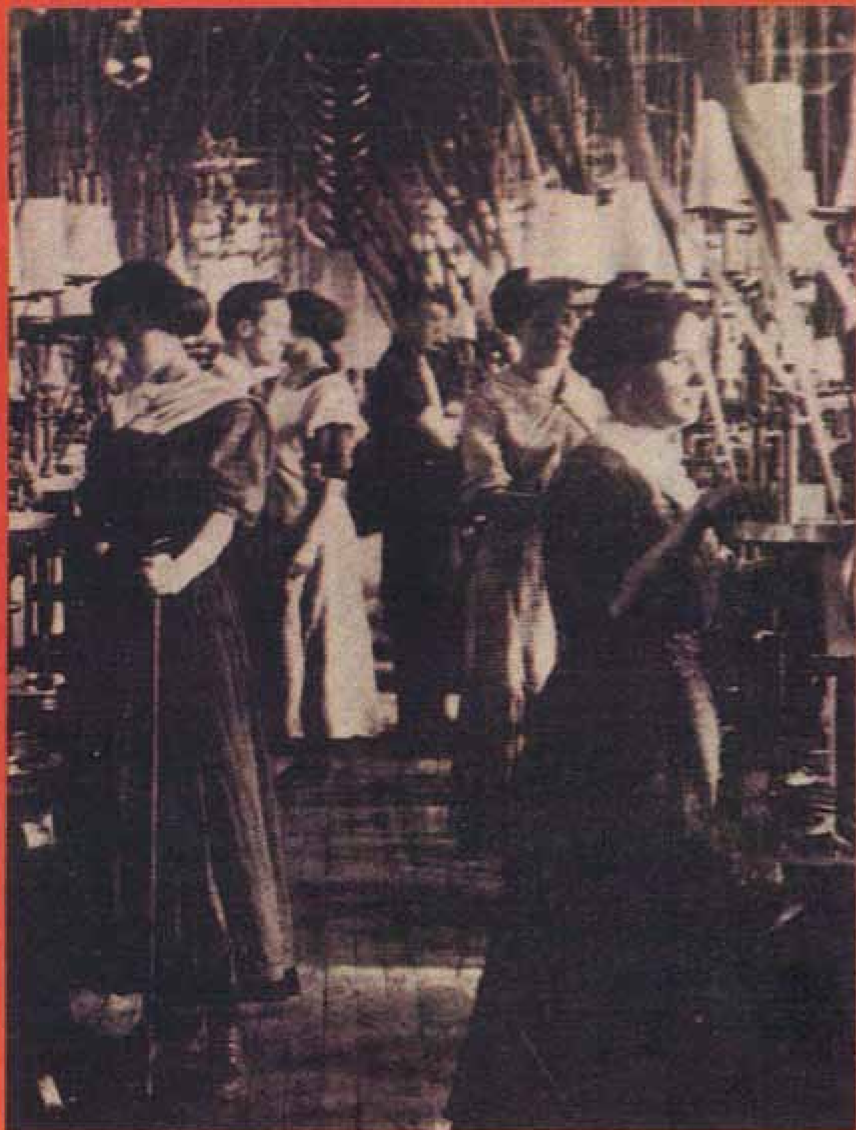
Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History



Edited by W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey

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Gregory S. Kealey

Committee on Canadian Labour History
& New Hogtown Press

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Edited by W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey

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W.J.C. Cherwinski,
and Gregory S. Kealey,
January 1985

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Preface

In 1983 the Secretary of State Canadian Studies Program agreed to help finance a series of lecture programmes at four Canadian universities in the area of labour and working-class history. The aim of the series was not to add to the burgeoning specialized literature in the field but rather to begin a process of making that material more accessible to Canadian workers and to the general public, as well as for use in the classroom. Thus these lectures are not heavy with scholarly apparatus nor do they represent the last word in up-to-the-moment doctoral dissertation research. Instead they attempt to provide a general readership with the fruits of the last fifteen years of Canadian scholarship on the working class. A major growth area in Canadian history in those years this volume brings together lectures by many of the major figures in the field.

Eight of the lectures derive from the original series at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The other six are taken equally from the Laval and Winnipeg series. All of the authors join with the editors in hoping that this volume will serve the purpose for which it was intended, namely to make more accessible to Canadian workers their own history.

Dedicated to
the memory of
Leo Roback.

John Flett, a Hamilton carpenter, became one of the most phenomenally successful union organizers in Canadian history.

OVERVIEWS

The History of the Canadian Labour Movement

Eugene Forsey

SOMEONE ONCE ASKED Samuel Gompers to define the aim of the labour movement. He replied "More, more more."

The history of Canadian labour organizations is a tangled skein. But one thread runs right through it: the determination to get "more, more, more." What they wanted more of has varied with time and circumstances. So did the means by which they tried to get it. But the basic aim has remained constant.

So did much else. Surprisingly, what emerges unmistakably from the whole story is the persistence of specific problems: of attitudes towards them, of methods of dealing with them, and of arguments about them. There have been so many changes, especially in the last forty years, that one might have expected to find accounts of unions and their activities in the last century of almost purely antiquarian interest: "old, forgotten, far off things, and battles long ago;" what the victories and defeats were all about, obscure or undiscoverable. On the contrary, what one finds is, over and over again, startlingly contemporary. It is only necessary to change a few names, dates, and figures, and the tale might have come from yesterday's newspaper. The unions were so often fighting for the same things they are fighting for now, wielding the same weapons, using the same arguments; employers were so often resisting exactly the same things, wielding the same weapons, using the same arguments; governments were so often acting, or not acting, for the same reasons, or lack of reasons, as now. There was no golden age when unions were unnecessary because employers, and economic conjunctures, were so benevolent; when such unions as there were were too "moderate" or "responsible" ever to strike; when union demands were generally recognized as "reasonable" and "justified;" when employers were rational and "gentlemanly" in their dealings with their employees. The world of the nineteenth century was in these respects basically the same as the world of today.

Let us look first at the specific content of labour's "more, more, more." More of precisely what?

First, foremost and always, more money: higher wages.

Second, more leisure. In the early years, this meant a shorter work-day and work-week, with overtime for extra hours and for Sundays and holidays. It still does, though for organized workers the hideously long hours of a century ago, or even of the early 1900s, are now done with. In the last forty years or so, more leisure has increasingly meant more paid statutory holidays, and longer and better paid vacations after a shorter period of service.

Third, more control over working conditions: protection against piecework, speedup, "scientific management," uncontrolled technological change; protection against industrial accidents and disease; provision for employers' liability, until the early years of this century, and after, state workers' compensation at an adequate level.

Fourth, more control over the supply of labour. In the nineteenth century, "more, more, more" often meant "less, less, less:" less assisted immigration, very much less or no Oriental immigration, less or no child labour. It also meant regulation of apprenticeship, and fair-wage labour clauses in government contracts. It meant, and still means, the closed shop, the union shop, the check-off of union dues by the employer, and, since 1945, the Rand formula (no compulsion to join the union, but compulsory payment of union dues — the taxes for the support of constitutional government in the workplace.)

Fifth, more political power. In the beginning, this meant gaining a wider franchise, and blocking attempts to give the rich extra votes for extra properties. Later, it meant proportional representation, the initiative, and referendum. For almost a century it has meant abolition of the Senate. Recurrently, as we shall see, it has meant demands for independent political action: a Labour Party, a Farmer-Labour Party.

Sixth, from at least the 1890s, taxation based more on ability to pay. For many years, this meant Henry George's "Single Tax," almost forgotten today.

Seventh, more social security. Initially, this meant provision for unemployment, old age, illness, and funeral expenses; and, initially, the unions themselves did, when they could, what little was done. The Quebec Ship Labourers in the 1870s bore banners proudly proclaiming, "We support our infirm; We bury our dead." State old-age pensions and unemployment insurance scarcely figured among labour's declared aims until well into the present century; health insurance was also a latecomer; and the unions at first opposed family allowances, fearing they would be used to undercut wages.

Eighth, more legislative safeguards for union rights. Until the 1930s, this was almost wholly negative: a matter of blocking anti-union legislation. (In the nineteenth century, it sometimes meant favouring, sometimes opposing, incorporation of unions, and favouring, or opposing, compulsory arbitration, which was enshrined in the Trades and Labor Congress "Platform of Principles" in 1898, but hastily removed in 1902, when the government proposed compulsory arbitration for railway workers.) Blocking anti-union legislation is still indis-

pensable. But with the rise of the CIO and the passage of the Wagner Act in the United States, the emphasis shifted to the positive, to the enactment of legislation making collective bargaining compulsory and outlawing a series of "unfair labour practices" which had long been favourite employer devices for blocking, and if possible destroying, unions, and frustrating workers' efforts for self-protection.

Ninth, more legislative safeguards for the total environment. This is almost wholly a recent development, though the Toronto Trades and Labor Council passed a resolution well before 1900 on pollution from ice cutting in Toronto Bay.

1898 meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress, in the front row second from left, John Flett, fourth from left, Daniel O'Donoghue.

So much for aims. What of methods?

The Webbs, in their classic survey of British trade unionism, singled out three: mutual insurance, collective bargaining, and legislative enactment. The Canadian labour movement has used all three.

Mutual insurance was originally immensely important. Many of the early unions had benefit society features. The Saint John and Quebec longshoremen's unions called themselves "Benevolent Associations," although they were in fact exceptionally tough and powerful unions; and the Iron Molders' International Union at one stage called itself "Benevolent and Protective." Mutual insurance has now, of course, been overwhelmingly supplanted by state social security and by supplementary pensions, health insurance, and unemployment insurance negotiated with the employers.

Collective bargaining remains central, and essentially unchanged. But there have been variations, and development, in the instruments by which it has been carried on: craft unions, industrial unions, all-embracing organizations like the Knights of Labor and the One Big Union, local unions, regional unions, national unions, international unions, and sectarian unions.

Until the 1850s Canadian unions were purely local, and purely craft unions of skilled workers: printers, carpenters, bricklayers, masons, stonecutters, cabinetmakers, painters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, sailmakers, shipwrights, caulkers, bakers, tailors. Many of these, the printers especially, considered themselves highly respectable. The printers, indeed, often referred to themselves as "the profession;" the Toronto printers held dinners at which the master printers were honoured guests. (At one Toronto printers' dinner toasts were drunk, with musical honours, to the Queen, the Royal Family, the Governor-General, the City of Toronto, the armed forces, "the Fair of Canada," and a variety of others; there were proposals to invite to the next dinner the Governor-General and Lady Elgin.) When Poulett Thomson (afterwards Lord Sydenham) arrived in Saint John as Governor-General, it was the craft unions of the city who furnished his guard of honour.

1853 marks the advent of international unionism in Canada. The first international was British: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which opened its Montreal branch in 1853. It eventually spread east to Sorel and west to Vancouver, and survived until 1920, when its Canadian branches merged with the American International Association of Machinists. A second British union, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, entered Canada in 1871, at London, Ontario. It eventually spread east to Montreal and west to the Pacific, and survived until 1924, when most of its Canadian branches were absorbed by the American United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners.

The first American union to enter Canada was the Journeymen Shoemakers of the United States and Canada, which had short-lived lodges in Toronto and Hamilton in 1858. But the history of American international unions in Canada really begins with the entry of the Molders, in 1859, with locals in Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, London, and Brantford. A succession of other internationals followed. By 1902, there were about ninety of them, and they far outnumbered, and outweighed, all the local, regional, national unions, and the Knights of Labor put together.

What led to this preponderance? Why did Canadians join international rather than Canadian unions?

Until the passage of the American Alien Contract Labor Act, the main reason is simply that Canada and the United States formed a single labour market. Workers moved freely back and forth across the border. If trade was slack in Toronto, the Toronto craftsworker might go to Buffalo or Cleveland, or even farther afield; if jobs were scarce in New York, the skilled workers could go to Toronto or Hamilton or Brantford. If the worker was a member of a

purely local union, it might be more difficult to get a job in a union shop in a new city. But if a member of an international union, the door was wide open. In this early period, there does not seem to have been much effort by the Americans to "invade" Canada. On the contrary, the Toronto bricklayers, in 1872, tried to join the American Bricklayers' Union and were firmly rejected. The same thing happened even later: the Toronto Theatrical Stage Employees twice (1895 and 1897) tried to join the American National Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and twice were (in P.G. Wodehouse's phrase) "turned down like a bedspread."

Once the American unions were in, and firmly established, with their larger funds and their greater experience of industrial warfare, Canadian workers naturally gravitated towards them, rather than to the smaller, poorer Canadian unions. Once the AFL had conducted its mammoth organizing campaign (1898-1902), and had purged the Trades and Labor Congress of all unions "dual" (rival) to AFL unions, the American unions' preponderance was enormously accentuated. Nothing succeeds like success.

By 1911, the internationals included 82 per cent of all Canadian organized workers. In 1919, in the aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike, this dropped to 58 per cent. From 1920 to 1932, it varied from 62 to 72 per cent. In 1933, it dipped just below 60, in 1934 to 57, in 1935 to 51; and it rose only to 54 in 1936 and 57 in 1937. From 1938 to 1942 it varied from 60 to 66. In 1944, it was 65. From then until 1948 it averaged about 67; from 1949 to 1956, about 70. It is now only about 45 per cent.

The Canadian labour movement down to 1902 might be described as "ecumenical." The national central body, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLCC) (1883-1956) accepted every kind of organization: local, regional, international, Knights of Labor. In 1902, this came to an abrupt end.

Until 1897, the American Federation of Labor had paid almost no attention to Canada. Then it began to be afraid that American businesses might move to Canada to get away from American unions, and might find the TLCC and its unions less of a hindrance. The Congress was very poor. No national or international union was affiliated *en bloc*, just particular locals here and there, in one year and out the next. It was incapable of any serious organizing campaign. But it had the power to charter unions and Trades and Labor Councils; it had shown leanings towards socialism; it was being assiduously wooed by the Liberal Party. The AFL decided that the Canadian unorganized must be organized, and that the AFL must do it, and from 1898 to 1902, as already noted, it did. It also decided that the TLCC might come under the control of the Socialists or the Liberals, and might use its power to charter rival unions and Trades and Labor Councils which could obstruct AFL jurisdictional decisions. So it must be purged of all organizations "dual" to AFL unions and brought under AFL control.

In 1898, the AFL started paying the TLCC a "legislative grant" (at first a

mere $100 a year, later $500; but a substantial sum to a body whose total revenues in 1899 were only about $600, and even in 1902 less than $2,400). What with the legislative grant, and the organizing campaign, by 1902 the AFL was in a position to call the tune in the TLCC. It packed the Berlin, Ontario convention of that year, and the convention promptly voted to exclude, henceforth, every organization "dual" to an AFL union, and rounded off the performance by electing as president the AFL's paid Canadian organizer, John Flett. From then on, the TLCC was not much more than the Canadian legislative committee of the AFL. Over the next half-century, it made repeated efforts to assert its independence, but with small success.

By 1908, twenty-two AFL internationals had affiliated to the TLCC *en bloc*. Their dues provided 80 percent of the Congress's revenues. So the AFL had only to crack the whip by withdrawing its affiliates (as it threatened to do in 1939), and the TLCC had no choice but to obey.

From 1902 on, and most conspicuously from 1902 to 1956, the Canadian labour movement has been "by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed." The unions the TLCC threw out in 1902 proved to be not much more than a nuisance, except in Quebec. A rival, national federation, under various names, was generally a damp squib, at least until the formation of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour in 1926; and even that body had only one union of appreciable size or strength, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. But the TLCC itself was far from solidly united. The western unions became steadily more radical, the dominant eastern unions more cautious, not to say conservative, in practice, although the Congress's "Platform of Principles" retained most of the radical planks laid down in earlier years. By 1919, the division had become acute. It exploded in the Winnipeg General Strike and the formation of the One Big Union, which enjoyed a transitory success on the Prairies and in British Columbia.

The Winnipeg strike was really a strike for effective collective bargaining in the metal trades, not a very radical issue, and the strikers were impeccably non-violent. But the revolutionary speeches of some of the leaders scared the Winnipeg middle class and the Dominion government to frenzied and violent resistance to what they saw as the beginning of a Soviet revolution. Leaders were arrested and jailed; new repressive, and retroactive, legislation was enacted at lightning speed; and the strike collapsed. It left the Winnipeg workers broken, and disillusioned with industrial action. In response, they turned to political action.

It has been argued that in the mid-1930s, when the international unions accounted for little more than half of Canadian union members, Canadian workers muffed a great opportunity for Canadianizing their movement. This is, in my opinion, highly doubtful. True, the non-internationals had nearly as many members as the internationals, but they were deeply divided. Some members belonged to purely local unions, some of which were dummies; some

to the almost purely French-Canadian and purely Roman Catholic unions which were hardly more than tame cats; and some to the communist unions of the Workers' Unity League. The Catholic and the communist unions both hated the internationals. But they also hated each other with a holy, or unholy, venom. Cooperation among these disparate groups was utterly impossible.

That international unions now account for less than half of total Canadian union membership is the result of three developments which came much later: the vastly increased strength and militancy of the former Catholic unions, now the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU); the rise of the public service unions; and the transformation of the Canadian sections of half-a-dozen or so international unions into purely Canadian bodies. Even so, rather more than half the membership of CLC unions comes from international unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO. But it is indicative of the changes over the last twenty years that the two biggest CLC unions, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the National Union of Provincial Government Employees, are purely Canadian, and that the fourth largest affiliate, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, is also purely Canadian. The CLC's independence of the AFL-CIO is in fact much more than formal, as the recent secession of the building trades from the CLC makes clear; and on foreign policy, on relations with the world trade union movement, and on political action, this Congress, like its predecessor the Canadian Congress of Labour, is unmistakably independent of its American counterpart.

First executive, Canadian Labour Congress.

For most of the nineteenth century, craft unions overwhelmingly predominated. There were, indeed, some early unions of the unskilled, notably the Saint John and Quebec longshoremen, and some industrial unions, notably the Nova Scotia coal miners. The earliest local central labour bodies were, significantly, "*Trades* Assemblies." But those that were organized after 1880 were almost invariably "Trades and *Labor* Councils," and the national central body was the "Trades and *Labor* Congress," although the "trades," the craft unions, still predominated.

The change of name certainly made room in the councils for an organization radically different from the craft unions: the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. The Knights set up their first Local Assembly (LA) in Hamilton in 1875, but their history in Canada really begins in 1881. They flourished throughout the 1880s, but by 1902 had dwindled to a shadow. They were a truly international body, with LAs not only in the United States and Canada but in Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. Theoretically, they believed in organizing all workers into a single body, to work for the abolition of the wage system and the establishment of a new society. Theoretically, they were not much interested in organizing particular crafts or occupations. In practice, in Canada, they were prepared to organize everybody everywhere: men and women, skilled and unskilled, in cities, towns, and villages, by crafts, by industries, or in "mixed" assemblies of several occupations (especially useful for small places where there were too few workers in any one occupation to form separate unions). In Canada, they organized, at one time or another, some 40 LAs in every one of the then seven provinces, except Prince Edward Island, and in Calgary in the Northwest Territories. At their peak, in 1887, they had over 200 Canadian LAs, and in the twenty-one years from 1881 to 1902, they organized no less than seventy-five different occupations.

Theoretically, they disapproved of strikes; in practice, they conducted a good many, and they were responsible for the first nation-wide strike, which was also the only genuine international strike in our history: the Telegraphers' strike of 1883, when telegraphers in both Canada and the United States walked out from coast to coast in the United States and from Winnipeg to North Sydney in Canada. It was a white-collar strike, with demands almost identical on both sides of the border, demands that included the eight-hour day for the day shift and seven for the night, and equal pay for equal work for men and women. The Telegraphers' strike of 1883 deserves to rank with the great epic strikes of our history: the London Street Railway strike of 1899, the Grand Trunk strike of 1910, the Winnipeg strike of 1919, the General Motors strike of 1937, the Ford strike of 1945, the Asbestos strike of 1949, and the Newfoundland Woodworkers' strike of 1959.

The Knights, for most of their career in Canada, did not have a large or stable membership. But they dominated the Trades and Labor Congress con-

ventions for most of the 1880s. They finally succumbed to the tighter, more efficient organization and abler leadership of the AFL and its craft unions.

In the late 1890s, and just after the turn of the century, powerful new industrial unions, or unions of the unskilled, began to make their appearance in Canada: the Western Federation of Miners, the American Railway Union, the Longshoremen, the Railway Trackmen, the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, the Retail Clerks. Some of these were at odds with the AFL. For some, "Brief life was here their portion, brief sorrow, short-lived care." Others survived and flourished, but it was not until 1937 that industrial unionism really took hold in Canada.

The formation of the CIO in the United States lit a flame. The CIO did not "invade" Canada. It was dragged in, almost willy-nilly, by Canadian industrial labourers. They began organizing local unions, labelling them with the magic letters, and adopting CIO tactics (such as the sit-in strike). They faced furious and violent resistance from employers and a reactionary Ontario government, and more muted, but scarcely less deadly, hostility from the Dominion government of Mackenzie King (whom that great Newfoundland leader of Nova Scotia coal miners, Silby Barrett, used to call "the father of company unionism on this continent"). The labourers appealed to the CIO for help. At first they got very little. The chief CIO officer concerned told two Canadian emissaries that his organization had first to organize the forty-eight states, then Alaska; after that, it would come to Canada.

Nonetheless, CIO unions in Canada persevered. They soon had to face excommunication from the TLCC. That body was most reluctant to expel them, and at first refused. But in 1939 the AFL put the screws on: "Throw out the CIO unions, or we'll pull out the AFL unions;" and Canadian labour was cursed by a fresh split imposed by the Americans.

In 1941, the Canadian CIO Committee and the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (dedicated to national and industrial unionism) merged to form the Canadian Congress of Labour. The new Congress's unions were almost all industrial, and the Canadian sections of CIO unions were guaranteed (or so it appeared) complete autonomy. The CCL did not exclude unions dual to CIO unions, and it more than once refused to accept the affiliation of CIO unions. The Americans were apt to be rather absent-minded, often ludicrously, about the guarantee of autonomy, and making it stick involved formidable battles, in which the CCL was by no means uniformly successful. But its unions did succeed in organizing the mass production industries, and the Congress itself became far more independent of the Americans than the TLCC had ever managed to be. Moreover, the CCL was politcally independent, whereas the TLCC had too often developed a cozy relationship with the Liberal government in Ottawa and even Duplessis's Union Nationale government in Quebec.

In due course, the AFL and the CIO in the United States merged. This removed the only real obstacle to reunion in Canada, and in 1956 it took place.

with the formation of the present Canadian Labour Congress. The CLC united both craft and industrial unions, the skilled and the unskilled.

Sectarian unionism, common in Europe, unknown in the United States, made its appearance in Canada in 1921, with the organization of the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour. This was an almost wholly French-Canadian body, dominated by the Catholic Church's distinctive version of "the social doctrine of the church," a version which often startled, even horrified, European, American, and even English-speaking Canadian Roman Catholics.

OBU Camp in 1926, the only Labour camp in Canada for the children of the working people.

The CCCL started out with some 45,000 members, all in Quebec. By 1924, it claimed only 25,000 and it stayed at or near that figure until 1934. By 1934 membership had dropped to 30,000. By 1936 this had again grown to 45,000. In 1937 it reached 50,000; but from 1940 to 1942 it was back down to about 46,000 members.

So far, with its disapproval of strikes and its exaltation of "mutual charity" in labour relations, the CCCL had been mainly a boon to Quebec employers and a nuisance to the international unions. But during the war years the aggressiveness it had hitherto manifested chiefly against the internationals began to show towards the employers and the Quebec government. In 1946, the CCCL came under new leadership, and became increasingly militant; the tame cats started to scratch and bite, to the consternation of the employers and M. Duplessis (who is said to have growled at one point, "What do our Quebec workers want

with Catholic unions? Why can't they just join AFL unions, like anybody else?"). For the next few years, the Confederation often cooperated with the CCL unions in Quebec in opposing the provincial government. In 1949, it made Quebec, and Canadian, labour history, with the Asbestos strike. By 1953 it had over 100,000 members, and by 1956 over 101,000. Negotiations to bring it into the CLC failed, and by 1961 it was back to 92,000 members. In that year, it shed its confessionalism, and re-named itself the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU). Ever since, it has been in the vanguard of militant unionism in Quebec (it has now over 200,000 members), often cooperating in the "Common Front" with the Quebec Federation of Labour (CLC), which, to put it mildly, has developed a marked autonomy within the Congress. Apart from the CNTU, regional organizations, of which the strongest and most durable was the Nova Scotia Provincial Workmen's Association (it was founded in 1879, but did not survive World War I), have pretty well disappeared.

The method of legislative enactment took centre stage in the Toronto printers' strike of 1872, which resulted in the Dominion Trade Unions Act, which finally rescinded the eighteenth-century English law of conspiracy. From then on, the records of the local and national central bodies, and, during its heyday, the Knights of Labor, are full of demands for legislation on wages and hours of work, industrial health and safety, immigration, prison labour, the union label, electoral reform, public ownership of utilities, taxation, and a host of other subjects; especially, in recent years, collective bargaining, union security, and social security.

Demands for legislation involved, of course, the question of how to get it. The local and national central bodies were the first instruments. Until the 1860s, local unions seem to have felt little need to coordinate their activities even with other unions in their area. There is some evidence of attempts to form local central organizations in Montreal and Quebec in 1834, but the first body for which we have records is the Hamilton Trades Assembly (1864-75). Before 1880, however, the Toronto Trades Assembly (1871-78) was the most important local central organization. The TTA was influential in forming the first national central body, the Canadian Labor Union (1873-78), and often acted itself almost as the national voice of Canadian labour (it even corresponded with Marx's International Workingmen's Association). There was also a Trades Assembly in St. Catharines in 1875, and a Trades Council in Ottawa (1872-76). The TTA and the Ottawa Council played an important role in securing the passage of the Trade Unions Act, and the TTA undertook major organizing work in Toronto, setting up a labour paper, providing for lectures by visiting labour VIP's from Britain and the United States, starting a library, and engaging in a variety of other activities. The trades assemblies did not survive the depression of the 1870s.

Nor did the Canadian Labor Union. Although officially national, it was in practice an Ontario organization. The Montreal and Quebec Typographical

Unions wanted to send delegates to the first convention but couldn't afford to. The CLU concerned itself both with organization and legislation.

The formation of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, in 1881, opened up a new era for local central labour organizations. Similar bodies sprang up all across the country, from Halifax to Vancouver and Victoria. By the end of 1902, there were at least thirty-eight, in every one of the then seven provinces, in what is now Alberta, and in the Yukon. They were, and of course still are, often active and influential bodies, dealing not only with municipal concerns and legislation, but provincial and Dominion matters as well. The Toronto Council summoned the Canadian Labor Congress of 1883 (which became the TLCC), and counted nothing alien to its activities. Its minutes, even before 1902, record discussion of, and resolutions on, almost everything under the sun, from "scorching" of bicycles to the laying of telephone wires underground, from schools to the Georgian Bay Ship Canal.

Provincial federations were slower in developing. Apart from two abortive attempts in British Columbia in the 1890s, they are creatures of the twentieth century. Until then their functions were performed (as far as they were performed at all), by the provincial executive committees of the TLCC.

The Trades and Labor Councils, and the TLCC, and later the provincial federations, could, and did, pass resolutions demanding a multitude of laws labour needed and wanted. Getting action on them called for something more.

Almost from the beginning, Canadian labour has oscillated between two methods, and used both. One is American: lobby the governments and the members of legislatures, and, at the ballot box, "reward labour's friends and punish labour's enemies," by electing those who had voted "right" on bills, and defeating those who had voted "wrong." The American method works reasonably well in the congressional system, where members of the two houses vote as they please on each measure, without endangering the administration they support, since the president, or the governor, is not in the least danger of being thrown out by an adverse vote on any bill.

The other method is British: independent political action by labour. This works better in a system of parliamentary government, where lobbying individual MPs or MLAs is pretty much an exercise in futility since the government introduces most of the bills, and an adverse vote on any of them is almost certain either to bring down the government or to bring on a fresh election, so that members must, ordinarily, "vote just as their leaders tell 'em to."

For over ninety years, Canadian unions have relentlessly lobbied governments, and sometimes individual MPs or MLAs, with somewhat chequered results. But even in the Canadian Labor Union of 1873-78, there were voices calling for use of the other method; and Ottawa, of all places, actually elected the first independent labour MLA, Daniel O'Donoghue, in 1874. In the TLCC, the voices called louder and oftener, during the 1880s and 1890s, especially the late 1890s when leaders and rank and file alike became increasingly frustrated

with the meagre results of the "cap-in-hand" sessions with ministers. During these years, various labour bodies, Trades and Labor Councils, and the Knights of Labor, put up independent labour candidates in Dominion and provincial elections. They were usually defeated; when they were elected, they generally sank out of sight into the Liberal or Conservative party.

In 1906, the Trades and Labor Congress launched a Canadian Labour Party. But the launching was half-hearted and the ship hardly got off the ways. In 1917, there was a second launching, rather more energetic, and a considerable number of labour candidates ran in the Dominion election. All were beaten, and the second national Labour Party, except for a few local pockets, faded out like the first, although the Ontario election of 1919 elected enough Labour members to produce a Farmer-Labour government.

In 1943, the Canadian Congress of Labour formally endorsed the CCF, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, as "the political arm of labour," and urged its member unions to affiliate to the party. Very few did so, the conspicuous exception being District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick). But the connection between the congress and the party was close enough that, in the Ontario election of 1943, the CCF came within a few hundred votes of winning the same number of seats as the Conservatives (the actual number was thirty-four to thirty-eight). What was more, a majority of the CCF MLAs were trade unionists, active and often prominent, and a CCF trade unionist had won every provincial seat where the Dominion MP was a liberal cabinet minister. The Liberal government hastened to pass an Order-in-Council, PC 1003 of 1943, under the War Measures Act, which made collective bargaining compulsory for all industries under Dominion jurisdiction, which, in wartime, meant most of them. In 1944, labour played a conspicuous part in electing a CCF government in Saskatchewan, a government which promptly passed a series of the laws the unions had been demanding.

In 1961, the Canadian Labour Congress and the CCF launched the New Democratic Party, which the congress has consistently backed ever since, although never abandoning its lobbying of governments of other parties. This has helped to produce NDP governments in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and enactment of pro-labour legislation in those provinces. Elsewhere, the results have been disappointing, even in Ontario, which, theoretically, ought to have been one of the party's best fighting grounds.

Finally, this paper will close with a note on the size of the Canadian union movement at various dates. There are, as far as I know, no figures of total membership before 1911. There is my own estimate of the number of locals in 1902, some 1,200 or 1,300. By 1911 there were over 1,700; by 1919, over 2,600; by 1938, over 3,300; and by 1956, over 6,700.

Total membership in 1911 was 133,000 workers. It rose to almost 176,000 in 1913; fell to 143,000 in 1915; rose again to almost 249,000 in 1918. In 1919, the year of the Winnipeg General Strike, it leapt up by almost 52 per

cent, to 378,000 (a figure never surpassed until 1937). By 1924 it had slumped to 260,000. By 1930 it had got back to 322,000. In 1935 it reached a low of 281,000. In 1937 it registered a new high of 383,000. It dropped in the next three years to 362,000. From 1941 to 1944, as a result of increased employment in wartime industries, and the organization of workers in mass production industries, it increased spectacularly to 724,000, more than twice what it had been at the outbreak of the war. There was some falling off in 1945. But the next eleven years saw continuous gains. By the time the Canadian Labour Congress was formed, the total was over 1,350,000. By 1981 it had reached 3,487,000, more than nine times what it had been in 1939. Over 37 per cent of non-agricultural paid workers were organized.

Labour in Canada is still split. It faces a deep and prolonged recession, with the distinct possibility of long-term unemployment on a scale unknown since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It has to cope with what was supposed to be impossible, simultaneous massive unemployment and massive inflation. Some of the industries where it has been strongest are in serious trouble. The world groans under the burden of nuclear and other armaments, and shudders at the possibility of their use. The North-South negotiations seem to be a dialogue of the deaf. Canadian labour is stronger than ever before, but it faces challenges beyond anything in its experience. To meet them, it may have to pass through great tribulation, and will certainly need all the resources of mind and spirit it can summon.

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The Structure of Canadian Working-Class History

Gregory S. Kealey

IN THIS PAPER I WANT TO accomplish a rather large, perhaps impossible, task — namely to offer you an overview of Canadian working-class history. The nature of this overview may at first seem strange, even to those readers familiar with the general history of Canadian labour. Strange, because what I want to offer is an interpretation that does more than simply present the history of working people as an interesting addition to our general knowledge of Canadian history. Instead I want to argue that Canadian workers have been central to Canadian historical development and that Canadian history cannot be understood without their inclusion. Much previous Canadian historical writing has simply ignored the presence of working-class people, just as it has ignored the existence of women, of native people, and of other oppressed groups. More recently, with the rise to acceptable status of social history, it has become commonplace to find workers and women simply added in to the general contours of the old view of historical development. In this version workers are now present but — and this is a rather large but — their presence makes little discernible difference. This essay will argue that if class and gender are added to the historical record, then that record must of necessity be transformed.

Canadian labour and working-class history and indeed the broader critical social thought of which it is a part, have made remarkable strides in the last fifteen to twenty years. These years have witnessed the blossoming of critical Canadian scholarship, built to a large degree on the various social struggles of the 1960s wherein renewed class conflict was a significant element. Given the all-too-frequent recent attempts to belittle the experiences of the late 1960s both inside and outside the universities, I think this is an important fact to assert at the outset.

The focus of the recent work in Canadian labour and working-class history has changed significantly. Rather than simply considering the labour movement — even in its broadest sense involving economic struggles and political activities as well as trade union organization — most of the recent work in the field has taken a still wider field of vision which encompasses the totality of the working class, a totality which has always, unfortunately, transcended the labour movement. The new labour and working-class history argues that the larger issue of the entire working class must be the focus of our analysis

because of the structural tensions which often surround the relationship between organized and unorganized. Indeed, the simple fact that the history of the Canadian labour movement and the history of the Canadian working class are not identical represents one of the major questions on which our historical analysis must focus. While this totality must go beyond economic and political factors, and most of the new literature does this quite successfully, I will focus my attention here primarily on the workplace. This is a disservice in general, especially to women whose work has often been outside the paid labour force. Moreover, the whole sphere of reproduction is analytically cut off from production only at great cost. Unfortunately, however, the realm of reproduction is only now beginning to be studied by social historians in relation to class.

I suspect that no one will be surprised if I suggest that the Canadian economy, and the world capitalist order of which it is part, are in profound crisis — a crisis unmatched since the 1930s. The crisis surrounds us, pervades our everyday lives, and shows little sign of abating despite recent political assurances of recovery. The official national unemployment rate remains above 11 per cent, and even the most optimistic prophets of recovery hold out little hope for improvement in the near future. Material recently published by the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto estimates that the official unemployment figures hide another 9-10 per cent who simply have stopped looking for jobs. In British Columbia, the virulent offensive launched against working people by the Socred government and their Fraser Institute advisors continues. On all sides there is further news of shutdowns and layoffs. For those still at work, wage gains at best match inflation. Meanwhile, of course, the social wage — the hard-won social security net of the post-war accord between labour and capital — declines everywhere, not only in British Colombia. Attacks on the social wage are matched by equally vicious offensives against collective bargaining rights, especially in the public sector. The Anti-Inflation Board, "6 & 5," back-to-work legislation, the jailing of labour leaders, and ever-increasing designation of public-sector jobs as "essential" services all reflect the depth and extent of the crisis.

Yet it is useful to remind ourselves that this is not Canadian capitalism's first major crisis. The depression of the 1930s, broken only by the advent of World War II, the significant depression of the 1890s, and the massive dislocations of the 1840s, all represent equivalent economic crises in the development of Canadian capitalism and major moments in the making and remaking of the Canadian working class. An understanding of these past crises can provide us with historical perspective on the current crisis and perhaps even suggest some paths to be taken in the fight to resist the current onslaught against Canadian workers. For while crisis is a dangerous time, it is also a time of opportunity — a time when structural change is on the agenda, a time when the way forward is up for grabs, and thus a time which occurs only periodically in history.

I want to argue here in favour of a five-period construction of Canadian working-class history. First is the period before 1850 about which we have known little until recently. The old Staples, Laurentian, and Metropolitan approaches to Canadian history remained silent about the nature of class formation under what has sometimes been termed as "pre-industrial capitalism," but which might be better described as a period of primitive accumulation, as Bryan Palmer has persuasively argued. In this period, under the general hegemony of merchant's capital, two conflicting methods of appropriating economic surplus co-existed side by side. In the country an agrarian petty capitalism rooted in household production held sway, while in the towns and villages of the British American colonies an early inhibited manufacturing emerged. Both forms of appropriation held within them the seeds of transformation. In the country the productive household was premised on expansion without which the large numbers of progeny demanded to work the land would find themselves facing a bleak future. Equally, expansion led to an ever-increasing commercialization which in turn fueled proto-industrial manufacturing of agricultural implements, milling, and food processing. The relationship of town and country in this period demands further historical attention.

Meanwhile, a form of metropolitan industrialization developed in the towns, which would eventually displace such rural proto-industrial production. In cities like Montreal, Quebec, Saint John, Halifax, and Toronto, manufacturing engendered a bewildering number of forms — early factories, manufactories, artisan shops, sweatshops, and outwork. Women, we should note, were especially prevalent in outwork and early factory work. Such an extraordinary mix of work sites combined with the different interests of town and country might suggest a society in which merchants' hegemony would go unchallenged, but such was not the case. Both in country and city, resistance was offered by their respective producers, although it took quite different forms. In the country the major aim was to resist the proletarianization which became increasingly evident as the once favourable land-to-labour ratio started to reverse itself. In town and city the plebeian orders engaged in a wide array of riotous behaviour (over 400 riots before 1855); they also began to form the more familiar trade societies and unions which in the Canadas alone would conduct some forty-five strikes before 1850.

