

Labour Relations in Scottish Agriculture before 1870

By GEORGE HOUSTON

AN outstanding feature of Scottish economic development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the rapid growth of capitalist farming and the emergence of a large agricultural working class all over the lowlands. By the middle of the nineteenth century there were about 200,000 wage-earners working on the land, two-thirds of them on the 10,000 farms with the largest staffs.¹ The main characteristics of their conditions of employment are fairly well known. The great majority were hired for periods of six months or one year, new engagements often being arranged at feeing markets held regularly in many country districts. All types and grades of farm workers received a large part or in some cases the whole of their wages in kind. Unmarried servants generally boarded in the farmhouse or lived in an outhouse (or 'bothy'), while married servants lived in cottages on the farm. Conditions of employment varied over the country and many local customs were very long in dying out, but gradually a more homogeneous class of agricultural wage-earners was built up, and today minimum wages and conditions are enforced throughout the country.

A comprehensive history of this important section of the Scottish working class remains to be written.² The present article deals with only one aspect of such a history; it is a study of institutional factors which influenced relations between farm workers and employers and helped to determine working conditions in Scottish agriculture.

The article is divided into three sections, each corresponding to a stage in the general history of labour relations in Britain. In the first stage, although feudal relations had been abolished and workmen were nominally free, with the same legal status as their masters, the level of wages and conditions of work were regulated by law, and the workmen's freedom of movement, even at the conclusion of a contracted period of service, was severely limited. In the second stage, the market had become the 'regulator' and conditions of

¹ Estimates based on the 1851 Census Report. In 1956 there were about 90,000 employed workers in Scottish agriculture.

² There is useful source material in T. Johnston's *History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 1920. For the post-1870 period a helpful and little known source is *The Plough*, published from 1893-5, initially for the Scottish Federal Ploughmen's Union. A complete file is in the B.M. Colindale Library.

employment were negotiated by individual employers and workmen. Relations between members of these classes were still strongly influenced by the law on master and servant, however, and disputes were settled in the last resort by individual recourse to the courts. The third stage saw the decline of individual bargaining and the growth of collective agreements, with the workmen beginning to come together in an organized way in order to improve conditions of work and to bring about changes in the law affecting their relations with employers. All three stages may be discerned from a historical study of relations between farmers and servants in Scotland before 1870, a convenient limiting date which marks the end of the 'golden age' of farming and closely follows the passing of the Master and Servant Act (1867).

I

REGULATIONS ON FARM SERVANTS, 1617 TO 1751

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries several Acts of Parliament were passed and many regulations issued by justices of the peace which affected farm servants and sought to control their conditions of work and freedom of movement. There were four main forms of intervention: (a) the fixing of wages; (b) the stipulation of long periods of service rather than daily or weekly engagements; (c) the enforced detention of farm servants on the land; and (d) the conscription of 'idle persons' for work in agriculture.

(a) The fixing of wages by the justices of the peace in Scotland was carried out under the acts of 1617 and 1661.¹ Both declared that at the Quarter Sessions in August and February the justices should lay down the wages and terms of hire of labourers, workmen, and servants. Those who refused to serve for the stipulated terms were to be imprisoned, and masters could be compelled to pay the proper level of wages should the servant sue for them. Evidence that the justices in several counties used their powers under these acts may be found in extant records of the J.P.s in Scotland.² In Peeblesshire in 1656 the justices fixed the wages of a ploughman boarding with a farmer

¹ *Acts Scot.*, iv, p. 537, and vii, p. 306.

² Some of these records have been transcribed and printed, e.g. C. A. Malcolm, *The Minutes of the Justices of the Peace for Lanarkshire, 1707-1723*, Scot. Hist. Soc., 1931, and W. R. McDiarmid, 'The Regulations of Farm Servants in Dumfriesshire in 1751', *Trans. of . . . Dumfries and Galloway Nat. Hist. and Ant. Soc.*, 1864-5, p. 37. Other printed sources are, for Peeblesshire, W. Chambers, *History of Peeblesshire*, 1864, p. 176, and, for Midlothian, C. H. Firth, *Scotland and the Protectorate*, Scot. Hist. Soc., 1899, pp. 405-11. The writer has also consulted the manuscript J.P. records for the counties of East Lothian, Kinross, Perth, Stirling, Wigtown, and Kirkcudbright that are in the possession of the county clerks of the peace. The information contained in section I is derived from these sources except where indicated otherwise.

at ten pounds Scots (16s. 8d. sterling) for the half year. In the same year the Midlothian justices issued regulations laying down the rate for ploughmen boarding with farmers at 40 merks (£2 4s. 6d. sterling) a year, considerably higher than in Peeblesshire. The Lanarkshire justices issued wage regulations in 1687, 1708, and 1716, fixing the ploughmen's rate at £2 per annum. In Wigtownshire in 1749 farm servants' wages were fixed at £1 5s. for the summer half year and £1 for the winter half year. In Dumfriesshire in 1751 wages were fixed at £2 10s. a year. There is also evidence that the justices in East Lothian and Stirlingshire issued similar regulations during the eighteenth century.

