

Popular artisans: the role of personal networks to worker organisation in Freetown, 1884-1900.

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The development of the Global Labour History literature has led historians to reconceptualise labour and workers. The efforts of Marcel van der Linden and others in developing Global Labour History have generated a considerable debate. The definition of a worker has been broadened and moved away from an exclusive focus on male wage workers.¹ This paper builds on a critique of van der Linden's work on Global Labour History. From a feminist perspective D.S. Cobble argued that: "Indeed, one of the fundamental insights of the worldwide upsurge of feminist labor history since the 1970s has been that limiting labor history to "waged work" meant not only excluding the work and lives of most women historically but also making it impossible to understand the politics, institutions, and identities of male wage workers. Men, like women, relied on the reproductive labor of others to sustain their market work. Men, like women, also were social beings, embedded in families and communities. The goals of the movements built by men and women, as well as the successes and defeats of these movements, are not fully grasped without connecting the public and the private, the individual and the social, market work and family work."²

A partially biographical account of artisan trade union activity in Sierra Leone between 1884 and 1900 reveals the complex interactions between artisan trade unionists and the rest of colonial Sierra Leonean society. This paper focusses particularly on the connections between early trade union leaders and various influential Sierra Leoneans. By doing so it shows how various connections were forged through membership of religious and social organisations. These connections subsequently supported artisan organisations and provided opportunities outside of these organisations to potentially bring about social change. It also shows how the particular social position of artisans influenced their access to platforms where they could voice and possibly resolve their grievances.

First some aspects of the social and economic context must be introduced. The first failed experiment to relocate a number of poor blacks from London to what is now Sierra Leone took place in 1787. In 1792 a second group consisting of black loyalists who had been

¹ The global labour history literature is too extensive to comprehensively cite here. See: M van der Linden and J. Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History*(Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History 1999). in J. Lucassen(ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art*(Bern 2008 Second Pressing). M. van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays Toward a Global Labour History*(Leiden, Boston: Brill 2008).

² D.S. Cobble, 'The Promise and Peril of New Global Labour History', *International Labour and Working-class History* 82(2012), 99-107, 102.

resettled after the American War of Independence arrived from Nova Scotia. In 1800 they were joined by Maroons from Jamaica.³ After the abolition of the slave trade the British government resettled slaves liberated from the intercepted slave ships in Sierra Leone.⁴ Between 1808 and 1864 84,000 Liberated Africans were settled in the colony.⁵ Literacy in English and the adoption of European modes of dress and customs were required for admission into the colony's upper social strata. Many rural inhabitants of the colony did not live such Europeanised lives and most Sierra Leoneans practised a combination of African and European customs.⁶ Religiously the colony's population was quite diverse. By 1900 the colony's population was predominantly Christian with a significant Muslim minority and a smaller group adhering to various traditional beliefs.⁷

The colony's Christian population belonged to several different denominations. The Church Missionary Society(CMS) was the first organisation to send missionaries to the colony in 1799.⁸ The CMS played an important role in the administration of the colony after the introduction of the parish system by governor Charles MacCarthy(r. 1816-1824). In this system the newly arrived Liberate Africans were settled in the villages surrounding Freetown. Here the Church Missionary Society would ensure that they and their children were educated. The settlers were trained in a craft and expected to attend church. By providing the religious and secular education of the settlers the CMS became an important part of the colonial administration.⁹ In addition to the Anglican church represented by the CMS various Methodist churches existed in Sierra Leone. The Nova Scotians for example were Wesleyan Methodists.¹⁰ In 1844 Antony O'Connor led the Liberated Africans out of the Methodist church to form the West African Methodist Society. O'Connor protested the fact that Liberated Africans had not been allowed to preach from the pulpit but were instead relegated to the reading table. After O'Connor's death in 1855 the West African Methodist society joined the recently formed United Methodist Free Churches(U.M.F.C.) of Great Britain in 1859.¹¹ In Freetown the CMS had a monopoly on secondary education until the Wesleyans founded their own secondary education institutes in the 1870s. The churches would remain

³ G. Cole, 'Re-thinking the Demographic Make-Up of Krio Society' in: M. Dixon-Fyle and G. Cole(eds.), *New Perspectives on the Sierra Leone Krio* (New York 2006) 33-51, 36.

⁴ L. Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism, 1870-1945* (Madison 1974) 10-11.

⁵ A. Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: an Interpretive History* (Freetown 1989) 2.