The second period, which has been studied far more extensively, covered the years from the late 1840s to the 1890s and included Canada's industrial revolution and might be termed the period of initial "proletarianization." During this time workers actively participated in the destruction of the old colonial system and helped to build a new nation oriented to American trade and increasingly to industrial development behind protective tariffs and a boosterish promotional climate. These new economic directions also led to Confederation and the creation of a national economic entity out of the previously disparate British American colonies. The inspiration for this creation

came from Toronto and Montreal capitalists and their British allies who saw a brave future in the economic exploitation of the west and the integration of the Atlantic colonies into a national system. It should be added, however, that the Atlantic colonies had their share of industrial capitalist visionaries as well, although they were less powerful in their local bailiwicks than their central Canadian counterparts.

The first twenty-five years of the nation's existence were troubled ones, but beneath the pessimism associated with population loss and economic recession a steady industrial growth was achieved which especially accelerated during the early 1880s after the inauguration of the National Policy tariffs. The CPR was not the only economic achievement of these years since rapid growth also took place in both consumer goods and producer goods segments of the new manufacturing sector. Moreover, while the CPR tied the slowly developing west into the new state, the completion of the Intercolonial also integrated the Maritimes into the new national economy.

During these years competitive capitalism was at its height. Despite recent capitalist rhetoric, the state played an active role in economic development. Laissez faire was a myth that applied only in the social realm of government activity. Canadian tariff policy was only one example where the models of German and American industrial development helped offset the ideological claims of Manchester liberalism. The state, then, was a particularly active partner in Canadian industrial development.

In these years the capitalist mode of production triumphed and large numbers of Canadians were proletarianized. Canadian capitalists overcame significant impediments to the development of a waged labour force such as the availability of land. They were helped in this immensely by the massive famine migration of the Irish in the late 1840s and early 1850s. In addition to immigrants, however, waged labour was also recruited from the native farm population, especially in Quebec, from the ranks of women and children, and from craftsmen's shops. Thus Canadian workers continued to be segmented along various lines — craft versus unskilled, male versus female, and native versus Irish and other immigrant groups.

In this second period capitalist production was based on the new proletariat, but the new industrialists failed to achieve much control over the labour process. Traditional techniques of production prevailed in most sectors of the economy and even in the largest factories skilled workers retained considerable control over production. Thus while skilled workers lost much independence and control of their means of production, they still retained a power based on their skill and knowledge. Accordingly skilled workers through their craft unions fought bitterly to resist attempts to disrupt traditional methods of production. Economic growth in this second period continued to be "extensive" not "intensive," and was based largely on expansion.

By the 1870s and 1880s the very success of capital in creating the new

industrial nation had begun to create the contradictions which would only be resolved in the crisis of the 1890s through the final arrival of what Marx termed modern industry. Capital's success in creating an increasingly national market led to intensive competition which in turn caused price declines. Owing to lack of control over the labour process, industrialists could not intensify production in the face of craft workers' intransigence. Even in industries where crafts had not existed, the managerial wherewithal to control large bodies of workers through intermediaries had not yet been established. Instead industrialists turned to wage cutting and to intrusions into the labour process, both of which helped to engender the massive labour revolt of the Great Upheaval of 1885-7. Only with the eventual defeat of labour's first significant challenge was capital able to commence transforming the labour process to eliminate the bottleneck of craft control.

In the Great Upheaval, for a time, labour overcame many of its structural weaknesses through the all-inclusive organizational strategy of the Knights of Labor. The Knights tried to organize all workers regardless of skill, gender, race, or ethnicity. The Knights also enter the political arena in a significant manner, running independent labour candidates and influencing the politics of the young nation. Their potential power was underlined by the appointment of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in 1886 and by the creation of various provincial bureaus of labour.

Perhaps the Knights' greatest contribution was their willingness to address the question of women's work. While preferring the model of the family wage and thus of an idealized proletarian family in which the male head-of-household could support his wife and family through the achievement of wage rates high enough to sustain that goal, the Knights recognized the necessity of organizing women workers as part of that struggle. With women in their ranks, they were pushed to discuss organizing domestic workers as well, and even on occasion to consider the collectivization of elements of the reproductive sphere. The Knights' insights in this realm, like many of their other aims, would be partially eclipsed in the 1890s. Pure-and-simple trade unionism would make fewer efforts in this direction.

The importance of the Knights' aim of organizing all workers is especially evident when we consider in more detail the three separate worlds of these nineteenth-century workers. Women factory operatives, skilled male workers, and labourers occupied different spaces within the working class, as David Montgomery has argued. Much of the most mechanized factory work, for example in textiles and boot and shoe manufacturing, became women's work. Meanwhile men were sharply divided between the craftsmen and the labourers. Craftsmen, even in the new factories, continued to control much of their work and that of their helpers. While seeing themselves as socially superior to their helpers (often apprentices or youth) and to labourers, they nevertheless led the trade union and socialist movement. Their socialist ideas were based on their

primacy in production. As the real creators of the world's wealth, they deserved to control not only production but also society. Production for use not profit would insure social equality.

Nineteenth-century labourers worked as surrogate brutes. They constituted a high proportion of the male labour force, perhaps one-third, but they simply supplied the craftsmen in industry. In construction and on the public works they carried and excavated. In their work world there was little pride. Their major goal was to prevent being overworked and to gain wages adequate for their families' survival. While often rebellious, as on Canada's canal and railroad building projects, they seldom formed permanent unions.

Simply tracing these themes into the next major period — the third period stretched from the 1890s to the crisis of the Great Depression and World War II — suggests the major transformation of the labour process and massive reconstitution of the working class which occurred in the following forty years, years which might be typified by the phrase "homogenization," following again on the usage suggested by Gordon, Reich, and Edwards.

The "Second Industrial Revolution" which swept North America at the turn of the century ended the nineteenth-century relationship of craftsman to labourer by universalizing the factory operative. The new techniques of Frederick Winslow Taylor and Henry Ford systematized the mental labour involved in production. The beneficiary of this process was the engineer; the loser was the craftsman. Scientific management did not eliminate skilled workers, but instead shifted them out of production. The unskilled operatives became the producers; the skilled craftsmen took over jobs such as set-up, inspection, toolmaking, and maintenance. They also created a vast array of new clerical and related white-collar jobs, increasingly filled by women. For example, Imperial Oil in Canada employed 11 white collar workers in 1898 but over 6,000 by 1919. Public service employment also grew rapidly with 17,000 in 1901, 77,000 in 1911, and 108,000 in 1931. Put in different terms, in 1911 there were 8.6 administrative workers for each 100 production workers; by 1931 there were 16.9 per 100.

These changes in the nature of production led factory workers towards industrial unionism and away from themes stressing workers' control of production. But first they fought an extended struggle against capital's attempt to transform production. Typified by the uniform organization of production in which work tasks were reduced to detailed, atomized, semi-skilled operations, capital aimed to destroy all remnants of the old workers' control and replace it with enhanced managerial power which would expand the corporations' ability to extract labour. Here we find the switch from "extensive" to "intensive" growth and control. Key to all of this were the massive merger movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the second Industrial Revolution, and the massive influx of American capital and corporations into Canada. The merger movement was, of course, based on the creation of national mar-

kets, the arrival of the stock market, and the transformation of the law to allow for corporate consolidation. In turn the new massive factories were based on far more extensive mechanization, but here we should remind ourselves that these machines were not simply part of some neutral progress, representing scientific advance and more efficient production, but rather the specific machines were often intended simply to displace the skills, and thus the power, of the skilled worker.

The managerial system that accompanied homogenization is described by Gordon, Reich, and Edwards as "the drive system." While there were many experiments with scientific management, most often associated with Taylor and termed Taylorism, these probably can best be taken as symbolic of the new emphasis on "science" and "efficiency". In most industry, "drive" was enough, and the complexity of Taylorism found relatively few advocates. Equally symbolic was Ford's assembly line, which had been predated by similar processes in meat packing and in the development of interchangeable parts in the sewing machine, clock and watch, and small arms industries. Nevertheless, Fordism like Taylorism has become a symbol of the twentieth-century transformation of capitalism.

The "drive" system of production was based on three interrelated factors: 1) the reorganization of work through mechanization and job restructuring; 2) the rapid increase in plant size and the subsequent impersonality of labour relations; 3) the continuous expansion of the foreman's role. It might be defined as the policy of achieving efficiency by putting pressure on workers to work hard, with the pressure being sustained by keeping the workers in permanent fear of management.

Predictably the working class did not respond well to these innovations and the history of the labour movement in this period is one of accelerating militancy which culminated in the labour revolt of 1917-21. The extent of this working-class resistance demanded a corporate response and capitalist strategy aimed directly at the suppression of this working-class threat. Two broad strategic aims can be detected: 1) the attempt to increase the threat of the reserve army of labour (massive immigration); 2) efforts to divide and fragment working-class solidarity on the job. There is not space available to examine the specifics of this strategy but let me suggest a few of its components: centralized personnel offices concerned with hiring and transfers — specifically aimed at activists; artificial job ladders; decentralization of factories (industrial suburbs); fragmentation of plant design; wage incentive schemes; welfare plans; racial and ethnic manipulation; militant antiunionism; the "open shop;" the American plan; use of the courts; and cooptation of AFL/TLC as "responsible" labour.

Monopoly capitalism replaced the older form of competitive capitalism during those decades and successfully initiated a national labour market to match the new national product market. In addition, capitalists recruited labour

from a vast international pool and continuously extended the concentration and cartelization of capital which had begun to emerge in the 1890s. Overseeing all of these developments, capital had a more mature partner — a state that was willing to conciliate and to moderate between capital and labour through new agencies such as the Department of Labour and new legislation such as the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. If these allegedly neutral activities failed, then capital's partner was also willing to play a harsher role. Staggering demonstrations of force, unprecedented in the nineteenth century, were used to intimidate workers in the coal fields of Nova Scotia and British Columbia and in industrial centres such as Winnipeg and Sydney.

An understanding of working-class history in Canada must seriously face the differences which confronted the working-class movement as capital changed its nineteenth-century face into its modern twentieth-century countenance. For too long Canadian history has viewed this transformation only in quantitative terms. The rapid growth of the Canadian industrial economy and the arrival of American capital have been appreciated, but the complete revision of the "rules" under which capital and labour operated has been underestimated. Capital in its new phase did not play according to the old rules and it took the labour movement some time to learn the nature of the new contest. Moreover, workers faced an entirely new set of problems created by the vast resources that capital now had in its service. Labour faced a new enemy and the proven nineteenth-century tactics of class struggle had to be modified accordingly. The new strategies were evident in the level of class conflict which prevailed in Canadian society throughout these years; that they failed was also quite evident by the 1920s. The strength of capital had been too great. Moreover, labour's ability to resist in a concerted, country-wide fashion was weakened by the relatively late national consolidation of the labour movement itself. Institutionally the Trades and Labor Congress only became nation-wide at the turn of the century and even this centralization led to the loss of certain national and Quebec unions, as well as the remnants of the Knights of Labor.

One example of all these trends must suffice. Let us consider the case of the Canadian steel industry. Until the construction of the Algoma and Disco plants in the early twentieth century, the Canadian steel industry fit well our model of the previous period where skilled workers exercised considerable workplace control. With the coming of massive American capital to build the plants in the Sault and Sydney, and then with the merger magic of Max Aitken to create Hamilton's Stelco, Canada had three world-class modern steel plants before World War I. The effects on production well illustrate the new system:

1901	4,110 workers	245,000 T. pig iron 26,000 T. steel
1929	10,500 workers	1.1 m. T. pig iron 1.3 m. T. steel

Production in these steel plants was definitely based on the drive system. The twelve-hour day, seven-day week existed in Hamilton at Stelco until 1930 and did not end in the Sault and Sydney until 1935. Piece rates and tyrannical foremen prevailed and workers were drawn from diverse ethnic and racial roots. Labour relations were authoritarian and based on fear and resentment. In the aftermath of labour's defeat in steel — the old skilled craft union, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Tin and Steel Workers, was totally gone by 1923 — there was some softening, partially because of the commonly perceived problem of high turnover rates. This brought increased internal recruitment, job ladders, welfare programmes, and industrial councils of various types.

The choice of steel, of course, suggests that this system too would end in crisis and that the workers would eventually mount an effective assault. The major contradictions which had emerged in the drive period revolved around the extraordinary turnover rates and later around the subterranean revolt of informal work groups in which workers devised effective methods of restricting output. Other contradictions of a different order also existed. These resulted in the crash of 1929 and a decade of depression which ended only with the outbreak of World War II. Relatively untrammeled capitalist growth in the 1920s unleashed the Great Depression. Out of this major crisis and the class conflict it engendered grew yet a fourth major stage of capitalist development which saw the creation and elaboration of a welfare state as its major symbol. The establishment and later sophistication of a different structure of legal constraints surrounding the entire realm of class relations was another major innovation of this period. The creation of a new administrative system of labour law entrenched in federal and provincial labour boards once again transformed industrial relations and provided both capital and labour with another set of new rules intended to regulate and delimit their struggles. This fourth period which stretched from the 1940s to the 1970s we might term the period of "segmentation."

The intense struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, which saw the arrival of the CIO and industrial unionism in Canada, forced another major restructuring on capital. Unable to solve the crisis of the depression until the outbreak of World War II resolved the question, capital and the state slowly responded to the demands of an increasingly assertive and militant labour movement. From the miners of Kirkland Lake through the steelworkers of the industrial heartland to shipyard and aircraft workers, a national strike wave of previously unprecedented heights forced the King government to guarantee the right to bargain collectively. While PC 1003 finally brought this right to Canadian workers in February 1944, it would take the further post-war struggles of 1945-6 to confirm the gains. The massive Ford Windsor strike and the equally important Stelco strike led to the final confirmation of a new legal status for Canadian workers. This was entrenched in the Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act of 1948 and in a series of equivalent provincial acts.

While representing a major gain for Canadian workers, and one which should never be denigrated, it is nevertheless clear that the effects of this legislation and the subsequent elaboration of yet more complex legal and quasi-legal systems of labour relations in this country were undoubtedly not what CIO and CCL activists had envisioned. The intricate complexity of the legal structures are themselves based on two elaborate myths: first, that the two parties involved — capital and labour — meet as equal parties in so-called "free" collective bargaining ("industrial pluralism"); and second, that the state role is simply that of a neutral umpire, aiding the two parties in their deliberations and protecting the interests of the public. The first, of course, perpetuates the commonly-held myth of the equal power of capital and labour, while the second disguises the pro-capitalist role of the state and especially of its potential for coercion. Meanwhile the IRDIA which is often compared with the American Wagner Act, contained within it a series of important limitations on labour's power which continued the earlier Canadian tradition enshrined in King's original IDIA of 1907. The major example, of course, was the fencing-in of labour's ability to resort to strike action during negotiations or during the life of a collective agreement. In addition, various unfair union practices were named and proscribed and the underlying assumption of the state's role to assist the two negotiating parties remained. Restrictions on the nature of picketing and on secondary boycotts were further limitations. All this then was ironically also part of Canadian labour's supposed Magna Carta.

The Canadian state also delivered a second concession to working-class militancy in this period. In a complex series of decisions, the King government assumed some element of responsibility for insuring "a high and stable level of employment" and for offering security provisions for those who were unable to find work. Note that these levels of employment were, of course, never defined as "full." Moreover, while the King government moved to implement some elements of the social security programme discussed by its various advisory committees, it stopped well short of the full vision of the 1943 Marsh report.

The choice of C.D. Howe as the minister ultimately in charge of the reconstruction package demonstrates how free enterprise notions still prevailed and that social reform remained subject to the dictates of the capital accumulation process. Thus elements of the social wage were won, notably family allowances and unemployment insurance, but the grandiose plans for extensive pension and national health schemes would wait some twenty years. In addition, investment decisions were left entirely up to capital.

Thus the vaunted post-war accord brought circumscribed welfare state reforms, new labour legislation, and a limited commitment to reducing unemployment. These were undoubtedly gains for Canadian workers, but they were intended, as Justice Rand actually said in his important, precedent-making decision in the Ford strike of 1946, to help maintain capital's "long-run dominant position." The rule of law had come to prevail in labour relations. In the

process the ideology of "industrial pluralism" has dictated that workers "fight their daily workplace struggles out in an invisible, privatized forum where each dispute is framed in an individuated, minute, economistic forum."

Ironically given women's significant contribution to the war effort, they were nevertheless largely forced out of industrial work after the men came home, as Ruth Pierson has convincingly demonstrated. Nevertheless the trend towards higher female participation in the work force continued, and increased dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s. Changes in the family also meant that increasing numbers of married women began to join their single sisters in the paid labour force. The labour movement made some efforts to organize women workers in the post-war period, the most famous being the huge drive to organize Eaton's, an effort which eventually failed.

While the dust of the post-war accord was settling, capital got on with the business of accumulation. In return for various collective bargaining concessions to the CIO which included grievance procedures, seniority provisions, and productivity-related gains in real wages — clearly attempts by labour to disrupt the authoritarian elements of the old drive system — capital gained an important concession, namely management's rights clauses. These clauses, in effect, conceded all residual areas to management and allowed capital to get on with its restructuring. In the propitious climate of the post-war world with American capital dominant and the Cold War raging, the multinational corporations developed systematic collective bargaining strategies and restructured work by increasing technical control through technological change but also through the creation of new forms of control termed "bureaucratic" by Richard Edwards. In corporations such as Polaroid and IBM, internal labour markets were created on the basis of elaborate job systems and rules. Here too one finds finely divided jobs situated within detailed job ladders and internal promotion systems. Technology is used not simply to regulate the pace of work but also to serve broader managerial aims. Hiring, promotion, and firing are all regularized, and collective bargaining tends to focus on wages and fringes, leaving the organization of work to engineers and labour relations experts. Corporations have fully developed systems of rules and procedures which leave little to the haphazard nature of arbitrary supervisory intervention. This system is termed "segmentation" by Gordon, Edwards, and Reich.

They further argue that this system is most fully elaborated only at the heights of the economy in the largest firms in the monopoly sector. Thus the working class comes to be further split between this *primary* segment and a *secondary* segment typified by peripheral firms which have never gained this kind of labour control and indeed still function in the drive stage typical of the 1920s and 1930s. Clothing and textiles would probably be the best example of the secondary segment. Moreover, even in the primary sector they see a further division between what they term *independent* jobs and those they describe as *subordinate*. Independent jobs are typically of professional, managerial, and

technical kinds, and provide considerable autonomy and independence. Subordinate jobs are those which are routinized, repetitive, more heavily supervised, and based on extensive formal rules. These significantly divided areas of labour fractured the unity of the working class severely and limited its ability to resist the reorganizations of capital.

The period of "segmentation" prevailed from the 1940s through the late 1960s, but has been in crisis since. The fifth period — the current crisis — is what we are living through now and the nature of its resolution is far from clear. It seems that the post-war accord had ended. Labour began to demonstrate its impatience in the 1960s when the management prerogative to organize production came under increasing challenge even while workers were still receiving real wage increases. Typified by wild cats and refusals to ratify collective agreements in the 1960s, revolt in this area led to extensive governmental concern, evidenced in the Woods Task Force on Labour Relations on the federal level and various similar efforts by provincial governments, such as Ontario's Rand Report. With the demise in the inflation-plagued 1970s of those gains, with the further erosion of employment security, and with deteriorating working conditions, the crisis in the subordinate primary sector had fully arrived.

The current crisis of "deindustrialization" is being fought on this terrain as corporations seek to solve the crisis by various means — increasing supervision and speedups; shutdowns and new plants in labour-weak areas; extensive anti-union activities; and demands for concessions and give-backs. Further ahead, corporations seem to be looking to more technological solutions involving robotics and microelectronics, various worker-participation schemes (representation on boards, QWL), and interest in Japanese corporate labour relations schemes, and, of course, as in the 1970s, wage determination through the state.

Even in the independent primary sector the erosion of wage differentials, the lessening of autonomy, the decline of stable employment, and the erosion of advancement chances have also resulted in rising dissatisfaction and further unionization. Among teachers, nurses, health care workers, and college and university professors, increased militancy from the 1960s on has been the order of the day.

In the secondary segment improvements had been limited anyway, even in the post-war period, but now real wages are falling rapidly and job insecurity prevails. It is here that the growing International Division of Labour has made itself most deeply felt with the export of vast numbers of jobs. Here in what is sometimes termed "peripheral Fordism" we see one major effort by capital to create a new strategy of accumulation. Capital, which formerly imported foreign labour now hires cheap labour in Third World countries to manufacture for metropolitan markets. The Third World's vast potential reserve army of labour is being exploited. While initially limited to the secondary segment, in the late 1970s and early 1980s this process is spreading to subordinate primary jobs as

is only too evident in automobile and steel manufacturing. Desperate economic straits apparently are to be depended on to discipline recalcitrant workers in the private sector.

Meanwhile in the public sector, the state continues its assault on workers who only joined the post-war accord in time to see it disintegrate. Public sector workers in Canada only gained collective bargaining rights and, in some jurisdictions, the right to strike, in the 1960s and early 1970s. From its beginnings public sector collective bargaining legislation was heavily restrictive, nowhere fully approximating the rights of workers in the private sector. For example, the scope of bargaining is limited dramatically by the legislation itself. Moreover, the right to strike is forbidden in many jurisdictions including Ontario and Nova Scotia. In addition far more public servants are eliminated from collective bargaining by extensive definitions of confidentiality — up to 27 per cent in Ontario. Nevertheless, even with all these restrictions, this is the group of workers currently facing strident governmental attacks.

This current attack on public sector unions and wages is related to the more extended attack on the "social wage." Some estimates place the total Canadian social wage at fully 21 per cent of wages and salaries in 1982. If attacks such as the Bennett government's 1983 autumn offensive are allowed to gain ground, all workers, not only those in the public sector, stand to lose.

The expansion of public sector employment commensurate with increased levels of state intervention and welfarism has come under ideological assault of late. For structural reasons, especially the holes in our allegedly "progressive" tax system, many of these arguments have proven persuasive with some workers. The cost of state efforts have been increasingly transferred to individual Canadian taxpayers. The general split in the Canadian labour movement between the industrial unions and the new, rapidly growing public sector unions has also played into this divide. Just as racial, ethnic, and sexual divisions have hindered working-class unity in the past, the public/private rift sometimes does the same now. Divisions based on the too easily perceived white collar/blue collar differentiation between public and private sector and the fact that public sector strikes often directly inconvenience private sector workers because they too are dependent on government services, should no longer divide workers. B.C.'s Operation Solidarity, while highly suggestive of what is possible, faltered partially on this divide.

The increased participation of women in the labour force and the rising prominence of public sector and service sector employment which involve high concentrations of women workers has contributed a renewed vibrancy to the labour movement of late. While labour has often carried progressive positions on women's issues, for example, equal pay for work of equal value, their actual performance often left much to be desired. Women workers have increasingly made their voices heard and the most recent organizational gains are coming in precisely those areas where women work such as data processing

at the banks and in retail trade. Given the generally dismal record of late this represents one of the few bright spots on labour's horizon.

In conclusion I'd like to reiterate that Canadian historical development to date has been based on the combined effect of capitalists' and workers' activities within the broader context of the contours of capital accumulation. We have identified five major periods: up to the 1840s, the 1840s-90s, the 1890s-1940s, the 1940s-70s, and from the 1970s on, which we have described in terms of primitive accumulation, proletarianization, homogenization, segmentation, and the current crisis. Since the late 1960s then, we have entered into what appears to be another major capitalist crisis which will only be resolved by the creation of a new social structure of accumulation. In each of the previous crises the working-class role had significant import. In the late nineteenth century the skilled workers' control of production and increasing militancy in the 1880s set the limits on the productivity of initial proletarianization. In the post-war revolt of 1919, labour defiantly challenged the new system of homogenization but failed; it renewed that challenge through industrial unionism and the organization of the mass production industries in the 1930s and 1940s, ending the homogenization phase. Since the late 1960s the increased economic and political power of labour has played a role in the destabilization of the institutional arrangements of the post-war accord. Solutions to the crises of the 1890s and the 1930s both demanded major structural transformations. The resolution of the current crisis can be expected to as well. In this process labour must struggle to prevent that solution from emerging from the New Right coalition which aims to reestablish the conditions which predated the post-war accord. The Bennett programme attempts to revive the boom by rolling back the last forty years of working-class gains. It is the task of the labour movement today to pose a socialist alternative either to that or to other forms of capitalist restructuring. It certainly should be clear again that capitalism simply does not deliver the goods.

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY EXPERIENCE

The Canadian Worker in the Early Industrial Age

Michael S. Cross

WORK IS SO BASIC to our lives that it often becomes simply part of the landscape; it is taken as a given rather than reflected upon. As a given, it may seem essentially unchanging. Yet if we can bring work to the forefront and explore its complexity, it becomes clear that the process and meaning of work have in fact been constantly changing. Equally clearly, it has had very different meanings for different groups and different classes in society. Three men of the nineteenth century expressed some of that diversity.

"Work is the scythe of time," mused Napoleon Bonaparte as he sailed into exile in 1815. The poet of the industrial age, John Sullivan Dwight, penned this homily:

Work, and thou wilt bless the day
Ere the toil be done . . .
God is living, working still.

More earthy was the Canadian rebel of 1837, William Lyon Mackenzie, whose politics were defined in the aphorism, "Labour is the only true source of wealth."

My intention is to attempt to outline a very general overview of the work experience in early industrial Canada. These three quotations will help to define the various levels on which such an analysis must proceed: work as what people do, Napoleon's "scythe of time" (and I would suggest that that definition ought to be borne in mind as a kind of background noise for what we'll be considering here because when we bring work to the forefront for analysis we can over-systematize it, we can make it an intellectual preoccupation instead of what it is for most of us for most of our lives, simply the "scythe of time," what we do to fill our time); work as a social phenomenon so central to a society's self-definition that it has been weighted down with divine sanction; and work as class relationship, as the basis of politics.

On whatever level, the changes in work processes are fundamental to social evolution. The ways in which people work and the relationship between

employer and employed, are reliable guides to the nature of a society. That is why when we study labour history we are indeed studying social history. The coming of industrialism to Canada shows this in a very compressed form. In the 1830s, British North America was still an undeveloped colony, a cluster of pioneer farmers, timberers, fur traders, fishermen, of hand skills and staple products. Within two generations the Canada of the National Policy was emerging and by World War I an industrial nation existed, a nation of urban centres, factories, of machine production and manufactures. In fact, it was even more compressed than that — a single generation of workers experienced that industrial revolution, within their own jobs and in observing the changes around them. Between 1840 and Confederation, the Canadian economy was revolutionized and technological change, at an ever accelerating rate, became a fact of life.

Three things intertwined in creating that revolution between 1840 and Confederation. One was Britain's adoption of free trade in the 1840s. The mother country's dismantling of the tight imperial trading system, a system which had shaped the character of the Canadian economy, forced the North American colonies into fundamental readjustment. In 1846, the president of the Toronto Board of Trade captured the Canadian reaction to the suddenness and sweep of the British reforms. "We are," said George Workman, "in the same condition as a man suddenly precipitated from a lofty eminence. We are labouring under concussion of the brain." Certainly British North America lurched about drunkenly for a few years like a society of the brain damaged — a mob angered by the economic threat of British free trade burned down the parliament buildings in Montreal in 1849; a large number of Canadians advocated annexation to the United Sates; and worker rebellions on the public works were epidemic.

The second development of the period helped Canada to recover from that condition, however. That was the influence of an industrialized United States. The American example of an economic success unparalleled in human history was an enormous pull on Canada. It urged Canadians on to emulate the American example, to attempt to mimic the policies which had made the United States the colossus of the economic world. It also generated a fear of eclipse, of being overwhelmed by American economic imperialism. Our ancestors began to betray that curious psychology that is so characteristically Canadian. They struggled to build a northern nation that was, by definition, anti-American, a defiance of the American predominance on the continent. In place of *Mari usque ad mare*, the motto of the new Canada might well have been taken from a Mexican saying which describes that country as "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States." At the same time, Canada attempted to gain access to American markets and to copy the American success story. And so that tension which has always marked our approach to economic life was established.

Especially important in that attempt to copy the American example and to

tap American markets was the third key element of the period, the railway. The railway was seen as the key to industrialism, the greatest instrument of modernization. In the adjustment period forced by Britain's adoption of free trade, the railway was thrust on Canada with brutal rapidity. There were sixty-six miles of railway in the colonies in 1849. By 1867 there were tens of thousands — more miles of track on a per capita basis in Canada than in any other country on earth. The railway obliterated the backwoods, allowed cities to spring up, conquered the Prairies, spun off industry, and allowed the changes that would so piercingly alter the lives of all Canadian workers.

These changes affected every Canadian worker, from the sailor on the eastern coasts to the prospector in the west. Above all the railway brought everyone into the machine age. Farm work was modernized by the introduction of wave after wave of technological innovation. Improved agriculture, combined with the growth of cities and more rapid transportation, plunged farmers into the market economy. The rapidity with which farm life could be altered by new machinery and new techniques was illustrated, for example, in the dairy industry. Canada, like other British colonies, imported at considerable cost familiar luxuries from the old country. One was cheese. In the 1870s, Canada imported hundreds of thousands of pounds of British cheese. Governments, especially in Ontario and Quebec, undertook the introduction of modern dairy techniques and an aggressive marketing programme. Within two decades, by the 1890s, Canada was exporting cheese to Britain. The creation of this important trade underlined the rapidity of technological change in the nineteenth century. It also suggested the significance of government initiative in Canadian industrialization.

The farm family, to which most Canadian workers belonged up until the 1840s, was profoundly affected, as profoundly affected as the export trade. The cloud on the farmer's horizon was hardly visible in the mid-nineteenth century, but it was there and growing larger. The machine, the lure of the city and its market began the process which would change the farm from a way of life into a business, which would reduce the proportion of farm people in the population from a huge majority in 1850 to the tiny minority of today. It was about 1850 that the urban proportion of the Canadian population began to grow rapidly. That meant not only more urban workers but also an evergrowing complexity of occupations. The age of the machine was the age of specialization, in people as well as in technology. The pioneer farm family had never been self-sufficient, of course, since it had always had some link to a market economy, and had always been attached to a cash nexus. But, of necessity, it had been a versatile work unit, each member involved in the multiple activities necessary to wrestle a livelihood from an unwilling soil.

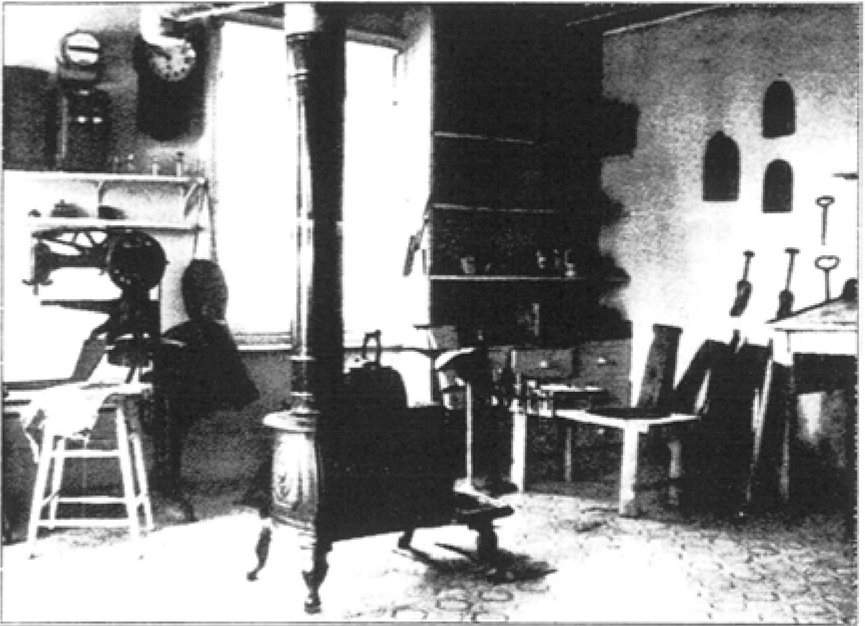
The urban economy, on the other hand, forced a subdivision of labour, demanding specialization not versatility. This transition was perhaps even more profound for women and children than it was for men. Some women and

children became direct participants in the industrial economy — the mill girls of the cotton factories in Quebec and New Brunswick, the children who darted about shopfloors, fetching and carrying for machinists. In most parts of Canada, at most times in the nineteenth century, however, women and children represented little more than a tenth of the waged work force. Most women and children were specialized into ghettoized functions, women as housewives, children as students. Woman's unpaid labour in the home, which supported male industrial labour and thus its economics, and children's work preparing for a more complex future, underlay the male labour which was most visibly altered by industrialism.

These were changes huge in extent and in influence. It is perhaps best, in hopes of understanding them, to bring them down to human scale. So let me introduce one group of ordinary Canadians who lived through these upheavals. Meet Patrick Ryan and family.

Let us go down to the docks at Quebec City on a hot, muggy afternoon in July 1843. Among the sweating, confused emigrants disembarking from a leaky hulk named the *Duke of Brunswick,* shaking off the cramps induced by a month spent shoulder to shoulder in the steerage hold of the decrepit vessel, wondering at the strangeness of this ancient city set in a raw new world — among the jostling, frightened, hopeful, exhausted mob of immigrants were Patrick Ryan, his wife Mary, and their four children. Patrick was thirty-two, a

After 1858, an Allan Line ship, subsidized by Canada, left Liverpool every week crowded to the rails with European emigrants.



A shoemaker's shop in the nineteenth century.

native of Cork, Ireland, come to find a new life on a new continent, as far as possible from the charnel house his homeland was becoming after centuries of bad farming, overpopulation, and foreign misrule. He was a very ordinary man, yet he arrived in Canada with some advantages not enjoyed by most immigrants. He was a shoemaker, a skilled artisan. That lifted his employment prospects above that of most of his countrymen, who could hope for no more than to be the beasts of burden of the North American economy. Moreover, his craft gave him a place, made him not simply another faceless migrant. His trade gave him a station in society, a definition that crossed the ocean with him. This occupational identification is both a boon and a bane for historians. On the one hand, it makes the stratification of society clearer than it is in our own time. Yet it can obscure differences that historians would like to study. So strong was the occupational identification even at mid-century that for the census or assessment rolls, all those engaged in shoemaking for example, from apprentices to factory owners, might well describe themselves simply as "shoemakers," a description as helpful as if John David Eaton listed himself now as a salesman, or E.P. Taylor as a brewery worker.

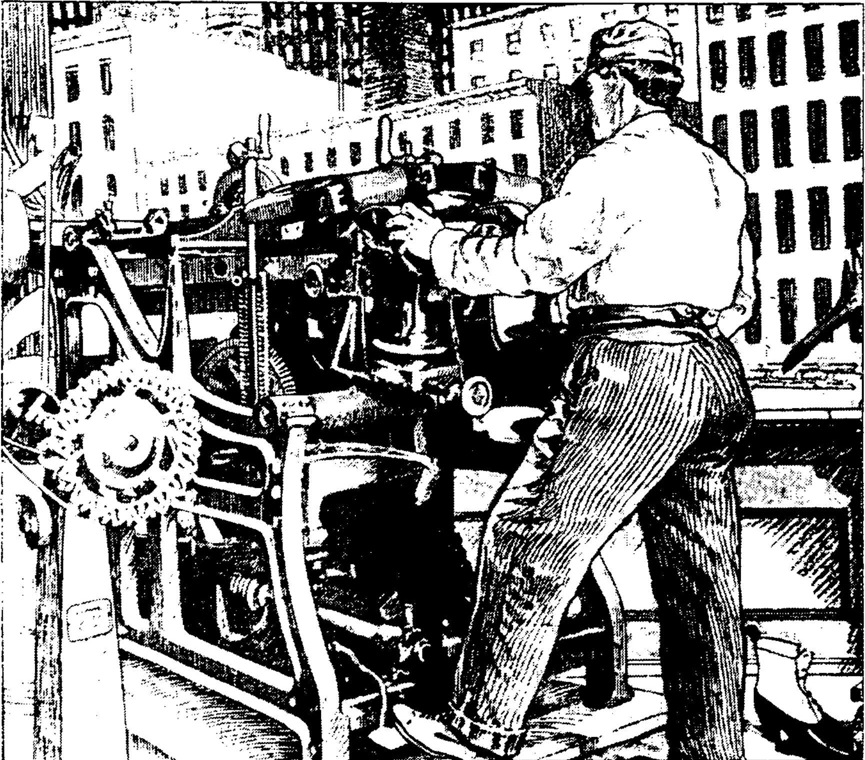
That identification with the trade paid dividends when the Ryan family arrived in Montreal. Patrick found employment in a small shop and the family settled into lodgings on a more prosperous fringe of the Irish ghetto, Griffintown. Patrick enjoyed a wage which raised the Ryans above the subsistence

level. He enjoyed the fellowship of his workmates, eased by his craft into a community which mitigated some of the strangeness of the new environment. Patrick did not have to look far to appreciate the advantages that his work gave him. Outside the city of Montreal were thousands of Irish labourers toiling on the great public works, the Lachine and Beauharnois Canals. Those workers echoed a past as old as the pyramids as they hacked at the earth, hauled stones, sweated away their lives from dawn to dark on these monumental enterprises. Yet they whispered of a future as new as the railway locomotive, in the first mass employment in Canada, the first great massing of workers who would be subjected to the needs of a new technology. The canal navvies, and the railway workers who soon followed them, worked in a twilight zone between the old economy and the new, between the condition of a plantation gang and a factory work force.

In their alienation from the product of their labour, these navvies typified the industrial work force of the future. In the spring of 1843 the labourers on the Lachine Canal had struck for higher wages and, at least as important, against what they called "negro-like cruelty" by their foremen. United by the deplorable conditions of their employment and by their Irish nationality, the Lachine workers had waged a long and partially successful strike. Less happy was the situation on the nearby Beauharnois Canal where, at the very time the Ryans were landing at Quebec, striking workers were fired upon by the troops, leaving five Irish dead. Louis LaFontaine, leader of the liberal government then in power in the province of Canada, whose ministry had sent the troops to subdue the navvies, sermonized that "these poor labourers are the victims of their own folly." Perhaps, but they were also the victims of the turmoil inevitable at the birth of the new economic system and new work relations.

