

MAINE LOBSTERMEN AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT:
THE LOBSTER FISHERMEN'S INTERNATIONAL
PROTECTIVE ASSOCIATION, 1907

In the early years of the twentieth century, a surge of unionism, led by the American Federation of Labor, swept across the nation as workers turned to collective action to secure a measure of dignity, security, and a greater share of the wealth they helped to produce. The united effort of workers to protect and enhance their interests extended to Maine, and was symbolized by the formation of a State Branch of the A.F. of L. on June 6, 1904.¹ The following year an official census of the labor unions in the state revealed the existence of 212 unions, 194 of them reporting a total of 13,798 union members drawn from myriad workplaces scattered over fifty cities, towns, and plantations.²

Maine clearly shared in what the national secretary of the A.F. of L. called the "phenomenal growth" of that organization between 1898 and 1904, when its membership leaped from 278,000 to 1,676,200.³ Samuel Gompers, president of the A.F. of L., described that explosive growth of unionism generally as the fruit borne of "the harvest of years of organizing work."⁴ The state's commissioner of industrial and labor statistics hinted at the excitement of those who piloted the young labor movement in Maine when he observed that the marked increase in the number of unions and union membership "must be gratifying to those interested in union labor."⁵ Indeed, the enthusiasm of those "interested in union labor" tended to outpace reality, as they often claimed between 20,000 and 25,000 members for their cause in the opening years of the new century.⁶ Included within the labor movement for the first time in the history of organized labor were lobster fishermen who (in sharp contrast to the ever present romantic images and portraits depicting them as fiercely independent) joined the A.F. of L. to secure the advantages of collective action.

It was true that no screeching steam whistle or factory bell awakened and called the lobstermen to work, and that no



Although not typical of American trade unionists, Maine lobster fishermen too were caught in the web of larger commercial and industrial forces. Seafood, as this Mount Desert canning "factory" suggests, was big business in Maine. Consolidation in the marketing end of the industry also prompted some lobster fishermen to seek protection through unions. Courtesy Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

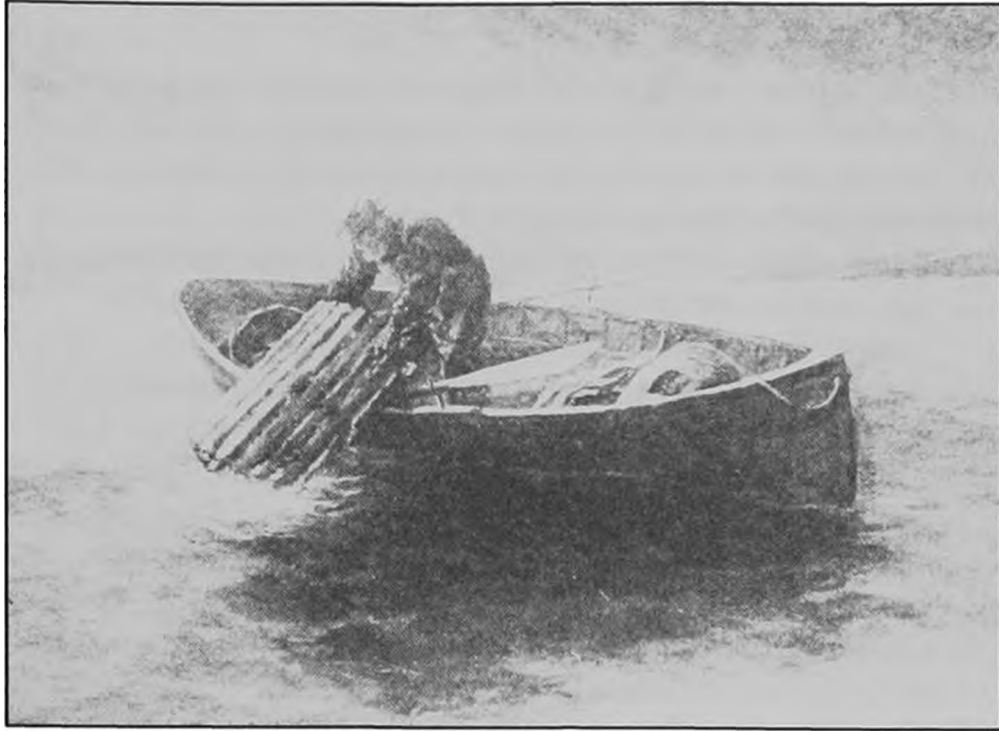
employer required them to comply with workplace rules and regulations. It was also generally true that the fruits of their labor (the lobster "catch") were theirs to dispose of as they chose. Such control over their work lives, however, was always subject to the whims of nature and was increasingly challenged by changing economic circumstances at the turn of the century.

