request was being considered, the miners left the mine. According to John Muir, the oversman, the lack of assistance and protection at last prompted him to bring his men to the fort and offer their services wherever they might be needed. Two of them, Andrew Muir and John McGregor, were sent to cut a drain through the fort below "the Kanaka's house, a place not fit for a pig to go through, let alone a man to work in." On their fourth day of work, 26 April 1850, George Blenkinsop, the officer left in charge while his father-in-law, the irascible Captain William Henry McNeill, was absent, came up to them and "in an abusive manner" charged them with breach of contract, fined them £50, and put them off duty. When McNeill returned he sent for the men and "in the most abusive manner possible to describe" threatened that they would "be shot like dogs" and had them "thrust" into the bastion, "with Irons on their hands," and kept there for six days, fed on bread and water, with the irons on day and night for two days and two nights. On 9 May, their irons were removed and on 11 May they were permitted to return to their own houses, but not allowed to leave the fort until 13 June. Since they received no satisfaction from James Douglas, they refused to return to work and demanded a "public hearing." The London committee demanded an explanation and an investigation into Blenkinsop's management,¹⁴⁸ but it nonetheless took a stern view of the miners' actions. Not only had Muir not been specific enough about the assistance he needed, though the committee presumed he needed carpenters and protection against Indian attack, he should have limited his action to an appeal to James Douglas "to see that justice be done." But, by refusing to work, the miners had "taken the law into their own hands" and "caused great loss to the Company thereby."

¹⁴⁸HBCA, B.226/c/1, London committee to James Douglas, 25 Oct. 1850, fos. 84, 85; "Extract from a letter from Mr John Muir dated Fort Rupert 2nd July 1850 to Archibald Barclay Esqre", fos. 86-87.

Douglas would investigate, but the miners would have to fulfill their contracts or suffer the penalties inflicted therein.¹⁴⁹

Douglas thought that the miners had no cause to complain of ill treatment. The fact that they hunted along the coast proved that they were not really afraid of the Indians and their request for a stockade was, therefore, unreasonable. When they offered their services, they were employed about the fort under the supervision of their oversman. Trouble erupted when Andrew Muir and John McGregor refused to dig a drain and Blenkinsop had told them they were "idle fellows" and a bad example to his men and that if the company chose it could fine them £50 which they had forfeited by breach of contract, whereupon they threw down their tools and said they would not do another day's work for the company. Douglas sent McNeill back to assist Blenkinsop. By the time he arrived, the rest of the miners had joined in the strike, refusing to return to work until they received 2s.6d. per day for shanking. Blenkinsop confined them all, with Andrew Muir and McGregor in irons. After six days, they were liberated, but remained "refractory." Thereafter, they did no work, but received their full allowance of provisions. Although their confinement had been illegal, Douglas thought it had been necessary because an example had to be made or there would be "an end to all subordination." He also believed that the miners' real object had been to get to California.¹⁵⁰ The London committee shared this view,¹⁵¹ although there is little evidence for this. Nevertheless, all the miners but John Muir, his wife, and their youngest son left for California aboard the *England* along with a blacksmith and six men from the *Norman Morison*. Muir was dismissed and mining carried on with local recruits and regular servants.

Douglas at first favoured replacing the miners and then thought that the coal business would best be left to an independent joint stock company because it depended on a

¹⁴⁹HBCA, B.226/c/1, Archibald Barclay to John Muir, 25 Oct. 1850, fos. 112-113.

¹⁵⁰HBCA, A.11/73, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 24 Feb. 1851, fos. 72-74.

¹⁵¹HBCA, A.6/29, A. Barclay to James Douglas, 15 Nov. 1850, fo. 9d.

heavy investment in tools and machinery as well as satisfying the miners who objected to living on fish and whose wages would have to keep pace with those offered in California.¹⁵² The HBC, however, sought new miners, a difficult process. Douglas's advice to Blenkinsop to avoid intemperate language because the miners' complaints of threats that they would be shot or knocked down gave "a ruffianly character to the Service"¹⁵³ came too late. Rumours that the Indians had massacred the miners at Fort Rupert and reports of "severities practised on the men under John Muir" prompted some of the new recruits to refuse to go and replacements had to be found. These, the committee emphasized, had to be "treated with more than usual Kindness" in order to "reconcile them to the new state of things upon which they are about to enter." Moreover, they deserved "this indulgence" because they were "superior to the ordinary class of Servants." The oversman was "an intelligent and highly respectable person."¹⁵⁴ The new group, among whom was the future mining magnate and exemplar of unfettered capitalism, Robert Dunsmuir, was no happier than the first however. They complained about their provisions, both aboard ship and at Fort Rupert, and the state of the coal operations.¹⁵⁵