For most of the navvies, work on the canals and after 1850, on the railways, was a necessary stage in working off their passage. They were able to move on to better things, perhaps even to become skilled workers like Patrick Ryan. Out of their struggles — the great strikes on the canals and on the railways — the navvies became workers. Most took their experience in these protoindustries and converted it into jobs in more permanent, more respectable occupations. Some were unable to make that transition and became the first lumpen proletariat of Canada's age of industry. One of the products of industrialization was a more efficient structure for controlling the unruliness of the "lower orders," like these navvies. In Ontario the police power was sufficiently sophisticated by the 1870s that the government appointed the first provincial detective, a professional criminologist, John Wilson Murray, who has been recently portrayed on television as the great Canadian detective. Murray travelled the province applying the techniques of modern crime-fighting to the deviance of a new age. One of his cases took him to the Welland Canal in the 1870s. There he found a criminal sub-culture among the unemployed men and women who clustered in run-down shanties along the banks of the completed

canal. This northern Appalachia of misery and ignorance was the residue of the canal-building era of the 1840s, the last refuge for those navvies who had failed to make the adjustment to the new world of industry.



Industrial shoemaker.

Patrick Ryan, as I have suggested, was somewhat more fortunate. He was not, however, totally shielded from the economic revolution by his craft: technology came to the shoe industry, as well. The first large shoe factories were built in Montreal in the 1840s. In the late 1840s they introduced a technological wonder, the sewing machine. Not only the workers at the factories where sewing machines were introduced, but all shoemakers in Monteal were alarmed. The machines, they realized, would alter their working conditions drastically and negatively. So Patrick Ryan and other shoemakers joined with their colleagues to strike against the machines. In April 1849 the attention of Montrealers was focused on the old town, where a Tory mob burned down the parliament buildings. Under the cover of this excitement, shoemakers smashed the sewing machines. Just like the attack on the parliament buildings by the

Tory merchants who saw their livelihood threatened in the new age of free trade, the attack on the sewing machines by the shoemakers was an act of desperation, and a hopeless one. New sewing machines could be imported, and were imported, and modernization of the industry proceeded. Twenty years later that modernization had leaped ahead and the bulk of the shoe market was being supplied by mass-produced, machine-produced shoes. As Greg Kealey has written in a very dramatic account, at that time during a strike of Toronto shoemakers, the workers again vented their frustration by taking sledge hammers to sewing machines.

Such acts of desperation signal that the distance between skilled and unskilled was not so great as perhaps Patrick Ryan had once believed. The economic and technological revolution of the nineteenth century destroyed the special status of the artisan, and overturned the peculiar relationship between the craft workers and master. Patrick Ryan as a young man had worked his way through apprenticeship to the status of craftsman. In Ireland he had laboured in a shop of some dozen shoemakers, working side by side with his employer. He shaped the entire shoe, taking responsibility for the product, and bringing his individual skills to bear on it. He and his fellows shared many of the decisions about what to produce, and how and when to produce it. It was a hard life with few material rewards but the hardship was somewhat mitigated by the satisfactions of the craft and the quasi-independence of the labour. Shoemakers, perhaps more than any other artisans, were able to elevate their work to fellowship. It was common at one time, for instance, for groups of shoemakers to hire boys to read to them while they worked. Shoemakers were widely recognized as the intellectuals of the working class as a result of this enrichment of their working life.

In the railway age, however, a great trade-off began. As we know, industry brought unparalleled material prosperity. Already in the nineteenth century, workers gained some share in that prosperity, their standard of living improving appreciably. The trade-off for that prosperity was a loss of independence and at the same time a loss of community. At thirty-two, Patrick Ryan had been a semi-independent artisan in a small shop. At fifty, in 1861, he worked in a shoe factory, along with fifty other workers, finishing the tops of shoes whose soles had been sewn on by a machine operated by someone else. His employer worked on account books, not shoes, in a glassed-in office above the shopfloor. In 1880, Patrick's son John worked at a similar factory, now swollen to a great enterprise of 300 workers whose employer was visible to the men only during his occasional ventures out onto the shopfloor to deliver inspirational homilies about the Christian virtues of thrift, temperance, and hard work. The brotherhood of artisans and masters was no more. Now the men were linked by a union, the Knights of St. Crispin, whose bonds were more those of self-interest than shared skills.

John Ryan, as much as his father, had thought of himself as different from

the unskilled. He belonged to the so-called "aristocracy of labour," the skilled workers who retained enough sense of unity and whose expertise was enough in demand that they were able to form the first trade unions to protect their position. The trade unions which began to spring up in the 1860s, the associations of shoemakers and printers and coopers and the like, attempted to freeze the work process against the changes pressing on it, to rescue the artisanal past. For example, they tried to reassert the traditional artisans' control over how the work was done by controlling who could work. They tried to enforce apprenticeship and to insist that only workers with a union card could work. They attempted to negotiate the pace and the hours of work. And off the shopfloor they tried to maintain the fellowship and rituals of the past in their union. Members swore oaths of loyalty, joined in ritualized ceremonies, and unions adopted names evocative of artisanship — the Knights of St. Crispin, the Knights of Labor. It surely tells us a great deal about the changing purpose and nature of unions to compare such heroic titles with the prosaic modern names of unions — Canadian Union of Public Employees, Widget Workers and Allied Trades, and so on.

Trade unions had rocky beginnings in Canada, enjoying a brief success in the 1870s when the federal government legalized trade unions, fading during the depression of the 1880s, and finally establishing themselves on a permanent basis in the 1890s. What is important here, however, is that trade unionism was a response to changing work conditions, and a response with some of the same touch of desperation that marked the riots of canal navvies. Indeed, disorders of greater or lesser scale often marked the protests of skilled workers themselves. Some of them were just the growing pains of a new institution, as both employers and workers learned about the roles of unions and the methods of collective bargaining. Union techniques were understandably rough and ready. Listen to Samuel Scofield, a shipbroker in Saint John, New Brunswick. He was testifying in 1889 about the troubles on the Saint John docks as longshoremen attempted both to raise their wages and to prevent ships being unloaded either by their crews or by non-union workers. Mr. Scofield said:

> We have had steamers laying at the wharf in Saint John, being discharged by what are called outsiders, and also by the crew, interrupted in their work by these society men, [the union men] because we would not agree to give them their exorbitant demand of $5 a day. These laborers have gone on the steamer by hundreds, completely crowding her, and terrorizing our men, who have quit work and left us. We have had men at work beaten here in this city while at work, and they have been made to go away from our city on account of treatment received at the hands of this laborers' society. These outsiders are so frightened that when they get home, at night they are afraid, and will not come back to work.

But disorder grew out of more than inexperience. The pre-industrial past out of which Patrick Ryan and his compatriots emerged was an unruly one, especially in the English-speaking world. If strikes and slowdowns are consid-

Workers demonstrate near Quebec.

ered the "English disease" in contemporary times, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rioting was the "English disease," and even more certainly an Irish sickness. The British novelist Henry Fielding, author of *Tom Jones*, remarked in the mid-eighteenth century that those who spoke of three estates in English society were mistaken. A fourth estate stood alongside the aristocracy, the commoners, and the crown as a factor in English society and politics — the fourth estate was the mob, the terrible underside of the common people that so often controlled the streets of England. The famous bloody code of English criminal law, with over 200 capital offences, had not tamed the mob, so it was not surprising that industrialism had some difficulty doing so. Nor is it surprising that workers, skilled or unskilled, reached into their own past, and their own experience to find ways to present their demands or voice their grievances. Trade unions took names and rituals from earlier fraternal societies. Canal workers adopted the tactics of Irish peasant terrorist groups. So on the Cornwall Canal in 1844 we see striking navvies raising the black flag of agrarian terrorism. Strikers on the Beauharnois Canal in 1845 attempted to

intimidate contractors by sending them notes threatening death and destruction, signed by "Captain Moonlight."

Such violent labour activity, drawing on earlier forms of community, reminds us of the importance of work in social life. If work was central in defining one's station in society, it was understandable that people were conservative about the way they worked, and attempted to hang on to familiar work processes. That conservatism may have been especially powerful in a country such as Canada where everyone was an immigrant, where all was strange, where people held tenaciously to anything that was familiar.

Pre-industrial work was, by and large, hard, poorly paid and, by our standards, unpleasant. But it had important social functions, often allowing the worker relative freedom in choosing how and when to work, and it grew out of the nature of the community. For example, the French Canadians of Quebec and the Métis of Manitoba were the bane of Canadian modernizers because of their insistence on maintaining traditional work patterns. Francophone groups farmed in ways that were, by nineteenth-century conceptions, old-fashioned and inefficient. Yet the way in which they worked their land was intimately related to the way they lived their lives. Long, thin strip farms enabled them to remain close to their neighbours, even if these strip farms were less efficient than compact farms. Subdividing farms permitted them to provide for their children close to home, even if smaller farms were less productive.

Work was clearly a political activity, if by politics we mean the ground rules which define the relationships between people. Patrick and John Ryan were immigrant shoemakers seeking a better life. They were also working-class and Irish. Their responses to the new industrial world were shaped by all these things. As with all of us, their reactions were created from a delicate and always shifting balance of influences. We cannot understand them by simplistic theories about the rational "economic man." If work was part of the politics of their lives, it was also part of the general ideology of their society. The muscular Christianity of their time imbued work with a divine importance. The belief in work's intrinsic importance, a belief encouraged by the weight society placed on it, drove the Ryans and everyone else as surely as their individual self-interest did. What I am suggesting is very simple. People in the nineteenth century were products of their environment and had all the influences of that environment playing on them at the same time. So we should not expect them to operate only according to myths of North American individualism and modernism. Nor, of course, should we expect to see them act out of some straightforward class consciousness or peasant mentality. One of the abiding sins of historians is our need to simplify a complex past. Nowhere is this more obvious than in our treatment of working people. Traditionally, historians have treated workers as part of the background, as a sort of local colour to highlight the performance of the important historical actors, the politicians and soldiers. When the workers obtruded themselves by rioting or

striking, historians dismissed this impertinence by treating rioters or strikers as irrational mobs. Recently, historians have tried to redress the balance by bringing working people to centre stage. In doing so, however, they have sometimes swung the balance too far the other way. Shifting the portrayal of workers as a unreasoning mob, some historians of the new school have turned workers into calculating machines and crowds into groups of ideologues. Neither extreme is necessary, of course. If we can agree that groups of workers were not, as they were sometimes seen to be in the nineteenth century, mindless and animalistic — one remembers Alexander Hamilton telling a democrat "Your people, sir, are a great beast" — neither do we have to imagine crowds of strikers composing the Declaration of Independence or the Communist Manifesto as they protest against working conditions.

If we questioned Patrick Ryan about why he helped smash the sewing machines in Montreal in 1849, or why the changes in his conditions of work alarmed him, we would not expect a rounded, theoretical reply. Nor, if we could somehow plunge deep down into his consciousness, would we find any simple answer to these questions. But we might sense the wisps of explanations. On some level, Patrick knew that to give up his traditional way of creating shoes was to give up part of himself. To accept an employer's definition of his job was to take at least a small step into the employer's world and out of Patrick's own.

Yet, as the railway slashed across the continent, the force of change was overwhelming. Nowhere was that more evident than in western Canada. So rapidly and thoroughly did industrialism do its work that the Canadian west virtually skipped the nineteenth century altogether, leaping from the eighteenth century of the fur trade and the Métis to the twentieth century of the urban metropolis and the commercial farm. Perhaps the shock of that transition explains why it was in the west that workers seem most vigorously to have fought to control change, to resist the new economy's intrusion on their lives. The Winnipeg General Strike, the great labour wars in the mines of British Columbia, the bitter struggles of the early twentieth century at Drumheller and Estevan and in a hundred other places across the Prairies and over the mountains workers drew on their work traditions and on the strengths of their communities. As Patrick Ryan in the 1840s immigrated from Ireland and tried to bring as much of his craft and his inheritance with him as he could; as his son John moved on to Toronto and to unionism in the Knights of St. Crispin in his search to, at the same time, improve his material condition and retain his identity; so at the turn of the century Patrick's grandson, Philip, migrated to Winnipeg and the new leather industry springing up there. By Philip's time, the Industrial Revolution had done its work. He belonged to the third generation of the family in Canada and in industry. His grandfather's artisanal tools were museum pieces, the skills and atmosphere of the small shoemakers' shop faded memories. Yet the multiple functions of work remained. Work could still be

political, as the General Strike would so amply demonstrate in 1919. True it was a somewhat dull "scythe of time," for a leather factory, where machines held pride of place, undoubtedly was a less interesting environment than the lively, intellectual atmosphere of the old shoemakers' shops. Work held its central place in ideology, however, so much so that Philip Ryan rarely stopped to question the process or the atmosphere. One of the reasons for that was education.

One of the propelling forces of the Industrial Revolution was education. The railway itself was an educational vehicle. It carried newspapers and ideas from place to place, breaking down local peculiarities. Indeed, throughout the Industrial Revolution, the reshaping of people accompanied the reshaping of nature, so that the school became as much the symbol of the age as the factory. School systems were created to teach the young, at least in part, the self-discipline necessary for a modern, efficient economy. Children learned to obey clocks and — a vital skill for factory labourers — to subdue boredom. The heavy weight of social and divine sanctions was attached to work to reinforce the lessons. From Horatio Alger to school readers, children were taught the special virtue of hard work, and about the lure and possibility of success.

The school, as the instrument for passing on society's most important policies, replaced both home and community to some degree. It taught the things that parents and fellow workers had once taught, and added its own stress — to basic skills were added the socially useful qualities of obedience, patience, and commitment to work. The purpose was clear. Once one subdued the animal spirit of youth and the boisterous inefficiency of the preindustrial era, once one learned to sit quietly at a desk in row on row of desks, how much easier it was to sit or stand patiently at a machine, to measure out life from school bell to school bell, from factory whistle to factory whistle.

This was the trade-off that the Ryan family made in the generations that separated Patrick the immigrant from Philip the urbanite. How to measure that bargain? Philip was better dressed, fed, and housed, and his life was immeasurably easier physically. Patrick, on the other hand, had been more closely bound into his community and enjoyed greater individual satisfaction in his work. The measurement of the two realities is as much an emotional one as a pragmatic historical judgment.

What is certain, however, is that work remained throughout a reliable guide to the social landscape. The size of the old shoemakers' shop contrasted with that of the swollen factory much as the meagre frontier population contrasted with the concentrated population of the twentieth century. The work of the 1840s was integrated while in the twentieth century it became specialized and subdivided, as society was itself. In the transition, the workplace lost its centrality. During the 1840s there was still a close physical relationship between work, home, and recreation, the artisan often living above his shop, next door to the neighbourhood pub. By the twentieth century, city space had

become differentiated into work areas and living areas. This physical change paralleled the division of responsibility in society, the specialization of education, social services, and other aspects of life.

While the similarities of the changes in work and in the outside society are clear enough, the casual relationship is more puzzling. Does work mimic society or does society take on the shape of its productive processes? This is not an academic question since we must now contemplate the significance of the third Industrial Revolution. What would Patrick Ryan make of the microchip world? How would his hands respond, not to the feel of soft leather, but to the push of the plastic button, his ear not to the ring of the hammer but to the croon of Muzak? Napoleon surely would have adjusted well, revelling in the conquest of complexity. The poet J.S. Dwight might well have embraced the new management techniques imported from Japan — "compute and you will profit the day. . . ." The IBM is living, computing still." And William Lyon Mackenzie would still say, "labour is the only true source of wealth," and be organizing the Canadian Union of Postal Workers' campaign to control the introduction of technology.

Yet all would have to cope with the ongoing abstraction of the product and the isolation of the worker. All would have to prepare for the Telidon revolution, the shunting of shopping, recreation, and even work itself back into individual homes — homes that are individual fortresses, not parts of the pre-industrial village. All would have to wonder about the effect of this atomization on institutions which grew out of collective action, such as universal social programmes.

The interrelation of the nature of work and the nature of society, again, is not an academic question. In the 1960s it used to be said, "You are what you eat." Maybe, maybe not. But it surely is true that you are how you work.

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Labour in Nineteenth-Century Canada

Bryan D. Palmer

DANIEL J. O'DONOGHUE, the first worker elected to the Ontario legislature in 1874, a leading figure in both the International Typographical Union and the Knights of Labor, and the man most often dubbed "the father of the Canadian labour movement," spoke in Montreal in 1875. He noted that workers "came shrinking along in the shadows of the walls so much did they fear lest their employers know where they had been." Eleven years later, in 1886, he appeared in what he claimed was a different city. "There is no such fear today," he asserted. That same year, 1886, was remembered in the 1920s by One Big Union advocate Richard J. Kerrigan, who recalled that, "The Knights of Labor grew to alarming proportions in the country, and the Province of Quebec, always the political storm centre of Canada, had to get drastic treatment if it were to be kept safe and sane for law and order."

O'Donoghue's and Kerrigan's comments speak to what historians have tended to ignore: the abrupt shifts in working-class life and organization that are themselves rooted in changing material circumstances. What we lack in the study of nineteenth-century labour is any sense of periodization, any analytic attempt to take the century as a whole and explore the shifting foundations of economic and socio-political life.

Let us begin by considering two realms of working-class experience: class conflict, as expressed in strikes, and organization, measured by the number of local and international union bodies present in Canada. A note of caution is, of course, in order. The figures presented here, drawn largely from research conducted in connection with Volume II of the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, are not statistically unproblematic. Nineteenth-century data are notoriously imprecise, were not collected with the interests of capital and the state (through the Department of Labour) in mind, and are thus useful only in gesturing toward trends. We can establish patterns within conflict, but we can not, and never will be able, to compute the number of worker-days lost to strikes, or an exact tabulation of strike victories, defeats, and, in the parlance of "mediation," compromises. Similarly we can locate approximations of organizational formation, but we can hardly establish the percentage of the work force organized or even the mere number of unionists with any surety.

Nevertheless, the inadequate data collected do reflect significant shifts.

Between 1815 and 1849 at least 56 strikes took place across the Canadas. Over the course of the next decade, paced by an "insurrection of labour" much reported in the press in 1853-54, that number rose to 76. A holding pattern characterized the 1860s, with workers balancing their euphoria for Confederation with modest levels of hostility toward their employers, 72 known confrontations disrupting the relations of labour and capital. But with patriotism wearing thin at the edges by the early 1870s, the nine-hour agitation of 1872 signalled the arrival of discontent in many workplaces, and the strike count spiralled to 204 over the course of the decade.

During the 1880s, as North American labour engaged in an unprecedented expression of class action, over 425 Canadian strikes would be fought, and the 1890s saw almost 600 battles waged by discontented workers. Riots, once a vehicle for working-class protest — over 330 erupted between 1820 and 1875 — gave way to the small craft struggles and mass strikes of the "Great Upheaval."

Organizationally the picture is remarkably comparable. Prior to 1850, unionism in the Canadas was a local affair, legally precarious, and formally unconnected to wider constituencies: forty-five local worker societies were known to exist, almost all serving the interests of craft workers, and many concentrated in specific centres of organization such as the port city of Saint John, New Brunswick. Between 1850 and 1879, international unionism established itself in Canada, with organizers from either Great Britain or the United States chartering locals of specific craft unions affiliated with an international body. Twenty-six Knights of St. Crispin lodges were founded from Saint John to Petrolia in the late 1860s and early 1870s, while railway unions and early machinists formed a further twenty-two locals before 1880. Moulders, printers, cigarmakers, woodworkers, and other craftsworkers were also active, and before the onslaught of a major depression in 1873, craft unionists could be found in eighty-one internationally-connected organizations across Canada, from Victoria to Halifax. Before 1880, counting these bodies along with local societies, approximately 165 labour organizations had been formed in Canada. During the 1880s, however, roughly 760 such bodies or their equivalents existed, comprised of local unions, international unions, Knights of Labor Local Assemblies, and lodges of the maritime-based Provincial Workmen's Association.

In both conflict and organization, then, we see major moments of upheaval shift the quantitative dimensions of class action during three discrete periods. The years 1800-50, 1850-80, and 1880-1900 are marked off from one another by a doubling if not trebling of the count of confrontation and organization. Here, surely, was one reason why, for D.J. O'Donoghue, Montreal was a different place in 1875 than it was in 1886. What lay behind these vast changes?

What I want to argue here, in the most general of ways, is that these three

Union mine at Cumberland, B.C., c.1892.

periods of the nineteenth century represent particular stages in the development of both Canadian capital and labour. The years 1800-50 are marked by the hegemony of merchant capital, the dominance of trade over production, the reliance upon staples export, the rural contours of settlement, and the stunted character of the domestic market. To be sure, as we approach mid-century, as canals integrate the home market, and as debates in the 1840s over tariff protection for Canadian manufactures and the 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws hint at structural shifts in the nature of the colonial political economy, change was increasingly in the air of social relations. Still, this is a half-century of decided limitation in the realm of economic life. Class formation, too, was inhibited: artisanal production and the peculiarities of labour in the immigrant-led workforces of canal construction and the timber trade produced dichotomous halves of a schizophrenic working class. Rough and respectable workers appeared as different as night and day: their work, attitudes, wages, family lives, modes of conflict, and cultural universes seemed as deeply divided as it is possible to imagine. The 1800-50 years thus gave rise to little that could be considered a coherent working-class presence. Rather, these were years in which the producing classes themselves lacked self-conception and common forms of action. Out of the structural context of an economy guided by merchant capital and turning on the needs of a distant empire and the harvesting of staples arose a process of class formation both fragmented and ambivalent.

These fragmentations and ambivalences begin to give way in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Technological change made its presence felt in shoemaking and tailoring, where a general homogenization of labour was underway by the 1850s and 1860s. The first railway boom promised to deliver the age of wood, wind, and sail into the epoch of iron and fire. Immigrant Irish labourers, once the social outcasts of North American society, adjusted to life in the New World and by the mid-1850s were fighting their way into the lower echelons of the skilled trades. Expanding employment opportunities for "green hands" enhanced the possibilities of waged work for women and children, a process that left its mark in shifting patterns of reproduction as the fertility of working-class families climbed to take advantage of economic opportunities. Working-class communities began to emerge. They consolidated around the tangible material context of waged labour in the urban centres, but their visibility was not only apparent at the factory gate. In sporting associations, cooperatives, taverns, crimping houses, churches, Mechanics' Institutes, and leisure activities, a working-class presence was surfacing over the course of the 1860s. That presence was not without its ambiguities as workers and non-workers shared much in the cultural arena, skilled and unskilled remained distinct entities within the world of the working class, and women workers and their male counterparts shared little organizational common ground. Major moments of class initiative — the "insurrection of labour" of 1853-54 and the nine-hour movement of 1872 — seemed the prerogative of the skilled and were undercut by depressionary dips in the business cycle. Politics, while hardly as rigidly defined as the terrain of the propertied as it was in the 1830s and 1840s, was not yet the site of major working-class initiatives or victories. Indeed, Tory paternalism, thoroughly revamped by sweeping changes in the political and economic life of the 1840s, gained an atavistic second wind with Macdonald's Trade Unions Act (1872) and the election of Hamilton Tory workingman, Henry Buckingham Witton.

By the end of the 1870s, then, a working-class presence existed, but it lacked the force and coherence to challenge capital. Confined by the depression of 1873-79, which saw the collapse of many unions, the waning of workplace militancy associated with the short-hour agitation of April-May 1872, and the demise of new institutions of centralized authority such as the Canadian Labour Union, workers appeared to be on the retreat. Three developments serve to indicate how labour was charting its course out of the confusion of the 1870s.

First, working-class political involvement toward the end of the decade remained dominated by Tory attachments, but the formation of Tory front groups such as the Workingmen's Liberal Conservative Association of Ottawa and Toronto unwittingly contributed to limited forms of independence for labour in politics. Second, even among the most cautious of skilled craftsmen, the locomotive engineers, the severity of the 1870s depression and the harsh acts of wage-cutting employers precipitated a stance of defiance, expressed in

the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers' 1876-77 assault on the Grand Trunk Railway Company. At Stratford, Belleville, and Brockville the engineers and their working-class supporters attacked strikebreakers and helped the railway workers win a major victory. Third, and finally, as all labouring people confronted the spectre of unemployment, workers across trade and skill lines began to come together in deputations to protest the lack of jobs. In Montreal, the changing character of working-class protest followed a logic of escalating demand. December 1875 saw a series of demonstrations in which labourers pleaded for work or bread. Originally peaceful, these rallies eventually culminated in attacks on police and demands for "bread or blood."

The growth of independence within labour politics, the involvement of the previously non-participating engineers, and the common confrontation with distress all separate the end of an epoch in which labour was subordinate from the beginnings of a new phase of class formation. These factors were, along with many other developments, part of what D.J. O'Donoghue saw as different in the Montreal of 1875 and 1886.

Leading out of the depression of the 1870s was the economic boom of the early 1880s, stimulated by the National Policy, the unambiguous arrival of the factory system, the new railway boom and the construction of the CPR, increasingly close and often scandalous relations between business and government, and the initiation of corporate mergers that led into capitalism's monopoly phase in the twentieth century.

This economic development, Canada's industrial revolution, would have a marked impact in the realm of politics, where the class question was confronted decisively for the first time. Factory acts and the Royal Commission on the Relation of Labor and Capital were but two examples of the new concern with the labour question, evident in the daily newspapers and the intellectual life of the young Dominion.

Capitalism's unambiguous industrial arrival in Canada, admittedly concentrated in the Montreal-Windsor axis, but also spreading to the eastern and western hinterlands, had created a "social" problem. For behind the economic growth and the impersonality of expanding production lay a massive working-class mobilization, centred in the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor that D.J. O'Donoghue travelled to Montreal to champion.

Supplemented by the craft internationals and scores of local unions, the Knights of Labor leaders marched Canadian workers into what came to be known as the "Great Upheaval." The Canadian Trades and Labor Congress was founded in 1883 and the next three years saw frenzied organizational activity, bringing Knights and unionists together. It was this upsurge of labour that more than tripled the number of working-class organizations in Canada during the 1880s, doubled the number of strikes in a short decade, and probably increased the percentage of the work force which was organized by five times.

Striking miners at Kirkland Lake.

Originating in Philadelphia in 1869, the Order was premised on the need to organize all workers, and it appealed to women and men, skilled and unskilled, French and English, Protestant and Catholic. An unprecedented expression of mutuality and collectivity, the Order was an eclectric articulation of labour reform sentiment and practice. It drew its members on the basis of secrecy, ritual, and fraternal impulse, provided a secular church proclaiming the brotherhood of man, shouted the necessity of sisterhood, stood behind the cause of political reform, and provided the education and protection of the trade union. Its impact was simply phenomenal, and it had ramifications in a host of realms: the regional scope of organization, reaching from sea to sea; the sheer numbers of workers drawn to reform; the emergence of independent working-class politics; the addressing of women's issues; the integration of the unskilled into the labour movement; the escalation of conflict; the downplaying of old ethnic divisions; and the rise of an eclectic but vibrant movement culture. These were successes of some magnitude. But there were also failures, and in the end the Order succumbed to: breakdown of unity, employer hostility, political machinations of the state, and the depression of the 1890s.

The eclectic radicalism of the 1880s thus gave way to a more ideologically fragmented and less cohesive workers' movement in the 1890s. During the twentieth century an employers' offensive, a new wave of technological refinements bred of the second industrial revolution, and the demographic revamping of the class by the eastern and southern European migrations of the post-1903 years remade the Canadian working class so that it was barely recognizable to those, like O'Donoghue, who had led the workers' movement in times past.

Yet the working class had indeed been made, historically, in the 1880s, not only by the march of capital but also by the march of men and women like O'Donoghue. The strength and legacy of the movement culture of the 1880s was considerable, the continuity of personnel, ideals, and forms of resistance sufficient to insure that in the changed context of the twentieth century some remnants of a consolidated working class remained to fight new battles in new ways. An old message lived on among many. Clint Golden, labour intellectual and founder of the United Steelworkers of America, put it better than most when he remembered the Knights as "that all embracing holy order that dared dream of a co-operative commonwealth for industrial America." He closed his assessment of the Knights of Labor with lines worth considering in any evaluation of the making of a class, a process encompassing more than capitalist structures and the impositions of exploitation and inequality:

> Their ritualism, the secrecy with which their meetings were conducted, the signs and symbols that gave notice to their members as to when and where meetings were to be held, fired my interest and imagination and in my own mind I resolved that henceforth my lot was cast with that of the wage earners. I began to see class lines and distinctions.

In the small town of Gananoque, Ontario in the 1930s a Canadian steelworker had similar thoughts. Looking back to his days in the Knights of Labor, Gordon Bishop recalled that the Order's solemn pledge and secret ritual bound members to the cause, building the sense of "unity and brotherhood" so essential to labour organization. That accomplishment, first sustained in the 1880s, remains one significant component of class formation as well as a vital imperative for the workers' movement.

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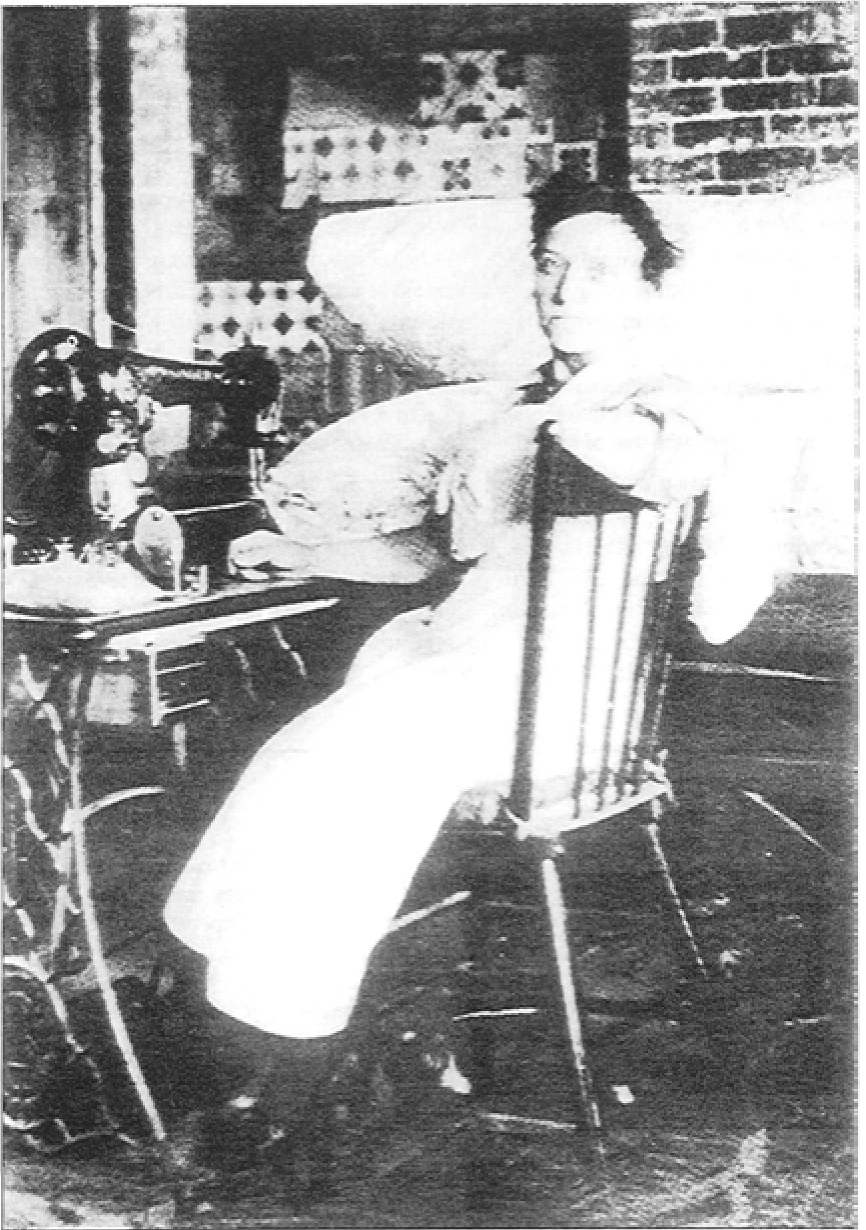

A seamstress at the Membery Mattress Company, 1920s.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY EXPERIENCE

Canadian Working Women in the Twentieth Century

Joan Sangster

THIS MONTH MARKS THE 75th anniversary of the first North American celebration of International Women's Day, a day inaugurated by the socialist movement to protest women's inequality, a day to celebrate the struggles and victories of working women. Socialists, trade unionists, and feminists still participate in this tradition — indeed, there has been a resurgence of interest in recent years — even though, at a glance, it might appear that the situation of working women has improved considerably over the last seventy years.

But unfortunately, as we all know only too well, there are profound similarities between the work of our sisters seventy years ago and our work lives today. Our economy is still characterized by a sex-segregated labour market; women still receive a much smaller wage packet — almost one-third less than men do — and women's work in the home, as well as in the labour force, is still consistently undervalued. Women's inequality is deeply embedded in the economic structures and social thinking of our society; it has been shaped by the imperatives of industrial capitalism, and by woman's role in reproduction and her unpaid labour in the home. Yet, women's role as worker, both inside and outside the home, has also developed as a result of historic struggles — in the workplace, between classes, within classes — and it is this element of struggle which leaves us not with a picture of predetermined subordination, but rather with some hope of change.

Our knowledge of the history of working women is only in its infancy. If the history of the Canadian working class has been for too long obscured by the curious fascination for historians of the exploits of politicians and business tycoons, then we can say that the history of working women has been doubly obscured from view. Admittedly, sources are difficult to locate. Often unorganized, sometimes inarticulate, and largely ignored by observers of the labour movement in their own time, women workers pose a difficult question for historians. To date, women's history has tended to concentrate on the more accessible story of middle-class women. Within working-class history, records

of better-paid, skilled workers (obviously not women) often survive; newspapers often wrote long accounts of dramatic (men's) strikes; and government inquiries often consisted of men querying men about men's labour problems (or sometimes men querying men about women's problems). Too often, historians also ask questions of the past which automatically exclude women. Labour historians, for example, often define work as work done for wages, but women's work doesn't easily fit into this category: their work includes child care, looking after boarders, taking in laundry, and unpaid domestic labour for the family.

This particular bias — neglecting women's work in the home — certainly prevails for the first two decades of this century. Using more accessible sources, such as newspaper accounts, government documents, and union records, research has yielded a much more complete picture of the young woman worker than of her older sister or mother working in the home. Yet, at the turn of the century, women comprised only about 13-15 per cent of the paid work force; they usually worked from the ages of fifteen to twenty-four, then left waged labour for married life, and rarely returned unless desertion, widowhood, or illness in the family required them to. In some occupations, such as teaching, employers asked women to leave on marriage, but such requests were not usually necessary. Prevailing ideals of domesticity for women, a slightly higher birth rate, and the onerous tasks of housekeeping, kept working-class women more than occupied in the home, where their unwaged labour was essential to the daily reproduction of the family. In periods of economic stress, before children were old enough to work, married women often participated in an "informal economy" — taking in boarders, doing laundry, or perhaps doing piecework at home in order to keep family finances afloat.

We know much more about the young women of this period who went out to work. A high proportion of these young workers were immigrants, responding to the aggressive immigration policy fostered by business and government; others were recruits from the slowly depopulating rural areas. Many young women looking for work shunned the isolated life of the farm worker and gravitated towards the fast growing towns and cities. Sometimes young women were part of an entire rural family which transplanted itself into the factory setting, usually a textile mill. Here, the family provided a housing aid and informal apprenticeship system within the factory, and in general, "cushioned the shock of adjustment to industrial work." For the employer, the family system offered the possibility of a trained, stable work force, often for extremely low wages. Apart from this family system, women often found work through contacts among friends, relatives, or neighbours; thus, ethnicity also played an important role, and one ethnic group came to dominate certain occupations. Many immigrant groups had their own autonomous structures of mutual aid, including employment aid, as one young Finnish domestic worker revealed in her description of her first two days in Toronto:

I was met at the station by my stepfather and went with him to Widmer street, [with its Finnish boarding houses]. The next morning, I found myself at a job exchange, Mrs. Anderson's. Mrs. Anderson found jobs for the maids and looked after the Finnish girls until they could do so themselves. . . . She also had a home restaurant where the maids could go on their days off. They had to pay a little of course, but they could sometimes live with her between jobs. . . . The morning I went, I joined other women sitting around the edges of the room, while the employers looked at you as a gypsy would a horse, and then pointed a finger, as if to say "this is the one I want."

After the advent of industrialization, women had moved into jobs which were extensions of their work in the household: they served food, sewed, and cleaned. Before World War I, the largest concentration of wage-earning women was the composite of these roles: the domestic. Many were immigrants, starting at the bottom rung of the ladder, for domestic service was badly paid and low in status. Most were "general help," doing all varieties of domestic work, labouring long hours with very little privacy or free time. Few domestics experienced the specialized, hierarchical, and supposedly benevolent paternalism so nostalgically rendered in *Upstairs Downstairs*. Given the chance, they might move into factory work, for at least after a ten-hour day, a woman could call her time her own (unless she went home to help with the housework). Given bad times, they might find themselves in another all-woman occupation, prostitution. One study of Toronto the Good showed that a substantial proportion of prostitutes "plying the trade" were from immigrant backgrounds, and 50 per cent in one study had formerly worked as domestics. The connection between low wages, restrictive working conditions, possibly the isolation of domestics from family support systems, and prostitution were lost on many reformers of the period, who characterized the problem as one of temptation, ignorance, or immorality — on the woman's part, of course. Unfortunately, their proposals for rehabilitation often involved training prostitutes for one occupation — domestic service.

In the early twentieth century, the constant shortage of domestics was lamented by many middle-class women's reform organizations like the National Council of Women. Nineteenth-century methods of recruiting servants — through the informal channels of family, neighbourhood, and church, or recruiting from homes for destitute women — had proven inadequate. Luckily for these middle- and upper-class women, their need for domestics coincided with Britain's worries about a large unmarried female population, referred to rather pejoratively as "surplus" women. As a result, various women's immigration societies flourished, as joint ventures in which British women were recruited, transported, and chaperoned to the new world. Canadian mistresses pictured these British recruits learning valuable domestic skills while working as servants, then later marrying and populating the Dominion with good, Anglo-Saxon progeny. But many employers could not compete successfully with more attractive prospects: better paid factory work, the lure of the western

frontier, or the designs of Canadian bachelors, and so reform organizations turned to a new solution for the shortage of workers — providing specialized training for domestic service in order to "elevate" the status of the occupation. This was not the last time such training programmes were attempted; indeed, they are a recurring theme in Canadian history, revealing the tenacious association of women with domestic labour. And it was not the last time that such programmes failed, in part because guarantees for better wages and working conditions were not part of the scheme to "elevate" the occupation. In the 1920s, the evolution of domestic labour took a new turn. The intensification of capitalist consumerism, with its subsequent introduction of prepared food and labour-saving devices, growth of suburbs, and a burgeoning advice literature which counselled married women to remain in the home elevated the practice of housework to a new science. This meant that the daughters of the middle class came to be reared as domestic "scientists." Their labour was justified by a domestic ideology which glorified the housewife as "an efficient consumer, skillful operator of household appliances, and a professionally trained mother."