(b) From 1621 attempts were made to prevent farm servants from working for daily or weekly wages and to compel them to engage for at least six months. In that year an act was passed "anent servants goeing lowse and leaving their masters service."¹ Apparently many farm servants were in the habit of hiring themselves only for the six winter months, preferring to work for daily or weekly wages in the summer when the demand for labour (for working with peats, building dykes, and shearing in harvest) was greater and wages higher. On August 7th, 1716, the Lanarkshire justices laid down the minimum period of service for farm servants at six months, extending it to twelve months on May 6th, 1718. In Dumfriesshire in 1751 it was declared that farm servants should work at least six months with one master and twelve months if the latter wished it.

(c) The act of 1621 also laid down that farm servants engaged for the winter had to continue to work for their masters during the summer months unless they could prove to the justices that they were hired by another master for the whole period from Whitsunday to Martinmas. A regulation to this effect was passed by the Lanarkshire justices in 1716, and in the same year the justices in Stirling gave farmers the power to detain any of their farm servants "who design to Leave their Service after Martinmas next and have not feed themselves with any other master." Even where specific powers of detention were not granted, regulations were often laid down which must have made it very difficult for a farm servant to leave a master who wanted to keep him in service. In 1716 the Lanarkshire justices declared that servants could only leave if they gave 40 days' notice and obtained a certificate from their employer or the justices before applying for another place. Farm servants who left without permission were to be treated as vagabonds. In 1751 the Dumfriesshire J.P.s declared that farm servants must give three months' notice in the presence of two witnesses before leaving at the end of a term.

¹ *Acts Scot.*, IV, pp. 623-4.

(d) Regulations designed to force 'idle persons' to enter farm service date back to 1425 when an act was passed: "Gif ony idle men, that has not to live of their own, be received within his bounds . . . the Shireff sall gar arreist sik idle men . . . and . . . sall assigne fourty dayes to sick idlemen to Gett them masters or to fasten them to Lauffull crafts."¹ This act was reproduced by the Lanarkshire justices in 1708 along with the act of 1621 which laid down that "the Justices of Peace and constable shall have power . . . to force and compell all and whatsoever lowse men and women to serve for competent hyre and wages."² In Stirlingshire in 1716 the constables were ordered to make out a list of "all idle persons and others out of service fitt therefore and in use to serve and fee termly or yearly" and to summon such persons to the next Quarter Sessions. For each person the constables received a reward of 20 shillings Scots (1s. 8d. sterling).

It is clear that, at least until the second half of the eighteenth century, the Scottish justices (many of whom were landowners) made periodic attempts to control the wages and conditions of farm workers and to limit their freedom to become day labourers or leave the land altogether. Regulations were passed concerning other workers as well, but in many of the counties the main energies of the J.P.s appear to have been³ "directed against the farm workers". Strengthened by their powers to imprison offenders, the justices must have wielded an important influence on working conditions in agriculture, and there is evidence that the wages actually paid in some parts of Scotland about 1750 were not very different from the regulation rates already noted.⁴ The rise in farm wages from 1650 to 1750 was not more than one-third—an astonishing degree of stability compared with the next hundred years, when there was an eight-fold increase in cash wages in Scottish farming.⁵ After 1750 the countryside saw rapid changes and many direct controls and regulations disappeared before the onslaught of economic progress. It was not until 1813 that the act enabling justices of the peace to fix wage rates was repealed, but long before then a change had begun to take place in the kind of control over labour conditions which the justices were able to exercise. Direct jurisdiction over wages and other conditions gave way to an indirect influence wielded mainly through the power to settle disputes between masters and workmen.

¹ *Acts Scot.*, II, p. 11.

² *Ibid.*, IV, p. 624.

³ C. A. Malcolm, *op. cit.*, p. xli.