A declining lobster population during the latter part of the nineteenth century, traced to reckless fishing practices, aroused the concern of those who were dependent upon lobster fishing and those interested in conservation of one of the state's primary resources. The purchase of small lobsters ("shorts") proved profitable to the canning industry, and the demand created by an emerging tourist industry for the "exotic" food

contributed to the shortened life expectancy of the young lobsters. That fishermen would "rub the seed from the spawn of female lobsters and sell them to the lobster buyers with other market lobsters" contributed to the problem, as did the increasing use of the power boat, which enabled the fishermen to multiply the number of their traps. When there was no demand for small lobsters, the fishermen often gave them to friends and neighbors who sometimes cooked them and fed them to their hens. Early legislative efforts to regulate the catch and sale of small lobsters proved ineffective, as lobster catchers regarded such legislation, and the fish wardens assigned to enforce it, as interference with "the natural rights of fishermen."⁷

A. W. Roberts, a lobster fisherman from Vinalhaven, provided a glimpse of some of the problems that faced those who harvested lobsters for a living at the turn of the century. He estimated that a fleet of about 7,000 sloops were employed in lobster fishing throughout the state, but most of them were confined to summer fishing, since winter fishing was notoriously more challenging and hazardous. It was "pretty perilous work," Roberts noted, to engage in fishing for lobsters when the thermometer dipped below zero, and "not at all pleasant to be out all day half-frozen and half-starved."⁸ Apart from the physical hardships and challenges to life itself, winter storms often prevented a fisherman from pulling traps set during a previous week, and might prevent him from reaching them for another month. In some cases a gale might destroy every trap he placed, as well as the car that contained his catch of many weeks.⁹

Roberts estimated that to fit out 100 traps cost \$100, while the price of a sloop, depending on size, ranged from \$150 to \$800. Those fishermen who could not afford a sloop used a small boat ("pea pod") propelled by oars or sail, which required a smaller investment of about thirty dollars. Roberts noted that lobsters were no longer to be found near the rocks, but only in deep water. This added to the expense for gear. A ten-fathom warp, for example, was no longer sufficient; deep



Occupational individualism proved no insurmountable barrier to union organizing among Vinalhaven lobster fishermen. *Scribners Magazine* (1909).

water called for a rope over fifty fathoms long. Gone were the days when one could find lobsters under the rocks with a gaff.¹⁰

The veteran fisherman reported that the earnings of the lobster fishermen varied. "Many ... did not make much over a hundred dollars a year," but they usually owned their own homes and "lived for the most part on fish." It was only the most successful among them who received \$600 or \$700 for their year's catch.¹¹

Under market conditions in which many buyers competed for their "catch," lobster fishermen lacked an incentive for united action. Demand for lobsters was fairly constant, and many fishermen were not obligated to sell their lobsters from day to day, as the lobsters could live for several hours out of the water, or, when placed in cars in the water, kept for weeks or months.¹²

The advantageous market position of the lobster fishermen was altered, however, by a growing concentration of buy-

ers ("the lobster trusts") who sought to control the price they paid for the fish. A union granite cutter from Vinalhaven described the new economic environment which confronted lobster fishermen when he observed that:

These fishermen never realized the necessity of their organizing, because the buyers were generally in competition, and the highest bidder got the catch But the time came when there was rumor of a combine to control the whole business; the buyers were all to agree only to pay a stipulated sum, and it began to look as if the fishermen were 'up against it,' but the remedy was in their own hands. Organize! was the slogan¹³

Challenged by a declining lobster population, the increased expense of engaging in fishing, and the concentration of buyers for their "catch," the lobster fishermen of Vinalhaven, where granite cutting had been unionized since 1877, took the initiative in protecting themselves and the "toothsome crustacea." They formed the nation's first union of lobster fishermen on February 22, 1905. Under their leadership the movement quickly spread up and down the whole coast; leaders hoped to organize the 18,000 lobster catchers they believed existed in Maine.¹⁴

Stuart Reid, general organizer for the A.F. of L., was instrumental in organizing the lobster fishermen into the Lobster Fishermen's International Protective Association. While on assignment in Maine in the spring of 1905, Reid learned that the lobster fishermen of Vinalhaven had formed an independent union and were preparing to extend their organizational efforts all along the coast. He quickly informed Samuel Gompers that he saw an opportunity to form a union, "the first of its kind in the labor movement."¹⁵ He related to the national labor leader that while he was in Vinalhaven he made himself known to the fishermen, addressed a meeting of seventy union members, and sensed that they stood ready to be captured for the A.F. of L. After he informed the fishermen that the cost for membership was only ten cents a month and outlined the

aims and objectives of the national organization, "they voted unanimously to apply for a charter."¹⁶ A communication to the *Rockland Opinion* from Vinalhaven captured the excitement and militancy of the fishermen, who declared that "this is one industry that cannot be successfully 'trustificated' "¹⁷

Winning over the Vinalhaven fishermen was important, since the island was the headquarters of the movement to organize all the lobster fishermen of the state. In Vinalhaven, Reid argued that affiliation with the A.F. of L. insured that others would be certain to follow. Local officials urged immediate action, for there were "thousands of men that can be brought into line if an organizer could be sent to the different fishing grounds."¹⁸

The labor movement among the lobstermen was rather extensive and reached into Nova Scotia. The existence of independent lobster unions in that province prompted Reid to recommend to Gompers that Canadian organizer John A. Flett be sent there, while Reid or some other missionary of labor carry through the work begun in organizing the lobstermen of Maine.¹⁹

Apart from the potential benefits to the lobstermen and the A.F. of L., Reid offered Gompers an additional reason to assist the labor movement in Maine. The International Laborers' Union, a socialist oriented union organized in 1902, had taken root in Rockland, the largest city in coastal Knox County (which embraced Vinalhaven), and threatened to undermine the Federation, which had been successful in organizing workers there. That prompted Reid to write, "It would be unwise for us to leave this section at present, under any circumstances."²⁰

Knox County, the center of the state's granite and lime industries, was also the early center of socialist political activity in the state. The Socialist Labor party made an appearance in Rockland in 1895, and the Socialist party of Maine was organized in the same city in 1900.²¹ Gompers's opposition to socialists within the A.F. of L., and to radical labor movements outside of it, was so intense that it would have been surprising

if he did not take every opportunity presented to him to capture another slice of the work force for the A.F. of L. and defeat his ideological opponents.