The second largest female labour ghetto was in factories, especially textiles and the clothing trade. Many women also worked in laundries, or at waitressing or dressmaking. In garment-making, one might overcome the isolation of servant life, but many workshops in this period were extremely small. Historian Wayne Roberts found that in nineteen Toronto establishments there were 500 women in shirt, collar, and tie making, and that in 400 dressmaking and 216 tailoring shops there were only 1,000 women. As well as the obvious fact that such small workplaces, with as few as four workers, were hard to unionize, there was the added disadvantage that small establishments were not covered by the Factory Acts. Even larger, inspected factories could prove unsafe: a nighttime blaze destroyed one Toronto garment factory where 100 women worked during the day. The firemen declared it one of the worst firetraps they had ever seen; Torontonians only narrowly escaped the tragedy of their own Triangle Shirtwaist fire. The garment trade had other disadvantages: piecework, subcontracting, and extensive use of home work, all of which reflected the viciously competitive nature of the industry. Women's wages were much lower than men's, partly a consequence of the male monopoly of such skilled positions as cutting. But even identical work was rewarded differently. As one frank factory owner told Mackenzie King in the latter's investigation of sweating in Toronto:

> I don't treat the men bad, but I even up by taking advantage of the women. I have a girl who can do as much work, and as good work as a man; she gets $5 a week. The man standing next to her gets $11 a week.

Severe occupational health hazards, checked only by the barest minimum of government regulation, characterized much of women's waged work. Garment shops were often badly lit and ventilated; waitresses accepted long hours

on their feet and sometimes sexual harassment from customers; fur workers contended with chemicals causing skin rashes, eye problems, and headaches, and always faced the threat of tuberculosis; and laundry workers spent long hours on their feet in intensely hot rooms filled with gas fumes. One Finnish woman describes her work in a Toronto laundry:

> We just stayed in the basement until the work was done, usually from 9 until 6 . . . we had to wash everything by hand and boil all the clothes and hang them outside to dry even in winter. Well, you know what happens to your hands when you take them from the boiling water and put them wet out to the freezing cold . . . these people who work today don't know anything about work. It was a real torturing of people.

Given these arduous working conditions, it is not surprising that many young women looked hopefully to the growing clerical sector where employers promised cleaner workplaces, shorter hours, and more "genteel" employment. Since the late nineteenth century, changes in corporate structures and the consolidation of business organization combined with innovations in office technology laid the basis for what is called the "feminization" of clerical work. The small, nineteenth-century office, employing Bob Cratchit-like clerks hopeful of upward mobility in business, gave way to larger offices drawing almost exclusively on female labour for the lower echelons of work. A growing number of literate high school graduates and burgeoning business school enterprises churned out a ready supply of labour, and as with other "feminized" occupations, the flood of women into clerical positions resulted in the depression of wages, with many women competing for a narrow range of jobs.

Women's "natural" feminine characteristics — sympathy, adaptability, courtesy, even nimble fingers — were used to justify women's inclination for clerical work. It was not their nimble fingers, however, but the search for cheap labour and the ready use of a gender ideology which secured clerical work as a ghetto for women workers. In this same time period women made their way into the world of retail work; here, feminization accompanied the appearance of the department stores. And nowhere was the feminization process more noticeable than in the telephone industry. In the late nineteenth century, Bell Telephone had used boys as operators, but found them to be an undisciplined work force, quick to "match insult for insult" with irate customers. Taking women's qualities of "patience and courtesy" into account, as well as the tantalizing prospect of women's lower wage rates, the Company switched over to women operators. In its hiring procedures Bell stressed the higher status of white-collar work (and indeed, operators had to prove their worthiness by submitting a letter of reference from their clergymen) but the operators' shift work, strict supervision, physical endurance, and occupational health hazards (long distance operators sometimes received electrical shocks) gave the job many of the characteristics of blue-collar work. Moreover, wages, while slightly better than most factory pay, were inadequate for a woman living

on her own — a disadvantage of most women's work during this period. After a major strike by Toronto Bell operators in 1907 the company manager explained to a Royal Commission that women were only secondary wage earners; he testified that many operators "were just working to earn money for a fur coat or something." But in cross-examination he was forced to relinquish his pin money theory, admitting that many self-supporting operators did extra shifts or moonlighted to make ends meet. Commission Chairman Mackenzie King revealed something of the government's attitude towards women workers at this time. He claimed to be particularly concerned about women's health, their prospects for future motherhood, and any danger to their morality; in his diary he professed horror at Bell's disregard for women: "the image before me is of some hideous octopus feeding upon the life blood of young women and girls." Yet King did not consider any legislative action to guarantee better wages or working conditions; instead, he hid behind labour legislation which promised a public inquiry into labour disputes, but which ultimately allowed a hands-off approach to business.

Like clerical work, teaching and nursing were "feminized" occupations which explained women's employment suitability with reference to their "feminine" — meaning maternal or nurturant — character. The feminization of teaching was the result of a number of factors: the increased grading of schools and consolidation of larger school systems, the demands of male teachers for higher positions and better pay, and the subsequent decision by money-conscious school trustees to solve all these problems by hiring women, at lower pay, for the lower grades of teaching. At the same time, the changeover to women was accomplished with the ideological blessing of educators who believed that women's maternal inclinations and ability to care for children suited them for public school teaching. Since we all know that "motherhood is a labour of love," this meant that women teachers came cheap. In Toronto, their wages were about one-half those of male teachers and were often lower than those of unskilled blue-collar workers; occasionally women had to bid against one another for jobs (a practice still used many years later in the west). Yet women teachers were still expected to be paragons of moral virtue and "examples" for the community. Toronto the Good's Board of Education accepted applications only from women of "good moral stature," under thirty and unmarried, and the board made it quite clear that it frowned on bloomerwearers and gum-chewers.

Given the low wages, arduous work, and strict regulation I have just described, we must ask how women coped on a day-to-day basis, how they viewed their work, and whether they tried to change or resist the conditions under which they laboured

For the vast majority of wage-earning women, work was a necessity of life, and the fact that these women belonged to working-class neighbourhoods meant that they went out to work from a milieu in which many women their age

did likewise. Waged work did not cause a break with family life, for most women's lives were intertwined with family needs and relationships. The majority of young women lived at home, accepting parental authority and making significant contributions to the family economy, sometimes turning over all, or most of their wages to their mothers. The other side of the coin was women's dependence on the family; many industries using female labour were seasonal and uncertain, and relied on women's dependence on the family to justify the low wages they paid, although in fact, the low wages they paid necessitated women's reliance on the family. On a more positive note, entering the work force did initiate a new set of experiences for young women, many of whom now remember their feeling of contribution to the family income, their sense of self-worth, and the new independence they gained.

Most women perceived that they would centre most of their lives around marriage and motherhood; in fact, radicals trying to organize women workers complained that women saw the imminent arrival of "Prince Charming" as their escape from work. A more sympathetic rendition of this theme is given by Louise Tentler who has suggested — and her ideas are not without controversy — that the role of the working-class homemaker, which has some recognized material importance, some social respect, and at least a measure of autonomy and self-regulation, was more attractive than the petty discipline and low status of women's jobs. Thus, woman's desire to marry, a reaffirmation of dominant social values, was reinforced by her experience of work.

Working women were influenced by the dominant ideology of "marriage, motherhood and domesticity," and by ideas of women's more moral and pure nature, but they seemed to filter this ideology through their own class experiences and modify it accordingly. They rejected for instance the views of many middle-class women's magazines and reform groups that factory work was "unfeminine:" "While they saw motherhood as their ultimate goal, they also recognized the necessity to work, felt some pride in their economic contribution, enjoyed the workplace culture of talk and friendship, and they rejected the view that they were sacrificing any womanly interests by working for wages." At times, the working woman would openly challenge what she saw as unjust criticisms of the life-style of the working girl. In 1913, a Hamilton woman worker wrote to the newspaper in response to concerns voiced about the lax morality of women wage earners. The writer insisted:

> Instead of some of the employers of the city interesting themselves in the white slave traffic and girls going astray, if they would look into the pay envelopes of their employees on pay day, they might see how such evils exist. Girls, after all, are only human and naturally want to share in the good things of life as much as their luckier sisters.

Women workers did sometimes organize to resist the injustice of the workplace. Sam Gompers was known to say that women were "unorganizable," but

given the limitations imposed on women by factors beyond their control, it is remarkable how much women did accomplish. Before World War I, efforts were made to organize female telephone operators, retail clerks, bookbinders, laundry workers, candy factory hands, waitresses, and even domestic workers. Many women in the garment trade joined International Ladies' Garment Workers Union locals, and were part of the upsurge in militancy in this industry in the years just prior to the war. Women's high degree of organization in garment work may have been partly related to the fact that they shared the trade with men. Women not only benefited from contact with male trade unionists whose stay in the work force was long-term, but men needed women's cooperation to shut down a shop effectively — and so we find instances of male workers pleading with the international to send in women organizers to help them sign up their sisters. Secondly, in many cities the high number of Jewish garment workers meant that Jewish women benefited from the solidarity of their ethnic community; under certain conditions, the ethnic base of the clothing trade, as well as the presence of politicized Jewish socialists led to militance and solidarity that was crucial in unionization and strike situations.

Yet, even though we can point to inspiring examples of women's militancy, we must still explain their low level of unionization. For one thing, women often reacted to harsh working conditions with brief protests, or by "voting with their feet;" many commentators of the time noted women moving from one occupation to another to allay boredom, monotony, or unpleasant working conditions. Secondly, employer opposition and intimidation was always present, and some employers may have been particularly intransigent with women workers because the reason they had hired them in the first place was to pay them lower wages. Thirdly, the structural conditions of women's waged labour deterred unionization. The continual turnover of young workers prevented the continuity and collective lessons which might have consolidated unions. It is noteworthy that after the massive 1907 Bell Telephone strike, the operators' attempt to set up an International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) local floundered not only on employer opposition and the union's ambivalence towards women members, but also because of the rapid turnover of telephone operators at the workplace. Many women also worked in geographically separated or small workplaces, and most were unskilled. Like the unskilled man of the time, there was no place for them in the craft trade union movement. The largest category of women workers at this time were in domestic service — an organizer's nightmare because of the number of workplaces involved.

Lastly, women workers usually had heavier domestic responsibilities, an obvious deterrent to union activity, and even if a woman found the time and inclination for union involvement, she might encounter the distrust or disinterest of male trade unionists who were, at best, ambivalent about women's waged labour. As historian Ruth Frager argues, there never existed a "battle

between the sexes," for in many labour disputes male workers defended and aided their sisters. But exclusionary policies had for some time been the answer of many trade unionists to female labour. Many men saw women as "unskilled intruders" on the shopfloor, and even though women usually competed with other women for jobs, trade unionists still feared that the introduction of women, like the arrival of immigrants, would "break down the labour process and cheapen the costs of labour." After all, it was not until 1914 that the Trades and Labor Congress (TLC) finally abandoned that part of its platform which called for the abolition of female labour. The ambivalence of male workers stemmed not only from the fear of competition for jobs, but also from patriarchal assumptions about women's "proper sphere:" workers feared women's wage labour would weaken the family and impair women's roles as wives and mothers. Even many socialists of the time shared these views. As Linda Kealey has noted: "their acceptance of the primacy of motherhood, their distrust of women as competition or potential strikebreakers, and their constant promotion of the 'ideal' of the family wage all tended to reinforce, rather than expose inequalities in the labour force." Whether or not a "family wage" existed is another whole debate, but it remains true that this ideal tended to undermine the promotion of economic independence for women.

Trade unionists' fears about the lowering of male wages by the introduction of female labour intensified during World War I. As employers continued their assault on craft skills, working conditions, and wages, workers responded by trying to prevent, or at least to restrict what was called the "dilution" of labour — that is, the introduction of women into "men's" jobs. The TLC urged that women be used only after all available manpower had been absorbed, and it called on the government to legislate equal pay for equal work, a measure it was hoped would remove the low-wage incentive for hiring women. Yet, contrary to popular assumption, with the significant exception of munitions, large numbers of women did not move into the work force during the war, certainly not into "men's" jobs, only to be squeezed out later by returning soldiers. Even in munitions, the majority of women were recruits from other blue-collar occupations, seeking the higher wages of munitions work. And as one woman remembers of her experience in a Toronto munitions plant, the higher wages were often the price paid for dangerous work:

> Work, there was a real endurance test. The factory was a hell hole, avenues of clanking, grinding, clashing machines with too much noise to talk . . . and your feet wet all the time. It was dangerous; there were no covers for many machines, and you were splashed with chemicals. And my factory had a blasting furnace and no fire escape.

From the very beginning of the war, there had been some debate within government and business circles about the value of using female workers. Some employers were unsympathetic, claiming women could not do the job, or would require better working conditions, which of course they were unwilling

to provide. R.B. Bennett, then chair of the National Service Board opposed dilution on a massive scale because he feared it would "create a large female industrial army doing men's jobs at lower wages, which would be opposed, after the soldiers' return, by a male army of the unemployed." But if Bennett had any fears of a future "war between the sexes," his predictions were skewed, for it was general strikes and class warfare, not sex warfare, which characterized the post-war period. In any case, Bennett's views were rejected by the man in charge of dilution at the Imperial Munitions Board (IMB), Sir Joseph Flavelle, an Ontario Tory who seemed to believe that if more women were introduced into the factories, it would push more men to enlist, thus replenishing the troops rapidly being depleted by the slaughter of trench warfare. Some employers also came to look positively on dilution, not only due to women's lower wages, but also because they believed the "passive" female worker would save them labour troubles and strikes.

Women munitions factory workers.

By 1917, the IMB had mounted a large publicity campaign, including a film and an attractive picture book, promoting dilution. The private archives of the board reveal a more cynical side to the government's efforts. One letter to the chief press censor asked for censorship of any news which would deter women from taking up shift work, such as news of women being assaulted on the streets at night. Another mused at the advantageous prospect of having provincial governments turn a blind eye to factory acts protecting female labour, and a third discussed why or why not women should work in an explosives plant at

Trenton. Publicly, the government claimed the question would be determined by the danger to women's health, but privately, they discussed cost and productivity. In the last resort, the IMB opposed the idea because the number of male jobs replaced would not make the expense of accommodating female labour worthwhile.

At the end of the war, women's small and brief incursion into heavy industrial work came to an abrupt end. Encouraged by women's contribution to the war effort, and by recent suffrage victories, many feminists anticipated substantial progress for working women in the next decade. But the suffrage movement, although always given sterling support by labour, had been largely a middle-class movement, and in the post-war years feminists kept their sights fixed on women's progress in non-traditional professions like medicine. The vast majority of working women, located in manufacturing and service work, still experienced inequality in the workplace, even though as Veronica Strong-Boag says, it may have "modernized its forms." A slight relaxation of Victorian sexual mores in the post-war years and the popular images of the 1920s — the flapper, flask, and Ford — may have affected the consciousness of wage-earning women, who were influenced by the "commercialized mass culture" of the 1920s. But it would be wrong to differ over whether the working class enjoyed any overall improved standard of living in the 1920s. What we do know is that women workers still earned 50-60 per cent of the male wage; most self-supporting women lived at or near the poverty line; and most women still competed for a narrow range of sex-segregated jobs.

In the 1920s the informal networks of kin and community which had formerly introduced women to jobs were augmented by guidance from vocational schools, more advice literature, and the beginnings of a government bureaucracy, in the form of labour exchanges and employment bureaus. Yet, as Veronica Strong-Boag's research on women in the 1920s has established, women's job options remained extremely narrow. The government's 1919 Technical Act (once again) emphasized domestic training for women and new government labour exchanges were concerned primarily with placing women in domestic service jobs. If a woman was interested in upward mobility, she was advised to take up typing, and the expansion of clerical jobs during this decade was held up as proof of "expanding" job horizons for young women. New chain stores, the telephone industry, banks, and restaurants all offered new jobs for women, but these workplaces were based on a sexual hierarchy in which "women were assumed to be somewhat malleable, interested in temporary work and secondary wages, and of course, happy with male bosses." In the telephone industry a few men might advance into management, but women had to be content with the position of chief operator; in banks, women clericals trained the men for management; and in stores, women looked after clothing and notions but seldom reached department head or buyer.

Despite such discrimination and exhausting working conditions, women in

white-collar work showed little evidence of resistance in the 1920s. One reason for their quiescence may have been the growth of welfare capitalist schemes designed to provide fringe services for workers, and thus increase team spirit, productivity, and stave off unionism. However regulated, disciplined, and supervised an Eaton's employee was in the store, she still might look forward to use of Eaton's summer camp, or if she was a "loyal" employee, aid from Eaton's welfare worker in time of sickness.

In the world of the factory, such benefits were seldom found. Women in manufacturing were still concentrated in low-waged, highly competitive industries like clothing, where piecework, bonusing, and subcontracting remained an integral part of the work process. Although in many provinces health and safety legislation had been improved, many owners refused to install safety equipment, claiming it would retard production. Luckily for women workers, fashionable shorter skirts and hair styles freed them from the possibility of being drawn into machinery. Unluckily for women, however, the 1920s saw the intensification of a process begun earlier in the century — scientific management, or "Taylorism." Efficiency experts, with their stop-watch mentality, were used by employers eager to streamline production and increase managerial authority. Many unorganized women were unable to challenge speedups occasioned by Taylorism, but there were a few examples of efforts to oppose the process of rationalization. In a Hamilton cotton mill a five-week strike in 1928 was sparked by the spontaneous walk-out of women workers who opposed efforts to alter production so that female spinners would tend more machines. The strike spread to other workers who increased demands to include wage increases, the rehiring of strike leaders, and "a return to things . . . [as they were] before the efficiency experts came along." Confronted by a powerful employer who was able to bring in scab labour, the strikers were eventually defeated, but the extent of their campaign, including daily mass picketing, indicated a militance and determination which was impressive by any standards.

There were other examples of women's militancy during the 1920s: there were strikes by teachers, garment workers, waitresses, telephone operators, and factory workers during this decade. In Hull, Quebec, Québécoises, supposedly passive members of a Roman Catholic union, walked out of E.G. Eddy's match company when they were asked to sign yellow-dog contracts and were told their forewomen would be replaced by men. The company responded by transferring operations to another plant, an anti-union strategy increasingly made possible with large corporations. The women continued their strike, and the Roman Catholic union came to their support, articulating some concern with the potential "danger" to women's morality if foremen were hired. It is hard to say if the women were primarily concerned with the question of morality; they were certainly willing to abandon female stereotypes when pickets captured the manager on his way to work, and forcibly prevented him from

entering the mill. Although the company verbally assented to some of the strikers' demands, it later reneged on its promises, a pattern often repeated with the more fluid, less organized female work force.

In the 1920s, organizing women into unions remained a difficult task. The expanding white-collar sector had few union traditions upon which to draw, and as well as the structural problems associated with women's waged labour, women still found little aid from the trade union movement. After the heady days and high hopes of 1918-19, the labour movement was badly weakened by the 1921 depression, membership losses, and employer offensives of various kinds. Under such circumstances, the movement had little or no time for women, a group they had traditionally neglected even in the best of times.

In the wake of trade union apathy, some feminists and leftists took up the cause of women workers. The women's movement, although largely depopulated after the suffrage victory, lobbied for better factory acts, increased mothers' allowances, and minimum wage acts. They were especially hopeful that the minimun wage would prevent the degradation of women's wages, but like other protective legislation, the minimum wage had drawbacks and contradictions. There were numerous loopholes for the employer who wished to make use of them; regulations were enforced by understaffed government offices fearful of alienating business, and the wage rates were based on "model" budgets which were usually low.

The flaws and abuses in minimum wage legislation were the target of a new group organized out of the left, the Women's Labor Leagues (WLL). First formed before World War I, the leagues were rejuvenated and reorganized in the early 1920s by Florence Custance, head of the Communist Party of Canada's Women's Department. The CPC's interest in the woman question had taken a quantitative and qualitative leap over pre-war socialist parties, and although it was far from a priority for the whole CPC, the WLLs made important efforts to mobilize working-class housewives and to organize women workers. Their aims included the unionization of women, the legalization of birth control, and an end to military training in the schools. Their activities often carried on traditions of women's support work in the labour movement. They raised money, conducted strike support, and in the troubled Alberta coal fields during the 1920s, women from the WLLs were often found on the picket line.

In 1929-30, the WLLs were advised to join the Workers Unity League (WUL), a new communist-led trade union centre. In the economic crisis of the early 1930s, both the communist and the socialist left (soon to be organized into the CCF), continued to woo the working woman, and they often supplied important leadership for the struggles of working and unemployed women.

Women, as some leftists recognized, suffered the consequences of the Depression in ways particular to their sex, as well as to their class. According to the unemployment statistics of the time, women suffered much less unem-

ployment than men, but these statistics were particularly biased against women, for "women in the home," were usually ignored. But, even taking this bias into account, there is some evidence that because of the sex-segregated labour market, women's unemployment rates were lower. This calls into question the oft-cited "reserve army of labour theory" which is used to explain women's inequality in the work force; as Ruth Milkman, Jane Humphries, and recently, Lynda Yanz and David Smith have pointed out, the experience of women in the Depression points to the need for a reassessment of this theory.

At the same time, the Depression did lead to deteriorating working conditions and wage cuts for many women: the testimony of female Eaton's workers before the Price Spread Commission was one of the most telling and depressing descriptions of women driven by constant pressure to increase productivity, yet paid wages less than the going relief rates. And during the 1930s more and more women were forced into domestic work. In Manitoba, the number of women working as domestics between 1921 and 1936 almost doubled, and yet their wages were almost halved.

Ironically, although the low-wage labour of many women kept their families eating, the 1930s also witnessed condemnations of married, sometimes even single women, workers who were supposedly "taking jobs away from men." As Alice Kessler-Harris has pointed out, the Depression imparted a curious double message to women: pressured on the one hand into the work force, they were simultaneously encouraged to believe that women belonged in the home. The "cultural anger" directed at women, who became the scapegoats of the crisis, was even shared by some trade unionists, who passed resolutions opposing the employment of married women. Many conservative commentators — sometimes even radical ones — deplored the endangered male ego and the disruption of traditional family roles. A Quebec MPP, repeating some of the prevailing concerns of the Quebec clergy about the family, urged that: "we correct a completely abnormal situation which sees girls, even their mothers leaving the house to work, while the husbands and male youth stay at home looking after the children, and even doing the cooking."

Thus, women's waged work might be essential to the maintenance of the family at the same time as their unpaid domestic labour could also prove essential to family survival. Commentators in the farm and labour press during the 1930s often described how women had to make new efforts to use domestic labour — remaking clothes, finding cheaper food, providing alternate leisure activities, and so on — to alleviate the economic stress of unemployment. As Ruth Milkman has put it, women "took up the slack" in the economy during the Depression, not by withdrawing from the work force, but with increased unpaid household labour, which in turn, reinforced women's traditional family role.

The popular image of the Depression often focuses on unemployed men:

men riding the rods, transient men fed in soup kitchens, the On-to-Ottawa Trek, the Relief Camp strike. But where do women fit into this picture? We know it was extremely difficult for single unemployed women to obtain relief, as local authorities assumed that women, "dependants" always, could go home to a family, or perhaps find some domestic work. Winnipeg was relatively humane in its treatment of single women: after a thorough investigation, a woman could receive a $1.25 voucher each week for a room and vouchers for meals or groceries. In other cities women got money only for a room or meals, or sometimes nothing at all. And what of women who continued to work during the Depression? Women in one Hamilton oral history project conducted by Pat Bird remember the ominous threat of layoffs always hanging over their heads, as well as a lack of job mobility and difficult working conditions. At the same time, most rejected the view that they were "victimized," and recall their work experiences with a measure of pride, stressing their independence, respect from family members whom they helped support, and the social contact with co-workers who often became lifelong friends.

Some women did join the "culture of protest" which began to take shape in the Depression. It was women who fed and sheltered men on the trek to Ottawa, and it was women who organized Mothers' Committees to lobby for the release of jailed men after the Regina Riot. Women formed a part of the Ontario contingent of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, and although their numbers were few, they ate, walked, and camped on equal terms with male trekkers. Women were also active in anti-eviction struggles and relief protests, and sometimes organized protests based on women's particular concerns. In Winnipeg, a group of women, including the WLL, organized a campaign to fight for additional relief money for essential household items like pots, pans, and bedding; in Saskatoon, a woman led a sit-in in city council chambers to draw attention to meagre relief payments; and in Lakeview, a frustrated women's group took the relief officer and his two assistants hostage until police broke down the door to rescue the beleaguered bureaucrats.

Organizing women wage-earners proved to be a difficult proposition in the early 1930s. TLC membership plummeted and although the WUL, by virtue of its commitment to organizing the unskilled, held out some hope for female workers, the league sometimes became embroiled in fights over "dual unionism." The strength of the WUL remained in unions already sympathetic to the left — such as the furriers and the garment workers — although heroic efforts were made to organize cannery workers, waitresses, laundry workers, and clericals before the WUL was disbanded in 1935. In the last years of the decade both socialists and communists devoted time and energy to the creation of the CIO. By the late 1930s, CIO organizing had begun to make some important inroads into industries employing significant numbers of women. However, even in CIO contracts unequal wage rates persisted, and many trade unionists took for granted the division of the plant into "male" and "female" jobs.

Despite this, union recognition was the first thought in most women's minds. In Alberta, women and men in the packing houses sat down on the job; in southern Ontario hundreds of women in rubber plants walked out; and in British Columbia women cannery workers joined native and Japanese women on the picket line: all were demanding union recognition. A new militancy was afoot — not only in CIO unions — and was reflected in strike statistics. In a peak year for CIO organizing, 1937 saw more strikes than any other year of the decade. In some industries long plagued by wage cuts, CIO organizing sparked a burst of militancy. In 1936 and 1937, a series of dramatic strikes involving hundreds of women and men swept Ontario textile towns like Welland, Cornwall, and Peterborough. Alex Welch, CIO organizer was labelled a radical and an agitator by Mitch Hepburn but it was not Welch's politics which caused and sustained the strikes; it was the workers' pent-up anger, the product of years of deteriorating wages and working conditions, and the suppression of unionism by the industry. Women in the Peterborough mills earned an average of $11 a week, but because the industry could duck the minimum wage with piecework, some women made as little as $7.50 for a 60-hour week. Women were prominent on the strike committee and on the picket lines, where violence broke out more than once over the use of strikebreakers. Tear gas was used to contain the pickets; the women responded by throwing eggs and tomatoes, and according to the mainsteam press, fought the police by "clawing, screaming, and scratching." According to the radical press, they responded by "putting up a militant defence." The strikers eventually gained some minor gains in wages and working conditions, but not union recognition. The company may have seen that as a partial victory, but this struggle, like many others, was only the beginning of the CIO story, not the end.

For many Canadian workers, it was World War II which eventually provided the conditions in which unions could achieve some basic rights. For women workers, the war was not a milestone or a turning point for their waged labour; it did not mark any major advances towards equality in the workplace. Although women's recruitment to non-traditional work was greater than in World War I, the methods and extent of women's recruitment were shaped first and foremost by Canada's war needs, not by consideration of women's right to work. By 1942, the federal government was trying to alleviate manpower shortages with female labour, referred to as a "surplus labour pool," using a three-step programme: first, drawing in single women, next married women, and lastly women with children. The plan was designed to interfere as little as possible with women's traditional role in the family.

As in World War I, attempts to interest women in work in war production industries were often framed in a patriotic appeal: "Back Them Up to Bring Them Back" was one of the key slogans, although advertisements were also careful to add two other inducements: new skills learned and higher wages. It was the latter which lured most women into war work. The government added

two other incentives: income tax laws were changed to allow a married woman unlimited earnings with no effect on her husband's deduction, and the federal government provided grants to the provinces for day nurseries. Given their recent Depression experiences, it is not surprising that many women flocked from low-paid service jobs to better paid jobs in war-related industries; they knew from experience that "they better get what they could, when they could." For women workers only a few years earlier pressured into domestic work or criticized for "taking jobs away" from men, the war offered exciting new job opportunities, higher wages, and a feeling of economic security and independence. Yet, some observers were cynical about long-term opportunities for women. It seemed that only in war, not in peace, was prosperity possible, and well-paid work for women available; as one writer in the Alberta CFF paper put it, "After the war . . . it's back to Woolworth's."

Women riveters at Stelco.

Government propaganda had never really claimed otherwise, for women's war work had always been posed as a temporary expedient. Pressed to consider reconstruction plans for women, the federal government appointed a sub-committee, but took up few of the committee's proposals, and ultimately fell

back on one plan of action, a training scheme called the "Home Aide" programme. It was that perennial answer to the problem of unemployed women — training for domestic jobs. Like previous schemes, this one was also a failure.

Some women were reluctant to leave the lucrative wartime jobs but found few allies to plead their case; many others had always seen their work as temporary. When women were asked in response to a questionnaire on reconstruction about their post-war plans, some asked for better training for single women, but the majority counselled a "return to the home" for all married women. In fact what women returned to was their traditional job ghettos, and perhaps the best that they could hope for was that the increasing expansion of the CIO held out the prospect of unionization of the white-collar sector. At least one massive attempt was made to break into the clerical sector, when Steelworkers organizer (and CCFer) Eileen Tallman led a drive to unionize Eaton's Toronto store. But facing intense employer opposition and constant employee turnover, the Eaton drive narrowly failed, and it was the last effort of its kind for many years.

Although World War II turned out to be less of a "turning point" for women's work than a temporary response to well-paying jobs, perhaps what really became the turning point for women's waged work were the changes in women's labour force participation which began in the 1950s, picked up speed in the 1960s, and eventually transformed the role of women in the economy. It was, as one American historian suggests, "the radical consequences of incremental change," beginning in the 1950s, that led to increasing contradictions and a re-questioning of women's role in the work force. Between 1945 and 1970, the female participation rate in the work force almost doubled, although the gender-based structural inequality of women's work remained unchanged. Beginning in the 1950s, changes in business organization opened up new areas of work in clerical and service work, to be followed in the 1960s by the expansion of public sector work. Increasingly, married women were pushed and pulled into the work force by changing domestic labour in the home and the need for female financial contributions to deal with inflation or depression. As families had in the 1930s, women's waged work was now seen as the means to augment — or more accurately, maintain — the family income. Throughout this process, the life cycle of the woman worker was also undergoing profound change. Rather than a two-phase cycle of work, and after a delayed marriage, childrearing, women moved to a three-phase life cycle of work, earlier marriage and childrearing, and then a return to permanent work. This is not to argue that domestic labour was becoming irrelevant. On the contrary, in the 1950s homemakers still constituted the largest occupational group for married women, and despite the introduction of labour-saving devices to many working-class homes, women still played a crucial role in the family economy. And if married women working outside the home made less than their husbands, they could always have argued that they made up for it with unwaged

housework, for studies showed that women still carried the burden — or double burden — of household labour.

Striking female employees of Proctor-Silex in Picton side-step the law to express their opinion.

Even though the 1950s saw more married women entering the work force, the idea of women's home-centredness had yet to be really challenged. The assumption of women's primary commitment to motherhood lay at the heart of much postwar popular culture; there were countless anti-feminist pseudo-scientific props for old platitudes, like a best-selling psychology work, *Modern Woman, The Lost Sex* — "lost," the authors argued, because women would do well to "recapture those functions in which women have demonstrated superior capability . . . the nurturing functions around the home."

In such an atmosphere, role models for working women seeking economic independence were hard to find. Hard-nosed film heroines of the late 1940s like Rosalind Russell and Kate Hepburn had been replaced by variations on a sex symbol like Doris Day and Marilyn Monroe. And what did one find in the emerging medium of TV — the patriarchal message, "Father Knows Best." Perhaps, however, the author of a book on women and film in the 1950s, entitled *On the Verge of Revolt* best caught the dilemma and meaning of the decade: "it was as if the whole period of the 1950s was a front, the topsoil that

provided the seed of rebellion that was germinating below." As Alice Kessler-Harris says, although it may have appeared that women were isolated within an ideology of family which denied their waged labour, there were important contradictions brewing which would eventually break open that isolation, and in the 1960s and 1970s raise questions to which women would demand an answer. Once the majority of women were permanent wage earners, working before and after marriage, they might reject the rationale that their low wages were the product of a "temporary" stay in the work force, and demand an end to job discrimination. Once women's labour became more and more obviously essential to the economy, they would question the denigration of their work and replace the old slogan of "equal pay" with "equal pay for work of equal value." With rising divorce and separation rates and changing family forms, they would begin to question the mythical male breadwinner and demand a living wage for all workers. And soon they would begin to question inequalities within the family, such as the double burden, or demand even wider freedoms, like the right to decide when and if to bear children. These are but some of the important issues raised by trade unionists and feminists in recent years. How much longer before we reach some resolution of them will not be answered by the prophecies of historians, but will be realized by the actions of those struggling for women's equality.

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Women Workers in the Twentieth Century

Joy Parr

IT IS A TWENTIETH-CENTURY truism that the world of work is divided into two spheres, work for pay and unpaid labour. The labour force, that part of the work world in which time spent in productive or even not-so-productive pursuits is remunerated in wages, salaries, or a share of the profits earned, has been populated principally by men. Women have more typically toiled in that part of the world of work where labour is unpaid. Women's work outside the labour force has, of course, been indispensable to the continuation of paid work. Women have carried the members of the labour force in their wombs, and given them birth. They have cared for children growing up into the world of paid work, and for the physical and emotional needs of wage-earning adults. They have budgeted, sewed, cooked, gardened, transformed cash income into goods and services, and have cared for adults who by reason of physical or mental handicap could not enter fully into the world of paid work.

In the early twentieth century the frontier between the world of paid and unpaid work was infrequently crossed. In 1901 only 13 per cent of the labour force was female. Most of these women were young and single, a high percentage in the 15 to 24 age group. In 1931, which is the first year for which these statistics are available, only 10 per cent of the women in the work force were married. Thus, in the early twentieth century women crossed the boundary between paid and unpaid work really only twice in a lifetime, once when they left their family home to work, once when they returned from the world of paid work to marry. Now, or to be precise, the figures which I have are for 1980, 40 per cent of the work force is female and 60 per cent of the female work force is married. Now, 60 per cent of working women cross the boundary between paid and unpaid work twice each day and the truth of that "truism," that men work for wages and women do not, is beginning to break down. Plainly the line dividing the worlds of work was socially made, and subject to change.

The indispensability of unpaid work in support of paid work, and the interdependence of those two worlds are realities with which women, far more than men, have had to deal. Earlier in the century the paid interlude preceded a long unpaid mature life for women. Now the two worlds are experienced for the majority of working women, for the majority of their working lives, not

consecutively but simultaneously. The commonality in these two patterns is that this fundamental, indispensable, enormously satisfying, and endlessly demanding unpaid work — reproducing the labour force and preparing it for paid work — has been named female. This naming is the key to understanding why women have behaved in the labour force so differently from men, and why discrimination in the labour force has so doggedly remained through the 80 years. This is what I want to consider here.

The first jobs which women took when they moved into the paid labour market were the commercial counterparts of the work they had done in the home or on the farm. In 1901, 34 per cent of the female work force was in domestic service and 30 per cent was employed in manufacturing. Women worked mainly in manufacturing of two sorts — food processing (in biscuit factories, confectioneries, and canning and bottling works), and in textiles and garmentmaking. The spinner moved out of the home and into the factory: the garmentworker often stayed at home but was paid piece rates for her sewing work. The only other occupation which figured prominently in early twentieth-century paid female work was teaching. The 15 per cent of women workers who were classified as professionals in 1901 were mostly women instructing children in the elementary grades.

World War I started a substantial change in this pattern, although perhaps not the particular change that readers might be expecting. We usually associate women's war work with manufacturing, partly because of all of those dozens of boxes of archival photographs of women working in shell plants. Women did work in munitions plants but in World War I these were mostly young single women who were already working in manufacturing when the call to arms work came. The women entering the work force during World War I became clerks, secretaries, bookkeepers, and typewriters in the offices of factories, wholesalers, and commerical concerns. Women had begun to replace men in clerical jobs before the war but in the decade from 1911 to 1921, the percentage of paid women workers doing clerical jobs doubled. In 1921, 40 per cent of all clerical workers were female. When the war ended and women munitions workers left the metal trades and went back to the textile plants, the women office workers stayed where they were. The female bank clerks hired during the war stayed on as well. And throughout the century the proportion of women in the labour force engaged in clerical occupations has continued to grow, surpassing first manufacturing, and then the service industries, to become in the 1980s the dominant species of paid women's work.

We can isolate certain characteristics common to women's work in this early period. The first is that women's work tended to be less well paid then men's. Female wages drifted between 55 and 60 per cent of male wages in the first quarter of the twentieth century which is about where they continue to linger today. In the early twentieth century the average level of female wages was below the level of subsistence, reflecting the idea that women were supple-

mentary workers and expected to live at home with their families. Their pay would not, and was not expected to, support an independent life.

The second characteristic common to women's paid work at the beginning of this century was that outside the 15 per cent of women in the professions, women workers tended to come to the labour market with domestically learned skills. In the case of clerks, they came to find jobs with skills learned free in the public school system. These young women were not unskilled but their skills were possessed by many others and they did not have the market power of craftsmen who successfully defended the value of their skills and who maintained control over entry into their trades. Women were thus vulnerable as workers and easily replaced.