Although there was some unhappiness among the miners, Douglas's increase of the bonus to 4 shillings and 6 pence per ton in 1853 appears to have had a beneficial effect. The committee, evidently still ignorant of the miners' culture, believed that people of this "class," presumably the irresponsible working class, "when they get very high wages" were "often disposed to work less, and to be content to earn only a little more than they had earned before." The committee believed that they should be spurred on by increasing their quota of coal from

¹⁵²HBCA, A.11/72, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 17 Aug. 1850, fos. 291d.-292d.

¹⁵³HBCA, B.226/b/3, James Douglas to George Blenkinsop, 29 May 1851, fos. 99d.-100.

¹⁵⁴HBCA, B.223/c/2, Archibald Barclay to Officers in charge of Vancouver, 13 Dec. 1851, fos. 17-17d.

¹⁵⁵HBCA, B.226/c/1, Boyd Gilmour to James Douglas, 22 Aug. 1851, fo. 165d.; A.10/30, Boyd Gilmour to Archibald Barclay, 23 Aug. 1852, fos. 592-593.

thirty to fifty tons a month.¹⁵⁶ Douglas reported that thirty tons was a large rate of production which had become the accepted rate and that he found that the extra wages actually spurred the miners on.¹⁵⁷ By the time the committee heard this, however, the third group of Scottish miners, traveling aboard the ill-fated *Colinda*, had been deposited in Valparaiso and efforts were under way to recruit English miners for the coal operations that would be concentrated at Nanaimo where promising coal deposits had been discovered. Its innovations in recruiting the Scots were, however, significant. The company was now proposing to hire families, in the hope that they would be more stable than their predecessors, although as many useful hands were to be included as possible, "a good proportion" of single men and few "unavailable" children being specified. It had hired 36 men, of whom only four had no families. The committee wisely accepted Landale's advice to modify the contract to oblige the engagee to serve as a "Working Collier, Miner, Sinker or Labourer" and ordered Douglas to have houses ready, all designed so as "to encourage decent habits of living among them." The committee hoped to supplement these workers with labourers drawn from its ordinary servants and the local natives because it had been unable to attract the ten "collier labourers" it wanted on the terms it was prepared to offer, namely on five year contracts at the rate of £17 a year with provisions and lodging and a gratuity of £25 in land at 20 shillings an acre if they conducted themselves satisfactorily.¹⁵⁸

The new miners, from Staffordshire, proved, as insubordinate as their predecessors.¹⁵⁹ The voyage to Vancouver Island aboard the *Princess Royal* was wretched, marked by the deaths of several children and of a woman in childbirth, bad weather, and

¹⁵⁶HBCA, A.6.30, Archibald Barclay to James Douglas, 18 Nov. 1853, fos. 157d.-58.

¹⁵⁷HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 15 Mar. 1854, fos. 18-18d.

¹⁵⁸HBCA, A.5/18, A. Barclay to David Landale, 26 May 1853, pp. 121-22; A. Barclay to David Landale, 9 June 1853, pp. 132-33; A.6/30, Secretary to James Douglas, 17 June 1853, fo. 117d.; Eric Newsome, The Coal Coast: The History of Coal Mining in B.C. -- 1835-1900 (Victoria: Orca Book Publishers, 1989), 48.

¹⁵⁹HBCA, A.6/31, W. G. Smith to James Douglas, 21 Apr. 1854, fos. 23-23d.