⁴ Broadlee Day Book, 1748–55 (Byers MSS. on loan to writer); Hamilton, *Life and Labour on an Aberdeenshire Estate, 1735–1750*, Third Spalding Club, 1946, p. 80; *Old Statistical Account*, Penpont parish, Dumfriesshire. C. A. Malcolm considered that the justices' orders at the beginning of the eighteenth century were being disobeyed, *op. cit.*, p. xlii.

⁵ Cf. A. L. Bowley, 'Agricultural Wages in Scotland', *J. R. Stat. Soc.*, LXII, 1899, and G. Houston, 'Farm Wages in Central Scotland, 1814–1870', *J. R. Stat. Soc.*, CXVIII, 1955.

II

DISPUTES BETWEEN FARMERS AND SERVANTS, 1800-70

The period of transition from 'direct control' to 'indirect influence' cannot be clearly defined, but by the end of the eighteenth century the level of farm wages in Scotland was no longer regulated by formal decree and workers out of service were free to choose their masters or their work without interference by the justices.¹ The contract of service was decisive, and in theory it could take almost any agreed form. In practice labour contracts in farming were invariably informal and verbal, and, apart from the cash element in wages which often varied, were based on the customary practice of the district.

The influence of the justices was exerted through their interpretation and operation of the law on master and servant. Offending employers and workmen were not treated equally under this law, the former being liable in a civil action for damages or wages owing, whereas the latter could be sent to prison as criminals.² Prior to the act of 1823 (4 Geo. IV, c. 34), disputes between masters and workmen in Scotland were settled under common law,³ a feature of which was that servants could be imprisoned in order to enforce a contract of service. The practice was to send the servant to jail until he found security to fulfil his contract—a procedure which might mean a fairly long sentence.⁴ After 1823 action against servants in Scotland, as well as in England, was generally taken under the statute passed in that year which allowed three possible methods of dealing with offending workmen. They could be sent to a house of correction and held to hard labour for any period up to three months; their wages could be abated; or they could be discharged. In his evidence to the Select Committee set up in 1865 to consider

¹ In Peeblesshire in 1856, however, the Sheriff-Substitute declared that a farmer could refuse to allow a servant to go to the feeing market.—T. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 353. This seems to have been an exceptional decision. By this time farm servants were in the habit of changing employers frequently.

² Cf. D. Simon, 'Master and Servant', Chap. vi in *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, ed. J. Saville, 1954.

³ A number of statutes covering Britain had been passed in the eighteenth century, e.g. 20 Geo. II, c. 19 (1747) and 6 Geo. III, c. 25 (1766), but they were never acted upon in Scotland.—P. Fraser, *Treatise on the Law of Scotland relative to Master and Servant*. . . 2nd ed., 1872, p. 243.

⁴ An example is provided from the columns of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 7 Nov. 1808. Five servants of a "respectable farmer in the Carse of Gowrie" had "refused to remain at home and clean and dress their horses every night at 8 o'clock." The justices found "that the master's orders were not unreasonable, and granted warrant for committing them to Perth jail until they found security to fulfill their service, and obey all their master's reasonable orders."

the law on master and servant, Sheriff Barclay of Perth stated that servants in Scotland were still occasionally imprisoned under common law "as a sort of terror."¹

Contemporary accounts of a number of disputes between farmers and their servants taken to courts of law provide useful evidence on the state of labour relations in Scottish agriculture in the nineteenth century.² Farm workers were at an initial disadvantage in such disputes, for the cash part of their wages could be retained by their employers until the end of the agreed term of service.³ If a disagreement arose and the worker left his employer or was dismissed, he found it very difficult to obtain the wages owing him for the period actually worked. If he had taken the initiative in leaving his employer he would not only lose his wages but would run a serious risk of being brought to court by the farmer and might be sent to prison, fined, or ordered to return to his service and provide surety for his good conduct. If he had been dismissed and took his master to court, he had to show that the dismissal was unjustified, which generally meant proving that a certain order of the farmer was "unreasonable."⁴ Even when the servant managed

¹ Barclay, one of the more liberal Scottish sheriffs, criticized the law on master and servant in the following terms: "I am satisfied that [the act of 1823] has given great cause for dissatisfaction among the working classes upon this principle, that while the master failing to perform his part, can only be made civilly liable in damages, the servant is dealt with as a criminal, as a felon, and is convicted and sent to the felons' department of the prison, and alimanted by public funds; treated, in short, as a thief or a robber; and, the contract being civil, I think that the servants have good cause to complain."—P.P. (H. of C.), 1865, VIII, Q.199.