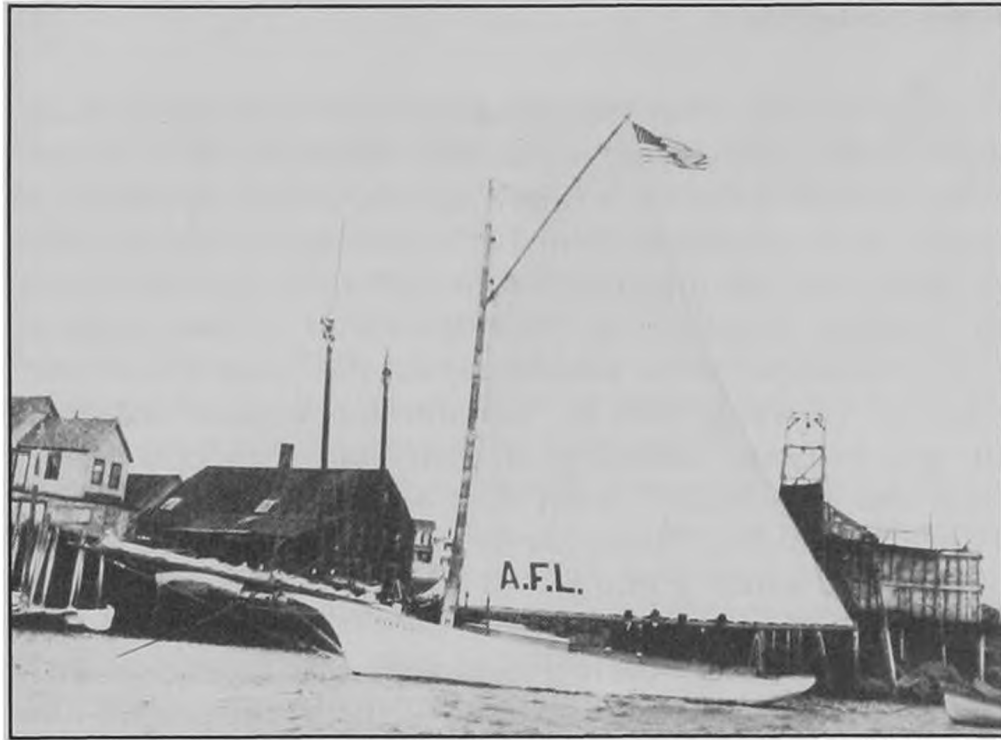
Gompers was impressed with Reid's assessment of the possibility of expanding the reach of the American Federation of Labor by organizing the lobster fishermen of Maine and Canada. In the interest of promoting an international lobster fishermen's union, he forwarded Reid's notes to John Flett and directed him to go to Nova Scotia to organize the lobster fishermen there.²² Reid, in what proved to be a first in the history of labor organizing, chartered a thirty-six foot sloop yacht, the *Marion*, to organize the fishermen, quarrymen, and other workers along the Maine coast. The cabin of the yacht was converted into an office. From his floating headquarters, and traveling at speeds as high as ten knots, Reid could be found at work typing his correspondence and reports as he sailed from one coastal community to another.²³

Reid was very much aware that this nautical mode of labor organizing was a novel "experiment," but in his judgment it was a successful one. (In the month of May alone he organized ten unions for the A.F. of L.)²⁴ He initiated the experiment in large measure because it was the only means possible of reaching many fishermen and other workers. He commented that:

Along the coast of Maine there are many places that are hard of access except by water and there being no regular means of transportation, this is almost impossible. These people are as much in need of organization as are the people of the cities and large towns²⁵

For Reid, a Chicagoan turned seafaring labor organizer, the experiment proved somewhat revealing as he touched remote areas in Maine. "You may not believe it," he told a newspaper reporter, "but we found one fishing hamlet where they had not even heard that Russia and Japan were at war — had not seen a newspaper or a periodical of any kind for more than a year."²⁶

Reid's organizational activities were interrupted when the *Marion* docked at City Point, Bangor, so that he could attend



Labor organizer Stuart Reid's innovative floating office, the sloop *Marion*, docked at Bangor for the second annual convention of the State Branch of the A.F. of L. in June 1905. Courtesy George Meany Memorial Archives.

the second annual convention of the State Branch of the A.F. of L., which convened on June 1, 1905. Following the convention proceedings, he traveled to Boston for treatment of a throat ailment, after which he resumed his coastal organizing efforts.²⁷

Officials of the A.F. of L. responded favorably to Reid's request for the purchase of a "faster gasoline launch." Reid had argued that the *Marion* lacked auxiliary power, which was essential for speed and safety on the sea, and that the national order could save traveling expenses if the Federation owned its own sea vessel. The new power sloop, the *Federationist*, was then placed in service for coastal organizing, and Reid, joined by national officials of the Quarrymen's International Union and the Paving Cutters' National Union, both of which had branches in Maine, sailed the Atlantic seacoast in the interests of organized labor.²⁸

In the summer of 1905, Gompers and his daughter, Sadie Julia, who was studying music in neighboring New Hampshire, visited Maine for a brief vacation. It was inevitable, of course, that he would be invited by local unions to address them on matters pertaining to capital and labor. He spoke to crowds in Bangor, Vinalhaven, and Rockland. From Bangor, Gompers journeyed to Vinalhaven on the steamer *Governor Bodwell*. He was greeted by "a continuous ovation" all along the way as lobster fishermen on their sloops "cheered, waved flags and blew horns" when the *Bodwell* passed by.²⁹ From Hurricane Island, "loud cheers" echoed as a large crowd gathered to catch a glimpse of the nation's leading labor spokesman.³⁰