dreadful rations which prompted a one-day mutiny by the miners.¹⁶⁰ They added a disgruntled element to an already discontented lot. When in 1854 Douglas went to re-engage miners at Nanaimo, he was annoyed by their extravagant demands, although he did not record the details, probably because he absolutely refused to make any concessions beyond raising their bonus from 4/- to 4/6. He also hired another two miners on very different terms: no fixed wages, only 4/6 per ton produced, victuals for one person, and tools. When sick or otherwise off duty, they would receive no food or pay from the company.¹⁶¹ Later that year the miners struck for higher wages. According to Douglas, "missionaries" from the American collieries at Bellingham Bay were promising them high wages, but he managed to persuade them that they would receive the same wages from the HBC and they returned to work.¹⁶² In April of 1855 seven miners deserted, but six returned and were readmitted. Douglas thought they would take to their work eventually. Like all new recruits, they needed "good training" and "the influence of proper discipline" before they became satisfactory employees. In fact, he became increasingly optimistic that the company would soon have no difficulty recruiting more miners as the Staffordshire miners became reconciled to the country. Some had even asked him if their miner friends could come here by the company's ships. He also observed that miners who were paid by the ton, with no other pay or allowances of any kind produced the most coal and were the least troublesome and suggested that fixed yearly wages for miners be abolished. The committee was receptive to this suggestion and introduced this new arrangement by directing that those who had broken their contracts not be readmitted on their old terms. Indeed, miners should be employed on piece

¹⁶⁰Randolph Sydney Vickers, "George Robinson: Nanaimo Mine Agent," The Beaver Outfit 315, no. 2 (Nov. 1984): 46-7.

¹⁶¹HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 11 Aug. 1854, fos. 30-30d.

¹⁶²HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 25 Dec. 1854, fo. 37d.

work and no annual pay was to be given at the expiry of the current contracts. Also, if they stopped work they would be ejected from their houses.¹⁶³

The miners continued to be "restive and untractable" however. There were frequent disputes between them and their manager, often ending in a "general strik[e]". The six deserters who had returned to the fold were "idle and disorderly" and careless about the quality of the coal they produced. Another party of eight had deserted to the nearby gold diggings. When they returned, as the committee had ordered, they were admitted on new terms: 4 shillings for every ton of coal and no rations. The miners objected, though their objections had no effect.¹⁶⁴ Nor did they alter the committee's favourable view of these new terms. It ordered Douglas to sell small lots around Nanaimo to encourage a permanent settlement of miners in the area,¹⁶⁵ a plan reminiscent of the HBC's establishment of the Red River Settlement. By December of 1856, Douglas reported that the miners were supporting themselves and being paid 9 shillings a ton, there was no longer a system of monthly wages, and the only benefit the miners received was free housing.¹⁶⁶ The following year Douglas hired three Cornish miners from California and he concluded that it would no longer be necessary to send miners from England.¹⁶⁷ In July of 1858, Douglas reported that it was easy to replace deserting miners with men from the colony, though some of them were "not the best characters."¹⁶⁸ In 1859 Douglas decided to sell the miners their houses along with the lots on which they were situated, thereby relieving the company of all

¹⁶³HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to Archibald Barclay, 22 April 1855, fos. 45-45d.; Douglas to W. G. Smith, 24 July 1855, fo. 49d.; A.6/31, W. G. Smith to James Douglas, 31 Dec. 1855, fos. 204-204d.

¹⁶⁴HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to W. G. Smith, 11 Oct. 1855, fos. 53-53d.

¹⁶⁵HBCA, A.6/32, W. G. Smith to James Douglas, 16 May 1856, fos. 48d.-49.

¹⁶⁶HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to W. G. Smith, 19 Dec. 1856, fo. 70.

¹⁶⁷HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to W. G. Smith, 3 Dec. 1857, fo. 79.

¹⁶⁸HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to W. G. Smith, 26 July 1858.

expense except wages¹⁶⁹ and eliminating the last remnants of paternalism in the HBC's relationship with its colliers. The following year Governor Dallas began to sell lots in order to attract settlers and render the company "independent of providing houses for the miners, or of finding them in anything but their pay, & that only when working."¹⁷⁰ As a result, the strike for higher pay that took place in 1860 did not lead to the intervention that previous incidents had.¹⁷¹ The operations were not profitable, however, and even with labour so close by, the wages in California and Oregon remained high and it was their level that regulated the rate on Vancouver Island.¹⁷² Both matters of expense and discipline were settled finally when the company sold its coal operations in 1862, a solution to problems of discipline that could be applied nowhere else in the HBC, although George Hyde Wollaston's suggestion in 1810 that the company abandon its traditional organization and outfit independent traders had offered a similar resolution of all disciplinary problems. Instead, the committee had adopted the "Retrenching System," hoping that new men and new rules would make its workforce more obedient, diligent, and profitable.