² The writer has collected reports of over thirty disputes from newspapers. No detailed court records of such cases were kept as they came up before the J.P.s or Sheriff. Appeals to the Quarter Sessions were generally briefly recorded; e.g., only the decision was recorded in the Minute Book of the Haddington Justices (Sederunt Book, 1817–24, p. 193). Nor are legal digests very helpful, for out of nine cases involving farm servants taken to the Court of Session between 1800 and 1873 and recorded in *The Scots Digest*, five concerned grieves or managers. No ploughman won his case on appeal.—*The Scots Digest of Cases . . . 1800–73*, III, 1911.

³ Cf. T. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 355. Some farmers no doubt gave occasional advances to their servants, but from a study of nineteenth-century farm account books it is clear that much of the cash wage remained to be paid at the end of the term. Regular, monthly advances to married ploughmen became more common in later years.

⁴ I have not found a single case in which an ordinary male farm servant succeeded in proving that his dismissal was unjustified, whereas there are reports of six cases in which the plea of "wrongful dismissal" was rejected. *Perthshire Courier*, 26 May 1838 and 24 Nov. 1842; *Scottish Farmer*, 4 Aug. 1848; *Peoples Journal*, 9 Oct. 1858; *The Scots Digest . . .*, III, p. 226. There are records of two grieves and one gardener who were successful in claiming wrongful dismissal (two on appeal), and Sheriff Barclay in 1842 awarded decree in favour of a woman (domestic) servant who had been "dismissed for refusing to go upon a Saturday evening to wash several pews in an Episcopal Chapel situated about a mile and a half beyond her master's residence."—

to convince the court on this point, he might find that he had to pay a sum for his own and the farmer's legal expenses which exceeded the wages owing to him.¹ A farm worker had to leave his tied house when dismissed; if he considered the dismissal unjustified he could sue for damages but must leave his house.²

Two common sources of dispute were the length of the working-day and the nature of the work the servant had been engaged to carry out. In 1807 a farm servant argued that the time spent in going to and coming from the field in which he was working should be held to be part of the five-hour yoking period. The Kelso justices rejected this argument and stated that "every master is entitled to order his servants to work daily two yokings, of five hours each, to be computed from the time the horses are yoked and ready to work, till they are loosed from the draught."³ In addition to their two five-hour yokings ploughmen had to 'supper' their horses in the evening and might find themselves in court should they refuse to carry out additional work at other times. In his book on Master and Servant, Fraser recorded the view that farm servants "cannot refuse to extend [their working hours] when necessity requires."⁴ A case from Aberdeenshire in 1848 illustrates how difficult it could be for a farm servant to prove that a certain task was outside his agreement.⁵

One afternoon, between five and six o'clock, a farmer had ordered his servant to get ready a horse and cart to take some furniture from the landlord's house to another house a mile and a half away. The servant had refused, was dismissed, and sued the farmer in the small debt court for his wages on grounds of wrongful dismissal. The farm servant's agent maintained that "such orders were unreasonable, so late in the afternoon; and besides that

The Scots Digest . . . , III, p. 226, *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 2 March 1860, and *Perthshire Courier*, 24 Nov. 1842.

¹ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 2 March 1860. Sometimes the farmer might not dismiss the worker but would bring him to court for disobeying orders, in which case punishment could vary from imprisonment to a small fine. Cf. *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 14 May 1803, 7 Nov. 1808, 8 Aug. 1807, 26 June 1806; *Perthshire Courier*, 21 Oct. 1813, 2 Jan. 1845; *Peoples Journal*, 9 Oct. 1858.

² *North Brit. Agric.*, 8 Feb. 1865.

³ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 8 Aug. 1807; a similar case was reported in the same newspaper on 26 June 1806. This question and that of "stable time" have caused many disputes in agriculture.

⁴ P. Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 66. He mentions a case in which a farm servant was dismissed for refusing to attend cattle on a Sunday in order to allow fellow servants to go to church.—*Ibid.*, p. 69. Sunday work was quite a common source of dispute; cf. *Perthshire Courier*, 2 Jan. 1845; *The Scots Digest* . . . , III, p. 226.

