

Petition of the Operative Manufacturers of Paisley

Source: National Archives [UK] CO 384/6 ff. 796

Paisley,
May 1820

Unto The Right Honourable Earl Bathurst,
principal Secretary of State for the British Colonies,
The petition of
The Undersigned Operative Manufacturers, and others,
Heads of families, in the Town and Vicinity of Paisley.

Humbly Sheweth,

That from the Calamitous State of the Trade in this part of the Country, which has now Continued for Eighteen months without intermission, the petitioners are reduced to the utmost penury and distress. The trade which they formally earned their Subsistence, and maintained their families in comfort and decency, having declined, with a rapidity unexampled in the Commercial History of this Kingdom, and left no hope of any amelioration in their Condition, Nor even the smallest prospect that they shall ever again behold the Days of Comfort and Competence, which formerly fell to their lot. – To such extremity are the petitioners reduced, that many of them are literally without Bread to satisfy the Call of nature, or Clothing to cover them, and although many have been assisted, by the more affluent part of the Community, during the Course of last winter, yet that assistance being now discontinued, they find it impossible any longer to Subsist, as it will be entirely out of their power to pay their Yearly rents, due at the insuing term, which falls on the 27th and 28th of the present month; Consequently their furniture, & implements of Trade, will inevitably be seized by their landlords, and the petitioners with their families, turned out to Starve. This Statement, they Beg leave to assure Your Lordship, is no exaggeration, the facts are well known to be true, by every person acquainted with the present state of this town and neighbourhood, and the pressing Necessity of the petitioners Case precludes the possibility of their awaiting, any longer, the result of time for a renovation of trade, if indeed such renovation be possible.

In these forlorn and distressing Circumstances, the only opening that presents itself to their View, by which they can prevent themselves from perishing, is that of Emigration to some other Country, where the redundances of Operative trades is not so great as in Britain, and where they can more readily earn Subsistence for themselves, and families; But the means of resorting to this expedient are totally beyond their reach, unless assistance can be procured from those who have the direction of National Finance, and to implore that assistance is the object of the present supplication.

The petitioners understand that it is in the Contemplation of His Majestys Government, [to settle?] the uncultivated Grounds in upper Canada, and to that Country the views of the petitioners are particularly directed, in preference to the Cape of Good Hope, as the Climate of the former is nearly similar to that of these Northern parts of Britain, and where (in the event of this application being deemed worthy of favorable Notice) they would have the advantage of being associated with the same General Habits, and speaking the same language with themselves. –

The petitioners therefor most humbly beg leave to request, that lands be Granted to them in Upper Canada, at the rate of One hundred acres per family, or to whatever extent shall be deemed expedient, and adequate to the purpose, by His Majesty's Government. At the same time they entertain no doubt, that the Goodness of Government would allow them lands, sufficient for the purpose, But the means of transporting themselves, subsisting their families untill their first Crop could be got off the ground, and implements to work with, are also wanting.

The petitioners cannot pretend to Calculate, with any degree of precision, what Specific sum would be necessary for this purpose, But whatever this may amount to (provided the request shall have the good fortune to Merit Your Lordships favorable consideration) The petitioners, for repayment thereof, most humbly propose to Enter into a Bond, Conjunctly and Severally, that the whole to be liable for each individual, or family, that they shall remain in the Country where they shall be placed, by the goodness of Government, and that they shall refund the sum so laid out. Payable in such proportions, and at such terms, as from their Circumstances, Your Lordship shall deem reasonable, and as, in case it shall so happen, that any family or individual shall fail to pay up their respective proportions, the whole of the others are bound to make good the same, they humbly suggest, that in such Case the remaining Obligants shall have right to the lands of the Defaulter, so far as to reimburse them, What they shall pay for the Default, in case the Defaulter shall desert his possession, and that they shall also have right to prosecute such Defaulter, according to the law of the Country, for the penalty specified in the Bond; and if the Default shall happen otherwise than by Desertion, then the parties aggrieved shall have right to Redress, in any of His Majestys Courts, or any Colonial Court in upper Canada, that may be competent to grant such redress. – The petitioners Beg leave further to state, that they are all heads of families in this place, and its vicinity, who are known to each other, and upon whose Principle, & Moral Character, they can mutually depend.

They now humbly Beg leave to submit their Case to Your Lordships most gracious Consideration, Trusting that you will have the goodness to interfere in their behalf, and rescue them from a state of Wretchedness & Want, either by granting their request, or in such other manner as Your wisdom may suggest.