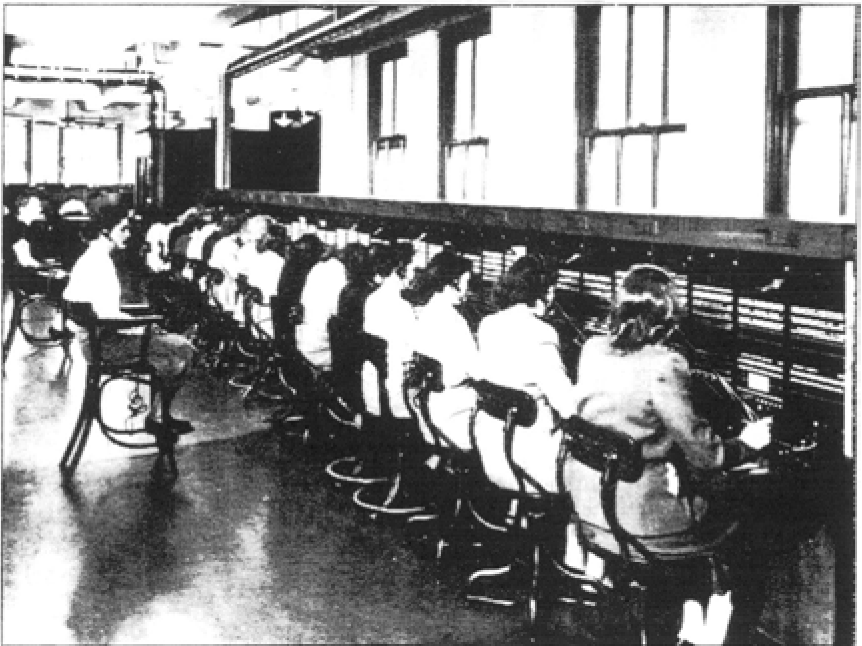
Third, women worked in small shops, shops with too few workers to be covered by the factory acts. Teachers and garment-workers tended to be the single paid employee in a particular work setting. Clerical workers were in a similar sort of situation, a handful of female employees labouring in a concern dominated by male workers doing very different sorts of jobs.

The small scale, then, and the isolation in which many women worked, made female employees difficult to organize, and combined with their lack of marketable skills, reduced the bargaining power of women in the labour force and resulted in low wages. As might be expected, women with dull, poorly-paid, highly regimented jobs in manufacturing, service industries, and domestic service tended to be highly mobile, moving from job to job to achieve at least a little variety. This constant turnover also made women workers difficult to organize, and made organized shops of female workers vulnerable when they were not closed shops.

Fifth, and crucially important, women had no ideological legitimation for being part of the work force. Women workers were freaks. They were workers who needed their pay packets, whose families needed their pay packets. Remember that unskilled male workers' wages did not constitute a family wage in Canada until the 1920s. But the dispute over women's wage levels was not merely one between female workers and their employers. The fathers and husbands of women wage earners believed what those propertied women who were called upon to advise governments and unions in the matter also believed, that paid female workers had no valid reason for being, and worse, that their participation in wage work imperilled the children and the family life of the nation. So women were not only highly mobile between jobs in this period, they were also birds of passage in paid work. They left the work force when they married and they never returned. In 1921, only one in five women age 25 to 34 was engaged in paid work and only one in six in the group over 35. To get a notion of the relative magnitude of those figures: in 1978, 60 per cent of 25- to 34-year olds and 48 per cent of 35- to 64-year-olds were in the labour force.

The pattern of married women leaving paid work was formed by a combination of choice and compulsion. On the compulsion end of things we think most

strikingly of the case of women teachers, who were required to leave their profession when they married. In many jurisdictions teachers who remained single at age 30 were also required to resign. The choice to leave paid work was not so much a decision between equally tenable options as the acknowledgement, and acceptance, of a belief insistently inculcated by a patriarchal culture — that women did harm to themselves and the men with whom they competed when they worked for wages. The predicament of women workers in this period, and of male unionists dealing with women as co-workers, is interestingly illustrated in the example that I want to dwell upon for a few moments, which I draw from a fine book by Elaine Bernard called *The Long Distance Feeling*, a history of telephone workers in British Columbia.



"Ma Bell's Daughters."

By 1900 most telephone workers in Canada were female, valued for their quickness, agility, politeness, and the low wages for which they were willing to work. For women, in comparison with other paid work, telephone jobs had the advantages of being clean, relatively interesting, and prestigious. The public was fascinated by the technology operators used, and women at the switchboard were seen as doing socially important work. Legion were tales of their quick thinking saving people in emergencies. Like many women workers of the time,

women operators were outnumbered by men in their work place but by men whose conditions of work were quite different from their own. Male telephone employees were typical union members of the time — linesmen and cable splicers defined in the market as skilled craftsmen, men whose bargaining power derived from their skills, and who saw unskilled workers and women (that is, low-waged workers), as a threat to the security of their livelihood and their control over their work. These British Columbia men were members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. In 1902 women operators formed themselves into an auxiliary of the IBEW. Their work was becoming more concentrated in large rooms of switchboards, more regimented, and more hierarchical. They came to see a union as an attractive way for them to negotiate working conditions, wages, and the rights of labour, as it was for their male colleagues.

In September 1902 the IBEW won union recognition and in November 1902 both the operators and the linesmen and cable splicers went out on strike for higher wages. That strike paralyzed the city, mainly because without the operators there was no one to mind the boards. The strike brought quick business and public sympathy. The public knew the operators were poorly paid and their participation in the strike made the strike more palatable, even to the business community. The strike was quickly settled with pay raises and a closed shop as the principal gains. But the operators' position quickly eroded after this first success. Organized women workers were so rare that the female telephone workers felt isolated within the labour movement, a movement which saw their status as organized workers as a product of awkward and unavoidable necessity. Rapid turnover among operators deprived the group of continuity and experienced leadership. No one in the operators' group had the long-term commitment to work as an operator or the experience with the union movement to sustain an educational programme among members of the auxiliary. As a result, the closed shop among the operators fell away through neglect. Women were allowed to work for years at the boards for B.C. Tel without being forced to join the union. At the same time, the closed shop was zealously guarded according to long traditions among unionized male workers.

Early in 1906, B.C. Telephone capitalized upon this situation and after preparing strikebreakers to use the switchboards, offered the operators yellow dog contracts. (The stipulation that each must either resign from the union or be fired.) The threat brought women back to the union and in February the operators struck and the craftsmen went out with them. This time, however, the operators were soon and efficiently replaced, and although there were some instances of cable slashing, the system continued to function reasonably well. Ten months passed and in November the skilled male workers in frustration went back to work. They saw a strike in support of easily replaced workers as unwinnable.

The operators auxiliary was broken. Not, I should say, broken forever. The

auxiliary was reorganized during World War I although this time the craftsworkers were more careful and kept the operators outside of the closed-shop agreement. But those members of the operators' auxiliary were the last to return from the 1919 Vancouver sympathy strike for the Winnipeg General Strike. In the absence of market power, they were still among the most militant of Vancouver's workers.

To move along into the century, the inter-war years saw important changes in women's unpaid work. Families became smaller, and the years spent in child rearing needed to be less long. There were electric and gas stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines available for purchase. Probably more influential then these big ticket items were the canned foods, the factory-baked bread, and factory-sewn clothes which reduced the labour demands on women in the home. And the larger institutional presence in the inter-war years reduced the home labour demands for the care of dependent adults. There is, however, an accompanying startling rise in the expectations about the quality and intensity with which unpaid work was to be pursued. Preceding but especially in the wake of World War I, mothers came to be seen as performing an important national as well as familial responsibility. Mothers were offered professional advice from the federally-funded committee on Child Welfare and from academic authorities such as the University of Toronto's, Dr. William Blatz. Unpaid home workers were now expected to be scientific managers, and rational and informed consumers. So in the inter-war years, there was only the smallest increase in female labour participation.

The sluggish and then depressed economy of those decades meant that there were few opportunities in the world of paid work for newcomers, and that male unionists more strongly opposed women as competitors with male heads of households in the waged labour force. The balance in women's paid work continued to shift away from domestic service and manufacturing towards the service industries and, particularly, into clerical work. The new industrial unions seeking to organize unskilled workers in mass production industries reached women as well as men. The most important of these for women were the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Industrial Union of Needle Trades, and the United Textile Workers of Canada. In the 1930s, unskilled working women, so long as they were working in sufficiently large plants to make organization feasible, could be organized by unions which believed that they had the right to be organized. The lesson of the 1930s was that women would recognize and exert collective strength, bargain, and if need be, strike, for better conditions and pay. Unfortunately in 1931, 1934, and 1937, the years in which these women were driven to strike, there were not many gains to be made or when made, many chances for these to be consolidated. The war helped in this respect. The number of women in the work force grew by 69 per cent between 1939 and 1944. Union membership also grew, and union organizers took heart from order-in-council PC 1003, which in

1944 made recognition of a union with a majority of the workers' support compulsory.

Toronto high school teachers on strike in the winter of 1975-76.

Married women were drawn into the work force by offers of daycare facilities and tax breaks. The tax break was that a man was able to claim his wife's marriage exemption no matter how much she earned for the duration of the war. Neither the daycare centres nor the unrestricted marriage exemption outlasted the conflict. Thereafter married women returned to unpaid work. Only 11 per cent of married women were in the work force in 1951, about the

same portion that were in the work force in 1931. But some major actors in the union movement left the war firmly committed to try and organize those legions of women in clerical, retail, and service occupations who were still earning less than 60 per cent of the average male wage. The first attempts were not always successful, certainly the best known was not. Between 1948 and 1951 a quarter of a million dollars and three years of very hard, cold, frustrating work was spent trying to organize the shops, retail outlets, and manufactories of the Timothy Eaton Company in Toronto. This was a drive which, it was hoped, would establish a precedent, bringing the main stream of the female work force into unions.

Eaton's by its nature had many departments with workers labouring under very different terms of employment — a high turnover, a work force without union experience — all were fearful of a powerful employer. That the Eaton drive was unsuccessful is not to say that women retail workers could not be organized. We have after all at about the same period, 1951, the example of Dupuis Frères, a department store in Montreal which employed elderly widows, and handicapped people earning even less than the other department store workers in Montreal. That group, the handicapped, the elderly, the widows, went out on strike in May 1951. Dupuis felt confident that they could get along without them and opened the doors to their department store, intending to function on a self-service basis. But inventory shrinkage discouraged them from this practice and within three months the strike was settled and those Dupuis workers won a pay raise, a 40-hour week, paid holidays, and union security. The Eaton's drive was not the thin edge of the wedge for women workers. The change in the organization of women's paid work occurred some time later. Of course, in the public sector the key date was 1967, the year in which collective bargaining was introduced into the Federal Civil Service.

In the last eighty years of women's work, then, there have been some changes. In the decade after 1967, female union membership more than doubled. In 1976, 43 per cent of male workers belonged to unions, and 27 per cent of female paid workers were unionized. However, the rate of growth among female unionists was four times as great in the late 1970s as among males. The largest part of this recruitment has been among public sector workers so that two-thirds of women unionists belong to Canadian unions and employee organizations, national bodies which have organized in the public sector. This is exactly the reverse of the pattern for men. Two-thirds of male unionists belong to international unions. Thus, there is now a group of Canadian unions successfully organizing women in the parts of the work force where they are most numerous, the clerical, retail, and service sectors.

The next change, over the last eighty years has been that young, single women no longer dominate the female labour force. The growth of the female labour force has been among married women half of whom are now engaged in paid work, and among women between the ages of 24 and 55. Sixty per cent of

the female work force now is married. The causes for this change in the nature of female labour force participation and its dimensions are many. Two that are particularly important are an increased need for married women to work in order to retain real family income in the face of the erosion of real wages in recent decades. We can see that by looking at participation rates by level of spousal income. The highest participation rates are among women whose husbands earn the least. The other factor is an increased expectation of career fullfillment which seems to be linked to higher educational attainment among women. The highest labour force participation rates for women according to educational attainment are among those women with the highest level of schooling.

With all these important changes — more married women working, working more of their lifetimes, more likelihood of having union protection — with all of this, some things, some disturbing things, in the twin worlds of women's work, have remained the same. In 1978, women who worked the whole year earned an average of 58 per cent of men's earnings. Women remain confined to a narrow range of occupations — occupations which are job ghettos, which pay less than occupations dominated by men, and from which there are no promotion ladders leading to better jobs. Women are still working in the blind alleys made for them in the time when they were expected, and themselves expected, to leave the paid labour force in their mid-20s. Unpaid work in the home is, however, still principally women's work. This work is done in addition to, rather than instead of, paid work, and here we have a vicious circle.

So long as men earn more than women, it is more reasonable for a couple, no matter what their beliefs about the matter may be, to decide that the woman rather than the man should take time from paid work to care for sick children, to wait for the repair person, to do all those jobs which are necessary and likely to interfere with paid work. Yet so long as this is the case, women are likely to gain less job experience, to be less regular in attendance at work, to be less punctual, to be more likely to voluntarily quit or leave the labour market, and to deliberately set out to have only a part-time job. Therefore, employers are less likely to see extensive job training or job upgrading for female employees as in the firm's best interest. For the same reason — conflict with the demanding regime of unpaid work — women are less likely to assume union office, to take on a third "job" in addition to their double day, and so they are less likely to be able to persuade the leadership of a union to place priority on women's issues — maternity, family illness leave, or equal pay for work of equal value. So that second world of work still looms as vexing, satisfying, inextricable from paid work and as female as it was at the century's beginning.

The problem here is not that women are less collectively-minded, or more deferential, or less militant, or less skilled — but that the culture of which we, and our mothers and grandmothers have been a part these past eighty years, has insisted that men's work and women's work must be different and that men's

work must be better paid. This is, of course, an unreasonable, inequitable, and wasteful proposition, and subject to change.

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Gompers In Canada Revisited

Robert H. Babcock

YOUNG PEOPLE TEND TO mark their recollections by summer romances, and a few years ago a Hollywood producer made a film called *The Summer of '42*. It was based upon the old story of a teenage boy who discovers the joys of love with an older woman, in this case one whose boyfriend had gone away to fight the Germans. Although the film presented some hilarious moments, it was not a memorable cinematic experience, and I mention it only to borrow its title. Where were you — not in the summer of 1942, certainly — but in the summer of *1968?*

In the United States that summer, President Lyndon Johnson was staying up half the night to direct the bombing of Hanoi while hundreds of thousands of American troops remained mired in the rice paddies of South Vietnam. Black Americans were rioting in the streets of several American cities during that long, hot summer, demanding redress of their longstanding grievances. At the Democratic Party convention in Chicago, helmeted police bloodied youthful anti-war protestors before batteries of television cameras. In the summer of 1968 Pierre Trudeau basked in the warmth of his first electoral victory, amid worries that Quebec might secede from Confederation.

In the summer of 1968 I was working in the archives of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in Washington, D.C. I had gone to that swelteringly hot city to explore the origins of the Canadian labour movement in various trade union sources. During forays to the Library of Congress and to the Public Archives of Canada that summer, I accumulated nearly enough material to write a doctoral thesis and later a book arguing that American trade unions had taken control of the Canadian labour movement at the turn of the century with important consequences for succeeding generations of Canadians. "The American Federation of Labor," I asserted,

> reached into Canada alongside employers who were constructing branch plants there: Both corporations *and* labour unions began to extend their bureaucratic and decision-making structures beyond the American environment which had originally shaped and oriented them. In short order the Canadian labour movement was rationalized into a segment of the American craft-union empire. . . . This book argues that Samuel Gompers shared the assumptions of American expansionists and constructed a durable conti-

nental trade-union empire before the First World War. But as his power waxed throughout North America, his sensitivity correspondingly waned to uniquely Canadian circumstances. Gompers opposed Canadian legislation deemed hostile to American interests and waged war upon socialists and dual unions in Canada in order to monopolize trade unionism throughout North America. The French factor in Quebec, the strong Canadian tradition of positive government, and the desire of many Canadian unionists to build a social reform movement were filtered out or warped by a bureaucratic structure and system of values which had arisen from the experience of Gompers and the AFL solely in the United States.

Today, fifteen years after *Gompers in Canada* was conceived, workers and scholars are still debating the consequences of Canada's trade union ties with the United States.

This paper explains how my argument emerged from a mixture of personal and cultural influences. I am a little reluctant to write so directly about myself, but I am spurred on by the conviction that "all . . . history is, in a sense, a form of autobiography and an essay in self-knowledge." Autobiographical statements by historians can be useful to the student striving to understand the origins of a particular interpretation of past events. Besides examining the personal and intellectual contexts in which *Gompers in Canada* was written, this paper assesses responses from the community of scholars to the book's arguments and evidence. While new methods and historiographical paradigms have rapidly dated my methods and perspective, historians have found my evidence, if not all my arguments, to be useful. Some recent work in American history lends credence to a number of points I argued, but if I were to rewrite the book today I would broaden its context to take into account a number of the problems deemed relevant to working-class history by contemporary historians.

Permit me to discuss first some of the personal experiences which I think have shaped my book. First of all, can you imagine what it means to be a child of the thirties in America? At the most elementary level, one learned to love or hate President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Since my family aspired to petit-bourgeois status, they rejected most of FDR's New Deal programmes. When I grew up and went off to college — the first person in my family to do so — I became a self-conscious intellectual who openly sympathized with the working classes. I quickly cast aside my family's conservative bent and embraced the politics of the democratic left. My views were strengthened by several summers of work in a camera factory in Rochester, New York, where I was able to experience at first hand the impact of industrial capitalism upon men and women. In conversations with other workers as I swept the floors around their benches, I learned about their hopes, ambitions, and frustrations. Although the factory where I worked has long since vanished, images from it are indelibly printed on my memory and indirectly found their way into my book.

The second personal experience occurred some years later when I began to

explore the mysteries of Canadian history and found myself spending spare hours at the New York State Library in Albany, a treasure-trove of Canadiana, thanks in part to the dedicated efforts of Dr. Edmund O'Callaghan, one of Louis-Joseph Papineau's lieutenants. My reading focused upon the staples theories of Harold Innis, and especially on the resultant similarities and differences between the Canadian and American patterns of historical development. Finally I decided to take up full-time studies in order to explore one of these problems.

I arrived at Duke University with a strong determination to write a thesis on an aspect of Canadian-American relations that would be broadly comparative in tone. My list of potential problems included a study of Canadian and American policies towards native peoples, and a study of the relationship between the American and Canadian labour movements. Two factors led me to choose the second alternative: one was those images from my work in the camera factory, and the other was John Crispo's book, *International Unionism: A Study in Canadian-American Relations*, published in 1967. Crispo, an industrial relations expert, assessed the strengths and weaknesses of international unionism in mid-twentieth-century North America after conducting a series of interviews with trade unionists on both sides of the border. I set out to explore the nineteenth-century origins of these contacts. I hoped, in other words, to put Crispo's book into an historical context.

At the time that I launched this project in the mid-1960s, Canadian-American relations appeared to be worsening. Almost daily the newspapers told me about Canada's growing fears of American global imperialism. Canadians had begun to worry about the baneful consequences of their branch-plant economy. I bought and believed the Watkins and Gray Reports; I agreed with Kari Levitt that Canadians had silently surrendered their birthright to the Americans. At the same time I found the idea of continentalism and the concept of an "informal" American empire to be useful devices for explaining the pattern of American dominance. William Appleman Williams in particular challenged previous assertions that the United States had not been an expansionist nation *comme les autres* because it had not acquired a large colonial empire and bureaucracy. Instead he argued that American corporations had exerted informal control over people and governments in central and South America. Perhaps trade unions had done the same. I knew that American trade union officials occasionally failed to recognize important differences facing Canadian workers. What were those differences? How had American trade unions responded to them? What were the historical consequences of international unionism for Canadians?

At the time I began to ask myself these questions, North American labour history was still in the grip of traditional methods and approaches. Historians had not yet digested the perspective of E.P. Thompson in his seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), or those methods developed

by French historians who founded the *Annales*. Although Herbert Gutman had published a number of articles in the United States which had used communities rather than trade unions as a focus for examining working-class experience, most historians still relied upon the methods of the institutional economists. In the Cold War context of the 1950s and 1960s when the American historical experience seemed so different from that of other societies, the theories of John R. Commons and Selig Perlman still made "sense." Job-consciousness rather than class-consciousness had opened the door to upward mobility for workers, and had produced a North American middle-class consensus. The economists and historians writing labour history still accepted traditional views about the correlation between product and labour markets, in the presumed identity between trade union and working-class history, and about the eventual absorption of workers' movements by an American political consensus. Philip Foner's diatribes were considered a Marxist exception which merely proved the Perlman "rule." In Canada, Harold Logan applied the same Commons/Perlman paradigm to Canadian trade union history, while Charles Lipton published a briefer Canadian equivalent of Foner's Marxist study.

In the 1960s, most historians of the North American working classes were still obsessed by the same questions which had bedeviled Commons and Perlman. Why had North American workers been less visibly class-conscious than European workers? Why had North American politics been so hostile to left-wing parties? Drawing upon the theories of the Harvard scholar Louis Hartz, historians of the consensus school stressed those ways in which a relatively homogeneous American society had differed from the more hierarchical European social structure. One of Hartz's students, Gad Horowitz, used his mentor's concepts to account for the differences between the political cultures of Canada and the United States. A more conservative Canadian society rooted in Loyalist beliefs, he reasoned, had made possible a radical critique of community which had found twentieth-century form in the CCF and NDP. Americans, on the other hand, still remained confined to a narrow spectrum of Lockean beliefs sanctifying individualism and private property rights.

These notions swirled about in my head as I began to explore the nineteenth-century connections between American and Canadian labour organizations. I learned that Canadian workers had sometimes attended American trade union conventions, and that they had clashed occasionally with Americans over political questions. But these public records obscured as much as they revealed about the motives and manoeuvres of individual labour leaders, and I began to look for records which might reveal private thoughts and actions. During the winter of 1967-8 I journeyed to Washington, D.C., to examine the correspondence of Samuel Gompers, a founder and long-time president of the American Federation of Labor, for information on the "Canadian connection."

Between 1883 and 1914 Samuel Gompers dictated approximately 150,000

letters to people all over North America and Europe. I discovered that many of them had been sent to Canadians who had raised questions or problems for Gompers. Fortunately, the AFL leader invariably summarized the letters he was answering; both the queries and Gompers' responses revealed much about Canadian workers and their relationship to American trade unions at the turn of the century. The letters were filed chronologically, 1,000 per volume, and indexed alphabetically according to the correspondents' names. In order to extract the data relating to Canadians, I set out to compile a roster of Canadian trade union executives, organizers, and leaders who might have written to Gompers, and checked for these names in each volume. (Incidentally, I also checked every French-sounding name.)

During the summer of 1968 I returned to the American capital to finish my search through the Gompers letters and to examine whatever might be found at AFL-CIO headquarters. It was an exciting and scary time to be working in Washington. Police regularly patrolled the streets in teams, accompanied by ferocious-looking dogs; curfews kept everyone indoors even on the hottest nights. Thousands of blacks had marched to Washington to demand economic and political justice and had erected a "Poor Peoples' City" in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. One day at the Library of Congress, these exciting events overshadowed everyone's dedication to the past. A procession of blacks rode beneath the Library of Congress windows in mule-driven wagons, drawing the historians away from their piles of documents to witness another kind of history in the making.

My own research into the AFL's relations with Canadian trade unionists hit a snag when I discovered that Samuel Gompers had given up day-to-day supervision of the organization's affairs in 1903. I walked over to the AFL-CIO building, where the archivist informed me that there was virtually nothing about Canada in his collection. Discouraged, I chased one false lead after another. Working conditions for researchers seemed purposefully designed to dissuade anyone from prying deeply into the AFL-CIO's past. All records were kept in the attic or the basement, the only places in the building without air conditioning. While temperatures soared to nearly 100 degrees F., I sat in an uncomfortable clerk's high chair, straddling a filing cabinet which supported the AFL-CIO's one antique microfilm reader. Stripped to the waist and dripping with perspiration, I slowly cranked the old, blurred 8mm film that contained reams of letters, scanning them all for references to Canada. One day, still sweaty and tired from working in such surroundings, I tarried in the archivist's office to ask a chance question about the whereabouts of the AFL secretary-treasurer's letters. "Oh, they're in the basement," he replied, adding, "You need not waste your time looking at them." He had previously leafed through the first six years of Frank Morrison's letterbooks, covering 1897 to 1903, and had found "nothing" of interest. Wearying of this chore, he had thrown the volumes out, but the remaining 300,000 letters for the period from 1903 to

1914 were still gathering dust downstairs. Although the basement storeroom was nearly as uncomforable as the attic, I made myself a temporary desk of packing crates and spent several fruitful weeks among these letters, interrupted occasionally by a secretary who came looking for supplies, and wondered what I could be doing with all those dusty old volumes. I soon discovered that Frank Morrison had taken over day-to-day operations of the AFL at just that point when Gompers had relinquished them in order to deal with new threats from the business world.

Later, my assessment of the impact of American international unions in Canada was fleshed out from a variety of materials found at the Public Archives of Canada, including the papers of Laurier, Borden, and Mackenzie King. In sharp contrast to working conditions in Washington, those at the Public Archives of Canada seemed extraordinarily quiet and comfortable, befitting a "peaceable kingdom." My thesis on the AFL in Canada during the years from 1896 to 1908 was accepted and this manuscript was subsequently revised and extended to 1914 in *Gompers in Canada, a Study in American Continentalism Before the First World War,* published by the University of Toronto in 1974. The book maintained that the AFL took over the Canadian labour movement in 1902 at Berlin (later Kitchener), Ontario, when the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC) voted to expel delegates, mostly from Quebec, who were members of organizations unaffiliated with the AFL. I argued that while Canadian workers undoubtedly benefitted from access to international union strike funds and insurance benefits, they were forced in return to accept the extension of AFL policies into Canadian workplaces and union halls. The TLC was reduced to the equivalent of a state federation of labour and remained financially dependent on American trade unions. For example, Gompers and his associates subsequently questioned the need for a French-speaking organizer in Quebec until confessional unions had appeared on the scene to challenge international unionism in that province. Jurisdictional struggles between American crafts were extended into Canada, industrial unionism was curbed, and Canadian socialists within the labour movement were denounced. While the AFL spent considerable money to organize Canadian workers into international unions, it still made a "profit" of over $15,000 between 1896 and 1914 on its Canadian work.

Reviewers without any interest in labour history generally ignored these arguments and found the book, as *Quill & Quire* put it, "well-documented, well-researched, and well-written." But more studious critics thought that I had pushed some of my evidence too far. At the Trades and Labor Congress convention at Berlin, Ontario in 1902, delegates from Canadian national unions representing nearly 2,300 mostly Québécois workers in Knights of Labor assemblies had been expelled, and the TLC subsequently had aligned the Canadian labour movement with AFL principles. I suggested that this chain of events was not accidental but may well have been set in motion at AFL head-

quarters in Washington, basing my assertion upon admittedly circumstantial evidence. TLC secretary P.M. Draper had been invited to an AFL Executive Council session a few months before the Berlin events to discuss matters of "utmost importance." At the time, Gompers clearly had his mind on the problems posed by dual unionism in North America, and the outgoing president of the TLC later remarked upon the extent to which the international unions had orchestrated the Berlin decisions. While Michael Piva agreed that 1902 had been a turning point for the Canadian trade union movement, he questioned whether Gompers had had anything to do with it and said I was blind to the fact that many Canadian workers had "voluntarily worked for the AFL." Others such as Terry Copp and Jacques Rouillard thought that conflicts between two city central labour organizations in Montreal, rather than AFL hegemony, had provoked the Berlin decisions. Copp qualified his criticism on this point by agreeing with me that AFL leaders had exhibited continentalist ambitions. On the other hand, one American critic sided openly with Gompers and concluded that AFL expansion into Canada had been a "logical outcome" rather than an "imperialist" conquest.

Some reviewers not only doubted that Gompers had engineered the Berlin decisions, but they also questioned the significance placed on those decisions. Jacques Rouillard thought that I had misconstrued the rise of confessional unionism in Quebec by basing it on cultural rather than socio-religious factors, and linking it to the Berlin decisions. Irving Abella, the author of a book on the CIO in Canada, still thought that 1937 loomed larger than 1902 in the history of the Canadian labour movement. Because of the small fraction of the Canadian working class represented at Berlin, Desmond Morton reasoned that the decisions made there must have been less than momentous. Furthermore, aligning the TLC with the AFL made sense, he said, "to sensible, conscientious, knowledgeable Canadian unions at the time, and they may well be as defensible (or as unavoidable) today." Greg Kealey went considerably further and suggested that the book as a whole may have overemphasized the role of the AFL in the struggles of turn-of-the-century Canadian workers. The big fight, he thought, was between socialists and pure and simple trade unionists rather than between Americans and Canadians. "Blaming Samuel Gompers for all the inadequacies of the Canadian labour movement," he concluded, "is unfortunately only another way of avoiding hard questions about the behaviour of the Canadian working classes." Kealey points to the basic cleavage among those who have commented upon my book. Those working from a nationalist perspective agreed with Abella that I had provided a lucid and provocative indictment of the role of the AFL in Canada. Indeed, Paul Craven thought my charges so thoroughly proven that he considered the book to be "probably the most significant work . . . yet published" in Canadian history. Kenneth McNaught agreed with me that both socialism and industrial unionism were thwarted in Canada by the American connection. But others like Piva and Kealey argued

from class-based perspectives that I had obscured the fundamental conflict being waged on both sides of the Canadian-American border between labour and monopoly capital. Which factor, then — class or nationality — was most important to Canadian workers at the turn of the century?

This historiographical shift from a national perspective to class analysis marks the most significant change in Canadian labour history since *Gompers in Canada* was published. Note, for example, that virtually every major work in the field published before 1975 contains the words "Canada" or "Canadian" in the title: Logan's *Trade Unions in Canada* (1948); Jamieson's *Industrial Relations in Canada* (1957); Lipton's *Trade-Union Movement of Canada* (1966); Martin Robin's *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour* (1968); Gad Horwitz's *Canadian Labour in Politics* (1968); Abella's *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (1973), and my own book in 1974.

Over the past decade, historians of social and working-class history have exploited new demographic evidence, applied new concepts derived from the social sciences, and proceeded to reconstruct the historical experience of large groups of workers rather than just trade unionists. By focusing their efforts upon single communities rather than whole nations, they have been able to reconstruct the whole economy and society in which workers participated. As a result they have been able to show how the many facets of a worker's life — in the shop, the union hall, at home, in lodge meetings, and on the playing fields — were interrelated. Trade union activities have been reinterpreted as part of a larger, autonomous working-class culture that helped to unite and galvanize workers during strikes. On occasion the techniques of the new social history have been blended with a Marxist analysis of the stages of industrial capitalism in sophisticated ways that achieve new levels of understanding of the working-class experience. Most of the Canadian social and working-class history written since 1975 is characterized by a recognition of the importance of class consciousness and class conflicts, by the exploration of linkages between changes at the workplace and responses by labour on the picket line, in the street, or at the voting booth, and by a new attention to the complex interplay between class, gender, and ethnicity. Not only do book titles such as Michael Katz's *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (1975), Bryan Palmer's *A Culture in Conflict* (1979), and Kealey's *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism* (1980) reflect the new techniques and paradigms, but the fifteen volumes of the journal *Labour/Le Travail*, published since 1976 by the Committee on Canadian Labour History, reveal the extent to which city, region, and industry have replaced the nation or the strike as the basic unit of analysis.

As a result of this historiographic shift, the limitations of the older institutional approach to labour history have been thrown into sharp relief. Historians now recognize that trade unions attracted only a small fraction of the working classes and were not necessarily representative of the larger mass. More importantly, in their effort to write "total" history, historians have revealed the

extent to which the institutional approach lacks important explanatory contexts. Changing technologies, changes in business structure, the presence or absence of competition in a particular segment of the economy, and the nature of government-business relations are all recognized today as important themes which bear upon working-class experience.

Were I to rewrite *Gompers in Canada* I would certainly look much more deeply into the origins of the branch-plant economy in Canada (a subject, incidentally, which has not yet been thoroughly examined). I wonder, for example, if American branch plants in Canada served as conduits for F.W. Taylor's scientific management. I would delve more deeply into the merger movement in American business at the end of the nineteenth century, and examine more closely Gompers' fear of trusts. I would certainly make a greater effort to identify rank-and-file attitudes and opinions within the Canadian working classes than I did fifteen years ago. Today I am convinced that the fate of, say, the average trolley car conductor in Canada at the turn of the century was shaped as much by Canadian streetcar industry executives and politicians as by Samuel Gompers and his good friend, W.D. Mahon of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees. In July of 1911, for instance, Canadian streetcar industry executives gathered at the behest of the Board of Railway Commissioners on the veranda of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in Toronto. They met to draft new work rules for motormen and conductors across Canada. After this meeting trolleymen were forbidden to talk with each other while the car was in motion, leave it without permission, or go to the bathroom in any hotel having a bar! As you can readily see, then, I have been persuaded that the forty-ninth parallel was less significant than I had originally believed for the vast majority of Canadian workers.

While conceding that I overemphasized the nationalist aspects of working-class experience, I would like to make three points in my defence. First of all, much of the data in my book has blended well with the research of later authors. Ross McCormack's study of working-class radicalism in the Canadian west and Bryan Palmer's work on Hamilton both make use of my evidence in interesting and corroborative ways. Carlos Schwantes showed the reverse side of my account of Gompers' war against dual unionism when he chronicled the struggle by trade unionists in the Pacific northwest to prevent AFL hegemony. Paul Craven's investigation of the rise of Canadian industrial relations policy leans heavily upon my book to explain the origins of those exogenous constraints upon the Canadian labour movement at the turn of the century.

Secondly, those who have presented the most uncompromisingly class-based analyses of Canadian trade unions sometimes refuse to recognize those bureaucratic imperatives which absorbed many trade union leaders. I think this is one of the reasons why the question of the American craft unions' role in the Berlin decisions remains so controversial a point in my interpretation. Did American labour leaders shape these decisions, or were they made solely in

Canada by Canadians sharing a fundamental identity of interest with American workers? Recently, Mark Erlich has presented new evidence to show that the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, one of the most important AFL affiliates at the turn of the century, experienced an important bureaucratic change that coincided with the Berlin decisions. Two new trade union leaders, Frank Duffy and William Huber, conspired to force the resignation of carpenters' union founder Peter McGuire, a long-time socialist. Scrapping McGuire's vision of working-class solidarity across craft lines, Duffy and Huber waged war on smaller and weaker unions and emphasized the shared values of employers and employees. The triumph of Duffy and Huber in 1902, Erlich concludes, was a watershed in American building trades unionism because "Socialist possibilities were foreclosed." As I pointed out in my book, Duffy was one of those activists on the AFL Executive Council who took the most interest in the Trades and Labor Congress in 1902 and who was the most suspicious of its loyalty to the AFL in later years.

Lastly, the thesis on American continentalism has received new support by an historian seeking to explain the foreign policy of the Taft administration. By 1910, Robert Hannigan argues, American policymakers

> had come to the conclusion that an integrated North American economic order, organized around the needs of the American industrial system, would be little short of critical to the future prosperity of American development into a core i.e., metropolitan state, to guarantee for the American economy a cheap and continuous supply of Canadian natural products, and to secure for American firms the Canadian market for industrial goods.

Thus it would appear that Gompers was not alone: American politicians as well as many business people and labour leaders sought to rationalize the North American economy at the turn of the century by integrating Canadian factories, resources, markets, and trade unions into a grand American design. By and large, they and their successors seem to have been successful.

It is trite but true that history and historians are both children of their times. Certainly *Gompers in Canada* reflected many of the ideas and assumptions of the 1960s. It was written by a political liberal, an American, who was deeply troubled (and remains so) by the general direction of American foreign policy since 1945. It was written by a former factory worker and later a student of Canadian history, politics, and culture, who agreed with Canadian nationalists that the Americans were taking over Canada not with troops but with branch plants. American trade unions seemed to be a variant of the branch plants which had crossed the border at the turn of the century. Drawing upon the then-current theories of institutional economists and on voluminous evidence in the letters of Samuel Gompers and Frank Morrison, I wrote a book which argued that the AFL had captured the Canadian labour movement in 1902 with important, and largely negative, consequences for Canadians. Although historians of Canadian labour have adopted new methods and paradigms that chal-

lenge the nationalist perspective in my book, they have accepted most of my evidence and some if not all the conclusions I put forward in 1974. Alas — some books age more quickly than others!

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IWW strikers against Canadian Northern Railway, Yale District, c.1912.

Wobblies and Blanketstiffs:

The Constituency of the IWW in Western Canada

A. Ross McCormack

IN WESTERN CANADA, perhaps more so than in the United States, the typical worker organized by the Industrial Workers of the World conformed to the stock wobbly of romantic mythology. He — the IWW's Canadian membership was overwhelmingly male — was an unskilled, foreign-born, migrant worker. These men called themselves blanketstiffs because they tramped from job to job carrying their possessions rolled in blankets on their backs. At the height of the Canadian economic boom in the years immediately preceding 1914, there were about 50,000 blanketstiffs, a significant component of the region's labour force. They were essential to burgeoning labour-intensive industries, especially in the construction and resource sectors: capital invested in railway plants and equipment quadrupled in the decade after 1906; British Columbia's lumber production doubled between 1908 and 1911; and the output of Alberta's coal mines increased by a phenomenal 1,800 per cent in the fifteen years before 1912. The peak of IWW strength in Canada coincided with the peak of the boom. The relationship seems straightforward; wobbly propaganda appealed to workers imported to supply the expanding capitalist labour market. But the appeal was incomplete and ephemeral. To understand the process it is necessary to consider the nature of the work experience, the extent of repression, and in addition, the ethnic composition of the IWW's constituency. Focusing on railway construction workers, this will be a preliminary inquiry into these issues.

During the nineteenth century, railway building and other low-status occupations had been filled first by Irish navvies and then by Chinese coolies, and an immigration policy was formulated to insure a regular supply of such labour. But the end of Irish migration and a political climate which precluded importing of large numbers of Chinese interrupted these sources of supply at the very time that Canada's booming economy most needed workers. Because the state was committed to the rapid expansion of the national economy, the federal government developed new immigration policies to supply labour-intensive industries with a cheap and stable work force. The labour

market in which low-status, unskilled immigrants worked was continental in scope and seasonal in duration. Within what a B.C. wobbly called the "migratory workshop," stiffs tramped westward and eastward across the country, and often across the forty-ninth parallel, felling trees, harvesting wheat, mucking ore, and driving spikes.

At the beginning of the boom, British workers, mainly Welsh, were employed in the CPR's Crow's Nest Pass line when construction began in 1897, but their vociferous and violent reaction to conditions alarmed railway executives and contractors. Consequently, company officials became skeptical about the suitability of such workers for the rougher jobs on the grade. The president of the CPR informed the immigration branch that it was inadvisable to recruit workers from the U.K. "who come here expecting to get high wages, a feather bed and a bath tub."