⁵ See also *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 14 May 1803, and *Peoples Journal*, 9 Oct. 1858.

the pursuer was expressly engaged as *first* ploughman, and was not bound to perform such extra services as carting furniture for other people. . .” In dismissing the case the Sheriff remarked that “although *frequent* orders to perform such services, after the ordinary time of labour, might be considered unreasonable and not within the contract, servants are bound to perform extra services, such as must occasionally occur and be necessarily required; and that the present was a case where the order given was fairly within the contract of master and servant.”¹

A more sweeping pronouncement came from the Kelso justices in 1807, who expressed “their unanimous opinion that it was a mistake in servants, hired by the year or half year, to suppose that, after their ordinary work hours, they are at liberty to dispose of or absent themselves as they please without their master’s leave; that, on the contrary, all such servants are bound to be at their master’s call, and to perform his lawful and reasonable orders, at all times during their service, by day or by night, when occasion requires.”²

Not every Scottish J.P. or Sheriff might have defined a farm worker’s duty in such terms, but it is obvious that in operating the law on master and servant many of them used their authority to maintain certain practices which some workers were trying to alter. The individual farm servant was in a very weak bargaining position with his employer and could expect little assistance from the law or the courts in any attempt to improve his position. Changes in the labour market could and did lead to higher cash wages, but other conditions of employment were more inflexible. It is not surprising that early attempts at combination among farm workers concentrated as often on changing the hours of labour and other working practices as on raising the level of wages.

III

EARLY ATTEMPTS AT COMBINATION

Trade Unions among farm workers are notoriously difficult to organize, and the sporadic attempts at combination before 1870 produced weak and generally short-lived organizations. Local newspapers provide practically the only contemporary records of these developments, so the picture that can be drawn is necessarily incomplete and leaves many questions unanswered.

The first attempt at combination among farm workers in Scotland which the writer has been able to trace was in the Carse of Gowrie in 1805.³ The

¹ *The Scottish Farmer*, 4 Aug. 1848.

² *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 8 Aug. 1807.

³ Apart from a reference to ‘Windy’ Shaw organizing ploughmen in Stirling about 1750 by J. Ramsay of Ochertyre in *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, 1888, II, p. 211.

following extract from the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 10 August 1805, shows that it was quickly suppressed.

“Public notices having been put upon several of the church doors in the Carse of Gowrie, requesting the ploughmen to meet in Perth on the 5th ultimo, to settle their wages and hours of working, the Sheriff convened before him four of the persons most actively engaged in the combination, who confessed the charges against them, and expressed extreme sorrow for their conduct. The meeting did not take place, and no further legal measures have yet been adopted against the other persons concerned, as they now profess themselves satisfied of the illegality of their proposed meeting. In order to prevent attempts at similar combinations, we think it proper to state that by Statute 39th and 40th Geo. III ‘all servants or workmen who shall enter into any combination to raise their wages, or lessen their hours of working, or who shall issue public notices, requesting any person or persons to meet for the purpose aforesaid, or who shall make such requests verbally or by write, are liable to be imprisoned three months or sent to the house of correction.’”

There is no other reference to combination among farm servants at this time, but in August 1806 the *Farmer's Magazine* noted that “from the increased rate of wages, or from a scarcity of working people, many more disputes occurred in various counties betwixt masters and servants at last Whitsunday than known at any former period.” Although the Combination Laws would have prevented any overt organization from being formed it may be that there were a number of attempts by farm workers to combine in order to gain some advantage from the prosperity of agriculture and the shortage of labour during the war years.

The outstanding effort to establish trade unionism among Scottish farm workers in the first half of the nineteenth century took place in Perthshire at the Whitsun term in 1834. It was noted briefly by the Webbs and by T. Johnston.¹ Shortlived though it was, the attempt is interesting because it reveals a level of militancy among farm workers in Scotland generally considered to be confined to English farm labourers at this time.

The *Dundee Advertiser*, which was sympathetically interested in trade unionism at this time, gave a very full and vivid account of a ploughmen's meeting held in the Carse of Gowrie, at which the movement was apparently launched. The opening paragraphs of the reporter's account both set the scene and summarize the main purpose of the meeting.—

“In consequence of a printed requisition which was extensively circulated

¹ S. & B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism*, 1907, p. 121 (their source was the *Poor Man's Guardian*); T. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

throughout the district, and which was signed by seventy individuals of their number, a public meeting of the ploughmen and agricultural labourers of the Carse of Gowrie was held at Inchtute, on Thursday the 5th June (it being considered the most central place in the district), for the purpose of forming an association to procure a reduction in their present hours of labour, which are admitted by every reasonable person to be unnecessarily long. Previous to the hour of meeting, the Errol band of music arrived, accompanied by about two hundred persons from the West Carse, exclusive of a number who had gone to meet them; and bearing a flag, on which was inscribed 'Errol Musical Band'. To persons not much versed in the routine of public meetings, and particularly to those who were totally unacquainted with a display of popular feeling, the procession presented a very animating appearance as it passed along the road. When the band approached the place of meeting, they were received with three hearty cheers.