⁶ Wyse, *Krio of Sierra Leone*, 10-12.

⁷ Cole, *Re-thinking the Demographic*, 44.

⁸ J. Agbeti, *West African Church history: Christian Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1919* (Leiden 1986), 19-24.

⁹ B. Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Basingstoke: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2013), 21.

¹⁰ Agbeti, *West African Church History*, 49.

¹¹ Fyfe, *History*, 232-233, 293.

the only providers of education until the twentieth century.¹² Church membership reflected one's social status particularly among Liberated Africans. As their fortunes and status increased they tended to move from smaller nonconformist denominations to the established Methodist and ultimately Anglican churches.¹³ Methodism in Sierra Leone encouraged its adherents to pursue personal social and economic advancement. Such personal success was perceived as a sign of divine grace.¹⁴

The economy of the colony was based on its function as an entrepôt. Freetown facilitated the export of agricultural products from the hinterland of the colony and the import of goods from Europe. In the 1850s and 1860s trade in the colony expanded.¹⁵ Meanwhile the colony struggled to raise sufficient revenue for its own maintenance. Particularly after governor Pope Hennessy abolished all forms of direct taxation in 1872 and replaced them with a system of customs duties.¹⁶ As a result of the global economic crisis in the 1870s the prices of the colony's exports dropped dramatically. As a result government revenue declined due to the declining value of the colony's exports even when volume of exports increased such as in the case of palm kernels.¹⁷ The colony's merchants proposed the annexation of portions of the hinterland as a solution to the colony's financial issues. They argued that annexations in the hinterland would provide easier access to local markets for traders and thus increase trade.¹⁸ Freetown's economic importance meant it attracted significant numbers of migrants. Freetown also served as the port of departure for migrant workers employed in colonial Africa and elsewhere. The Congo Free State was an important destination for migrant labourers. The colonial government was ambivalent about the recruitment of migrant labour. Yet the Executive Council felt that it needed reasons outside of their effect on the local labour market to deny requests for labour.¹⁹

The colony's economic difficulties laid a foundation for artisan trade union activity in the 1880s. Strike action and trade union formation in Sierra Leone prior to the First World

¹² L. Shyllon, *The Dynamics of Methodism in Sierra Leone, 1860-1911: Western European influence and Culture in Church Development* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1983 diss.) 136.

¹³ A. Porter, 'Religious Affiliation in Freetown, Sierra Leone', *Journal of International African Institute* 23:1(1953), 3-14, 13.

¹⁴ F.C. Steady, 'The role of women in the churches in Freetown, Sierra Leone', in: E. Fasholé-Luke R. Gray, A. Hastings and G. Tasié(eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London 1978), 151-163, 153.

¹⁵ A. Howard, 'The Role of Freetown in the Commercial Life of Sierra Leone', in C. Fyfe and E. Jones(eds.), *Freetown: a Symposium*(Freetown 1968), 38-64, 39-39.

¹⁶ N.A. Cox-George, *Finance and Development in West Africa: The Sierra Leone Experience*(London 1961), 79.

¹⁷ O. Goerg, *Pouvoir Colonial, Municipalités et Espaces Urbains: Conakry-Freetown des années 1880 à 1914 Vol 1* (l'Harmattan : Paris, Montreal 1997), 60. Howard, Freetown in the commercial life, 39.

¹⁸ Sierra Leone Association, *Paper by Samuel Lewis, on certain questions affecting the interests of the Colony of Sierra Leone* (Freetown 1885), 3-7.

¹⁹ *Executive Council Minutes 1882-1890*, Sierra Leone National Archive, 434.

War remains an understudied topic. The period between ca. 1880 and 1900 has received particularly little attention from scholars. In institutional studies charting the history and development of strikes and trade unions in Sierra Leone the period is treated as a prelude to the large scale strikes of 1919 and 1926. Conway and Fashole Luke both argued that strike action in Sierra Leone in the late nineteenth century consisted of more or less isolated incidents.²⁰