Eastern and southern Europe became the principal source of unskilled workers. Immigrants from Russia, the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and southern Italy were recruited because railway executives and contractors perceived these men as "obedient and industrious" and therefore well-suited to the heavy work on the grade. Immigration officials advocated the recruitment of Slavs. Not only were they considered racially superior to Mediterranean people, but Ukrainians and other eastern Europeans were essentially peasants who accepted waged labour merely as a means of taking up land. In fact seasonal work on the railway or in logging camps to supplement income and accumulate capital became a conventional part of the experience of Ukrainian pioneers in the western Park Belt.

Employers did not, however, share the bureaucrats' preference for Slavs. The manner in which this conflict was resolved is instructive since it demonstrates the federal government's determination to serve corporate interests. Precisely because Italians did not homestead but remained more or less permanently in the unskilled labour market, contractors and railways preferred immigrants from the region south of Naples. A CPR employment agent explained the advantages of a reliable labour supply: "if we have, the Italians . . . there is no danger of their jumping their jobs [at harvest time] and leaving us in the lurch." In addition, because of their mobility, Italians did not become integrated into Anglo-Canadian society and thus maintained a substantially higher degree of cultural integrity which insulated them from trade unions, newspapers, and other political institutions. "They are the strength of the employer and the weakness of the union," explained an experienced employer, "how to head off a strike of muckers or laborers for higher wages without the help of Italian labour . . . I do not know." To meet corporate demands, politicians overrode the objections of their permanent officials and authorized substantial Italian immigration.

After 1905, when railway construction got fully underway, thousands of unskilled Slavic and Italian workers entered the country. Southern and eastern

Europeans constituted 30 per cent of the immigrants to Canada in 1907 and nearly 50 per cent in 1913. At the height of the railway construction boom, approximately 75 per cent of Ukrainians entering the country were adult males. As a result of this process, the bulk of the unskilled labour force was composed of largely unassimilated immigrants.

An effective system developed to supply and distribute low-status immigrants. To maximize profits in the highly competitive north Atlantic passenger market, Canadian steamship companies contracted with labour-intensive industries to supply workers from Europe. These immigrants were recruited by the ubiquitous passenger agents on the continent and consigned to ocean ports, principally Liverpool in the Canadian trade. Canadian Pacific Lines supplied labour for its parent railway, CPR subsidiaries, and contractors. Allen Lines held long-standing contracts with the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) and the giant construction firm of Foley, Welch, and Stewart. If other steamship companies had less well-established corporate ties, their brokers were no less active in supplying the contract labour market. In 1901 one of the Beaver Lines agents in Italy boasted that he had recruited 6,000 passengers in a year and could have shipped as many more on demand.

Once in Canada immigrants were distributed by the most infamous element in the commercial network that linked home villages to Canadian jobs — employment agencies. Often associated with steamship companies and European brokers, these agencies contracted with railways, construction companies, mines, logging operations, and even large farms.

The process of "buying jobs" from employment "sharks" was a source of bitter and persistent complaint from workers who claimed they were regularly defrauded. A wobbly working on railway construction in northern Ontario charged "they send you out on a job for a dollar fee, and give you a contract with certain information, but when you get out to the camps, the boss gives you different orders. I learned a few facts in the last two weeks. I was out of town twice, but came back again, and lost two dollars and about ten dollars fare, and can't see the end of robbery. When you come back and go to the office asking for the return of your fee, the shark chases you out." A common allegation was that collusion existed between agencies and foremen who systematically discharged members of their gangs and replaced them with other men who had paid commissions for the same jobs. Bureaucrats, police officers, churchmen, and journalists agreed that employment agencies did, in fact, regularly defraud itinerant workers. "It has been said," a student minister reported, "that as a general rule there are three classes of men working in the railway camps — one working, one coming and one leaving." Yet it was not until the end of the railway construction period, by which time employment brokers had served the short-run needs of Canadian industry, that the federal government began to regulate the agencies.

The federal government showed a similar toleration for a peculiarly Italian

manifestation of the distribution system, the *padrone*. Acting as an intermediary between Canadian employers and immigrants, *padrones* supplied railways and contractors with labour. Canada's most notorious *padrone* was Antonio Cordasco, principal labour contractor for the CPR. When his operation resulted in demonstrations by unemployed Italians in the streets of Montreal during the spring of 1904, he was censured by a Royal Commission. But Cordasco remained in business because his services were essential to labour-intensive industries. *Padrones* provided regular and reliable supplies of preferred labour. As far as companies were concerned, *padrones* served the additional purpose of disciplining the workers whom they supplied. Robert Harney's research has demonstrated, however, that this brokerage was no less advantageous for Italian sojourners. Even if the relationship was at times characterized by extortion and intimidation, the *padrone* provided services which facilitated the Italians' stay in Canada. He arranged steamship tickets, guaranteed remittances to Italy, supplied familiar food stuffs and, above all, assured a job. In 1912 an Italian construction foreman employed by the CPR in the Rockies systematically fired English workers so that he could hire compatriots.

Such networks were advantageous because ethnic heterogeneity characterized the railway construction grade. A missionary working in the GTP camps of British Columbia discovered that 80 per cent of his congregation were "foreigners:" Russians, Swedes, Ukrainians, Bohemians, Poles, Finns, Norwegians, Italians, and a few Turks. The only systematic estimates of the ethnic composition of the labour force were those developed by Edmund Bradwin; in northern Ontario during the early twenties he found the labour force made up of 32 per cent Slavic workers, 25 per cent Scandinavian, 20 per cent British, American, and English Canadian, 11 per cent French Canadian, 7 per cent Italian, and a sprinkling of other nationalities. But descriptive refinement of this sort was irrelevant in the railway camps where workers were divided into two categories: "white men," composed of Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians, and French Canadians; and "wops" or "bohunks" composed of eastern and southern Europeans. A contractor explained "we distinguish white men. Austrians and Italians we don't call them white men. I don't know that it's hardly fair but it's customary."

Ethnic segregation was typical in camps. To an important degree, group identity determined status and roles in Canadian society, and on frontier jobs, where conventional behavioural restraints were absent, this process was most blatant and brutal. Isolation and transiency prolonged cultural distinctiveness, and aesthetic forms, such as the Italians' observance of dietary customs or the Ukrainians' retention of traditional costume, dramatized ethnic boundaries. A significant manifestation of the condition was spatial segregation. "Foreigners always herd together if possible," an observer reported, and "the English-speaking fellows do not care to have much to do with them." Segregation

carried over into occupations. Eastern and southern Europeans were recruited for the unskilled labour market because employers considered them docile peasants; Anglo-Canadian ethnocentricity insured that the perception died hard. A contemporary sociologist elaborated the stereotype: "[Slavs] display definite characteristics; slow and immobile, lacking initiative; rather careless of personal appearance; with but limited mechanical ability; not quarrelsome except when liquor is about; easily brow-beaten, for the foot of despotism had cowed their spirit; just plodders in the day's work — that pliant type that provides the human material for a camp boss to drive." Consequently the most menial and dangerous jobs were almost invariably assigned to eastern and southern Europeans. "Wops" and "bohunks" were muckers. Gangs on track-laying machines were at the other end of the occupational scale. Because the job was considerably less isolated, because work was carried out by either the head contractor or the railway itself, and because wages were relatively high, workers did not have to endure the worst aspects of the construction system. These gangs were typically composed of "white men."

Whatever their job assignment, stiffs on the grade faced real physical dangers. Any heavy construction project will produce accidents, but rock work on the railways in Ontario and British Columbia resulted in remarkable carnage. In a three-month period during the winter of 1911, eight men were killed by dynamite at the western end of the Kitselas tunnel on the GTP. Injuries caused by blasting were horrible; a powderman who died at Kamloops had "his left hand blown off at the wrist, the thumb and two fingers gone from his right hand, both eyes blown out and a number of ghastly wounds in his abdomen." Such dangers naturally produced bitter resentment among workers. An itinerant poet protested:

> The life that God created
> Is mangled torn and hurt
> By those who in their greed have rated
> Humanity to be as cheap as dirt.
>
> And ever the ones who are toiling
> Die hard for the ones that rest:
> The victims of a hellish spoiling
> Of a system that stands accurst.

But most stiffs simply fled from the more dangerous jobs. One man who had worked for several years on the National Transcontinental (NTC) explained "lately I seen so many blown to pieces that I got afraid and quit railroad work for good." High accident rates produced periodic local labour shortages in Ontario and British Columbia throughout the period.

The conditions under which men lived were no better than those under which they worked. Construction camps were impermanent places built only to

meet limited needs during the short life of a contract; to minimize capital and operating costs companies skimped on building and maintenance. The result was notoriously inadequate bunkhouses. Accommodating fifty to sixty men, bunkhouses were usually built of logs or rough-sawn planks and often offered little protection against the weather. Double bunks lined the sides and end of the building, and usually workers were obliged to pay for the hay which served as mattresses. Dark and dungeon-like, the bunkhouses had only two small windows in the gables, which always resulted in a brisk trade in candles at the company store. Poor ventilation became evident in the evenings when men hung out overalls and underwear to dry. One veteran of the grade observed, "I can assure you that the stench that protrudes from those places between 11 o'clock at night and 4 a.m. is enough to knock a man down." Bunkhouses invariably became infested with lice, called the "B.C. grayback" in the camps west of Tete Jaune Cache. Because two men slept in each bunk, the vermin were easily transmitted, and it was virtually impossible to avoid becoming lousy. "[The bunks] . . . were filled with lice," an English worker recalled, "your clothes became impregnated with them. At first we tried to keep clean by frequent washings in strong solutions — but it was no use. When the body got warm either in the bunk or at work they would bite you to pieces. I have stripped in the snow to try and get relief."

Frequently sanitation was primitive and unsafe. A B.C. health officer reported, "the sanitary arrangements [in a Canadian Northern camp] . . . are nil. Previous to my visit the closet was closed because of its wrong location and want of proper construction. As a result the ground was filthy." Under such conditions water supplies became contaminated, and consequently typhoid fever was endemic in the camps. During 1911 CPR section gangs in the Calgary division lost 3,000 mandays as a result of the disease. Provincial inspectors reported that "foreigners" were regularly housed in the most unsanitary accommodations and as a result suffered the worst ravages of typhoid. Provinces enacted health standards legislation, but contractors violated the laws with immunity.

Did prevailing wages compensate workers for the danger and squalor they endured in the camps? Apparently not. Historical wage series are notoriously elusive, and reliable data for migrant workers are especially difficult to locate. Nonetheless some tentative judgements are possible. With the beginning of large-scale railway construction after 1905, money wages for unskilled labourers increased and in the years before World War I occasionally ranged up to $3.00 per day. Wages reflected local and temporal supply conditions, however, and could fluctuate substantially from region to region and from year to year. During 1907 an immigration inspector reported daily wages of $2.00 in New Brunswick camps and $2.50 in Quebec. When a labour surplus developed in 1911 on the Canadian Northern (CN) grade in the Fraser Valley due to a slow start-up, contractors beat the day-rate down from $2.75 to $2.25. Wage differ-

entials were also a function of ethnicity: "white men" were better paid than "wops" or "bohunks." It is significant that Robert Harney and Orest Martynowych estimate day-rates for Italians and Ukrainians respectively at well below $2.00. On balance Clare Pentland's assertion that real wages in the unskilled labour market were probably lower in 1913 than in 1905 remains plausible.

In addition to such structural factors as inflation and immigration policy, the stiffs' low wage position was maintained by the practice whereby itinerants started a job indebted to the company for the costs of transportation to the site. Indebtedness increased as a result of a modified truck system — charges for board, various fees, and the extortionate price of goods in "pluck-me" company stores. A wobbly grumbled "the company certainly believes in letting its left hand take in what its right hand pays out." It was only after some weeks at work that a stiff actually began to accumulate wages. There are cases on record of men earning as little as 25¢ for two weeks work and 65¢ for six weeks work on the NTC in northern Ontario. So stiffs regularly complained that they were working for "grub and tobacco."

The method of letting construction tenders promoted the development of an unusually authoritarian work environment on the grade. The many-tiered system in which contractors, sub-contractors, and so on could only make profits by meeting inflexible government schedules dictated rigid job discipline. A cultural clash resulted. A basic paradox of Canadian immigration policy was that it did not provide the most suitable type of labourer for railway construction. Unlike Italian workers, who were often disciplined by sub-bossi, Ukrainian immigrants were peasants, socialized to pre-industrial work habits which were not easily compatible with the organization and technology of modern railway construction. Because they were isolated on frontier projects, the process of acculturation to Northern American values which could have imparted a regular job discipline was retarded. A foreman on the GTP complained that Ukrainians were "green, inexperienced, cannot speak any other language than their own and they have to be taught their work from the very commencement." Consequently Ukrainians, and their fellow workers, had regular work habits forcibly imposed upon them. An English immigrant claimed that a stiff "is absolutely driven, as slaves never were. At many jobs a man cannot keep up the pace for many days. Directly he slackens, he is canned." Because the power of contractors was virtually exclusive on isolated grades, no constraints were imposed upon the means used to discipline workers. The means that emerged frequently combined physical coercion and corporal punishment. Foremen known as "drivers" were common; one boasted, "I kept them in their place with my bare fists and not a man among them even raised a shovel agin me." Magistrates in frontier towns regularly heard assault cases brought against foremen; occasionally the charge was murder. A journalist familiar with the GTP grade in British Columbia claimed that the railway was being

built under "a system that is close to peonage."

The workers' principal response to camp conditions was flight, and it was an effective form of rebellion because it disrupted construction operations. "Job jumping" was a source of constant concern for railways and contractors: to maintain a work force of 2,800, one contractor on the NTC was obliged to hire 5,100 men in a single month. Companies offered various bonuses to encourage workers to engage for a full season, but stiffs seldom collected these. Consequently "jumpers" faced several forms of coercion, debts at company stores, higher rail fares outbound, exclusion from roadhouses. Police and magistrates supported contractors' efforts to maintain stable labour forces. When five workers left their jobs on the GTP grade in central Alberta, they were arrested by the NWMP for violation of the *Masters and Servants Act* and sentenced to a month's hard labour by a justice of the peace. In isolated camps employers were more draconian in their efforts to discourage "jumping." A contractor on the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway maintained armed guards and a jail where he imprisoned workers who attempted to leave his camps. None of these devices eliminated widespread mobility among unskilled workers. "The majority of the men," a wobbly reported, "work just long enough to get their fare to some other place."

If mobility was in part situational, that is, ephemeral flight from a primitive and brutal environment, it was also, in part, cultural. Substantially more research must be done before it will be possible to assess the relative importance of cultural imperatives in determining levels, and perhaps patterns, of mobility among unskilled workers. Still some of the evidence presently available is suggestive. It seems clear that personal and communal exigencies founded in custom and tradition, because they were non-materialistic, were incompatible with modern job discipline and contributed to mobility. These varied in their content and influence between groups, but the variations made them no less real. Italians, considered the most stable workers, periodically returned to family and village, some making the Atlantic crossing a number of times. And though the urban boarding houses to which they returned from time to time were commercial institutions, the houses did afford the comforts of kinship and paesanism. Ukrainians left their jobs to work the land they longed to own and thereby confirmed the fears of contractors. Even those who did not homestead returned to ghettos such as Winnipeg's north end to rest among families and countrymen, thereby retaining something of the seasonality of a peasant economy. Other workers, usually British and American whom employers considered the least stable, were part of the migrant subculture identified by Nels Anderson and Carleton Parker. After making a stake, they rode the freights south to winter in California or Louisiana. A hobo working on the GTP boasted "I have knocked around ever since I was eleven years of age. Worked I think in every state in the Union. Worked up here three years."

Mobility was, however, primarily structural, a function of changing sea-

sonal demands in the unskilled labour market. Workers migrated in response to sectoral employment trends. The annual cycle began when spring brought on the resumption of construction, and workers took up jobs on the railway grade or at large building sites. In early autumn when farmers anxious to harvest their crops bid up the price of labour, many stiffs migrated to the wheat fields. At the end of the harvest season some itinerants found work in the woods for the winter. The unemployed returning from the harvest or the railway camps, which reduced their work by as much as 75 per cent in late autumn, migrated to cities. During November an estimated 400 construction workers per day arrived in Edmonton. By early spring, basic economic necessity forced unemployed workers to return once again to the grade. When a Prince Rupert employment agent offered the first thirty construction jobs of the season in April 1911, several hundred men fought each other in the street for a place in the gang.

A long, hard winter on skid row usually preceded spring. Cities provided migrant workers with a wide range of services, and laundries, steam baths, cafes, bars, brothels, pool rooms, and cut-rate clothing stores did a brisk trade for a time. Vancouver experienced the largest annual influx of unemployed workers. In addition to its moderate climate, the coastal city offered itinerants a large number of "flops" on the waterfront, casual employment on the docks and in the building trades which continued during the winter, and relatively generous sources of charity. Wherever they wintered, migrant workers crowded into cheap hotels and boarding houses and lived on their stakes. For some the winter outlasted the stake, and they were forced to pawn their few possessions. Most cities maintained relief work, because most cities where itinerants wintered had at one time or another experienced demonstrations by the unemployed during the slack months, Montreal in 1904, Winnipeg in 1908, Vancouver in 1912, Edmonton in 1914. But because wages on municipal works were modest and places restricted, many of the unemployed sought charity. Some panhandled. More turned to relief organizations such as the Men's Own Hostels or the Salvation Army. During the winter of 1911, the United Charities of Vancouver distributed as many as 200 meal tickets daily. The unemployed's destitution was complete; the 134 men admitted to the Salvation Army hostel in Edmonton one night in February 1914 had $4.30 among them.

Faced with such conditions, civic administrations adopted harsh policies to control the unemployed. Men found begging by police were often shipped out of town on a freight train without benefit of a court appearance. But an as yet incomplete and unsystematic examination of magistrates' court records in Winnipeg and Vancouver indicates that vagrancy convictions increased dramatically during the winter. The mayor of Kamloops boasted about his administration's direct approach to the problem of unemployed workers: Usually they get run in and spend five, ten or fifteen days in jail." To reduce the costs

attendant upon this form of control, some cities contracted to supply vagrants to employers at substantially reduced wages. The enthusiasm with which police chiefs and municipal clerks entered into such arrangements appeared suspicious at times. A wobbly whom Sudbury's city fathers had shipped to the NTC charged, "when arrested, my underclothing, top shirt and socks were clean. I had a $9.00 watch, a $1.00 knife, a $10.00 suit and a clean and presentable appearance. I was hunting for a job."

Such was the experience of migrant workers. Alienated from society and ignored by AFL affiliates, to wobblies they appeared to constitute the basis for militant industrial unionism. The IWW elaborated an ideology and employed a propaganda which cast these wretched and exploited workers as the revolutionary vanguard.

Wobblies organized cooks and waiters in the Kootenays, laundry workers in Prince Rupert, "newsies" in Saskatoon, workers on the CPR irrigation projects south of Calgary, teamsters in Victoria, and street excavators in half a dozen cities. The IWW's campaign to organize the B.C. lumber industry began in 1907 when loggers informed wobbly leaders that the province's bush camps and sawmills would be fertile ground for revolutionary industrial unionism. Many loggers were IWW sympathizers or carried the red card of membership, and for a time Vancouver's lumberworkers' local was the largest in Canada. Wobblies made their most impressive gains among the workers who built the Canadian Northern Railway, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, and the National Transcontinental Railway. In 1912 the union contained some 5,000 workers; twelve wobbly locals stretched from Winnipeg to Victoria. While this membership constituted only an insignificant proportion of the industrial labour force in western Canada, nearly 40 per cent of workers engaged in railway construction in the region belonged to the IWW.

The tactics and structure of the IWW were intended to overcome the difficulties inherent in the organization of itinerants. As wobblies worked their way back and forth across the west, they preached their revolutionary doctrine, and stiffs were exposed to IWW propaganda on the job. This tactic was formalized in the camp-delegate system by which any wobbly could act as a full-time organizer while he tramped. The IWW charged low initiation fees and dues and allowed universal transfer of membership cards. These practices were designed to make it easy to join the union; "all we ask of one in becoming a member of the IWW is to swear allegiance to the working class," declared a member of the Vancouver local.

The IWW provided services of real importance to members. Wobbly halls functioned as mail drops and dormitories for itinerants. Most locals provided job information, and Prince Rupert's hall even functioned as an employment agency for unskilled workers. The Vancouver local appears to have furnished some medical services for stiffs passing through the city. Camaraderie was an important dimension of the IWW's appeal, and wobbly halls were one of the

few social centres that were part of the itinerants' experience. At the Vancouver hall workers could swap tales about life on the road in the club rooms, read Marxist classics or copies of "nearly every Socialist and revolutionary paper of the world" in the library, or listen to regular lectures on revolutionary industrial unionism.

If the IWW was fighting ultimately for revolution, it never lost sight of the need to secure immediate improvements in the working conditions of its members. The organization's official demands for itinerants in British Columbia focused on many of the hardships endured by these workers: exploitation by employment agents, long hours, low pay, unsanitary camps, inadequate medical services, and so on. By pressing these demands, wobblies made an appeal itinerants could easily appreciate: "The IWW will take the blankets off your back, Mr. Blanket-stiff. It will make the boss furnish the blankets. And, further not only the blankets, but springs and mattresses, yes and as we grow stronger sheets and pillows. Just imagine yourself in camp snoozing away, tucked up between nice clean sheets, with your head resting on a feather pillow and a good mattress and springs under you."

The IWW's most important asset in the unskilled labour market was its determination to organize all immigrant groups, a policy born as much of pragmatism as from a commitment to the proletarian solidarity of the working class. Unless "wops" and "bohunks" fought side by side in the union, it would fail. A Prince Rupert wobbly exhorted, "when the factory whistle blows it does not call us to work as Irishmen, Germans, Americans, Russians, Greeks, Poles, Negroes, or Mexicans. It calls us to work as wage-workers, regardless of the country in which we were born or the color of our skins. Why not get together, then . . . as wage-workers, just as we are compelled to do in the shop." The union circulated propaganda in at least ten different languages in western Canada, and when agitators with language skills were not available, speakers frequently had their remarks translated for immigrant audiences. There was an Italian local in Vancouver, a Swedish local in Edmonton, and a Ukrainian and Polish local in Winnipeg. The first IWW local to conduct a strike in western Canada was a remarkable organization: a Vancouver union of longshoremen and lumber handlers, it was composed of eighteen different nationalities.

As the IWW grew in the camps, it encountered stiff opposition from employers. The vice-president of the giant Canadian Northern Construction Company told Prime Minister Robert Borden that wobblies were "the biggest curse to railroad construction in this western country." The IWW's drive to organize the entire CN grade began in the autumn of 1911. In response contractors disrupted IWW meetings, encouraged provincial police officers to harass organizers, and placed Pinkerton agents in the union. Instead of driving the IWW off the grade, the campaign of intimidation only encouraged more wobblies to migrate to the CN camps during the winter.

Late in March the largest IWW strike ever fought in Canada effectively stopped work on the CN grade from Kamloops to Hope, a distance of 300 miles. The men struck primarily to protest conditions in the camps: "They treated us like swine," charged a Swede. The strikers, approximately 7,000 strong, were "nearly all foreigners," primarily Slavs and Scandinavians. One of the strike leaders claimed the men realized that "there are only two nationalities, and . . . these nations are divided by class and not by geographical lines."

Western Federation of Miners Strike, South Porcupine, Ont., c.1910-15.

To keep the men in the strike zone and thus maintain solidarity, the IWW established camps at several towns along the line. One of the most important strike camps was located at Yale. Here the IWW provided food and crude accommodation for more than 500 men. When the strikers were not on picket duty, they spent their time listening to lectures, debating industrial unionism, and singing revolutionary songs. The songs, such as "Where the Fraser River Flows," were composed by wobbly bard Joe Hill who arrived in Yale shortly after the strike began. The organization of the Yale camp prompted a reporter to describe it as "a miniature republic run on Socialist lines."

To win, the IWW recognized it must insure that the strike was nonviolent. Despite alarmist and xenophobic newspaper accounts, the strike was peaceful, as far as the men were concerned. B.C. provincial police reports demonstrate this condition. Strike leaders had received explicit orders from Chicago headquarters to take no provocative action; they assured the senior provincial constable in the strike zone that "all the IWW have been instructed . . . not to give the police any trouble." It was difficult, however, for the IWW to prevent

violence. The federal government relaxed its immigration regulations to allow contractors to procure strikebreakers, and the provincial government encouraged the companies to employ large numbers of private detectives to guard them. Most of the scabs were Italian, and the tension of the conflict exacerbated traditional ethnic antagonisms between them and northern and eastern Europeans strikers to produce violence.

From the beginning of the strike the Canadian Northern and its contractors sought the aid of the B.C. government in their fight against the IWW. At a meeting in early April, contractors told Sir Richard McBride, the premier, and William Bowser, the attorney-general, that wobblies had duped simple-minded immigrant workers into striking as part of the IWW's "stupendous scheme for tying up the leading industries of the Pacific Coast." In addition to the companies' campaign, the government came under popular pressure to break the strike. Citizens of Yale demanded the IWW camp be removed from the town because they feared for their property and because the strikers were "foreigners who do not practise the laws of sanitation or even common decency." In the circumstances it was not difficult for the B.C. government to go to the aid of its political railway.

On April 16 the attorney-general informed the superintendent of police that "the time has now arrived to prosecute and imprison [the IWW] on every possible occasion." Health inspectors began attempting to close IWW strike camps which, in fact, conformed more to sanitary regulations than did the contractors' establishments. Then in the third week of April police raids began; these followed a general pattern all along the grade. The strikers were ordered to return to work; when they refused, the police tore down the camps, closed the IWW halls, and forcibly ejected the men as vagrants. Police detachments then drove the strikers along the line to insure that they left the strike zone. A number of men were arrested, and local magistrates joined in the repression. A New Westminster judge warned wobblies against preaching their doctrines because Canadians "are a free and law-abiding people, and above all will not tolerate the red flag of anarchy." Strikers were sentenced to terms ranging from three to twelve months on such charges as vagrancy, unlawful assembly, intimidation, and conspiracy. By June 250 wobblies were in B.C. jails. Simultaneously the provincial government sought the deportation of wobblies because Bowser was "anxious" to rid British Columbia of "these undesirables." The state's campaign broke the strike, destroyed the IWW organization on the CN grade, and initiated the union's decline.

Repression was significant in the decline of the IWW in western Canada. Initiated during the Canadian Northern strike, state harassment of wobblies intensified during the pre-war depression and reached an hysterical peak during the "red scare." Structural forces contributed more to the union's collapse. The end of the railway building boom dispersed the construction work force, and the demand for labour in the resource sector did not pick up until 1916,

when wartime constraints impeded the organization of low-status immigrants. But these explanations are not completely satisfactory.

If objective social conditions were the essential determinant of collective working-class behaviour, stiffs should have been thoroughly and permanently radicalized. They were not. What was the solvent of solidarity? I should like to offer ethnicity as a tentative answer. In this context two dimensions of collective group identity are important: the content of specific cultural traditions and inter-group relations. Were, say, Italians, whose cultural baggage contained vestiges of social banditry and peasant violence, more likely than other ethnic groups to respond to the wobblies' appeals for direct action? We do not know. It appears, however, that Italians were more persistent and vehement in their advocacy of syndicalism. Did ethnically homogeneous groups achieve a greater degree of solidarity than mixed collectivities? Again a categorical answer is impossible. But the wobblies' own willingness to organize ethnic locals in western Canada seems to demonstrate, at least, their appreciation that shared identity consolidates intragroup solidarity. To answer these questions and thus to understand the totality of working-class experience more completely, labour historians must take up the models and explanation forms of ethnic studies in the way that political historians have.

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The Western Working-Class Experience

A. Ross McCormack

THE WESTERN WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCE has not been historically unique; nor is it unique today. To assert that it has been or is unique is to beg the question, "Has the sense of grievance characteristic of western workers been incompletely articulated by workers elsewhere or has it been incompletely appreciated by historians who have studied the lives of those workers?" I do not intend to address that question.

My purpose here is to discuss instead the content of western working-class political culture on either side of the divide of the Winnipeg General Strike. The structural context, based as it is in the resource industry, clearly links the experience of western workers to that of men and women in other parts of the country. The cultural context which is characterized by ethnic diversity may provide a margin of difference, because, I submit, that some margin of difference clearly *does* exist between western workers and that of their comrades elsewhere. What I would like to argue, or at least attempt to argue, is that the western working class was made, made in the E.P. Thompson sense, in the rapid period of industrialization at the turn of the century. The class was forged in a fire of phenomenally rapid change. Part of this process was simply trauma, part of this change was the introduction of new values and ideologies. These two imperatives — structural and cultural — exposed the western working class to radical tendencies. I think that is demonstrable. I would argue as well that there is a continuity in those tendencies over time. Social democratic governments, if we are willing to accept them as a criterion of some kind of radical tendency, have only been elected in western Canada.

There has been and there remains a tendency to perceive the west, especially the Prairies, as rural and agrarian, as a frontier. Partly, of course, this is merely a reflection of the reality. If one travels on the Prairies or even in British Columbia, there is an overwhelming sense of vastness and isolation. The way in which westerners think about themselves, their self-concept, has been nurtured by that environment. In important novels, Margaret Laurence and W.O. Mitchell have celebrated wheat farms and prairie towns. Westerners, as much as other Canadians, believe that these authors have portrayed the essential experience of those that live in the region. This attitude is in part a defence

mechanism. The west has been exploited by central Canada. Central Canada is urban, we've got to be different. Therefore, we're just plain folks, even if most of us live in cities.

Despite physical realities and intellectual tradition, the perception of the west as rural and agrarian should not be allowed to serve as the essential explanation of the region's social institutions and political behaviour. We must be especially careful about interpreting the working-class experience in such terms. In fact this has happened to an important degree. Historians, often with rural backgrounds and a romantic approach to their subject, have asserted that agrarian populists and radical miners were equally products of the frontier. For instance, the first scholarly treatment of the Winnipeg General Strike was published in a series on social credit. Perhaps what is more remarkable is that the frontier has recently been used to explain the uniqueness of the western radical movement. By the logic of the frontier explanation, men and women are said to have subscribed to radical ideologies not primarily because they were workers but because they were westerners. This analysis tends to obscure the central urban and industrial experience of the region's history.

The character of the western working class was determined by industrial capitalism. At the end of the 1890s a number of factors converged that were highly favourable to economic "take-off." In other words, structural conditions promoted industrial growth and a modern urban society emerged. I believe that it is highly significant that this process occurred at a phenomenally rapid rate. Protraction mitigates trauma. The industrialization of Britain took approximately a hundred years; the process lasted for some fifty years in the United States. But in western Canada, that process of massive change was compressed into a very few years. As a result of that compression in time, the trauma of development was fully felt by workers. That is important because a sense of dislocation entered into their consciousness at the time when the movement was in the making, when a sense of self was developing and the trauma became a part of their sense of self.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the domestic capital supply in the form of Canadian, American, British, and European investments exploded. Between 1900 and 1911 the gross capital stock increased by 250 per cent. In the west the greatest investment occurred in the resource industry, especially mining. The statistics are truly dramatic. B.C. copper production increased by 1,200 per cent in the two decades before World War I. Because investment was producing a modern integrated economy, coal production shot up as well. Alberta mines hoisted 1,800 per cent more coal in 1914 than they had in 1900. But growth was not restricted to the resource sector. Capital invested in manufacturing increased significantly and western cities sprouted factories. In 1901 the average manufacturing establishment in Winnipeg was capitalized at $45,000 and employed thirty-one workers; ten years later the average investment had quadrupled and the work force doubled. By the beginning of World

War I, Winnipeg was the nation's fourth-largest manufacturing centre.

The region enjoyed another differential advantage which expedited development. The west had access to supplies of labour — manual, technical, and managerial. While Britain had to forge these capacities, often at tremendous social cost, and the United States had to buy or borrow them, Canada, especially the west, did not face similar impediments. Skilled capital migrated. This process was part of the enormous population transfer in which some 50,000,000 departed Europe in the century following Waterloo. The immediate circumstances that promoted migration at the turn of the century were political instability and economic stagnation. Canadian development strategy, Sir John A. Macdonald's National Policy, dictated that this process provide the country with the skills essential to growth. The state — federal, provincial, and municipal governments — promoted immigration on a massive scale. Between 1900 and 1914 nearly 3,000,000 persons entered Canada; well over half of these settled in the west. The country's population increased by 33 per cent during these years, the west by almost 200 per cent. Officially Canadian immigration schemes were aimed at farmers and domestics. In practice industrial workers were recruited. The programmes were intended to serve a capitalist labour market, one in which large mobile supplies of workers were employed when profitable and discharged when unprofitable.

At the risk of being accused of irresponsible and glib generalizations let me try to set up three archetypes for you in the immigrant population. One would be a skilled worker from the industrial midlands or the north of England. He would be a trade unionist, probably a non-conformist, he would have some technical training, and he would probably be experiencing some dislocation of his economic lifestyle at home. He would likely have been recruited by Canadian government agents and he would have migrated to a Canadian city where he would probably have found work relatively easily and where he would have enjoyed a relatively high degree of sympathy from Canadians who met him. The second type would be a hard rock miner from the United States. He would probably have been a native born American, probably would have had considerable experience of mobility, moving around from mining camp to mining camp in the mountain states, and probably when he came to Canada he would not have any real appreciation that he was leaving the United States. He would probably be quite willing to celebrate the fourth of July whether he was in Sandon or Butte. And too, he would probably have enjoyed a relatively high degree of sympathy from Canadians whom he met. He probably would harbour a certain resentment as a miner to the conditions under which he worked. The third archetype would be a peasant from either Galicia or Sicily. He probably would have experienced some mobility in Europe, perhaps travelling to Germany, perhaps travelling to northern Italy. He would have learned that travelling produced some form of economic betterment. With that realization he would accept the blandishments of a steamship company or a railway looking

for labour and when he came to Canada he would very quickly join the pool of unskilled labourers who moved back and forth across this country in the years between 1900 and 1930. Of the three, the latter, of course, with low status because of both his job and his ethnicity, would experience the greatest exploitation. In speaking about these people, I'm considering them at this point merely as factors, I'm talking about immigration in terms of factor flows. I would like later to return to the social and cultural implications of immigration.

If capital and labour were available for western development so also was technology. It was highly significant that western take-off occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, at the end of a period of previously unprecedented technological improvement. The machines and techniques that had been laboriously developed in Europe and the United States could be applied in the west in their perfected form. Refrigeration, secure canning and the "iron chink" revolutionized the Pacific fishery. (I should explain that the "iron chink" was a machine that gutted fish. The name dramatizes the low status of peasant immigrants. The Chinese were very well established in low-status jobs in canneries by the turn of the century. When a machine was introduced to replace them it seemed only proper to describe it as an "iron chink.") Winnipeg powered its industries with hydro-electricity, Cominco installed carbon furnaces. These were all highly capital-intensive industries which were technologically advanced. Advanced technology more than any other advantage insured the rapid industrial development of the west.

Political circumstances were no less conducive to development than factor flows. Victorians were, to a really remarkable degree, enchanted by growth, what they called progress. It was a grossly materialistic age. A Vancouver lumberman caught the spirit of the time rather well in a bit of doggerel verse:

> You can have your golden sunrise and your sunset rich in red,
> You can have your summer rose and autumn peace,
> But give to us the honey time, the honey time instead
> And we will have every treasure in our reach.
> It's fine to watch the apple when it ripens on the bough,
> It's fine to see the wheat in the bin,
> But there's another season that we are singing for right now,
> We want to see the money coming in.

I'd like you to note that this is the only time when I will make direct reference to employers. Bear in mind that I am arguing against the concept of western particularism, of uniqueness, and consequently don't want to suggest that western employers were somehow special. I don't think they were. Thus, I would simply suggest that western employers behaved in a conventional way. It was their objective to maximize profits, maximize return on capital investment, and one way of doing that was to reduce the advantages enjoyed by their workers. Consequently they did everything they could do to achieve that end.

In other words they behaved the way employers do everywhere and the notion that we have some kind of ogre in board rooms in western Canada has never made an awful lot of sense to me and I suspect would not make sense to a Newfoundland lumberman either.

The National Policy was the most prominent manifestation of such values. But the promotion of growth was no less central to the provinces and municipalities. Indeed at lower levels of government, public aid to industry was more explicit and direct. Jurisdictions fell over each other in the scramble to attract industry through subsidies and concession. Winnipeg secured the CPR, and thus assured its status as the metropolis of the Prairies, by ceding large tracts of land to the railway, installing facilities at public cost, and freeing the company from municipal taxation in perpetuity, a decision that the present Winnipeg mayor has very little sympathy with in these hard times. British Columbia, the only western province that had jurisdiction over its natural resources, adopted the policy of making massive land grants to capitalists. Some 5 per cent of the province's total area was alienated in this fashion. The greatest of these empires was what workers called Dunsmuria on Vancouver Island where the Dunsmuir family ruled their coal mines, ports, and railways in a fashion worthy of feudal autocrats.

Factor flows, and a political environment highly conducive to development, insured that by the first decade of the century there was a basic regional infrastructure in place. Railways linked collieries and hard rock mines to smelters and transported finished minerals and other resources to the port of Vancouver. Similarly, railways carried manufacturers' goods from the great marshalling yards of Winnipeg's north end to prairie stations and then carried the grain crops back to be shipped to European markets. The railways linked the west to both the St. Lawrence system and the Pacific world.

Essentially the same structure obtains in the western Canadian economy today. The west remains a resource-based economy. The proportions of capital invested have shifted somewhat but the integrated function remains the same. Some of the linkages are now by satellite rather than by CPR, but they have basically the same function. Cities continue to play much the same kind of role: they're basically transfer centres with minimal secondary manufacturing. It's precisely for that reason that Calgary is in deep depression. If the national energy policy were working, things would be better in Calgary. Vancouver and Winnipeg are in a steadier state, because of their transfer functions and the consequent cushion that these provide.