"David Watson, ploughman at Seaside, having been called by acclamation to the chair—and having read the requisition in consequence of which the meeting was called—Charles King, ploughman at Raws, moved the following resolution—viz.

"1. That it is the opinion of this meeting, that, from and after the term of Martinmas next, the hours of labour should be reduced to ten hours in summer and eight hours in winter.

"2. That while this meeting is of the opinion that the above hours are as much as the human frame can bear with a due regard to its physical and mental powers, yet, as the seasons are beyond human control, this meeting, having no wish to injure their masters' property or neglect the bounties of Providence, the persons composing it resolve—

"3. That in seed-time, hay-making, and harvest, they will work extra hours whenever their masters require them, provided they be remunerated, according to the rate of day-labourers, for every hour beyond the stipulated agreement.

"4. That in order to carry the above resolutions into effect, an Association shall be formed, and a committee appointed, to promote by every legal and constitutional means the object which we have in view, until it reach the 'consummation so devoutly to be wished for'."¹

The resolutions were passed unanimously and several speeches followed, two of them from men prominent in the trade union movement in Dundee at this time, James Begg (probably a weaver), and Edward Buik (a flaxdresser).²

¹ *Dundee Advertiser*, 13 June 1834.

² *Ibid.*, 16 May 1834 and 30 May 1834. There was an important weavers' strike in Dundee at this time.

Both Dundee speakers attacked the Corn Laws, which, said Buik, "are the cause of ruin to your immediate employers, the farmers as well as you. It is their operation that forces them to press hard upon your comforts, and appear tyrants in your eyes." Buik singled out the landlords, not the tenant farmers, for his main attack, arguing that they were the framers of the Corn Laws.¹ Other points from his speech included a reference to the "operatives in the towns of Great Britain around you [who] have united for the same purposes." He also suggested that a committee be elected to carry the resolutions into effect at Longforgan feeing market a few weeks later, and that they call a meeting before the market "to fix the method by which you intend to work on that day [and to declare] that no farm-servant shall fee or accept any proposals from the farmers, differing in the least from the rules, until he shall first have consulted with the Committee."

Buik urged the Committee, which was later elected by the 600 persons attending the meeting, to "do everything in their power to form bodies of a similar nature throughout Perthshire." At least one known attempt was made to do this, for the *Perthshire Courier* of 19 June (two weeks after the Inchtute meeting) reported a "general meeting of the Farm Servants in the parish of Forteviot," a few miles west of Perth. Whereas the Inchtute meeting had confined itself to passing resolutions on the length of the working-day and in favour of payment for overtime, the demands of the Forteviot ploughmen included references to the level of wages and to the suppering of horses. The 'rules' of the Forteviot ploughmen were:

"1. In the winter season to rise at sky and drop at sky.

"2. In the summer season to rise at 5 and work till 6 in the evening, with the exception of 2 hours in the middle of the day.

"3. Wages to vary from £11 to £14, according to the experience of the workmen, with meal and milk as formerly.

"4. Horses to be suppered at 8 from 3rd Friday of October till 1st March and in the summer season when they come from the yoke."

In commenting unfavourably on this development, the *Perthshire Courier* referred to associations of farm servants which "have been formed in various districts," suggesting that the movement was quite widespread. The newspaper argued that it had taken place "under the instigation of the leaders of

¹ If the farmers complain of poverty, said Buik, "tell them you cannot help that; they must insist for a reduction of rent from the laird. . . They will strive to frighten you by speaking of bringing over Irish labourers to fill your places. But I can tell you that, though they did, they would not keep them three months (*cheers*). They would find they had not the cannie Scot to deal with—(*cheers*)—they would find they had got as ugly customers as the stack burners of England (*great cheering*)."

the town unions," and was a consequence "of the late introduction of the demon of politics into the country districts." The farmers were not slow to retaliate, for, according to the *Courier*, "whenever they were aware that any in their service had connected themselves with these Unions, immediate intimation was given that they should quit at next term; and in no case will they re-engage or recommend any servant who has so attached himself."

Among the farm workers themselves an attempt was made to arouse opposition to the principle of trade unionism. At Methven, a few miles north of Forteviot, a meeting of farm servants was held on July 1st, 1834, and passed a number of resolutions, the first of which deprecated "the idea of dictating to their masters, after the manner of a trades union, in any way to interfere so as to throw impediments in the way of the regular operation of agricultural labour."