The first trade union in the colony, called the Mechanics Alliance, was formed in August 1884. One of its founding members Samuel Henry Athanius Case had founded a newspaper called *The Artisan* a few months earlier to support his efforts to organise the colony's artisans.²¹ Both *The Artisan* and the Mechanics Alliance folded not long after their inception. By the time of its second anniversary the Mechanics Alliance numbered 24 paying members down from a peak of 190 in late 1884. *The Artisan* struggled financially and ceased publication in late 1888. Explanations for these failures have varied. Fashole Luke argued that neither initiative really addressed the grievances of their intended audience. Case emphasised the importance of moral and educational self-improvement as the basis for economic improvement. Furthermore Case's paper gradually shifted its content away from the goals formulated at the inception of the paper. Fashole Luke noted that by 1887 *The Artisan* was more important as a source for proposals for the upcoming centenary of the colony.²² Ibrahim Abdullah interpreted the history of *the Artisan* in a more positive light. He saw *The Artisan* as the nucleus of class based movement in Sierra Leone that for the first time brought people together on the basis of a shared experience as workers. Their grievances arose from the perception that the extensive apprenticeships which had granted them the status of master artisan were losing their value. They complained about poorly trained artisans who were As such Abdullah argued that *The Artisan* and the Mechanics Alliance formed the nucleus of a nascent working class in Sierra Leone. Their mode of organisation along class lines was inspired by existing mercantile organisations. Abdullah argued that artisans shared a cultural experience of being Christian and an associated vocabulary of resistance with the city's merchants.²³ Abdullah referred to E.P. Thompson's work on the working class formation in nineteenth century Britain. Thompson's view of class emphasised the importance of its

²⁰ H.E. Conway, 'Labour Protest Activity in Sierra Leone during the Early Part of the Twentieth Century', *Labour History* 15(1968), 49-63, 49-51. D. Fashole Luke, 'The Development of Modern Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone, Part 1', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18:3(1985) 425-454.

²¹ Fashole Luke, Modern trade unionism, 426-427.

²² Ibidem, 427.

²³ I. Abdullah, 'Rethinking African Labour and Working-Class History: the Artisan origins of the Sierra Leonean working class', *Social History* 23:1(1998), 80-96, 88.

emergence as the result of interactions between actors with similar interests vis-à-vis other groups with different interests.²⁴ Based on Thompson's work other historians have made the argument that the initial struggle of this new working class centred around artisan attempts to not become a working class of proletarian wage workers. Instead they sought to preserve the status of the artisan as an independent producer with a particular social status.²⁵ Furthermore the early class struggles analysed by Thompson can be characterised, per Adam Przeworski, as "a struggle *about* class before it is a struggle among classes."²⁶

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s the struggle to assert artisan independence was expressed by opposition to the employment of poorly trained skilled workers in lieu of more qualified workmen. This grievance predated the founding of the Mechanics Alliance in 1884. Already in 1875 a proposal to form a union of artisans in Sierra Leone was published in the Sierra Leonean newspaper *Independent*. In March 1875 four anonymous master mechanics sent a letter to the *Independent* in which they commented on the death of Charles F. Hazelborg. In its obituary to Hazelborg the *Independent* wrote of Hazelborg: "Mr. Hazleborg was one of the oldest of our West Indian residents and has contributed in a great measure towards imparting whatever mechanical ingenuity our native workmen now possess."²⁷ Hazelborg had been a man of some political influence. He had been a member of the committee that had elected the successful Liberated African merchant John Ezzidio to the Legislative Council of the colony in 1862.²⁸ The four master mechanics proposed the formation of a mechanics' alliance to continue Hazelborg's work in improving the condition of Sierra Leonean mechanics and artisans.²⁹ The relation of this Mechanics Alliance to the one founded a decade later is unknown. Some founding members of the Mechanics Alliance claimed in 1884 that they had been encouraged by master of records Algernon Montague to form a trade union eight years earlier.³⁰ These examples show that the organisation of trade unions in Sierra Leone was partially encouraged by the colony's political and economic elites. This support continued throughout the period under review in this paper in different forms.

A more detailed account of the life and career of *The Artisan's* founder provides

²⁴ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963), 9.

²⁵ F. Cooper, 'Africa and the World Economy', in: F. Cooper et al.(eds.), *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 84-201, 107.

²⁶ A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 70.(emphasis in the original)

²⁷ *Independent* 25 February 1875, 2.

²⁸ C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (New York 1962) 320-322.

²⁹ *Independent* (Sierra Leone), 25 February 1875,2. *Independent*(Sierra Leone), 11 March 1875, 3.