As Gompers approached the birthplace of the nation's first lobster fishermen's union, crowds at the wharf greeted him with three cheers, and the Vinalhaven band played a "patriotic air." His arrival was marked by all the excitement and hope that characterized new beginnings. The local lobster fishermen's union and other unions in the area took Gompers and his party under their charge. His carriage slowly inched its way through a human thicket; workingmen followed him through the major street of the village. "Fishermen and granite cutters crowded around the carriage and grasped the hands of the labor leader, while 'God bless you' and 'God speed your work' were heard on every side."³¹

Officials of the local lobster fishermen's union fed and entertained the "grand old man" at the home of a union member. A veteran of the Vinalhaven Granite Cutters' Union noted that while Gompers took "very kindly" to enlisting the lobster fishermen under the banner of the A.F. of L., he was also "dearly in love with the products of their labors," for he "side-tracked" all other foods for lobster. "Every order was for lobster, more lobster, and a few clams on the side."³² Following this relaxing pause, Gompers proceeded to union headquarters, where he chatted with fishermen before departing for Memorial Hall to deliver a major address.³³

A torchlight procession composed of several hundred members of local unions lit up the night sky above Vinalhaven as the excited crowd made its way to Memorial Hall to hear the celebrated labor leader speak.³⁴ Granite cutters, quarrymen, and lobster fishermen who crowded into the Hall were greeted by the president of the local lobster fishermen's union and organizer Stuart Reid, who stoked the fires of enthusiasm for Gompers and the labor movement by singing the inspirational labor song — "Rally 'round the Standard."³⁵

While Gompers spoke of the labor movement generally, he addressed himself particularly to the lobster fishermen of Vinalhaven, complimenting them on their work and boosting their morale with pledges of support.³⁶ This personal endorsement by the nation's most prominent labor leader motivated the union lobster fishermen to continue to organize those fishermen who remained unaffiliated with the union movement.

While discussions relative to the formation of an international lobster fishermen's union occupied the attention of national leaders, the local unions held their own conventions. Their officials reported that following their initial efforts at organization, the fishermen had secured improved conditions and formed more unions.³⁷ By the fall of 1906, union activity among the lobster fishermen had increased spectacularly. State Federation officials, still trying to fathom the unprecedented surge of unionism among the fishermen, wrote the A.F. of L. requesting a list of lobster fishermen's unions elsewhere and the names and addresses of their respective secretaries. Even while such information was en route to Maine, lobster fishermen were organizing new locals.³⁸

Communications relative to the formation of an international union of lobster fishermen continued to reach Gompers's desk.³⁹ Failing to appreciate the myriad pressures on the national labor organization, impatient Vinalhaven unionists peppered Gompers with inquiries as to why no definite action



A.F. of L. President Samuel Gompers, no doubt intrigued by the novelty of organizing lobster fishermen, visited Vinalhaven in 1907. There, he encouraged the lobster fishermen in their endeavors and helped himself to several portions of the product of their toil. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (1925).

had taken place regarding the formation of an international union.⁴⁰ On January 22, 1907, Vinalhaven officials finally received the communication they had been waiting for. President Gompers directed his secretary to send an application form for a charter to the lobster fishermen.⁴¹ He informed the officers of the State Federation of Labor of his actions and of the encouragement he had given the local movement in Maine:

As far as the lobster fishermen are concerned, I beg to say that I have this day issued a charter to them as an affiliated international union and also forwarded them a little financial contribution as a nest-egg to help them in the beginning of their work and the great task before them. You may rest assured that every assistance within our power will be given them.⁴²

Gompers directed further inquiries from lobstermen's locals to the secretary of the new Lobster Fishermen's International Protective Association, James B. Webster of Vinalhaven. Locals were to affiliate with the new International, pay the appropriate per capita tax to the A.F. of L., and return the charter and die of the seal originally received from the A.F. of L.⁴³ Gompers continued to offer his assistance to the new

International by chartering new unions directly, even though he reminded officers of the new unions that it was the International that issued the charters. He also allowed some lead time to those unions that still owed per capita taxes to the A.F. of L. so that they might remain in "good standing" with the national organization. Letters were sent to all locals of lobster fishermen informing them that a charter had been granted to the Lobster Fishermen's International Protective Association and that all locals coming under the jurisdiction of the A.F. of L. were required to affiliate with the International.⁴⁴

The lobster fishermen were quick to take advantage of their new bargaining strength. Led by the fishermen of Vinalhaven, they demanded twenty cents for each of their lobsters, while the dealers would grant only fifteen cents. A compromise price of eighteen cents emerged from the conflict. As the settlement was arranged by the officers of the new association, it applied to all of the organized fishermen along the Maine coast.⁴⁵

By the fall of 1907, the lobster fishermen reported 1,055 members and twenty-two locals.⁴⁶ Assessing the impact of the new unions, the Commissioner of Industrial and Labor Statistics claimed that the organization of the lobstermen was helpful in stopping illegal traffic in "shorts." By-laws adopted by the unions provided a penalty for any lobsterman who caught and sold lobsters of illegal size. The success of this self-imposed code was revealed when one locality, in which there were five branches of the Association, reported that approximately 8,400 small lobsters were returned to the sea each week. The commissioner also noted that "each fisherman acts as a warden, and among the arrests made the past year for violations of the law, very few have been in the localities where unions exist."⁴⁷ The Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries publicly viewed the new union as an important force for conservation education and enforcement. He reported that the local branches of the Association had been of "great assistance ... in educating the people as to the real benefit of our laws [relating to lobster fishing] and in bringing about the feeling that it is for the