At the same time, the meeting (whose size was not stated) passed other resolutions very similar to those of the Forteviot ploughmen, except that no reference was made to the level of wages. These resolutions were published in an advertisement in the *Perthshire Courier*, 17 July 1834, and a petition was sent to the Perthshire Agricultural Association which, however, declined to receive it on the grounds that the association was "merely for the improvement of farm produce."

The outcome of these developments is obscure. The *Dundee Advertiser*, 27 June 1834, reported that "owing to the determined stand made by the farm servants for a reduction in their hours of labour, very little feeing took place" at Longforgan market. The less sympathetic *Dundee Constitutional* stated that "The Ploughman's Union has already well nigh fallen to pieces, and many of its members solicited employment from their masters on the old terms, and in the very teeth of the rules to which they not a month since bound themselves to conform."¹ Since there are no other known references to trade unionism among Perthshire farm workers for several decades after 1834, it is fairly certain that the organizations set up at Inchtute, Forteviot, and any other centres, collapsed very quickly. But it would be a mistake to conclude from this that they did not have any influence on working conditions in agriculture. The comments of a newspaper like the *Perthshire Courier*, which was antagonistic to trade unionism, make it clear that the demands of the organized ploughmen on such questions as the length of the working-day received widespread publicity and considerable support.²

¹ Quoted in the *Perthshire Courier*, 26 June 1834.

² The *Courier* stated that there were several farmers in the habit of "extracting 12 or 13 hours" of work from their servants, whereas other extensive farmers had declared that they had "never been in the habit of asking more work from their servants than in the intervals stated in

Eleven years after the Perthshire agitation, trade unionism seems to have had another short period of popularity among a section of farm workers, this time in the Lothians. Our knowledge of the 1845 developments is scanty and any organization must have had a very short life.¹ In the 1860's, however, a much more powerful movement spread throughout Scotland, starting off in Midlothian.

A Farm Servants' Protection Society was formed at a meeting held at Slateford, near Edinburgh, on December 15th, 1865, and appears to have lasted about seven years.² Local societies were formed in many other areas, e.g. in the counties of Kinross, Forfar, Perth, Kincardine, Stirling, Clackmannan, Peebles, Roxburgh, Berwick, and East Lothian,³ and by the end of January 1866 the society had changed its name to the "Scottish Farm Servants' Protection Association."⁴ The first set of rules approved by the Midlothian society appear to have been amended at later meetings, and local societies often adapted them to local circumstances.⁵ In Berwickshire, for instance, strong objection was taken to the 'bondager system' under which a ploughman had to provide a woman worker for a stated number of days' work in the year.⁶

The following account of the aims of the Clackmannan society probably describes the basis of most of the societies. "The association is open for farm servants and labourers, and the members provide that no member shall engage for less than fifteen shgs. per week, with free house and garden and fuel driven, and dinner in harvest, to be paid monthly. The hours shall be the same as at present, but that a half holiday be got, and the horses be suppered at 6 instead of 8 o'clock as at present. That for a weekly payment of a penny a sick fund shall be formed, and that when a member gets into a lawsuit with his master, the society shall protect him if a majority of the committee think

the prayer of the Forteviot petition." The newspaper went on to say that "we sincerely trust . . . that the farmers will distinguish between demands made in the spirit and through the medium of intimidating unions and the respectful and moderate requests of those who disdain all connection with such bodies or such objects."

¹ T. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 355-6; *North British Agriculturist*, 20 Dec. 1865; *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 5 Jan. 1866.

³ *Ibid.*, 12 Jan. 1866, 2 Feb. 1866, and 16 Feb. 1866; *Alloa Journal*, 17 March 1866, 14 April 1866, 9 June 1866, 23 June 1866, and 30 June 1866; *Perthshire Advertiser*, 3 Jan. 1866, 6 June 1867, 21 Nov. 1867, and 24 Jan. 1867.

⁴ *North British Agriculturist*, 31 Jan. 1866.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 Jan. 1866. There was a call by a member at one meeting that higher wages should be paid to ploughmen who could plough 9 inches deep.