Cities and other urban places are an essential component of this infrastructure. In the two decades before 1914 the population of Winnipeg and Vancouver increased by approximately 500 per cent. Rates of growth for the four major cities in Saskatchewan and Alberta averaged 1,500 per cent during the same period. With the exception of Saskatchewan, structural imperatives in each of the provinces insured that a significant proportion of the population

would be urban dwellers, nearly 50 per cent in the case of British Columbia. In B.C., mining, fishing, logging, and railway construction concentrated workers in what were essentially urban centres. Whether they were camps or cities, all western urban places shared one essential characteristic — they grew up too quickly. Workers who lived in them suffered the worst effects of rapid, unplanned urban expansion.

Winnipeg's north end may have been the region's most infamous quarter, but it was not untypical of the working-class experience. To insure easy access to the CPR, industries located in the north end, and factories made the district dirty, noisy, and smelly. But to be close to their jobs, large numbers of workers began moving into the north end in the late 1890s. Developers built row upon monotonous row of cottages and terraces, but they were inadequate to meet the housing needs of the rapidly expanding population. Space was at a premium and rents exorbitant. Development occurred under building codes that were so lax and so flexible as to be quite useless. The result was overcrowding and conditions of the most primitive sort. Although the north end comprised a quarter of the city's urban area, it contained half the population. City inspectors regularly reported three and four families crowding into one tiny cottage. In 1912 an official discovered families living in cellars — a practice which was especially horrifying to the population because it was associated with the worst habits of the Irish in British slums. Less than half of the houses in the north end were connected with the city's water supply and contaminated water resulted in typhoid epidemics. In 1904 the death rate from typhoid was twenty-five per thousand — a rate higher than any other European or North American city. Winnipeg also had an extremely high infant mortality rate. In 1912 one out of every five babies died within a year of birth.

Mining camps, whether in coal or quartz, displayed some of the worst aspects of company towns. In some camps, operators owned everything; even if they were not in a monopoly position, companies invariably controlled the towns. Miners with families lived in dilapidated company houses which almost always lacked sanitation. Single men crowded into bunkhouses. Companies opposed the provision of utilities in their towns because such improvements would entail municipal incorporation and taxation. A collection of shacks at the east end of the Crow's Nest Pass known as New York was the home of several hundred Russian miners who worked for the CPR. The company collected refuse and cleaned privies twice annually — as a result the town's single well was contaminated and typhoid was endemic. But death had a more fearful face in coal camps. Because the region's lignite was highly gaseous and dusty, explosions occurred with a terrifying frequency. A U.S. Labor Department study showed that these were the most dangerous mines in the world. Between 1889 and 1908, twenty-three men were killed in the production of every million tons of B.C. coal; in North America as a whole, which had the highest fatality rate of any continent, six men died to produce each million

tons. Death literally became a part of life in coal towns. I don't want that to sound trite. I had that reality borne home to me once in a very prosaic way. The provincial museum in Victoria contains a permanent exhibition on coal towns. And one of the most powerful and pointed features of the display is an entire wall of little cards etched in black which were used as death notices. They are cheap and shoddy for the most part because miners' widows couldn't afford very much else. But they signified, to me at least, that people going on with life simply went on with death as well. It struck me that they just coped. That I think indicates how much the experience of death was part of their lives.

Apart from raw squalor, the most prominent characteristic of the western urban scene was ethnic diversity. Massive immigration produced a heterogeneous society. Western cities were a great seething mass of languages and cultures. It was typical for large shops or factories to post notices for employees in five or even ten languages. Winnipeg, the gateway to the west, is usually considered the archetypical immigrant city. The 1911 census shows that 75 per cent of the persons living in Winnipeg were born elsewhere. But in fact both Calgary and Vancouver had proportionately larger immigrant populations, nearly 90 per cent in both cities.

Immigrants formed discrete communities. If immigrants from different countries worked together, they did not live together. Instead they sought out their own. The nuclear family and the home became a bastion for the traditional cultures. For those immigrants who lacked access to kin, surrogate families developed in the form of boarding houses. Familiarity facilitated accommodation with the new society and immigrants used that. Networks extended beyond the home and the boarding house; ethnic groups built their own churches, formed their own benefit societies, and organized their own athletic clubs. In larger cities and towns, streets, sometimes entire quarters, were associated with one ethnic group. In Winnipeg, Selkirk Avenue was a Jewish enclave; the British lived in Calgary's Mount Pleasant; and Pender Street was Vancouver's Chinatown. I have argued elsewhere that groups assert an ethnic identity in a search for greater power and in an attempt to create channels of access to scarce resources. Ultimately it is the number and kinds of resources to which access might be forged that accounts for the persistence, elaboration, or attenuation of ethnic networks.

Competition reflects tension. Ethnic boundaries clearly divided workers. There is reason to believe that British migration was deflected to Canada from the United States because of competition there from low-status groups. When British immigrants encountered competition from eastern and southern Europeans in the west, the British reacted in a xenophobic fashion. The Vancouver race riot of September 1907 was only the most spectacular manifestation of intergroup confrontation. Historians have focused on this tension; in other words, they have asserted that massive immigration precluded class consciousness, that solidarity foundered on the rock of ethnicity.

I am tempted to say that I don't know what the impact of ethnic diversity has been on the western working class. I am quite willing to admit that I'm uncertain. But let me propose a notion that we can talk about later — that massive immigration eroded consensus and promoted a radical tendency in the west. It seems that perhaps a contemporary case may be most persuasive in support of that contention. Look at the composition of any NDP cabinet — low-status ethnic groups are over-represented compared to other governments, although not to the population at large. This observation suggests two conclusions to me. First, that there is a close correlation between status and ethnicity; and second, that a representative component of the population is willing to vote for what is perceived as some form of social change.

Historians who have considered western political culture in broad terms have for the most part postulated consensus — either a conservative organic one or a liberal egalitarian one. I suggest that to the extent that consensus had emerged before 1900, immigration broke it down. This occurred in two ways. First, immigrants had no stake in the society to which they moved and some moved consciously seeking change. Greg Kealey has described the migration of British workers to Upper Canada and Ontario in the 1870s and 1880s. But these were basically complacent British artisans, Victorians to the core, who were not committed to change. They were in on the ground floor of the making of the Ontario working class. But the people who came to the west in the years after 1900, if they were British, came from an entirely different ideological environment. If they were eastern or southern European peasants, they came with a sense of grievance. If they were Americans, they came with an entirely different kind of attitude. The introduction of an intellectual and ideological leaven at the time when the working class was in the making is extremely important and may be the essential dimension of the migration process in terms of the emergence of a radical political culture in western Canada. Second, even apolitical immigrants carried cultural baggage different from the dominant value system. Each time a wave of immigrant workers came over, they had to become familiar with Canadian society. And in gaining this familiarity, they injected tension into society. This process modified the immigrant cultures, but it also modified the dominant culture. I'm not arguing that through this process conflict came to dominate western political culture, but I believe that it became a less consensual society as a result of the process.

This was the social and cultural context of the working-class revolt of 1919. World War I was the immediate backdrop for those dramatic events. For workers, and indeed for the population at large, horror at the mutilation and death in the trenches and outrage at the economic chaos at home shook forever the complacency of the Edwardians. Clearly, the age of improvement was at an end. This crisis in confidence was exacerbated by the Russian revolution. Tzarist autocracy in Russia had been hated and despised by a generation of British and Canadian workers. Eastern Europeans, especially Poles and

Ukrainians, harboured a substantially greater hatred for the Russian regime, and its overthrow produced in them a tremendous exhilaration. Now, for workers alienated from society, victory for the Bolsheviks became a burning inspiration.

The Winnipeg General Strike was the epicentre of revolt. Led by the most radical elements of the labour movement, nearly 50,000 workers walked off their jobs. Winnipeg workers defied their employers and the state ostensibly for the right to bargain collectively. They proclaimed they were striking to protect the right of workers to organize in unions and to negotiate collectively with their employers. But the massive and exhilarating solidarity of 1919 was founded in a more compelling and abstract ideal, social justice. The Winnipeg General Strike had the character of a crusade. Professor Bercuson has likened it, in fact, to the Children's Crusade. This may be a rather harsh judgement, but nonetheless the commitment, the zeal of mission, could be seen in the streets and parks of Winnipeg, in workers' halls, and in the newspapers they printed to defend their cause. For this reason, the revolt was regional. Workers from Victoria to Thunder Bay downed their tools and determined to stand firm until their comrades in Winnipeg, and they themselves, had achieved the great principle for which they were fighting. For workers who did not win many fights, this manifestation of power in the first days of the revolt caused exhilaration. It caused consternation and alarm in the middle class and the state. These elements of Canadian society had been conditioned to anxiety and watchfulness during the war. To guard against the machinations of German spies had become a patriotic duty, and so they decided they would crush what they saw as a Bolshevik revolt in Canada. The anxiety and the reaction of the middle class, then, was not ridiculous, nor was it evil. In fact, it was predictable. With the support of the state, the middle class fought to preserve the social structure as it was constituted.

The repression of the strike was massive and effective. A substantial military pressure was introduced into most western cities. Heavy armaments were displayed to intimidate workers and arrests began. The strike had been broken before the bloody and futile riot which has become central to the mythology of the Winnipeg strike. The scope of the disaster was in part caused by confusion among radicals, and perhaps, by a failure of will on the part of the revolutionaries.

The Winnipeg General Strike and the strikes across western Canada were a watershed in the experience of the region's working class. The revolt was not only a confrontation between classes, it was as well a clash between ideological tendencies within the working class. I've argued that three tendencies, labourism, militant industrial unionism, and Marxist socialism, characterized that movement. These can be discerned on either side of the divide of the Winnipeg General Strike.

The three tendencies are easily described. Labourism was basically a

reformist movement growing out of the British Labour Party which assumed that capital could be improved, improved to such a complete extent that it would cease to be an oppressive system. The ideology was informed primarily by Christian ethics and was centred among British immigrants in Winnipeg. The second ideological tendency is what I've called impossibilism, Marxist socialism. It was a stringent materialism which dictated that reform could not achieve any improvement in the workers' lives and insisted that the workers had to concentrate on revolution — not a doctrine one would expect to achieve any currency in Canadian political culture. Nonetheless, it had a very substantial following among British Columbia miners. The final tendency was militant industrial unionism. It was militant industrial unionism that triumphed in 1919. Western alienation from the AFL was a part of the third tendency. There was an essential sense of grievance in the ideological tendency. And this was expressed in the One Big Union.

When western workers established the OBU in Calgary in 1919 they consciously set out to destroy the power of craft unions and the AFL in western Canada. Both Professor Bercuson and I have traced the ideological development of the OBU from the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World, and from Marxist socialism. But what is important about the OBU is that it unified for a brief time the revolutionary tendencies of militant industrial unionists and Marxist socialism. This united front provided radicals with a broader base than they had ever previously enjoyed. The industrial union tendency afforded numbers, the socialists brought ethnic legitimacy and political savvy. Western politics would never again witness such a powerful working-class coalition. The radicals were determined that the OBU would unify all workers into a single union which could achieve its purposes, economic or political, through general strikes. The OBU was to be the embodiment of proletarian solidarity. Most of the workers who joined the crusades against craft unions and callous employers did not intend to destroy capitalism. The revolutionaries who founded the One Big Union did.

In the warm days of a western June the crusade failed.

A few years ago I argued that the outcome of the general strikes resolved the tension in the western radical movement. I am no longer comfortable with that judgement. I continue to believe that labourism emerged from the strike as the dominant and continuing radical tendency. At the same time, however, I have come to think that there was substantially more continuity to the other two tendencies than I previously allowed. Labourites were waiting in the wings in the summer of 1919, their organizations intact, their credibility unimpaired. No longer confronted with antagonistic tendencies, as well as a hostile political system, labourism dominated western working-class politics in the following decades. There was, of course, real continuity in personnel, in institutions, but there was as well continuity in the other two tendencies.

The continuity of the Marxist socialist tendency was insured by the migra-

tion of members of various socialist parties into the Communist Party. To the extent that any radical organization flourished in the quiescent 1920s, the party did. This condition is dependent, to some large extent, upon the institutions that eastern European socialists had been developing for two decades in larger urban ghettos and mining camps. Thus, in these years, the party took on its distinctive ethnic character. The economic hardship of depression insured vitality and the alliance with the Soviet Union afforded the party a unique legitimacy during World War II. I am prepared to accept Professor Abella's judgement that the party did important work. In the tradition of the Marxist socialist tendency, the CP was a political organization committed to change on the political front and it became a presence, if not a force, in municipal and provincial politics across the west. Comintern strategy required the party to organize in the trade union movement. As a result, our primary association of the party is with this role. The role may have been almost capricious, determined as it was by the short-run needs of Soviet foreign policy, but it was nonetheless effective whether in the Workers Unity League or the CIO.

Although the party was loath to recognize that Marxism had a history in Canada that predated 1917, the CP was clearly part of a tradition, a tendency. Its power base among extractive workers, its eastern European character, its essential political nature, and its commitment to revolution, all put it in a direct line to early socialist parties. The Marxist socialist tendency, then, remained vital well after the Depression. This is not, however, the case today, if we use popular perceptions and political appeal as a criterion of judgement. The Communist Party did not fare well under the batterings of the Cold War, popular revulsion with Stalinism, and the skepticism of the New Left. When one attends a meeting of the party today, one has the overwhelming sense of being with old men and women who have become tired and worn out in long and futile fight.

The second tendency, militant industrial unionism, remains vital. The most prominent organization presently challenging the national centre is the Canadian Association of Industrial Mechanical and Allied Workers. CAIMAW is a militant industrial union. Parallels with the historical tendency are significant and informative. CAIMAW originated in Winnipeg metal shops and spread to British Columbia where it is concentrated in the extractive industry, but it has also organized previously unorganized workers, including university support staff, an especially low-status group these days. Given the sectors in which it organizes, CAIMAW membership tends to contain a large number of recent immigrants. In a dramatic passing of the torch, it even took on Cominco. Its leaders are socialists, one of whom was trained on the British left. Perhaps for this reason, they have a fighting approach to labour relations, with a high worker-days lost record. The organization as a whole is as obstreperous and sectarian as any wobbly organization ever was. On the other side, there is an active antagonism shown to CAIMAW by CLC bureaucrats. Indeed, mainstream

condemnations of CAIMAW harken back to old dual union bashing days.

Vitality of the final tendency, labourism, does not, I believe, need to be elaborated. Suffice it to say that the New Democratic Party forms the government of Manitoba and the official opposition in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, where leaders Allan Blakeney and Dave Barrett are both former NDP premiers. The NDP does not call itself labourite. A few years ago the term social democratic enjoyed a certain vogue, but it is seldom heard these days. Instead, New Democrats call themselves New Democrats. That might signify a well-founded self-concept, but the semantic might equally signify the pragmatic politics practised years ago by labourite politicians. Because it makes for good politics, the links with the historic tendency are celebrated and emphasized. The tradition is personified in one man, J.S. Woodsworth. In Manitoba, buildings bear his name, his living associates are revered, and his house is taking on the quality of an NDP shrine. Until recently, the B.C. party was linked to J.S. and the heroic past in a powerfully emotive way through Woodsworth's daughter, Grace McInnis. There is no question that the essential principle of labourism informs NDP electoral strategy. The party's success is built upon trade unions. Cooperation between the NDP and provincial federations is close and complete. For the most part, NDP governments manifest an open sympathy to the labour movement and the labour movement reciprocates. It is not always a happy union, but as New Democrats would be quick to tell you, we live in a complex and pluralistic society. The NDP has gone beyond the earlier British ethnocentricity of the labourites. The organization and control of the immigrant vote has become one of the principal preoccupations of the party. Because there is a correlation between status and ethnicity, the party has been able to establish a firm base of support among ethnic groups, both old and new.

To conclude, then, the political traditions of the western working class have well-established structural and cultural foundations. Nickel and plywood are too important in the economies of Manitoba and British Columbia for Thompson miners and Island loggers not to be central to the councils of provincial labour movements. Their experience informs collective attitudes. Similarly, the cultural baggage of immigrants who have experienced oppression or aspired to improve their lives foster both political skepticism and activism. In a new world, pragmatism may mitigate the more divisive forms of ethnocentricity. These fundamentals of the working-class experience insure continuity in the movement's political tradition. Since they are no longer atypical in the larger Canadian experience, they may also signify the emergence of alternative regional tendencies.

The Provincial Workmen's Association:

A Brief Survey of Several Problems of Interpretation

Ian McKay

THE PROVINCIAL WORKMEN'S ASSOCIATION was the most important labour body in the Maritime provinces from 1879 to 1908. By national standards, it ranked among the top seven or eight unions in terms of its total membership (about 6,000 in twenty-four lodges in 1901). By regional standards, there were no other labour bodies of comparable size, nor of similar influence. The organization was all the more influential because its membership was concentrated in one part of the Maritime region, the zone of coal mining and heavy industry which is found in the northeast (from Moncton to Glace Bay). Although the union organized steelworkers, longshoremen, boot and shoe workers, glass workers, and railway workers, its heart always could be found in the coalfields, and the coal miners always dominated its proceedings.

Notwithstanding the importance of the union in Canadian and regional history, it has received little attention from historians. Most regional labour history has focused on events in Cape Breton after World War I, when the radical miners fought a series of bitter battles with the British Empire Steel Corporation. The history of the PWA is shadowed by the strikes of 1909-11, which marked its victory over the United Mine Workers of America. Since the PWA won these strikes with the assistance of the coal companies and the army, it acquired the reputation of being a "company union" that did not truly represent the workers. More sympathetic appraisals of the PWA in standard accounts of Canadian trade unionism praise the union's work in winning safety legislation in the mines and the caution of its leadership. Apart from nationalist approaches, which tend to force a regional union into an inappropriate national framework, most historical work on the union has interpreted it as a cautious organization governed by a conservative ideology.

It should be noted that there is an abundance of evidence to support the position that the PWA was a conservative body. This evidence may be found in the columns of the union's organ, the *Trades Journal*, and in the minutes of the Grand Council, the union's governing body. Additional confir-

mation may be had in the memoirs of the union's Grand Secretary and leader, Robert Drummond, who imported many of his trade union ideas from his native Scotland. Drummond's speeches to the Grand Council dealt with such topics as thrift, sobriety, and self-improvement. He once remarked that the greatest intellectual influence in his life was the British writer Samuel Smiles, whose writings on self-help and social mobility guided many a striving entrepreneur. Drummond's views were decisively shaped by his Presbyterianism. Besides being leader of the PWA, he functioned for a time as a justice of the peace, and in this capacity helped demolish the property of liquor-sellers in the mining community of Springhill. Drummond helped make the PWA one of the strongest forces for temperance in Nova Scotia, and was instrumental in banning the sale of liquor within one square mile of the province's coal mines. He was a proponent of compulsory arbitration, and an opponent of strikes, unless they were absolutely necessary. In 1891, Drummond accepted a seat in the Legislative Council from the Liberal government.

Drummond's career provides evidence of the conservatism of the PWA, as do many of the union's rituals. A prospective member of the union had to go through a secret initiation ceremony, during which the Assistant Master Workman of the union informed him:

> Our object is not to wage a war of labor against capital, nor to drive trade, by oppressive measures, from our locality; on the contrary, by mutual concessions between master and man, we seek to have it carried on with advantage to both.
>
> The chief objects of the Association are to use fair and legitimate means to secure fair remuneration for our labor; to obtain just legislation whereby our interests may be guarded; to advance, by co-operation and other means, our position materially; and remove any cause which hinders our advancement mentally, morally and socially.

The ritual of the association was heavily dependent on the Freemasons, and many of its members were also involved in such fraternal societies as the Orange Lodge. Each lodge had its own regalia. The PWA employed passwords, chosen quarterly by the Grand Master and Grand Secretary and forwarded to the lodges; only men who knew the appropriate word were admitted to lodge meetings.

Summing up the traditional interpretation of the PWA, we might describe it as a narrowly-based craft union, steeped in masonic ritual, largely ineffective as a bargaining agent, and governed by a conservative ideology of class harmony and individual self-improvement. Its achievements, such as they were, can be found in the area of mine safety and the extension of the franchise, but even these underlined the strong links between the union and the provincial government, which was able to absorb the union's political energies and bend them to its own purposes. J.B. McLachlan, the region's most influential communist and its most widely respected labour leader, set the tone of much later commentary when he described the PWA's regalia and the praise for the union from coal company managers as evidence of its impotence.

Although this traditional interpretation of the PWA has set the tone for virtually all the writing about the union and appears to be based on a wide range of documents, it is in fact open to serious challenge. On the question of sources, one should note the reliance of labour historians upon the records of the Grand Council and the memoirs of the Grand Secretary: this reliance assumes that Robert Drummond, the leader of the union, was its true representative. Other sources, such as the records of the local lodges of the PWA, have only just been discovered, and these give a very different picture. There are four main issues which the traditional interpretation fails to address. First, there were in effect *two* PWAs, because the union changed decisively after it underwent a serious internal crisis in the late 1890s. Judgements made about the PWA before 1900 cannot be applied to the union after 1900. Secondly, the PWA was a highly decentralized body, and for this reason it is misleading to assume that policies announced in the Grand Council were taken up by local lodges. Third, there was a gap between the philosophy of Drummond and the practice of the rank and file, and this gap between the leader and the led widened perceptibly when John Moffatt assumed control in 1898. Finally, in both periods, the ideology of the PWA was far more complex than the traditional interpretation allows, and left much more room for radicalism than has often been noted. These four points suggest that the interpretation of the PWA stands in serious need of revision.

First, the PWA in the nineteenth century and the PWA in the early twentieth century were strikingly dissimilar. In the nineteenth century, the PWA reflected the social relations of production in the Nova Scotia coal industry. The coal mines of the nineteenth century depended on the skill and judgement of the individual coal miner, who with a partner and a helper managed a "place" within the mine. The skills of the miner were important in determining the percentage of large coal, the quality of the coal, and the pit's general productivity, but their greatest importance lay in the miner's ability to survive in the pit. Because the coal miners' skills were highly contextual — outside the mine they were not acknowledged — and related more to their safety than to the production of coal, they enjoyed little protection in the labour market and the pits were frequently crowded with newcomers. The best way to think of the position of the nineteenth-century coal miners is to see them as workers with one foot in the world of the crafts and the other in the world of the unskilled labourer. The PWA reflected this ambiguity. It was overwhelmingly dominated by skilled colliers, whose role in the union was far greater than their proportion in the work force. Consequently one cannot understand the PWA without understanding something of the colliers, and many of the criticisms levelled against the union in the twentieth century simply make no sense.

Critics of the PWA have noted, for example, that the union was unable to enforce common standards and hours in the industry through the collective agreement. However, it is by no means clear that doing so would have been in

the interests of colliers who were paid by their output and worked in very disparate conditions. What the local lodges of the PWA did do, with a certain success, was standardize pay within each individual mine so that members did not fall below a certain minimum standard. When coal companies placed miners in places which were unusually difficult (places which were very wet, for example), the lodge would fight strenuously to have such men placed in better conditions or paid a better rate. It therefore seems that the PWA lodges in the nineteenth century were able to enforce a certain normative wage even in the absence of a formal written contract. It should also be remembered that the coal miners of the nineteenth century worked for independent, competitive companies, and had little reason to fight for a uniformity of wages across the province in the absence of a single large employer.

Glace Bay, c.1890. Coal miners at the turn of the century still used crude whale oil lamps attached to their caps.

This changed dramatically in the early twentieth century. In 1900 and 1901, the PWA engaged in province-wide wage bargaining for the first time and won increases of up to 22 per cent. This change in the strategy of the union reflected changes in production, particularly the emergence of one very large company in Cape Breton. After 1900, the PWA pursued wage advances aggressively and effectively, and placed increasing reliance on written contracts.

There were other profound changes in outlook as well. Although the nineteenth-century union had organized a variety of workers (including women workers in the boot and shoe factory in Amherst and juveniles in the mines), it had been content with a fairly narrow concentration on the coal miners. The twentieth-century union, in contrast, expanded very rapidly; from 1898 to 1902, twenty-six new lodges were formed and three old ones reorganized, including four of railway workers. The union's most impressive new lodge was located at the steelworks in Sydney, where immigrant workers were enlisted along with native Nova Scotians. The PWA, more than any other regional labour body, represented what David Montgomery and others have called the "new unionism," that vast movement of revitalization which swept the skilled and unskilled alike into organizations at the turn of the century. The PWA was responsible for more strikes in the period 1901-14 than any other labour organization in the Maritimes.

Secondly, the PWA was highly decentralized, and what often seemed to be a cautious and deferential attitude by the union as a whole in fact represented only its upper echelons. At the local level, strikes were common in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To take the example of Pioneer Lodge in Springhill, for which an unusually good body of records exists, out of 137 cases handled in the period 1882-86, an actual or impending strike was a factor in just under a fifth of them. In fact, delegates to the Grand Council defended the existence of the upper body on the grounds that by appealing to it for sanction to strike, they had forced management to yield on many occasions. In this period the lodge went on strike four times, although each strike was very short. Negotiations with management were conducted in an informal manner; meetings of the lodge were often interrupted to allow the committee to go to the manager's house, and resumed when the committee came back with a settlement. In the absence of a formal written contract, workers were able to defend their own interests with a surprising degree of success. Of the hundred cases for which a result is known, the workers won forty-three; the company thirty-one, and twenty-four were compromises. In Springhill, at any rate, the coalminers were able to fight grievances with a fair degree of success.

Elsewhere the pattern was somewhat different. In Joggins, which is near Springhill, the union was driven out of existence by an aggressive manager, although not before the employer was violently attacked by an outraged employee. (Commenting on this incident, the union newspaper expressed regret that the miner had not put the manager over his knee and spanked him.) In Cape Breton, the much greater prominence of company-owned stores may have curbed the independence of the rank and file. But generally the idea that strikes were a "last resort" to be avoided if at all possible was not widely respected in the mines, where the daily conflicts of production made frequent strikes inevitable. There were no legal impediments placed on the right of workers to launch spontaneous strikes over working conditions. In contrast to

the sentiments frequently expressed in the Grand Council, the employers were often held up to harsh criticism and their personal habits and failings derided without mercy. In a society which vested authority in the mines in personal trust of the manager, many attacks on autocracy took a savagely personal form.

This decentralized nature of the PWA was even more pronounced in the twentieth century, even though this was the same period in which the union achieved a more centralized form of collective bargaining. What happened was that local sub-councils of the union were given almost complete power to authorize strikes. In this phase the PWA was highly militant, but at a local level: there was almost no control over the right of workers to go on strike until passage of the federal Industrial Disputes Investigation Act in 1907.

The third point is related to this portrait of the PWA as a highly decentralized body: the PWA's rank-and-file members did not necessarily agree with the opinions of their Grand Secretary, who has provided so many quotations for historians of the union. Reading local records suggests fairly minimal contact between the leader and his constituents. Many critiques of the PWA are in fact imposing on the nineteenth century a twentieth-century model of trade union leadership. But in the nineteenth century it was not unusual for the "leader" of a trade union to be more of a paid lobbyist than someone whose outlook and policies were supposed to reflect the entire organization. Drummond was interested in publishing his newspaper, and regarded himself as a publisher and politician more than as a trade union administrator. He succeeded in bringing pressure to bear on the provincial government, which reformed mine safety laws, extended the franchise, and brought in an act for compulsory arbitration. Some of these political reforms were ineffective (compulsory arbitration never amounted to much) but many were extremely useful. After the Springhill Disaster of 1891, which claimed 125 lives, the government was persuaded to ban the use of explosive powder in gassy mines, a reform which probably saved many lives. The achievement of adult male suffrage was also part of the PWA's legacy. It is difficult to think of a nineteenth-century union which won more concessions from a provincial government than did the PWA.

Drummond's lobbying efforts did not compromise the independence of the local lodges. To suggest that the PWA as a body was simply a passive instrument of the Liberal Party is overstating the case. It is true that Drummond himself became firmly integrated with the Liberal machine, but there is little evidence that he carried the ordinary miners with him. Although many miners were willing to vote for the Liberals in recognition of their services, others remained stalwart Conservatives, and still others launched the union's first efforts in independent labour politics in the 1880s.

In the early twentieth century, there was an immense gap between the perceptions of the leader, John Moffatt, and many of the local lodges. Moffatt, who was also a partisan Liberal, lost support in the union because he failed to establish any distance between his political ambitions and his trade union

responsibilities. His downfall was hastened by the Liberal government's forceful smashing of the union's 1904 strike at Sydney steelworks, which caused many PWA members to turn to independent labour politics in protest. His Liberalism was also intolerable to the growing socialist element in the union, which often brought ideas from England and continental Europe.

Finally, the traditional portrait of the PWA has tended to simplify the union's ideology. The rhetoric of self-improvement was in fact very versatile and could be used in many contexts. Drummond could certainly use the idea of "manly self-respect" in his arguments for compulsory arbitration of temperance. But even in the case of compulsory arbitration, one is struck by the ambivalence of the rhetoric. When the coal miners attempted to use compulsory arbitration in 1889, and were stymied by the tactics of their employers, the *Trades Journal* could mock the coal companies as greedy, irresponsible combines, who had rejected the truly reasonable approach to industrial relations. In the bitter Springhill strike of 1890 which followed, public sympathy swung behind the miners, largely because the union had played its hand so well. Drummond's writing conveys the impression that he saw himself as something of a missionary to the coal miners, "civilizing" them and freeing them from industrial serfdom. But the rhetoric of manliness and independence was used for less conservative purposes in Springhill, when striking coal miners reminded their employer that the coal miner was "still a man" and "would not consent to be dogged or driven." The language of independence could be very powerful when used in this way.

It is even more dangerous to generalize about the PWA's ideology in the early twentieth century. At least in some places, local lodges came under socialist leadership. In Joggins, after the coal miners of Holdfast Lodge took up rifles in their struggle with the company in 1896, there was a growth of radicalism and subsequent support for the Socialist Party of Canada. In Springhill, Pioneer Lodge was led by socialists after 1905. There was growing radicalism evident in the Grand Council, where many members argued for a more class-based approach. The PWA invited radical American trade unionists to speak to meetings. All of this radicalization took place at the same time that the leadership was drawing ever closer to the Liberal Party, already discredited after the violent suppression of the Sydney steel strike in 1904.

The leadership condemned the PWA to oblivion by failing to adapt to this new radicalism. John Moffatt began to conclude contracts with coal companies without fully consulting the union's members. The growing ranks of the left in the union pushed for reform. Ultimately they saw their only chance for radical change in the United Mine Workers of America. Initially reluctant to enter Nova Scotia, the UMW was encouraged by euphoric reports from Springhill, where the new union was welcomed without reservation. Virtually all of Pioneer Lodge passed over to the new union. But elsewhere the PWA retained support. In Pictou County, the vast majority of trade unionists supported the

old union, and in Cape Breton, the contest between the UMW and the PWA was fairly even.

In 1909-11, the two unions, the coal companies, and the state entered into a turbulent period of conflict. After long and bitter strikes (lasting twenty-two months in Springhill), the UMW was defeated, even though it represented the majority of the coal miners. The PWA, now reduced to a conservative remnant, hung on until 1917. Then, as the coal miners (like many other Canadian workers) entered a phase of heightened radicalism, the PWA was voted out, and the UMW was finally victorious. In this long period of conflict between the two unions, the PWA unquestionably relied on the coal companies and the state for its survival, but by this point it represented only the most conservative elements.

It is for these four reasons, which emerge from a consideration of a wider body of sources than was available before, that the traditional view of the PWA as an ineffective, conservative union must be revised. Instead we need a far more complex view, which respects the variety of ideologies and conditions which could flourish in so decentralized a body. This naturally makes it difficult to characterize the PWA in a phrase which would allow us to place it quickly in a general pattern of trade unionism. Were one tempted to do so, however, one would say that in the nineteenth century the PWA represented the ideal of working-class independence in the mine, and democratic reform in society, and that in the twentieth century the union's radical response to the new conditions of economic and social life was a fledgling form of industrial unionism. Because it could not surmount the conflict between radicals and liberals, it could not preserve its attractive traditions of local militancy and regional autonomy for a new generation.

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The Struggle for Development

Workers in Atlantic Canada in the Twentieth Century

David Frank

LET ME BEGIN BY INTRODUCING James Bryson McLachlan. To the RCMP, who investigated him, he was "one bad man" and a "fiend:" "If he is left to go on with his sayings, it will lead to trouble. . . ." To the coal operators of Nova Scotia, who fought him, he was "a dangerously clever Red:" "with him away for a few years, possibly, his teachings may be forgotten." To the Nova Scotia coal miners, who followed him, he was a veritable " 'Moses' of the very first type," the man who led the workers out of captivity. Here I would like to turn your attention to one of McLachlan's "teachings," a statement he made to a royal commission in 1925, which seems an appropriate place to begin:

> I believe in education for action. I believe in telling children the truth about the history of the world, that it does not consist of the history of kings, or lords, or cabinets. It consists of the history of the mass of the workers, a thing that is not taught in the schools. I believe in teaching children how to measure value, a thing that is not taught in any school. . . .

It seems to me that McLachlan would welcome the kind of public lecture series that inspired this book, and indeed, would be pleased to know that slowly but surely Canadian history is being rewritten the way he recommended. The new approach is beginning to bring working men and women out of the margins and footnotes and into the centre of the story.

The importance of this kind of approach to the history of Atlantic Canada is not well understood. I say this because I have been reading a collection of essays entitled *Labour in Atlantic Canada,* published by a university and written by professors, and which presumably can be regarded as the voice of authority. In this book I find a number of surprising statements. In the early pages we are referred to "labour's lack of deep regional roots" in Atlantic Canada. The remark is made in an offhand kind of way, as if it were a well-known fact hardly worth repeating among educated people. It is a disturbing comment, one that betrays assumptions about the supposed conservatism

and backwardness of people in this region. I hope to make clear that it shows a lack of knowledge of the significant role which working people have played in our history. And so McLachlan's injunction is still necessary, a reminder that the job has not yet been completed.

I have a second complaint as well. There is an unfortunate tendency in the writing of Canadian history to assume that the Maritimes have been a region where little of interest or importance has happened since approximately 1867. As the prosperity of the "golden age" of wood, wind, and water faded away, Maritimers sat complacently by the sea waiting for the glory days of sail to reappear on the horizon. As for Newfoundlanders, they were even worse off, too down-and-out to recognize their plight, too downtrodden to bend their will against their fate. So goes the older, standard version of Canadian history.

We are now beginning to see a different account of the region's history. By the early years of the twentieth century the industrial revolution had arrived in Atlantic Canada. Sawmills and canneries were to be found throughout the region. The railways had carried the iron horse to all corners of the mainland Maritimes — and across the backs of the islands — Prince Edward, Cape Breton, and Newfoundland. Mill towns, rail towns, factory towns, mine towns, and steel towns had sprung up in communities like St. Stephen, Moncton, Marysville, and Chatham in New Brunswick, in Amherst and New Glasgow and Truro and Glace Bay and Sydney in Nova Scotia, and at Grand Falls and Buchans and Bell Island in Newfoundland. By 1900, the Maritimes accounted for about 10 per cent of Canada's national manufacturing output. Pulp and paper had emerged as a new staple industry. By 1914 the region produced more than 40 per cent of Canada's iron and steel, and more than half the coal produced in Canada. At the same time not all parts of the region prospered: industrial capitalism transformed the region with an uneven hand, favouring pockets of expansion, attracting workers from declining areas, and abandoning thousands of people to join the exodus down the road into the continental labour market. Still, the change had come, and the sons and daughters of the twentieth century belonged irreversibly to a national and international world transformed by the forces of industrial capitalism.

Amid these changes it is clear workers held on to older traditions. At towns like Judique on the west coast of Cape Breton Island, Gaelic-speaking women worked long hours in the cold and wet of the lobster canneries, and then they danced joyful square sets in the open air at break time. When time clocks were introduced into the Bell Island iron ore mines, there were strikes and protests against what these workers believed was unwarranted managerial interference in the workplace. In both cases workers were bringing their own humanizing customs and values to bear on the changing workplace.

Still, in this new world of labour, working people occupied an inferior, dependent position. Like workers in other times and other places, they had little say over the hours, pay, conditions, rules — even the purposes — associ-

ated with their jobs. "Labor, in spite of sentimental objections, is undoubtedly a commodity which is bought and sold," noted the region's pioneer political economist John Davidson in 1898. But, he added, there was a complication: "Labor differs from most, if not all, other commodities in retaining, even under modern industrial conditions, its subjective value to the seller. We cannot separate the labor and the laborer. It is labor that is bought and sold but, with the labor, goes the laborer. Therefore instead of a great simplification we have a great complication."

Out of this "great complication" came conflict. Workers formed unions in order to strengthen their position in dealing with employers. And workers went on strike to gain a greater say over their daily personal investment in the workplace. Eugene Forsey and other writers on nineteenth-century trade unionism have reminded us that the history of labour organization in this region goes back more than one hundred and fifty years, and that centres like Saint John, New Brunswick were among the greatest strongholds of organized labour in nineteenth-century British North America. As we look across the region in the early years of the twentieth century we find ample evidence that workers in Atlantic Canada were never passive victims of their circumstances.

Between 1901 and 1914 alone there were more than four hundred separate strikes in the three Maritime provinces, accounting for a total of almost two million striker-days, or as the Department of Labour called them, "man-days lost." Almost half these strikes were found in the seaport cities of Halifax and particularly Saint John. Counting another way, more than half the striker-days were found in the coalfields of Cape Breton and Cumberland Counties. But the strike had penetrated very widely as well: in Fredericton, New Brunswick, for instance, there were no less than nineteen strikes, many of them associated with a local nine hours movement. And on Prince Edward Island, so frequently assumed to be an insular strike-free zone, there were at least twenty separate labour conflicts during this period. Although employers liked to blame strikes on trade unions, especially foreign unions, this was too easy an analysis. Of the 384 strikes for which information of this type is available, only 220 (57 per cent) involved unions, and of those only half (112) involved international unions. For the most part strikes were local in origin and organization.

Hidden behind these figures were some very significant events. One of these local strikes by unorganized workers began in the freightsheds of the Intercolonial Railway in Halifax in 1907. By the following year these railway workers had united with others to found a new Canadian union; the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees would go on to become one of the largest unions in Canada.