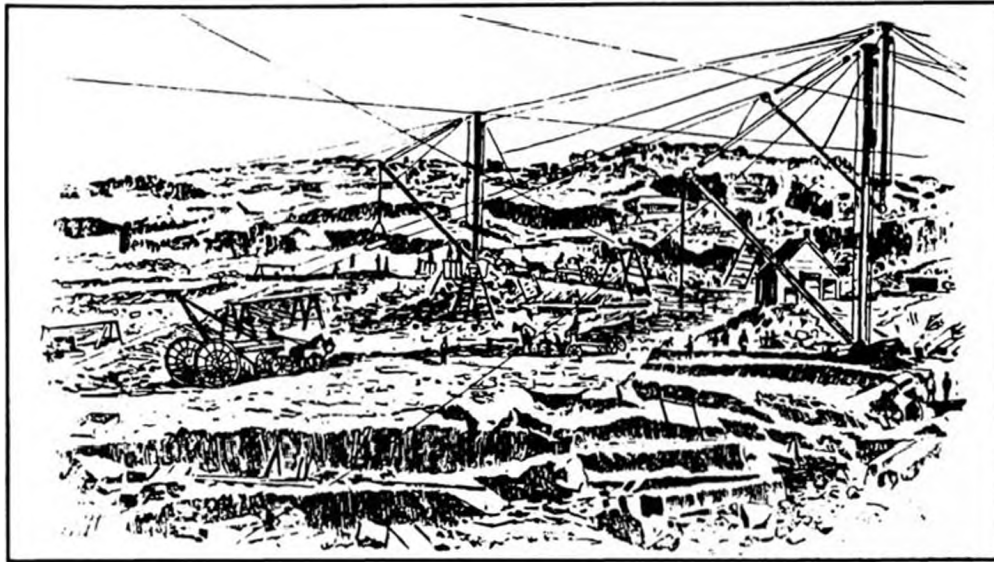
interests of the members to abide by them, not a feeling of fear of the law and the consequences of violation.”⁴⁸

Gompers commented on the growing spirit of cooperation among the fishermen. Union members no longer raided each other’s traps. In the past, the labor leader noted,

The first man to a lobster pot would pull it, whether his property or not. Now with the union in force it is different. There is a strong fraternal feeling among them and if a member is caught pulling traps other than his own, he is expelled from the order and is known as a black sheep.”⁴⁹

The union also bargained successfully with local buyers and with “smacks,” usually steamers sent out by wholesale dealers from Portland, Rockland, and elsewhere, which were able to store between 3,000 and 10,000 lobsters in their wells.⁵⁰ Before the union, many lobster fishermen could not afford to wait for higher bids. The prices offered were prices they had to accept, and the prices offered varied from place to place.⁵¹ State officials credited the union with standardizing prices, drawing up trade agreements with wholesale buyers, and persuading some of the steamers to fly the union flag and to handle nothing but union lobsters.⁵² The lobster fishermen were required to show that they were in good union standing before they could sell to the lobster steamers.⁵³

The formation of the lobstermen’s unions, and the Lobster Fishermen’s International Protective Association in particular, revealed that a perceived common interest could give rise to a group consciousness and collective action that transcended the conventional credo of individual self-reliance and personal responsibility. The success of the union was due, in part, to the fact that many of the fishermen were, or had been, granite cutters. These economic hybrids had a rich source of experience to draw upon, as the granite cutters were long-time veterans of labor organization. They had secured Maine’s place in the history of the labor movement by founding the Granite Cutters



Sands Quarry, Vinalhaven. Granite workers had been organizing unions on Vinalhaven and nearby islands since the 1870s. These traditions carried over into the lobster industry. *New England Magazine* (February 1892).

International Union of the United States and British Provinces of America in Rockland in 1877.⁵⁴ Equally important to the initial success of the lobster fishermen's movement was the interest and support it received from the A.F. of L. headquarters. Such support reinforced the fishermen's belief in the justice of their cause and encouraged their expectations of success.

The fishermen's labor movement was short-lived, however. Although scattered local organizations among lobster fishermen could be found in existence in 1912, the force of their movement had been spent by 1908.⁵⁵ The causes for the demise of the unprecedented labor movement among the lobster fishermen, while unclear, can be attributed in part to the depression which gripped the nation in 1907. The following year, the "contraction of business," which was officially reported to be rather general throughout the state, forced many workers to bow to layoffs and wage reductions "without a murmur."⁵⁶ Charles Beals, president of the Maine State Branch of the A.F. of L., took notice of the hardships that befell many fellow workers. He singled out those in the building trades who "passed through a hard winter" and the textile operatives who, more than any other group, he claimed, were victimized by the depression.⁵⁷ A union sympathizer from Lewiston reported to the *Journal of the Knights of Labor* that the curtailments in the cotton and woolen mills, shoe factories, and other industries in

MAINE LOBSTERMEN

the Auburn-Lewiston area had "turned hundreds out of employment." He placed unemployment for the state at 12,000.⁵⁸

The depression left various unions and the State Federation in a weakened condition. The tone of correspondence from local and state officials to national authorities testified to the detrimental effects economic adversity had upon the labor movement in the state. In 1909, the Portland Central Labor Union, the state's largest city federation of unions, anxiously related to Gompers the decline of the labor movement in that city.⁵⁹