However, the introduction of the allegedly more active Canadians, Highlanders, Irishmen, and, briefly, Norwegians had not had the desired effect. Nor had the committee's insistence on frugality and low wages. The servants behaved as they always had: shirking their duty, engaging in private trade, refusing to do as they were told, and combining to raise wages, demand sufficient provisions, and overthrow unpopular officers. In short, regardless of the committee's policies, they never abandoned their efforts to ensure fair treatment and exert some control over their working conditions. The increasing rigidity of the company's hierarchy and the growing distance between the committee and the servants did not really alter the relations between the two. Servants had always had limited opportunities for promotion and their

¹⁶⁹HBCA, B.226/b/14, James Douglas to Thomas Fraser, 21 Oct. 1859.

¹⁷⁰HBCA, B.226/b/19, A. G. Dallas to Thomas Fraser, 6 Apr. 1860, p. 107.

¹⁷¹HBCA, B.226/b/20, John Work to Thomas Fraser, 23 June 1860, p. 146.

¹⁷²HBCA, A.11/77, A. G. Dallas to Thomas Fraser, 16 Sept. 1860, fos. 715-18.

relegation to the lowest levels was nothing new, although the transformation of their officers into middle-class managers strengthened the cultural boundary that divided officers from servants. For the latter, however, this did not mean a longing to cross the barrier, but rather the development of mores that conflicted with those of their superiors and the continuation of old customs and habits, among which were an indifference to authority and the willingness to defy it, both individually and collectively. The employment of new groups of workers added elements guaranteed to conflict with the organizational ideal of the HBC, if not its reality.

A miner or a seaman could not be turned into a servant, a status which had, of course, never guaranteed that even a servant acted the part, but which clashed sharply with their traditions of independence and collective action. Ironically, these had grown in situations which should have rendered them submissive and tractable, namely, serfdom and the highly stratified society of the ship. That combination of subordinate status with insubordinate behaviour was already present in the HBC before their arrival, however. The Red River tripmen were something new though, the result of the company's deliberate attempt to create a private source of cheap, hardy labour easily acquired and easily dismissed. These men proved, however, to be as "attentive to their interests" as the Rev. William Clouston had declared the Orcadians to be in the last century.¹⁷³ Thus, the men of the HBC, whatever their origins, had in common the willingness to "combine" to negotiate a fair deal or protest the absence of one. That fair deal was not always a matter of wages either. The most serious conflicts erupted when superiors transgressed the "moral economy" that was supposed to regulate their behaviour. The assumption that men would meekly submit to what they perceived as injustice merely because they occupied a lowly place on the social scale was, and is, an erroneous supposition, based on the wishful thinking of those at the top. HBC employees were no more willing to tolerate what they considered oppression than workers anywhere else.

¹⁷³J. Storer Clouston, "Orkney and the Hudson's Bay Company," The Beaver Outfit 267 (Dec. 1936):8.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This thesis does not propose that the HBC was a hotbed of unrest or that the servants hated their work and their employer or that the HBC was a particularly mean-spirited master. On the contrary, the servants accepted their subordinate position in the hierarchy. They never demanded a more equitable share of the profits or a narrowing of the gap that yawned between their own meagre wages and salaries of their officers. The London committee was stern, but no harsher than other employers. It demanded absolute obedience, but had no desire to be either cruel or unreasonable. Had this been the situation, the company would have collapsed centuries ago. However, this thesis does suggest that this stability was due not to an absence of conflict, but rather to the fact that the conflict which did occur rarely called into question the relations of authority upon which the company was based. The HBC was a mercantile enterprise organized according to traditional, paternalistic principles. It hired servants from whom it demanded fidelity and obedience in return for wages, board, lodging, and the opportunity to accumulate modest savings. To ensure that it had workers who knew their place and responded appropriately to HBC's rewards, it recruited them from places where traditional social relations prevailed. But, although men from such places valued such benefits and the way of life they supported, they were neither as deferential nor as tractable as the company expected them to be because neither their societies nor pre-industrial societies in general were as harmonious as the ideal suggested. Pre-industrial social relations were not imposed from the top, they were negotiated and those at the bottom were prepared to defend themselves against injustice and oppression from the top. As a result, the London committee never achieved exactly what it had set out to do.