⁶ *Berwickshire News*, 28 Aug. 1923, and letter to Dr J. F. Duncan from R. Aitchison, Duns, 15 March 1923.

him right. The great object, however, is to secure a general rise of wages at next term by register offices (which are to be opened in every parish), so that the matter of increased pay may be at once set at rest."¹

There is evidence that some of the societies collected subscriptions and established a formal organization,² but sometimes this is only made clear because the society had to be wound up for lack of support and the funds distributed to members.³ Supporters of the union claimed a number of successes. At the hiring fair in Haddington in 1866, cash wages appear to have risen by about £2 per annum,⁴ and the bondager system seems to have disappeared on many farms as a result of the agitation against it.⁵ But other aims of the movement, such as the weekly half-holiday, the monthly payment of wages, and the replacement of feeing markets by registry offices, were not achieved at this time and reappear in the demands of the Scottish Federal Ploughmen's Union in the 1890's.⁶ Unlike this later union, the societies formed about 1866 do not appear to have set up a national organization with a full-time official, and most of them probably lasted for only a few months. In at least one district the farm workers most active in the movement were apparently forced to leave farming and went to work as miners.⁷

The significance of these early attempts at combination should not be measured solely by the permanence of the organizations set up. As long as disputes on working conditions arose only in a personal form, between an employer and an individual worker, they were settled in the last resort in a court, under the law on master and servant, and the wage-earner, as we have seen, was invariably at a serious disadvantage. Where the workers began to act as a group, their influence was considerably increased. Organizations set up on trade union principles had a short life, but not an ineffectual one. They failed to establish themselves as permanent bodies with a subscribing membership, but they helped to give expression and direction to criticism of working conditions in agriculture. Without exaggerating their importance,

¹ *Alloa Journal*, 14 April 1866.

² Dr J. F. Duncan has an old membership card of the Swinton (Berwickshire) Society, dated 8 Feb. 1866.

³ *Perthshire Advertiser*, 21 Nov. 1867; *Alloa Journal*, 23 June 1866.

⁴ *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 9 Feb. 1866. Another journal stated that "the agitation . . . has partially secured an advance of wages on some farms, rendering the rates of payment more uniform in certain districts."—*North Brit. Agric.*, 25 April 1866.

⁵ The agitation in the Lothians in 1845 possibly made the system less prevalent in that area.—T. Johnston, *op. cit.*, p. 355, and *Haddingtonshire Courier*, 21 Feb. 1862. It was still prevalent in Berwickshire in 1866, but became less common after the agitation.—*North Brit. Agric.*, 25 April 1866.

⁶ Cf. *The Plough*, 1893-5, and the Union rule book, held by Dr J. F. Duncan.

⁷ Letter from R. Aitchison cited above.

these early attempts at combination probably had an influence in establishing the principle of a normal working day in agriculture, in abolishing the bondager system, and in other minor changes in the customary conditions of farm work. Of greater significance, perhaps, is that they prepared the ground from which rose the agricultural trade unions of the future, the Scottish Federal Ploughmen's Union already mentioned and, in the present century, the Scottish Farm Servants' Union which is now a section of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

NOTES AND COMMENTS (*continued from page 26*)

on the agrarian structure of France, the Mediterranean countries, and Africa.¹ In addition, the papers read to the conference, with the contributions to discussion, will be published, it is hoped within one year.

As a further practical outcome of the conference it is hoped to publish an international lexicon of agrarian terminology. During the conference there was considerable discussion about the exact meaning of certain terms, not least between members speaking the same language. A list of main headings covering most of the aspects of agrarian practice has been drawn up. The aim is to collect from various countries a list of terms, grouped under these main headings. Each word is to be accompanied by a short explanation, and, if helpful, a map or air photograph. It is hoped that various terms peculiar to regions will be submitted and defined by experts in local agrarian history.

The British representatives on the lexicon commission are Professor Jones Pierce of University College, Aberystwyth, Dr R. H. Hilton of Birmingham University, and Mr Glanville R. J. Jones of Leeds University. It is proposed to collect material as follows:

Persons with a knowledge of regional terminology are invited to submit terms with accompanying explanations. The list of main headings referred to above will be issued to help in drawing up lists of terms, and helpers are asked to apply for lists as under:

For the terminology of the northern English counties (Lancs, Yorks, Northumberland, Durham, Westmorland, and Cumberland), Scotland, Isle of Man, and Cornwall, to Mr Glanville R. J. Jones, Dept. of Geography, The University, Leeds 2.

For the rest of England, to Dr R. H. Hilton, School of History, The University, Birmingham 3. For Wales and Ireland, to Professor T. Jones Pierce, University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Returns of terms should be made to the address from which lists are obtained. Please apply for the list of main headings before submitting contributions.

SCHOOL OF SCOTTISH STUDIES

In January 1957 the School began publication of a new journal called *Scottish Studies*, which is to appear twice a year. The first number is

(*continued on page 51*)

¹ *Structures Agraires et Paysages Ruraux, un quart de siècle de recherches françaises*, by E. Juillard, A. Meynier, X. de Planhol, and G. Sautter. Nancy, 1957.