While no specific references to the effect of the depression on the lobster fishermen appeared in official labor correspondence and documents, it is probable that the expressions of hardship, suffering, and erosion of union membership common elsewhere extended to the lobster fishermen and their organizations. The official census of labor unions in Maine for 1909 revealed that only four lobster fishermen's unions remained in existence, none of them located in Vinalhaven.⁶⁰ The economic dislocation may have made the one-dollar initiation fee and monthly dues of thirty cents burdensome, for as Maine's Labor Commissioner reported, the fishermen were not regarded as a "wealthy class ... the average annual earnings will not exceed, even if equal, those of the average mechanic."⁶¹

In addition, State Branch officials may have been partly to blame for the decline. No formal links were forged between the state organization and the lobster fishermen's unions. Although state labor leaders were aware of the fishermen's organizations, the lobster fishermen and their struggles were never the subject of the many resolutions, speeches, and communications that appeared in printed convention proceedings. Nor did delegates representing the lobster fishermen attend the conventions of the State Federation. While failure to affiliate with the State Branch was not in itself unusual among local unions, it raises the possibility that the state officers viewed organization among fishermen as a unique expression of discontent rather than as a natural component of the labor movement. As a consequence, they may have been reluctant to assign

the fishermen's unions priority in terms of time, energy, and resources.

Leaders among the lobster fishermen's unions took note of other factors that contributed to the demise of the movement. As early as 1906 local officials reported a "falling off" of membership, and traced it to the waning of enthusiasm and internal dissension regarding the degree of coercion that ought to be employed to insure conformity in the movement. They also noted the fact that, unlike other unions whose ranks were constantly infused with new "blood" due to the migratory nature of the work force, the fishermen's organizations were composed of individuals who were less mobile. Thus they lacked the dynamism brought by new recruits animated with the enthusiasm of recent converts.⁶² Indeed, one of the reasons union leaders advocated a national union was the belief that "centralization" would contribute to sustaining the initial enthusiasm that sparked the movement and insure that adequate resources were available to visit, assist and encourage the weaker unions, as well as expand the movement.⁶³

Despite the valuable lessons that union granite workers brought to the fishing industry, collective action was a new experience for most fishermen. James B. Webster, Secretary-Treasurer of the Lobster Fishermen's International Protective Association, captured this dimension of the problem when he wrote Gompers that "the men employed in the Lobster Fishing Industry are a class who never had any experience in Unionism and therefore are by far too impatient for me or anyone else to cope successfully with their ideas."⁶⁴

Still later, in 1909, when the labor movement among the lobster fishermen was a movement in name only, Webster again offered Gompers his assessment. While reluctant to attribute the decline to "any one individual or to any one condition," he singled out for Gompers "the rather radical and impulsive [sic] method used by members everywhere ... " Webster may have been referring to the demands of some lobster fishermen that all smacks fly the A.F. of L. flag and that

wholesalers purchase lobsters only from union members — the lobster fishermen's version of the closed shop. Webster also noted the difficulty of forging a strong central organization. He informed Gompers of the "utter lack of confidence together with prejudice against being dictated to or advised by the Board of Officers they selected for the purpose"⁶⁵

Public reaction to unionized lobster fishermen was another problem. Many general observers failed to understand or appreciate the new realities that gave rise to their protest. "The questions will be asked," wrote Maine's Commissioner of Labor, "What is the matter with those fishermen? Haven't they got a monopoly of their business? Don't they get a big price for their lobsters? What need have they for organizing?"⁶⁶ Many, no doubt, perceived the fishermen as more akin to the employer, small farmer, or preindustrial artisan than to the wage earner. They owned the means of production, a home, and often a farm, and within the gyrations of weather patterns, could control the cadence of their labor. Such perceptions did little to generate support in sustaining the labor movement among the lobster catchers.

Also to be counted among the mix of factors that contributed to the decline of the labor movement among the fishermen was the ideological opposition emanating from the office of the Maine Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, where efforts were made by some to disengage the new union of lobster fishermen from its parent organization, the American Federation of Labor.⁶⁷

Serving as Commissioner of the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries was James Donohue. In 1906 Donohue was campaign manager for Congressman Charles E. Littlefield of Rockland in his bid for reelection to Congress from the Second District. The A.F. of L. considered Littlefield one of its "most notorious enemies," who, as a member of the Judiciary Committee and the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, "conspicuously, unceasingly, and arrogantly" opposed labor legislation and "assisted its most bitter opponents." The entry into the campaign to defeat Littlefield marked the A.F. of L.'s

political debut into American politics as a national organization, and it used every resource at its command in an unsuccessful effort to defeat the Congressman.⁶⁸ Gompers again returned to Maine, but this time neither to relax and enjoy the natural beauty of the state nor to lend his personal encouragement and assistance to the lobster fishermen. Rather he came to engage in a political contest which many observers believed would be a test of the political strength of the A.F. of L. in national politics.

Through their efforts in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Maine's granite cutters and lobster fishermen left their mark on the labor movement. Both created international labor organizations — hardly the type of evidence one would summon to reinforce the position that Maine was an ideological fortress against unionism. Those who labored in the mills, shops, factories, and quarries of Maine, or who were "toilers of the sea," were far from immune to collective action in support of their own interests. Indeed, in the late 1930s, the lobster fishermen of Vinalhaven once again sparked a cooperative movement among those who toiled on the sea in order that they might secure a just share of the fruits of their labor.⁶⁹

NOTES

¹*Daily Kennebec Journal* (Augusta, Maine), June 7, 1904, p. 9; *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1904*, p. 40.