³⁰ 'Meeting of Mechanics', *The Artisan* July 30, 1884, 2-3.

useful insights into these initiatives. It serves to explain the content of the paper and the union and their respective successes and failures. Samuel Henry Athanasius Case was born in Freetown 30 July 1845. He enjoyed a good education in the Government School and subsequently the CMS Grammar School.³¹ He was reportedly a good and intelligent student and after completing his secondary education he was employed as a clerk by the Messrs. Macaulay Brothers firm around the age of 16. He left his clerkship to become a stonemason and a “few years later” he applied for the job of assistant Gaol Keeper in Freetown. He changed his employment again and became a bookkeeper for T.W. Hughes, then one of the city’s most important merchants. In 1869 Case was appointed as a clerk in the Royal Engineers Department in Bathurst in Gambia. In 1871 Case returned to Sierra Leone to serve as the foreman of works for the Royal Engineers Department in Sierra Leone. In 1873 Case, presumably still working for this department, joined Garnet Wolseley’s expedition against the Ashanti. He returned to Freetown after the conflict and worked for Surveyor’s Department of the Colonial Government.³² By the time of the first publication of *The Artisan* Case was foreman of works at the Royal Engineers Department.³³ Simultaneously Case built his reputation and network in the United Methodist Free Churches and as a teetotal activist. By 1876 Case was the secretary of the Young Men Christian’s Association and had founded a benefit society under the International Order of Rechabites.³⁴ As a teetotal activist Case worked with the Reverend J.C. May(1845-1902) who had by 1874 become the principal of the Wesleyan Boys’ High school and would go on to found the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* in 1884. Case himself noted with some pride that a significant number of important Sierra Leonean civil servants and artisans had promised to contribute to his paper by providing articles.³⁵

The Artisan contained much of the same rhetoric already outlined above. The paper ran pieces on the poor conditions of the colony’s artisans and several on the need for government funded technical education. It argued that the problems of the colony’s artisans were caused by the proliferation of lowly skilled artisans. These workers pushed down wages by inflating the labour market and reduced the artisans’ social standing.³⁶ The paper was only one part of Case’s efforts to improve the condition of Sierra Leone’s artisans. The other was

³¹ ‘Death of Mr. S.H.A. Case, *Sierra Leone Weekly News* 4 May 1901, 6.

³² ‘Death of Mr. S.H.A. Case, *Sierra Leone Weekly News* 4 May 1901, 6.

³³ *The Artisan*, 28 May 1884.

³⁴ Local, Independent 28 October 1875, 3. *Independent* 13 September 1877, 2.

³⁵ ‘Our First Issue, *The Artisan* May 24, 1884, 3.

³⁶ ‘Practical Education’, *The Artisan* 28 May 1884. ‘Our Mechanics’, *The Artisan* 24 June 1885. ‘Technical Education’, *The Artisan* 17 February 1886. ‘An Industrial School’, *The Artisan* 2 February 1887.

the founding of a trade union. This union, called the Mechanics Alliance was founded in August 1884. The objectives of the union were as follows:

“to raise a fund by entrance fees, subscription of members, fines and donations; for the relief of members in sickness; for assisting members in distressed circumstances; and for improving the moral and social condition of the members as to them shall seem expedient.”³⁷

“The Union is not intended to be aggressive as some think and speak; it is intended to promote and perfect as well as could be, the industries of the Colony, and to assert the rightful claims of the mechanics, not by bravado-but by merit.”³⁸

This approach of stressing self-improvement was not simply an expression of moderation. Rather it was a reflection of the strongly Methodist outlook Case had developed through his membership of and participation in the UMFC. As such he formulated the answers to the economic challenges presenting themselves to artisans on the foundation of self-improvement. This worldview was shared by many Liberated African Methodists regardless of their occupation.

The Mechanics Alliance appeared to be off to a good start but its success could not be sustained. When the Alliance was founded in August 1884 it had 176 paying members rising to 190 later in the year. Shortly before its first anniversary in August 1885 only 51 paying members remained.³⁹ One year later the union was dissolved. Case blamed the failures of the union and *The Artisan* on the indifference of the colony’s artisans.⁴⁰

While the Mechanics Alliance was unproductive the *The Artisan* was unprofitable. In response Case changed the content and emphasis of the paper for the second volume. The scope of the paper was widened as there were fewer contributions on industrial and labour affairs in the colony.⁴¹ Still the paper continued to depend on financial contributions from sympathisers including the Superintendent of the UMFC. In contrast Case himself was quite successful in the same period. He worked on the construction of the new Tabernacle Church for the UMFC.⁴² In addition Case was an important member of the United Methodist Free

³⁷ ‘Rules and Regulations of the Mechanics Alliance’, *The Artisan* 28 January 1885.

