

# Bank workers begin organizing

Canada's chartered banks have always promoted, and benefited from, the image of an honest, safe and rewarding place to do business. For years, they have put forward a human face, a pretty, cheerful, female face to charm money out of your hands and into their vaults.

The system has worked well. Profits of Canada's Big Five—the Royal Bank, Bank of Montreal, Bank of Nova Scotia, Toronto-Dominion and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce—have grown healthily and totalled about \$1 billion in 1978. The wages of their employees, meanwhile, have risen at about the rate of the cost of living and now average less than \$9,000 a year in the Atlantic region. It is in this light, many bank workers are turning towards unions.

"People think of the tellers as the bank," says one Halifax bank worker. "But when the bank talks of customer service, they spit on the tellers. They say you're only meeting the public, not that you're making the money for them. The tellers are the lowest paid yet they're the ones that get things rolling."

More than 70 per cent of Canada's 150,000 bank workers are women and only about two per cent of them rise to managerial positions or higher. They don't have any grievance procedure or job security and in many cases, they receive raises and promotions on the basis of a merit report.

Another bank worker, a clerk who earns more than the average wage, says that with a union, they would have a say in working conditions and wage rates and would have job security. Now, she says, "we're at their mercy."

Her co-worker, a teller, says the banks have a technique of "keeping you as a little person. They want to keep you under thumb."

The bank they work in is not yet organized but seven other branches in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have been certified or await certification under the Union of Bank Employees, sponsored by the Canadian Labour Congress. One Royal Bank branch in Pictou has entered negotiations for a first contract.

About 60 branches have been organized across the country, most of them in Quebec. Organizing was made easier in 1977 when, after the efforts of the Service Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada, the Canada Labor Relations Board ruled that unions could organize on a branch-by-branch basis. The banks argued that all of their branches from coast-to-coast should be considered as one bargaining unit.

Peter Jackson, Personnel Manager in the Royal Bank's regional office in Halifax, says "it's difficult to see any advantages" to the bank with unionization. He foresees the banks becoming "more rigid and less flexible towards a bargaining unit especially in the case where exceptions may have been possible before. Now we must stick with the contract."

He says the bank cannot by law, and has not tried to, interfere with an employee's right to decide whether or not to support a union.

However, Johanna Oosterveld, Nova Scotia organizer for the Union of Bank Employees, says the banks are using subtle methods to get their anti-union message across.

The Halifax bank clerk agrees and says the bank uses psychological pressure to promote distrust and suspicion among co-workers. This has resulted, she says, in a "lot of hate power and boot-licking".

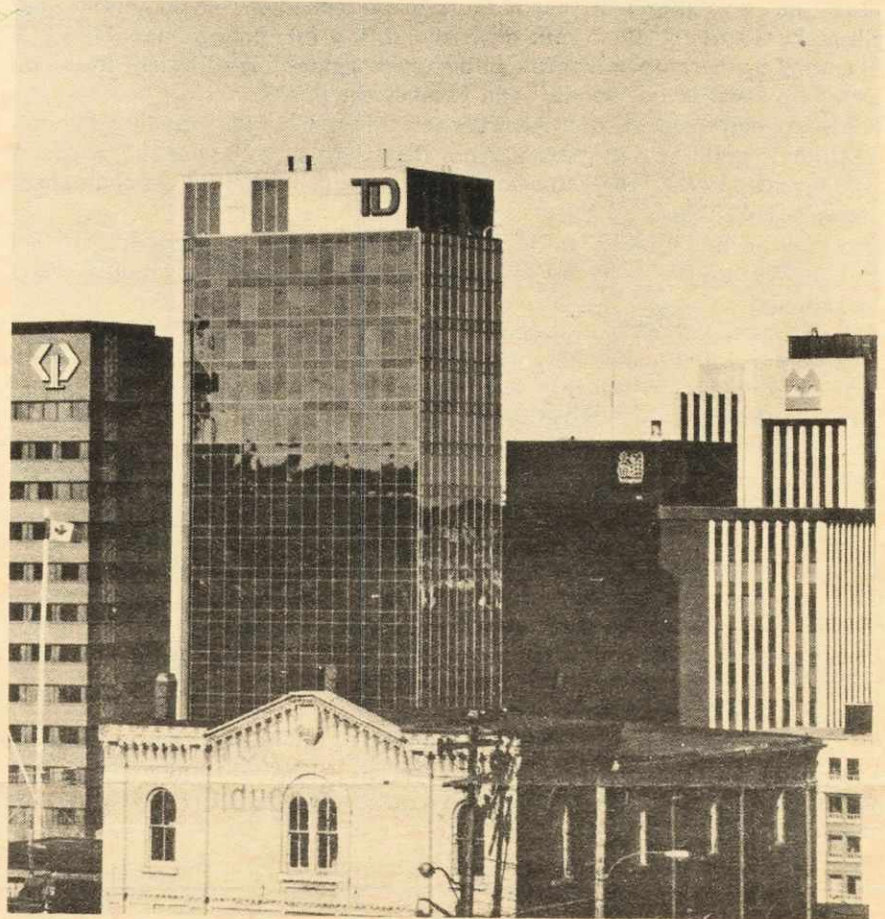
The banks' merit report on employees, used as the basis for promotions and