²*Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Industrial and Labor Statistics for the State of Maine, 1905* (Augusta: Kennebec Journal Print, 1906), pp. 5, 15. (Hereafter cited as *Annual Labor Report*.)

³*American Federationist* (Washington, D.C.), January 1912, p. 54.

⁴Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925), vol. 2, p. 105.

⁵*Seventeenth Annual Labor Report, 1903*, p. 23.

⁶*Maine Labor Journal* (Millinocket), June 1, 1906, pp. 1, 33; *Legislative Record of the Seventy-Second Legislature of the State of Maine, 1905*, pp. 830,

MAINE LOBSTERMEN

7844; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, March 31, 1905, p. 6. For a general discussion of the rise of organized labor in Maine at the turn of the century, see Charles A. Scontras, *Organized Labor in Maine: Twentieth Century Origins* (Orono, Maine: Bureau of Labor Education of the Continuing Education Division, University of Maine, 1985), pp. 6-54.

⁷*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, p. 37; *Twenty-Ninth Report of the Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries of the State of Maine for 1905 and 1906* (Augusta: Kennebec Journal Print, 1907), p. 19; *Thirtieth Report, Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, 1907-1908* (Waterville, Sentinel Publishing Company, 1909), pp. 18, 19; *First Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries of the State of Maine, 1918* (Auburn, Maine: Merrill & Webber Company, 1919). This latter report contains a brief history of the canning industry in the state, the origins of the Sea and Shore Fisheries Department, a synopsis of all laws relating to the fishing of lobsters, early methods of capturing lobsters, and an overall view of the causes that led to the depletion of lobsters. See also Robert L. Dow, *The Story of the Maine Lobster* (Augusta: Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries, July 1949), pp. 3-13; Graham R. Taylor, "The Industrial Viewpoint," *Charities and the Commons* 20 (May 2, 1908): 202.

⁸*Lewiston Evening Journal*, May 2, 1905, p. 9.

⁹*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, p. 42.

¹⁰*Lewiston Evening Journal*, May 2, 1905, p. 9.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Granite Cutters' Journal* (Quincy, Massachusetts), July 1905, p. 9.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Lewiston Evening Journal*, May 2, 1905, p. 9. Estimated figures of the number of lobster fishermen appear inflated, due in part to the probability that they included all who engaged in lobstering rather than just those who depended upon fishing for lobsters for a livelihood. The *Twenty-Ninth Report of the Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries of the State of Maine for 1905 and 1906* lists the number employed in lobster fishing at 2,562 and 2,762, respectively.

¹⁵Stuart Reid to Samuel Gompers, Rockland, March 19, 1905, in A.F. of L.-C.I.O. Library, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter referred to as Gompers Letters.)

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Rockland Opinion* (Rockland, Maine), April 7, 1905, p. 2.

¹⁸Stuart Reid to Samuel Gompers, Rockland, March 19, 1905, Gompers Letters.

¹⁹*Ibid.* The efforts of Maine organizers to reach out to Canadian workers was not without precedence. In the 1880s Maine extended the international character of the Knights of Labor when it founded a local assembly in the Acadia Iron Mines, Londonderry, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, in March,

1888. (*Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America*, November 13-27, 1888, p. 97.)

²⁰Stuart Reid to Samuel Gompers, Rockland, March 19, 1905, Gompers Letters; *Paper Makers Journal* (Albany, New York), August 1906, p. 14; *American Federation of Labor History, Encyclopedia Reference Book* (Washington, D.C.: A.F. of L., 1919), pp. 247, 277. President, secretary, and treasurer of the I.L.U. was W. G. Critchlow, formerly secretary of the Socialist party in Ohio, and once an advocate of the "boring from within" strategy designed to convert the membership of the A.F. of L. to the socialist cause. Critchlow was one of the original delegates who founded the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905. (*Proceedings of the Industrial Workers of the World*, June 27-July 8, 1905, pp. 10, 25, 384.)

²¹Charles A. Scontras, *The Socialist Alternative: Utopian Experiments and the Socialist Party of Maine, 1895-1914* (Orono, Maine: Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, 1985), pp. 81-126.

²²Samuel Gompers to S. Reid, March 23, 1905 and July 6, 1905, Gompers Letters.

²³*Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 3, 1905, p. 13; *Rockland Opinion*, May 12, 1905, p. 2.

²⁴*Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 3, 1905, p. 13.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*; *Bangor Daily Commercial* (Bangor, Maine), May 31, 1905, p. 7; *Bangor Daily News* (Bangor, Maine), June 2, 1905, p. 10; *Rockland Opinion*, June 9, 1905, p. 2.

²⁸*Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 3, 1905, p. 13; *Rockland Opinion*, June 16, 1905, p. 2.

²⁹*American Federationist*, November 1905, p. 849.

³⁰*Ibid.*; *Rockland Opinion*, September 1, 1905, p. 2.

³¹*American Federationist*, November 1905, p. 849.

³²*Granite Cutters' Journal*, September 1905, p. 9.

³³*American Federationist*, November 1905, p. 849.

³⁴*Lewiston Evening Journal*, August 26, 1905, p. 12.

³⁵*American Federationist*, November 1905, p. 849; *Rockland Opinion*, September 1, 1905, p. 2.

³⁶*Granite Cutters' Journal*, September 1905, p. 9; *American Federationist*, November 1905, p. 849.