³⁸ The Artisan Alliance, *The Artisan* 30 July 1884.

³⁹ ‘The Mechanics Alliance’, *The Artisan* 29 July 1885

⁴⁰ ‘The Artisan New Series’, *The Artisan* 24 June 1885.

⁴¹ ‘The Artisan New Series’, *The Artisan* 29 April 1885.

⁴² ‘Tabernacle Church’, *The Artisan* 8 October 1884. Works in Progress’, *The Artisan* 25 March 1885.

Churches. He served as the district secretary of this body and a lay preacher.⁴³ In 1886 Case became a member of the committee charged with the organisation of the colony's centenary celebration in 1887 which coincided Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. The committee included many notable Sierra Leoneans including J.C. May, Edward Blyden, members of the Legislative Council and future mayors of Freetown Samuel Lewis and Th. Colenso Bishop as well as Superintendent of the UMFC T.C. Carthew.⁴⁴ Despite the failure of *The Artisan* and the Mechanics Alliance Case remained a prominent figure in the colony. This position would be important to Case's subsequent work on behalf of the Sierra Leone's artisans.

Neither *The Artisan* nor the Mechanics Alliance had managed to bring about any of the reforms Case had argued for. It was only after the demise of *The Artisan* in 1888 that Case got a chance to possibly implement a reform of technical education. In 1889 the colonial government decided to address the question of technical education. The Board of Education convened a meeting to discuss the matter. As education was provided exclusively by the various churches in the colony they were necessarily a part of this debate. Again the discussion included many prominent Sierra Leoneans like J.C. May, Colenso Bishop and others. In September 1889 the Board of Education organised a public meeting on the future of technical education in the colony. Case spoke on the occasion and repeated many of the arguments discussed above. Case continued to emphasise the importance of sound technical education to improve the position of fully trained craftsmen.⁴⁵ The initiative did not immediately lead to the founding of a technical school due to the government's inability to contribute the necessary funds. The problem of competition was becoming increasingly acute for many artisans as throughout the 1880s the number of artisans, fully qualified or not, increased greatly from 2293 in 1881 to 3409 in 1891.⁴⁶ Simultaneously the colonial government, the most important employer of labour, had decreased its expenditure on construction activities that employed many artisans labourers.⁴⁷

After the failure of the technical education committee Case's involvement to artisan organisations appears to have ended. By the early 1890s it appeared that artisan trade unions had played their part. In November 1892 a large strike among Freetown's unskilled labour force broke out. The strike started among the workers employed in the construction of

⁴³ *The Artisan* 10 December 1884.

⁴⁴ 'Centennial Committee' SLWN 9 October 1886.

⁴⁵ 'Industrial Education', *Sierra Leone Weekly News* October 5 1889, 6.

⁴⁶ Abdullah, artisan origins, 87.

⁴⁷ These expenses went down from a high of £6210 5s. 4d. in 1883 to £ 1341 8s. 11d. in 1888. These figures are derived from the Blue Books See: CO 272/59, 60-67 and CO 272/65, 60-67.

military barracks. The strikers protested the reduction of their wages and the strike soon spread throughout the city.⁴⁸ On 1 December, when by the labourers had ended, a group of artisans convened in Wilberforce Memorial Hall. There they discussed “important Resolutions relative to the prices at which payment for labour rendered should be obtained”.⁴⁹ The newspapers made no further reports on the meeting but the importance of the meeting is evident from this statement. Explicit demands for higher wages had been absent in *The Artisan* and the Mechanics Alliance. Wages were also addressed by the Carpenters Defensive Union, founded in 1895. In 1896 this new union published a special notice to the public in which they announced new and increased rates for journeymen carpenters.⁵⁰ Similarly the Shipwright Union Society set prices for the labour of its members.⁵¹

Alongside these continued attempts by artisans to represent their interests the state and the city’s merchants also increasingly concerned themselves with a labour question. Their concern was not the improvement of workers’ conditions. Instead they desired to control the growing influx of labourers into Freetown.⁵² The proposed solution was a greater degree of regulation of labour migration and particularly of unskilled labour. After the strike in 1892 there were complaints that it was increasingly difficult to compel workers to work on conditions imposed by employers. There were also concerns over migrant labourers easily changing their occupation. One suggested solution was the institution of a labour bureau that could serve to exercise a greater deal of control over unskilled workers.⁵³ Such strictures were not to applied to artisans.