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# Atlantic Issues

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## Baie d'Espoir, NFLD.

# Bowater strangles a community

—by Sandy Martland

Unemployment in Newfoundland's south coast communities of Bay d'Espoir is 80 per cent. Yet Bay D'Espoir has a rich history of forest development and is the source of hydro power for most of the island.

What changed the once thriving economy based on forestry, fishing and agriculture into a pocket of Newfoundland's highest unemployment is characteristic of much resource development in the province.

Some residents of Bay d'Espoir remember how it changed. "They had their gardens," one man recalled. "They raised potatoes, turnip, cabbage. They had their sheep and an awful lot of them had cattle. People had an awful lot of land. I used to take loads of potatoes out of Bay d'Espoir. A year after she went under Confederation (in 1949), I was bringing them in."

They also remember why it changed.

In the 1940's, Bowater, a British-based pulp and paper company, was enticed to the bay to be a major exporter of lumber. As an incentive, they were given timber rights in Bay d'Espoir to all but a three-mile coastal strip.

Bowater offered better wages and greater stability to the people, who gave up their local sawmills and boats to work with the company. But some 16 years later, Bowater decided it was more profitable to harvest wood on the west coast and so they closed their door on Bay d'Espoir, throwing the loggers out of work.

When the people tried to go back to their sawmills, they found that the wood they had harvested before was no longer available - Bowater retained the timber rights.

In the pre-Confederation days, the people of Bay d'Espoir were basically employed in sawmilling and boatbuilding.

**"the wood they had harvested before was no longer available—Bowater retained the timber rights"**

The area exported planks and other wood products to nearby St. Pierre and also supported a major boat-building industry. These two- and three-masted schooners then provided work for other residents of the area, who fished off the coast of Labrador each summer, salted their fish, sold their catch and their boats in Spain and Britain, and then returned home to build another schooner. These industries were supplemented by agriculture, which enabled the people to provide their own meat and vegetables.

### HYDRO - A PROMISE UNFULFILLED

Before residents could organize to solve the question of timber rights, government announced the development of hydro in the bay. Bay d'Espoir, designated as a growth centre under the Liberal resettlement program, was to be the headquarters of Newfoundland hydro operations. It was to become an industrial centre, supporting such industries as an aluminum smelter. A national harbour would be built and major transportation systems established.

Not only did these industries never materialize, even the jobs directly related to distribution of hydro were eventually located in central Newfoundland and St. John's. The people of Bay d'Espoir gained only those construction jobs which were necessary to build the powerhouse.

When the first phase of construction was completed in 1973, there were only 80 hydro jobs in the bay. "So the end result, while we had the major resource," explains John Tremblett, chairman of the Bay d'Espoir Development Association, "was that we got few jobs. Now, over that period of time, all the basic skills fishing—was gone, because the older people died off, retired, and the younger people didn't bother picking it up because they were in high paying jobs. They became, instead of self-dependent, dependent. They became truck drivers, heavy equipment operators and that sort of thing. The basic trades they had were no longer applicable in the bay and so they had either to go to Labrador, to B.C. or Alberta in the mines and this kind of stuff."

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