³⁷*American Federationist*, February 1906, p. 105, and April 1906, p. 249; *Bangor Daily Commercial*, May 6, 1905, p. 11.

³⁸Samuel Gompers to Roscoe Eddy, October 13, 1906, and Samuel Gompers to Winslow Roberts, December 31, 1906, Gompers Letters.

³⁹Samuel Gompers to Fred Snow, January 11, 1907, Gompers Letters.

⁴⁰R. L. Guard to Stuart Reid, January 11, 1907, Gompers Letters.

⁴¹R. Lee Guard to Fred Snow, January 22, 1907, Gompers Letters.

MAINE LOBSTERMEN

⁴²Samuel Gompers to E. H. Graham, February 12, 1907, Gompers Letters. Gompers had recommended to the Executive Council that an appropriation of \$100 be made to help launch the new international union. (Samuel Gompers to J. B. Webster, February 26, 1907, Gompers Letters.)

⁴³Samuel Gompers to James H. Gerrish, February 15, 1907, Gompers Letters.

⁴⁴Samuel Gompers to J. B. Webster, February 26, 1907, Gompers Letters. See Gompers Letters, *passim*, from January 11, 1907 to March 11, 1907.

⁴⁵*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, p. 120.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 28 and 105.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴⁸*Thirtieth Report, Commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, 1907-1908*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 39; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, August 26, 1905, p. 5.

⁵⁰*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, p. 38.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁴The Granite industry was a prosperous and expanding industry in the seventies and eighties. In 1870-1877 thousands of laborers were engaged in quarrying at Dix, Spruce Head, Clark's, and Hurricane Islands, at Vinalhaven, Frankfort, Hallowell, Blue Hill, and other areas, producing granite primarily for numerous federal, state, and municipal buildings. The eight-hour day on federal contracts, plus good wages, prevented labor organization. Indeed, "the call for granite workers was so great that it took all that could be procured from England, Scotland, and Ireland to supply the demand."

These favorable conditions did not last. Federal laws were enacted providing that granite work previously contracted for directly by the government itself should be contracted out: "... from that time the oppression of the stone cutters and the reduction of their wages commenced." The new contractual arrangements, combined with the piecework method of payment, hastened organization of granite workers. The initial movement for labor organization began at Clark's Island, Maine, January 2, 1877. By February of that year there were local organizations on Clark's Island, Spruce Head, Rockland, Vinalhaven, and Hurricane Island — all areas in which men engaged in lobster fishing. Delegates from these locals met at Rockland on March 10, 1877, and formed the Granite Cutters' International Union of the United States and British Provinces of America.

The Knights of Labor founded locals in all these towns and cities in which branches of the Granite Cutters' Union existed, illustrating the part played by granite cutters in the Knights of Labor movement. Much of the membership of the Knights was furnished by the paving cutters, quarrymen, and other workers in the granite industry as well. Since the Knights formed "mixed local assemblies" in these coastal areas, it is very likely that lobster fishermen experienced membership in the Knights of Labor, and were thus

infused with the spirit of unionism that gripped the state. (Charles A. Scontras, *Two Decades of Organized Labor and Labor Politics in Maine 1880-1890* (Orono, Maine: The Bureau of Labor Education of the Continuing Education Division, University of Maine, 1969), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵*First Biennial Report of the Department of Labor and Industry of the State of Maine, 1911-1912* (Waterville: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1913), p. 195.

⁵⁶Scontras, *Organized Labor in Maine*, p. 41.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁶⁰*Twenty-Third Annual Labor Report, 1909*, pp. 115-165.

⁶¹*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, pp. 42, 43-101.

⁶²Letter to Samuel Gompers from James B. Webster, Corresponding Secretary, Lobster Fishermen's Union #11843, Vinalhaven, December 24, 1906, *American Federation of Labor Records: The Samuel Gompers Era* (microfilm edition, 1979: Microfilming Corporation of America) Part I section D, A.F. of L. Microfilm National Union File, 1890-1937 [1938-1948]. (Hereafter referred to as A.F. of L. Records.)

⁶³Samuel Gompers from Fred Snow, Chairman, Committee to form a National Union, Vinalhaven, November 19, 1906, A.F. of L. Records.

⁶⁴Samuel Gompers from James B. Webster, Vinalhaven, March 4, 1907, A.F. of L. Records.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, February 9, 1909.

⁶⁶*Twenty-First Annual Labor Report, 1907*, p. 38.

⁶⁷Samuel Gompers to E. H. Graham, February 12, 1907, Gompers Papers; *Bangor Daily News*, February 5, 1907, p. 5.

⁶⁸The author is currently researching a volume titled *Labor's Most Notorious Enemy*, the story of the national political debut of the A.F. of L. in 1906 and its effort to defeat Congressman Charles E. Littlefield of Maine, whom it regarded as one of the nation's leading opponents of organized labor.

⁶⁹Conversations (May 4 and 9, 1989) with Edward M. Holmes, Professor Emeritus of English, University of Maine, Orono, organizer of Vinalhaven Lobstermen's Co-operative.

Charles A. Scontras is Professor of Modern Society at the University of Maine and Research Associate at the University's Bureau of Labor Education. He is the author of TWO DECADES OF ORGANIZED LABOR AND LABOR POLITICS IN MAINE (1969); ORGANIZED LABOR IN MAINE: 20TH CENTURY ORIGINS (1985); and THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE: UTOPIAN EXPERIMENTS AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF MAINE, 1895-1914.