The master-servant relationships that were the norm between employers and workers when the HBC was chartered in 1670 became the basis for the HBC's organization. Its employees were servants, who signed contracts which obligated them to subordinate themselves utterly to the company or suffer severe penalties. The HBC was not, however, sufficiently in

control of the situation to impose the five year contracts it desired, to keep wages as low as it wanted, to enforce the contract strictly, or alter its business strategies. The efficacy of all such efforts depended on the behaviour of the men it hired. They resisted five year contracts, tried, often successfully, to impose wage increases, broke the terms of their engagements with relative impunity, and resisted changes that affected them. They did so because they had their own interests and ambitions, which, although modest and conservative, provided the basis upon which they dealt with their employer. They did not accept unquestioningly the terms offered them and when the HBC's benefits and remuneration no longer suited them they went elsewhere. Once in the service, they sought to control the pace and conditions of their work in a variety of ways, which the nature of the work itself made possible.

HBC servants did not live in cozy households with their officers. They had their own houses, dined at their own tables, and socialized with one another. Their experience in the HBC, therefore, reinforced the differences between themselves and their superiors that had characterized their position prior to entering the service and which at their entry was explicitly described by their contracts. While their officers came to resemble respectable middle-class gentlemen, the servants remained plebeian. At work, they usually supervised themselves and frequently took advantage of the opportunities so provided to neglect their duty and engage in private trade. Their self-interest also manifested itself in the refusal of dangerous or excessively hard work, demands for better provisions and wage increases, and resistance to what they considered cruel treatment. The HBC was not, therefore, characterized by strong vertical relationships that inhibited collective action, even though the workforce was too scattered to combine in a way that workers in other large organizations could. Moreover, such action did not depend on ethnicity. It grew out of a common experience and a common culture that distinguished HBC servants from their masters and which reinforced the awareness of this distinction that workers brought with them when they joined. A similar sense of identity underlay the actions of Red River tripmen, sailors, and coal miners.

However, HBC workers were conservative. They resisted innovations rather than trying to impose new conditions on their employer. As a result, although the servants did not threaten the relations of authority within the company, they undermined the ability of the committee to use its authority effectively. The committee and its officers were outnumbered and there were too many opportunities for servants to indulge in illicit behaviour in secret. If their misbehaviour became known or was of a more confrontational sort, their importance to the company's operations made it difficult to punish them. Most of the time, servants were not easy to lure into the service and, when the committee finally resorted to using the contract as a legal weapon, it discovered that it was a very blunt instrument indeed. Eventually it had to raise wages and add tea and sugar to make the service more attractive. The committee also had to guard against inflicting penalties that gave the HBC a bad reputation, repelled potential recruits, and roused the ire of old servants. Nor was it able to introduce unpopular new measures, such as payment by the task, the reduction of imported provisions, and higher prices without setting off ripples of discontent that could lead to disorder and loss. The servants' rejection of such novelties tended to reinforce the committee's own conservatism and cause it to jump back from the brink of changes that looked as though they might be too costly.

As a result, although the company survived, it did not survive on terms determined by the London committee. The success, such as it was, of its recruitment strategy depended upon the willingness of men to engage and their satisfaction with the conditions they found. Their attempt to found a colony to supply it with tractable labour did provide them with the tripmen upon whom its transport depended, but they controlled the conditions under which they carried out their duties. The success of its business depended on the fact that the servants did their work well enough to ensure its survival, but not that they threw aside all personal and private interest to subsume themselves in this organization. HBC servants had an identity of their own, which, although perhaps not a class consciousness that compelled them to strive to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, distinguished them from their superiors and led them

to act in ways that fur trade historians have either ignored or attributed to ethnicity. As a result, disobedience and resistance have been considered unusual, even aberrant, and, therefore, relegated to the margins of both fur trade and labour history. In fact, conduct that clashes with the harmonious image of the household model that dominates the history of the HBC was actually an important part of the master-servant relationship both in the pre-industrial household and in the HBC. To accept this is not to suggest that disobedience and dissension were dominant, but rather to submit that HBC servants were more complex than the cardboard figures that appear in the history books, that they had their own view of their work and their world, and that they acted according to it. The disobedience and discontentment of the William Paines, the Pierre Kanaquassés, the William Browns, the Palm Saunderses, the William Yorstons, and the John Muirs are as important a part of the HBC's history as the voyages of David Thompson, the imperium of George Simpson, and the plans and pronouncements of the London committee.

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