Case’s career as a trade unionist was over by 1892. He continued his printing business and remained an important member of the UMFC until he returned to the Wesleyan Church in 1895. He continued to be an active and important member of that church.⁵⁴ Case also became a Freemason somewhere in the 1890s. The membership of the Freetown lodge was quite diverse and included successful artisans as well as diplomats and merchants. Membership of the lodge expressed yet again the extent to which Case had become a part of the colony’s

⁴⁸ ‘The Strike of Labourers’, *Sierra Leone Weekly News* November 26 1892, 4.

⁴⁹ ‘The Labour Strike’, *Sierra Leone Time* December 3, 1892, 3.

⁵⁰ ‘Special Notice’, *Sierra Leone Times* April 11, 1896.

⁵¹ *Sierra Leone Weekly News* November 2 1896.

⁵² I . Abdullah, *The Colonial Stage, Mining Capital and Wage Labour in Sierra Leone, 1884-1945: A study in Class Formation and Action* (University of Toronto 1990 diss.), 69.

⁵³ ‘The Labour Question’, *Sierra Leone Weekly News* March 4, 1893, 5. ‘The Labour Question, Nr. 5’, *Sierra Leone Times* August 26, 1899, 2.

⁵⁴ Death of Mr. S.H.A. Case, *Sierra Leone Weekly News* 4 May 1901, 6.

elite. The lodge's mixed membership may be a testament to the extent to which shared values enabled daily interactions between people of different classes.⁵⁵

Conclusion

In a highly status conscious society that valued social mobility through education and self-improvement the perceived erosion of their craft presented a serious moral problem to many artisans. Their drive for self-improvement was influenced by the various forms of Methodist Christianity that many Sierra Leonean adhered to. Case as well as other artisans proposed government sponsored technical education as the solution to the decline in craftsmanship. This way they hoped to reinforce the distinction between fully fledged artisans and those who did not sufficiently know their crafts. The proposed solution to this problem did consist of training artisans so that they might outcompete their competitors based on merit.

To an extent this vision was shared by Sierra Leone's mercantile elites many of whom were also Methodist Christians. When Case started *The Artisan* in 1884 he embodied this ideal in many ways. He was an active in the church as a preacher and in various functions related to the churches' social organisations. His work allowed him to speak with a degree of authority on labour issues. Throughout his activities he continuously interacted with influential Sierra Leoneans. As a result he became a member of a network of influential Sierra Leoneans. This cooperation between artisans and merchants was enabled by a shared worldview as well as aligning interests. In this context interpreting their actions as a process of class formation is complex. E.P. Thompson reminds us that class formation is a historical process that takes place of long stretches of time and social change and that restricting the temporal scope of research obfuscates the process of class formation.⁵⁶ Yet this study covering nearly two-and-a-half decades has shown that solidarity is not always formed around occupation. Other socio-economic interests like strengthening the economy and other factors like a shared cultural and religious background have to be factored into this process. The latter factor also influenced the people with whom artisans could form relationships that could support artisan trade unions or hold them back.

The purpose of this paper has been to show how the private and the professional activities of artisans influenced and supported their advocacy on behalf of their own interests. Case serves as an example but is by no means unique in this regard although many more

⁵⁵ S.A.J. Pratt, *The early history of Freetown Lodge No. 1955 E.C.* (Manuscript: Library and Museum of Freemasonry, 1990), 14-16.

⁵⁶ Thompson, *making of the working class*, 11.

biographical accounts of these people remain to be written. Their participation in the colony's higher social circles supported their activities as trade unionists. Given a shared cultural background as well as ample opportunities for personal interaction artisans could manage the complex set of economic and economic problems they faced in cooperation with the colony's mercantile elites. This experience contrasts starkly with the experience of unskilled labour workers and migrants who were met with calls for greater degrees of control over them. Even so, artisans were unable to translate this support into meaningful improvements of their condition. In the 1890s artisan trade unions shifted their focus. Instead of an overarching organisation for all artisans ,as the Mechanics Alliance had been, artisans organised themselves by occupation. The efforts of these men were important but further research into their experiences is required to more fully reveal the social importance of artisans or indeed other categories of workers in the economy of late nineteenth century Sierra Leone.

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