In all parts of the region there was also an interest in social reform, and a small but remarkably widespread socialist movement appeared in the region. In 1910 the Socialist Party of Canada boasted fifteen locals in the Maritimes; in 1913 the socialist newspaper *Cotton's Weekly* had a circulation of more than

2,400 copies in the Maritimes and Newfoundland. The party members included radical labour leaders like J.B. McLachlan of the Cape Breton coal miners, who believed it was the mission of the working class to "redeem the world from the chaos of capitalism;" in New Brunswick there was H.H. Stuart, a newspaper editor and founder of the province's teachers' union, who stumped the countryside appealing for common action by "the workers, farmers and all others who perform any useful labour with hand or brain;" in Newfoundland, where there were several small independent socialist organizations, a Methodist lay preacher by the name of George Grimes become an organizer of fishermen and other workers, a member of the House of Assembly — and he influenced one youngster by the name of Smallwood to become interested in socialist ideas.

My point is that in the early twentieth century not all people in the Atlantic region believed that the triumph of the capitalist labour market and the industrial way of life were inevitable or even desirable. Such doubts were being voiced not only by socialists but also by large, popular organizations of working people throughout the region.

The most remarkable of these was the Fishermen's Protective Union. Under the leadership of William Coaker, the FPU was a social crusade to break the power of the Newfoundland fish merchants. From its model town at Port Union, through its network of local councils and co-ops, newspapers, and public meetings, the FPU mobilized the fishermen as never before. The FPU aimed at direct government intervention in the fishing industry, especially in marketing fish exports, but the FPU's goals also included social legislation such as minimum wages and old age pensions, which would benefit all working people. Similar organizations existed among other small producers in the region, particularly among the farmers of Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, who, like the FPU, organized co-ops to mobilize their economic strength and marshalled their voting power to force political parties to address working-class needs.

It is common in Canadian labour history to think of the year 1919 as the time of the great "western revolt," but we are coming to realize that this is no longer accurate, that the year 1919 involved a continental, even global, upheaval among working people. In St. John's the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association, pledging to unite workers in all trades into a common organization, was in its heyday. There was a wave of strikes across the region as there was across the country. If we are to believe the novelist Thomas Raddall, even the lonely wireless operators on a rocky island off the Nova Scotia coast went on strike — "like waiters, like miners, like longshoremen in a wages wrangle!"

One of the most interesting conflicts took place in May 1919 in Amherst, Nova Scotia, the busy little factory town on the edge of the marshlands that separate Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. It began only five days after the Winnipeg General Strike and as in Winnipeg, it was also a general strike. For

Boy Miner

Young miners at pit-head

Class struggle in Nova Scotia

Glace Bay by Lawren Harris

three weeks the town was shut down. Workers were seeking union recognition for employees at the local carworks, which in 1909 had become part of a national company, Canadian Car and Foundry. Most interestingly, they were seeking the same hours and pay increases that workers in the Montreal shops had won in an earlier strike that year. Unlike Winnipeg, there was no violence, and the results brought some economic gains for the workers. That story is often counted up simply as one more sympathy strike with Winnipeg workers, yet it is clear they had a cause of their own. Indeed, by fighting for the same wages and conditions as workers in central Canada, they were making their contribution to a battle against regional underdevelopment.

The resistance to underdevelopment has been strongest in the coal and steel industries of Nova Scotia, where the years at the end of World War I are remembered as the time of "labor's war." This was the era when the effectiveness of unions depended mainly on their ability to force employers to grant them recognition. By using strikebreakers, injunctions, arrests, evictions, blacklists — and the armed forces — the coal companies in 1909-11 had beaten back a challenge by the United Mine Workers, but in 1919 the union had become successfully established.

In the 1920s the local coal and steel industries faced severe problems in maintaining their markets in central Canada and in surviving the financial mismanagement of a new controlling company, the British Empire Steel Corporation, often referred to locally as the British *Vampire* Steel Corporation. Dramatic confrontations followed. In 1922 the corporation imposed a one-third wage reduction on the coal miners; in response one of the miners' tactics was to "go slow" and reduce production by one-third. In 1924 and 1925 the miners resisted further wage cuts designed to improve the company's financial picture, and the long battle culminated in the shooting of coal miner William Davis by company police on 11 June 1925, a day still marked as a memorial day.

The conflict in Cape Breton was really the last great hurrah for the use of military aid to the civil power by the Canadian government. The use of armed force was a long-standing tradition in Canadian labour history. Behind all the smooth talk of conciliators like William Lyon Mackenzie King, there stood the threat of force. If persuasion failed, the government was prepared to send in troop trains loaded with soldiers armed for battle, to roll armoured trucks and barbed wire through the streets of strikebound towns, and to set up military encampments opposite the union's picket lines. This was resorted to in Saint John and Halifax, as well as in Cape Breton and other coal and steel towns. Even among the well-behaved people of Corner Brook, Newfoundland during the construction of the great pulp and paper mill in the 1920s, a force of constabulary and a British warship were despatched to intimidate construction workers who were demanding a 10 per cent increase in wages, and improvements in housing and hospital conditions in the construction camps. (Again, an interesting point in this dispute is that the workers who were native New-

foundlanders were protesting the fact that they received lower pay than British and Canadian workers on the site.) Mackenzie King was dreadfully embarrassed by the too-easy availability of armed force for the use of employers, and it is clear that it was the impact of these unpopular invasions of Cape Breton that led to the amendment of the Militia Act and the eventual abandonment of this approach to solving labour disputes.

What is most notable about the Cape Breton story is that working people resisted so long, so resourcefully, and with some success. The wage reductions were limited, the miners' union was preserved, the British Empire Steel Corporation was dissolved, the use of the armed forces in labour troubles was widely discredited. These achievements were gained by union action, but we should not forget that the unions were only a part of the story. The Cape Bretoners established cooperatives, founded labour newspapers, took over town councils, pushed their churches towards social action, and even made plans to establish a labour college in Glace Bay. In the early twentieth century industrial Cape Breton became the home of what we might describe as a working-class culture of resistance, a culture that was carried on in the songs and stories of the oral tradition, and perhaps captured most effectively in the verses of Dawn Fraser:

> Listen, my children, and you shall know
> Of a crime that happened long ago,
> In the dark and dismal days of old
> When the world and all was ruled by Gold,
> When the Earth was a rich man's institution —
> That was before the Revolution —
> When the gold was dug by the toiling masses
> But stolen from them by the master classes.

Perhaps their greatest achievement was the establishment of public ownership in the coal and steel industries. The battle took almost fifty years to win. The arrival of public ownership in 1967 came late, very late, and the necessary reinvestment has trickled in very slowly. The present plight of these underdeveloped industries must remind us that this was an incomplete achievement.

It is now well-recognized in Canadian labour history that a critical turning point arrived in Canada in the 1940s. Though unions had been considered legal since at least 1872, they enjoyed no rights or protection under the law. Employers were free to fire union members and were under no requirement to recognize unions chosen by their employees. With the proclamation of PC 1003 in 1944 and later legislation, unions at last began to receive some of the legal protection they had long wanted: the right to belong to unions was protected; employers could not discriminate against members; and employers were required to recognize and bargain with unions chosen by their employees.

While PC 1003 is recognized as a turning point, it is not so well known that

this federal order was anticipated years earlier at the provincial level. In 1937 a Nova Scotia Trade Union Act protected the right to join a union and to have the union recognized. Things had changed since the 1920s. Although the steelworkers' unions had been broken repeatedly in the past, by 1937 they were once more organized. But the steel company remained adamant: it would not recognize the union. At one point in this story, Premier Angus L. Macdonald came to the Isle Royale Hotel in Sydney wooing the leaders of the steelworkers with a bottle of rum. The tide had changed. Premier Macdonald felt it was now to the government's advantage to appear as a friend of unions; certainly he feared a repetition of the violent events of the 1920s. In response to union demands, Macdonald went ahead and introduced the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act.

There were similiar developments in New Brunswick. In the wake of two explosive strikes in 1937 — one in the Minto coalfield and the other on the banks of the Miramichi River — the provincial government also moved to provide legal rights for New Brunswick unions. Compared to what was taking place in Ontario and Quebec at this time — where provincial governments stood firm against the union menace — the Maritimes appeared exceptionally advanced and "unconservative." Similarly, in Newfoundland labour legislation was one of the first items of business when the new provincial government of Joey Smallwood took office. Smallwood appointed an advisory committee composed almost entirely of unionists, and they prepared legislation modelled on the Canadian law.

There were, nevertheless, limits to what could be achieved merely through the letter of the law. The Nova Scotia Trade Union Act for instance did not seem to apply in the case of the fishermen of Lockeport, Nova Scotia, who formed locals of the Canadian Fishermen's Union in 1939. The fish plants shut their doors and more than two hundred Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrived to help break the strike. The union was defeated, and the province's minister of labour subsequently made the message clear to the local union president, writing him this personal advice: "jump in your boat and go out to sea and catch fish, where your talents might display themselves to better advantage." Similarly, in 1948 the Prince Edward Island legislature, determined to protect Canada Packers from the menace of CIO unionism, amended its Trade Union Act to prohibit Island workers from belonging to off-Island unions. In this case there was a national outcry against such obvious restrictions on freedom of association, and within a few months Premier Walter Jones announced that the legislation would be repealed.

The most famous of the post-war battles to confirm the new rights of labour took place in Newfoundland. There, after a long and difficult organizing campaign during the 1950s in which union organizers were literally parachuted into the logging camps, Newfoundland loggers voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining the International Woodworkers of America. The union was recognized,

but no first contract could be reached. A strike followed in January 1959 and the industry was crippled.

At this point Premier Smallwood took a stand that left the labour movement reeling: a special session of the legislature outlawed the IWA. Smallwood announced a new loggers' union of his own devising and called on the RCMP for reinforcements in what he described as a "Civil War." Again the strike was broken. Once more it was clear that the rights of labour could be swiftly withdrawn. Even Joey Smallwood, the most populist of provincial premiers in the 1950s, had found himself forced to accept what he saw as the logic of the capitalist free-market economy. "Personally, consulting my own feelings," he has mused, "I would like to be associated with labour legislation that would be a model for the world [but] we must temper that desire with our urgent desire to attract capital to Newfoundland."

Echoes of this kind of plaintive statement had often been heard on the mainland — in rejecting the idea of an eight-hour day for Nova Scotia workers at the turn of the century, for instance. And they have been heard repeatedly in later decades as well, perhaps most recently in the Nova Scotia government's successful campaign in 1979 to amend the province's Trade Union Act to prevent the certification of a union in one of the province's major heavy industries. Although the workers had already cast their votes, the ballots would never be counted: workers at the Michelin Tire Plant in Pictou County lost their right to belong to the union of their choice as the provincial government gambled basic rights for the hope of new multinational investment.

It is clear that although the legal changes recognizing the rights of labour were important milestones for Canadian workers, we cannot be certain these achievements were permanent ones. Looking at their origins, we are reminded that these rights were not easily established but were the result of long struggles. From the perspective of the 1980s, it is clear we are living through a time when these achievements are indeed in some jeopardy.

My argument, then, is that labour does indeed have deep historic roots in Atlantic Canada. But I do not mean to argue as well that labour history in this region is just the same as labour history in all the other parts of the country. Consider, for instance, the special features of the regional economy. Regional disparity has been with us for a long time and new revelations on this score will not be necessary. Like other parts of the Canadian hinterland, Atlantic Canadians live in a region suffering from continual economic difficulties. When the Maritimes and then Newfoundland joined Canada, it was done in the context of the construction of a national economic structure in Canada, one that involved domination and dependence. The rise of national transportation networks, of national markets in goods and labour, a centralized government and financial system — all of these assisted the growth of the hegemony of central Canada within the national economy.

The effects of regional underdevelopment have been deep ones, particu-

The conflict between the Cape Breton coal miners and their absentee proprietors was expressed in a contemporary cartoon.

Hon. William F. Coaker, President of the FPU.

James Bryson McLachlan, 1935.

FPU Council at Squid Tickle, after parade.

larly on the local labour market. When Harold Innis visited St. John's in 1930 he put his finger on the weakness of the local labour market: "Reserve force of labour, men always looking for a job," he wrote in his diary, "Unemployment, or rather fluctuating labour, very much the rule." Note that distinction between "unemployment" and "fluctuating labour." This was very much a characteristic of the regional situation. At the end of the fishing season the Newfoundland fishermen headed for the Cape Breton coal mines; meanwhile the longshoremen in the winter port of Saint John headed for the sawmills once the shipping season was over. Work was never steady, always punctuated by periods of idleness, seasonal shutdowns, layoffs, and wage reductions. There was always the temptation to head on down the road to places where there might be greater stability. "People: Nova Scotia's Biggest Product," noted the magazine *Canadian Business* proudly in 1944. And indeed people have probably been the region's biggest, most valuable export in the past: a most useful function for the national economy but a subversive one for the regional community. The Boston boat, the westbound train, the TransCanada Highway — these have been the roadways of the great exodus which in the last century has carried more than a million people away to the glittering cities and oft-times gloomy workplaces of the North American continent.

And yet there is another side to this story. In response to the region's great economic difficulties in the twentieth century, people in the Atlantic region have been less than passive. There is in Atlantic Canada an exceptionally strong sense of attachment to family and community, notions that in the calculations of the labour market may be considered old-fashioned. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the work force has tended to come not so much from immigration as from internal migration: the new industries and resource frontiers of the region have been worked by people who often shared common backgrounds, close family and ethnic ties and traditions, and strong attachments to their communities. Though they made a transition from the farm and the outport to the mill town and the city, they carried older values in their heads and in their hearts. They were the people of the land, they were the producers of the wealth: the business people who increasingly monopolized and controlled the regional economy were the true outsiders. Wrote one staunch community defender in the 1920s: "Every man has relatives and friends and neighbours. The entire population is with him. The managing operator is the floater. He shifts every three or four years and sees only the dollar in the vision, has no stake in the community; no love for the people." Thus there is the reputation for putting up a fight.

In the meantime, workers are gaining some interesting allies in their battles. There is of course, the controversial statement of the Canadian bishops made in 1983, their *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, which has prompted so much national debate. But in summer 1979 the Catholic bishops of Atlantic Canada issued a truly remarkable document, a pastoral statement

entitled *To Establish a Kingdom of Justice*, probably the most important social statement by a major regional institution in recent years. This impressive document invites us to stand back from the wilderness of partial explanations and consider the larger causes of regional underdevelopment in Atlantic Canada.

Two intersecting historical patterns emerge. First, the region *has become* a dependent region: our economy and our culture have fallen largely under outside control. Vigorous local economic institutions such as banks and businesses have been lost, and vast human and natural resources have been exported; paternalistic governments and bureaucracies have stepped into the breach, but often they have only strengthened the sense of dependency and defeat among those who remain. This approach stresses the differences between this region and "the metropolitan areas of Canada." It is a pattern of regional exploitation, one which has left us no longer masters of our own house, no longer makers of our own destiny. It is, as Dawn Fraser wrote, a case that "All the cream and all that's best,/Is grabbed up by the middle west." Secondly, the document describes a pattern of class-based conflict over the fortunes of the region. In our society, wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a small elite of individuals and corporations; most of us have little share in the ownership or control of our economic life, though many of our elite have become closely integrated into this network of prestige and power. The rule of profit and power, they remind us, is by no means inevitably a just one: equal sacrifice and effort do not yield equal rewards and security. "None Cease to Rise But Those Who Cease to Climb:" the old nineteenth-century wisdom of the Provincial Workmen's Association and of the Longshoremen's Protective Union had proven false.

While the *Kingdom of Justice* draws attention to the decline and difficulty of Atlantic Canada, it is nevertheless a hope-filled document, reminding us that many of the region's resources remain rich ones and that the people of Atlantic Canada are a proud people with a heritage of hard work and self-reliance and a "tenacious versatility" which has served well in adversity. In response to the challenges of regional underdevelopment working people have often organized to protect their communities. Through farmers' and fishermen's organizations, through the labour movement and through cooperatives, through political action and protest movements, working people have continually organized to fight for the development of the region's resources in the interest of working people.

And so I return you to our friend, the "bad man" and "fiend," "Moses" McLachlan, for although denounced as an atheist, he saw himself in the tradition of the great preachers of the past, and I think this old radical would welcome the bishops of 1983 to his side:

From Moses and Jesus and Marx and Carlyle, one outstanding theme runs through all their teachings, however much the language employed may have differed. The sins which all of them denounced most fiercely were economic sins, and the mission of all of them in life was to deliver the oppressed. Their gospel was an economic gospel that dealt with the affairs of men right down here on this earth, and the preacher that is going to be listened to today. . . . must stand either for the supremacy of things as against the supremacy of man, or the supremacy of man as against the supremacy of things.

In that struggle, people in Atlantic Canada have suffered defeats, and there is much history yet to be made. But as we continue the search for a more responsible and more democratic economic system, working people in Canada may well take instruction and perhaps even some courage from the history of workers in Atlantic Canada.

David Frank, editor of *Acadiensis* and member of the History Department at the University of New Brunswick, has written about Cape Breton coal miners.

H. Landon Ladd, President, District 2, International Woodworkers of America.

The Newfoundland Loggers' Strike of 1959

H. Landon Ladd

NO STRIKE IN CANADIAN labour history has had such a widespread and rippling effect as the 1959 loggers' strike in Newfoundland, which spread its waves across Canada, North America, and around the world. I was once called, and not very long ago, by a little fella, "the barracuda of Newfoundland." — Well that's me, I'm here and I'm proud to be that barracuda of Newfoundland. When the history of this province is written, it will be recorded that from this island a wave of social change moved out and touched not only the people of this island home, this complacent and smug society that looked down upon the logger as the lowest on the totem pole of social life. It caused the downfall of the federal minister of justice and the resignation of the commissioner of the RCMP. It split asunder the Liberal Party on a national basis. Its cause was taken to the United Nations that declared certain laws that were passed here in this land to be *ultra vires* of all things that were decent and good. It even caused the president of the United States to set up a commission to study whether the product that was produced during the strike was produced by what was called indentured labour and therefore could not be brought into the United States. I make that as a preliminary introduction to you. The question is how did it all come about? Why?

It started in an active way on my return from Europe in 1956, but even before Confederation, Donald MacDonald, the director of the Canadian Congress of Labour in the Maritimes, had urged us to come to Newfoundland to survey the industry in this province, to see if we could build an organization together. Back when Newfoundland became a province, I was again urged by the Canadian Congress of Labour to establish the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) in this province. It was not possible at that time because of our activities elsewhere but in 1953, and the records will show it, we had IWA people on this island of Newfoundland. We made a survey of the pulp and paper industry, the logging camps. We made a survey of every nook and cranny of this island and crammed it all away in files, because that is how we operate. Charlie Morton came over here from our Nova Scotia operations and I have 1953 wires from old J.J. Thompson in my case here tonight, requesting way back then that we take a look at the situation. And I tell you this for no

other reason than that over the following years there was this great story that the IWA hopped across the continent from British Columbia and took advantage of the Newfoundland Lumberman's Association, that glorious company union that was situated up in Grand Falls, and I tell you this because I think the history should be set correct.

Yes, I was in Switzerland — Geneva, Switzerland, — as a delegate to that section of the United Nations known as the ILO. I was sent there by Lester Pearson helping to debate the issue of that day, which was slave labour in the Soviet Union. The ILO was dealing with the prisoners, the people that had been taken from factories in Germany and elsewhere and had been taken over to Russia. When I left that conference, I went to Prestwick, Scotland, and three times we tried to get across the Atlantic. Three times the plane was turned back because of problems, but the fourth time we got this far, we landed at Gander, and more problems happened, not only for the airplane but for Joey Smallwood, and for all kinds of other people — because I came here that day. That day, because I had several hours to wait, I thought gee, 1953, I wonder if that old phone number is the same? Because I had some files. Lo and behold, I called up and on the other end of the phone was the fellow called Joe Thompson from the Newfoundland Lumberman's Association. He said, "you know we are going to have a convention in a short while, we are going to have a convention of our Newfoundland Lumberman's Associations and we would love to have you come and be our guest speaker." I accepted on the spot and consequently wires and letters went back and forth. I arrived back here first of all in September to meet with him, and then for his convention in October.

I've got a nice little card here with my name printed on it as the guest of this Newfoundland union. And I stayed as a guest at the AND Company staff house. I didn't know at the time what it was but I soon found out and I moved down to that fine place called the Town and Country Inn in Grand Falls, Old Baird's Hotel, because I just didn't feel comfortable. I said to Joe, "I just don't feel comfortable in one of these fancy places." "Well," he said, "This is where we all stay when we are around." At any rate, we had the beginnings of a relationship with Mr. Thompson's union, he had talked to me from time to time about how we could amalgamate his union with the IWA. And he said, "You know I've been down to Indianapolis which is the headquarters of the Carpenter's Union and they have offered me a pension and some other rewards, and I want to know what you've got that you can give me if I turn over this outfit to you." I looked at him and said, "Have you put the sign out?" He said, "What sign?" I said, "Unions For Sale." "God," he said, "I didn't put any sign out." "Well," I said, "That's what we are talking about. And the IWA has never bought a single person in its life and as far as I'm concerned we never will, but if you want to come and work in the IWA we would be delighted to have you on the basis of performance of a job." So that is how we went into his conference, and thus at that time he was supporting not the IWA but the

Carpenter's Union and eventually we took a vote because Mr. Cooper from the Carpenter's Union presented a case and I was invited to present a case on behalf of the IWA. We took a ballot and we got twenty-seven to fourteen and old Joe Thompson jumped up and says, "By God, that's not a majority, twenty-seven out of forty-one is not a majority." "So," he said, "I declare it all unconstitutional and you fellas can all go on home." Well, I just moved up and said, "I want to thank you for your interpretation of democracy and incidentally if there is anyone here who wants to move away with us, we will have a meeting outside and we will start the rolling of the International Woodworkers of America. We are not buying any unions, we have won this convention fair and square and we are here to stay and we are going to build a union in Newfoundland for the loggers." And that's precisely what we did.

So there's much been written how we jumped from place to place, from B.C. all the way down here. But we organized in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, had thousands of members in the eastern part of Canada, as well as hundreds of local unions. So we set about to see what we could do about organizing here in Newfoundland and the law said that workers in Newfoundland were free to join or not to join a union of their choice without company interference. But the company refused us the right to have our representative meet with the loggers in their homes — because the camp is their home, they pay room and board to it — and the company closed the gates. We walked through to the camps and our people went 30, 40, 50, and one of them went 72 miles on foot, and in spite of all the harsh things you might say, they didn't even take a bedroll or take anything other than what was on their backs to walk in to organize the loggers. Because that was the only way they were going to be able to stay in a camp, at least overnight, so they could talk to the boys. When we were excluded from the camps, we hired airplanes and landed our people in, put out leaflets across the province and we got it organized. We had our own snowmobiles, and we hired a schooner going around the island. The IWA campaign was probably one of the most intensive organizing drives that has ever been put on in any part of any province of this country. We even opened up our own unemployment insurance office and our worker compensation office, because we found that many workers had not got their unemployment insurance, and the guys who are out in the outports now and seeing this programme will understand what I'm talking about. But we set our own up, and within a short period of time we had collected over three million dollars from the federal government in back unemployment insurance that belonged to those workers. We collected compensation claims, sending workers all the way to Toronto who were injured and couldn't get the medical care here for rehabilitation.

We built a caring organization, but more important than all of these, more important than all of us, was a little-known operation. When I looked over the topography of this place and realized that the men were moving from camp to

Plane used to parachute union organizers into bush during Newfoundland loggers' strike.

camp, and it was very difficult to send a letter to them, or for them to have the continuity of union meetings, and decided we weren't going to use the camps as the basis of our operation. I put into effect our little committees of five in every outport, over 200 of them on this island. On those committees of five I insisted that three of them had to be women and my staff said to me, "My God, what have you done, women in a loggers' organization — what kind of an outfit are we going to build, what are you going to do with those damn women anyhow?" And I told them then, as I have told people since, more strikes have been lost in the kitchen than have ever been lost on the picket line. And throughout that strike the ferocious attitude of those women, the job they did for the IWA is part of the glorious tradition of Newfoundland and we could never, never have held that strike through all the times and built it and worked, without the assistance of our little committees of five with their three women and two loggers.

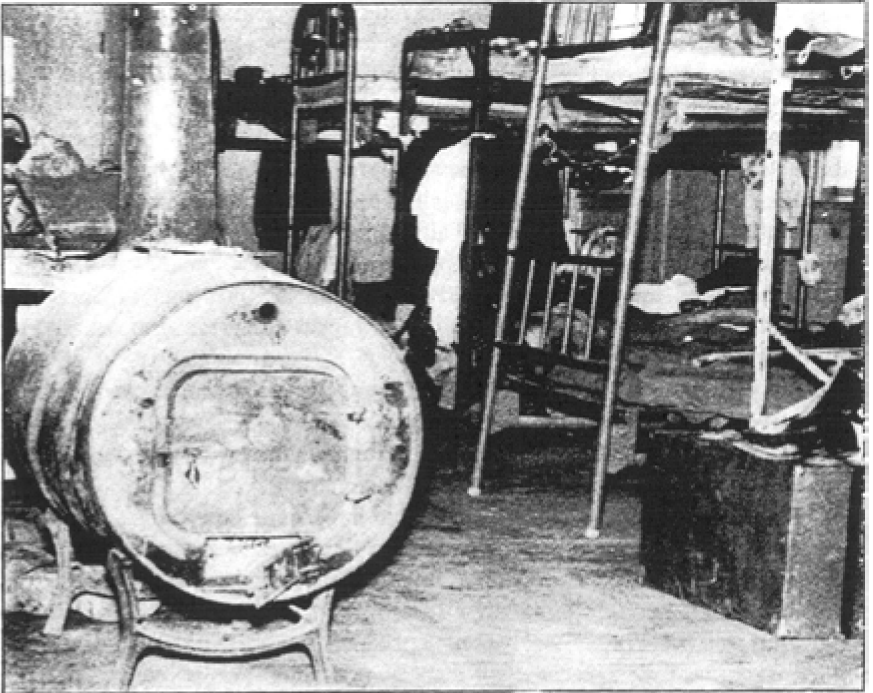
We made an application for certification in June of 1957, but it was turned down by the Labour Relations Board on a technicality. They said we did not have status — what status meant was that instead of certifying the International Woodworkers of America as had been done so often with different unions, they claimed we had to get certification for local unions separately. Well, I remember going to the Newfoundland Hotel after that meeting at the Labour Relations Board when they had turned us down for that first certification. Our people had gone through hell, they had walked miles in the snow and the heat, they had improvised in manners, which has rarely been seen in an organizational drive, and when they sat down in the room and looked at me, utterly exhausted, my staff said to me, "My God what are we going to do?" I said, "I

know what we are going to do, we are going to do it all over again." "Oh my God," they said, "I guess we had better take a couple of weeks holidays." I said, "A couple of weeks holidays! We're not taking a couple of hours holidays! You're going back now, back to the camps, back to the jobs. Go and tell the workers the facts." That same day they were beginning to sign up people on their way from St. John's and they got through to the outports and within thirty days we had done the following: we had got in touch with every local of our international union across North America, we had a referendum ballot that changed our entire international constitution, something never before heard of. In order to accommodate the requirements of Newfoundland we put a special section in there on Newfoundland and then within thirty days we reorganized the workers all over again.

We went back to the Labour Relations Board with a percentage of people signed up that has probably never been equalled anywhere in this province by any union. And we had a hearing in the fall of that year, in October, and they decided they were going to have a vote by ballot, a mailed ballot. And so the Labour Department sent out their ballots and when it was all over with 86.4 per cent of all the loggers on their voting list marking their ballots with an X for the International Woodworkers of America, we were certified. After that we set about trying to negotiate a collective agreement. Before we decided to negotiate a collective agreement we called for the first time a truly democratic convention of the loggers in Grand Falls and for several days we went through every section of a proposed collective agreement. Every piece was discussed and debated by the loggers themselves. Unlike the previous organizations where they had their proposals in their back pocket and went in to see the boss in the front office by themselves, this was to be an organization of rank-and-file people and it was. We hammered out there together a proposal for a collective agreement with the AND Company. And it was a very modest proposition indeed. I know the company was astounded when we suggested what we would like to have in terms of a collective agreement.

What did we really want? We wanted to have some bed sheets, some plain old sheets on the beds. We asked for a bit of hot water to shave, and to be able to wash clothes once in a while. We suggested that maybe it was possible, just possible, that we could supplant the beans just for an occasion and have bacon and eggs for breakfast. We wanted to reduce the back-breaking sixty-hour work week, and we asked for 25 cents an hour increase in wages. Well, we went through the normal procedures of collective bargaining, and presented our briefs. The company's answer was a long document — the essence of it all was that in order to accommodate each other and to have a happy family in the woods, that we should take a wage cut. And so we went to a conciliation board made up of Brian White, chairman, William Lundrigan, and Frank Chafe for the union. After a lengthy consideration this conciliation board came down and said they thought the wage increases should be three cents an hour effective

immediately, and another two cents an hour in another year for a total of five cents. There should be 2 per cent for vacation pay and working hours should be reduced to fifty-four over a period of time. Well — the most amazing thing happened — the IWA accepted the unanimous report of the conciliation board. If I came to you in 1983 and said will you take three cents an hour and a fifty-four-hour work week, and nothing more than promises to improve the camps! But we did it, we did it because we did not want to have a strike in Newfoundland. We wanted to build steadily step by step to improve our contracts as so many unions have had to do over the years. The company refused to accept it on the basis that it was too costly. And they rejected the report. When I said to Mr. Moore, Mr. Ross Moore, president of the company at that time, is there any way to get an agreement? He said, "Yes, Mr. Ladd, there is. Take a wage cut."



Living conditions, Newfoundland logging camps, 1958.

Well, the next part is the part that most of you have an interest in. On 31 December 1958, after receiving a 97 per cent strike vote, we went on strike against the AND Company. And looking back, having exhausted every possible way to find a settlement, we wondered what on earth we were doing. I was out

at Gander, having just come in from Ottawa, and there were a number of company people on the plane. When they got off at the Gander airport they went off by themselves, talking. I went over to wait for my baggage, where one of the boys was going to come and pick me up, and one of the officials of that party of the AND Company came over and said, "Mr. Ladd, would you like a lift into Grand Falls?" I said, "Well, thank you, you are very kind but we have our own transportation, and thank you just the same." "Well," he said, "It would give us an opportunity to talk." I said, "Well, if you have something to talk about, talk." "Well," he said, "I just wanted to give you a message." He said, "Do you remember the strike in Quebec, the Asbestos Strike, which Duplessis crushed?" I said, "I heard about it, I wasn't involved in it." "Well," he said, "Let me tell you something, if the IWA goes out on strike in Newfoundland, that Asbestos Strike in Quebec will look like a tea party." And I said, "I just can't believe it. I don't know what you are talking about. Surely you are not being serious." He said, "You bet we're serious." He said, "You'll find that the government of Newfoundland will support the companies and not the union." I said, "You have got to be kidding." But he said, "No, because they owe us, and we mean to collect." Oh, how right he was. I don't know what the debt was, or what they were to collect, but I looked at him and said, "Listen, when I came to Newfoundland, before I even came here, I was told that we had a real friend in Mr. Smallwood, that he was an old union organizer, an old socialist, a man of the people, and I just can't believe it." And everywhere I had gone across this island, I had heard nothing but good things said about Mr. Smallwood. I accepted it on its face value — the workers had told me in the outports how he had got this for them and that for them and that he was a man of the people — and never once in all the time since I first landed on this island did I ever once under any circumstances ever make a derogatory remark about the Premier of this province until the night of 12 February 1959.

Now, we had many problems conducting a strike that size, and with the distances we had to cover, but by 10 February 1959, the IWA had won the Loggers' Strike. The company was putting out feelers, we had people meeting in Montreal with Mr. Elliott Little of the Pulp and Paper Organization, the President of the Canadian Labour Congress, Mr. Claude Jodoin, discussed with me how we could resolve the matter and put it to bed. Well, on 11 February, I turned on the radio and I think it was that old friend of mine or yours, Phil Ryan, who used to broadcast every night — one of the best organizers the IWA ever had. I would say to him, Phil, here's a press release, tell them I'm going to be up into such and such an outport. I hope to get there tonight — if I can't be there I'll be there tomorrow night or another night because I'm going to go to this place, that place, and the other on my way in. Well, he would dutifully broadcast and so my meetings were all well advertised. I didn't have to put any ads into the papers. So I always remember him with a great deal

of kindness. But on that night I turned on the radio, and there was a story about a wire, a telegram, that had been sent to the Premier from Badger and it said that 800 IWA loggers were marching on the jail at Grand Falls to release the prisoners that had been taken by the RCMP. And in the *Evening Telegram,* in the news on your television, and in Nova Scotia, in Quebec, in Ontario and across the land, were the great headlines that said "Civil War," "Civil War in Newfoundland." "Hundreds of loggers are on the march and attacking a town." I couldn't believe it, just couldn't believe it, so I went to Badger and I rousted a fellow out of bed at 2 o'clock in the morning. And I got the information through the telegraph guy. The sender was a merchant, a very nice guy, sympathetic, who though he was doing the right thing. He had sent this wire to Mr. Smallwood that 800 loggers were marching. And I said to him, "That's not true, is it?" He said, "No, no, no." I said "Well, why did you?" "I don't know, I just thought the boys might like that." I said, "What were you doing?" He said, "I was drinking. I was drunk." "Do you realize that from one end of Canada to another, people believe that there are hundreds and hundreds of loggers marching on a helpless town because of your remarks?" "Get out of bed," and I dictated a wire to go to Mr. Smallwood in which he apologized to Mr. Smallwood for misinforming him, because he had. But, lo and behold, on the air it came back that Mr. Smallwood had checked this out and it was authentic. And then came the next position, the famous speech, "Send them packing, the 800 loggers are marching in Central Newfoundland, Civil War." He gets a reply from Mr. Smallwood. Mr. Smallwood said to him, "I accept your apology, you should never mix liquor with a strike, and next time you should stop drinking for the rest of your life. Signed, Yours Truly, Joseph R. Smallwood." But the same night, over the air, came "Civil War Rages in Newfoundland." I sent wires that didn't have any effect. February 11th, Mr. Curtis, the Attorney-General, came on the air, and I'm quoting the words that I have, "I understand that the loggers of Badger have thoughts of violence in their heads. If this be so, I suggest to them they do not go through with it. If this be so, I suggest they quietly go to their homes and not be led by the kind of people who are heading the IWA, because if you do not, you may find yourselves in jail and if you go to jail, you will never be able to emigrate to the United States." Eight hundred loggers marching on a town in central Newfoundland, behave yourself or you can't emigrate from the beloved island of Newfoundland.

And so that next night on came Mr. Smallwood with his famous position, "Send them packing and I'll give you a state-run union, as good as they've got in the Soviet Union, I'll give you a state-run union, I'll run it myself." God that's an improvement. "I'll get you a contract within a week or maybe two." (I'm quoting), and then he tied together the teamsters' union and talked of white slavers, pimps, communists, racketeers and twisted me among all this, which is fine — the barracuda has come back. He says "I'm going to

move out," he said, "And win for the loggers their own union." "Well," he says, "you know you might not want to be by yourselves, maybe it would be just as good if the fishermen came into your union."

A brotherhood of fish and woodworkers, — well, I immediately dubbed it the fish and chip union. He didn't think that was very kind. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be unkind, but we called it the fish and chip union, and that brotherhood of fish and chip unions was a flop like most of the things Mr. Smallwood has undertaken in his life, from pigs down to the loggers' strike.

And in all this there was not one single word about the company refusing to bargain, not one single word that the company refused to bargain even with unanimous mediation, a conciliation board that Mr. Smallwood's government had set up. We accepted it, they rejected it. Mr. Smallwood said "By God, it's going to cost a million dollars." The fact is that from 1933 to the end of 1957, the AND Company has operated as a reconstituted company, and every year, except 1942, that company made 90 million dollars in profit before taxes; 55 million after taxes, not including or counting 22 million dollars charged to depreciation and depletion. Its net worth in that same period of time jumped from 23 million to 50 million dollars — and Mr. Smallwood said, "We've got to get rid of the IWA," because the company couldn't afford to spend a million to clean up the camps, and improve the horrible, horrible conditions in which the loggers lived and worked. And so we come down to the very famous night — "send them packing" — and urged the loggers to send wires by the thousands, thousands and thousands, he said. Well, he didn't get any wires from the loggers, and he started out to organize his fish and chip union. He got nowhere with it and finally decided he was going to gamble all. He called a meeting for 28 February in Grand Falls; since 12 February he had pulled out all the stops, getting clergy, merchants, frightened townspeople, contractors, and hangers-on, but he didn't get the loggers. The test came when Joey announced he was going to sweep central Newfoundland with his fish and chip union. He called a meeting and less than 400 people attended and what a motley group it was, because I had my own people inside, taking a look at who was coming, local people who knew who was who. And there were a few beautiful people like old-age pensioners, bless them, company bosses, merchants — but where were the loggers? The loggers had gone down the road a few miles because I had called a meeting right in the hollow where the river flows, and I had sent the word out through my committees of five, the beautiful women of Newfoundland, that we would be meeting down by the river. And they came in their hundreds — there was a little bit of a hall, we couldn't even use it because only 400 people could get in the thing. So we met outside and flowed just like a great amphitheatre and I got an old flatbed truck and we stood there and we spoke at an outdoor meeting and the loggers came, and came in their hundreds and hundreds and hundreds. And the fish and chip union's great and glorious leader, brother Smallwood, decided that he had had enough, that the loggers

would not go to the fish and chip union, so he would try to smash the IWA.

And so a few days later Joey went back to St. John's from the AND headquarters where he was, and prepared the legislature to do those things that he wanted them to do. And they passed their laws for decertification of the union — Joey's answer to the loggers. How dare they stand by the IWA, he declared. And the legislation to outlaw the IWA, to deprive it of the certification that his own labour board had granted, and to eliminate picketing of any kind, even the effort to persuade a worker to stay with the IWA, made the penalty $500 per day for the worker and $5,000 for the union for each offence. The IWA was outlawed for fighting for more than $1.05 per hour and against a sixty-hour work-week, for hot water, sheets, and a little bit of decent food once in a while. The day that legislation was passed, on 6 March 1959, I listened carefully, and I heard the rustling of papers, and I knew that Joseph R. Smallwood was tearing up the Magna Carta that had stood for liberty of the British people for 1,000 years. He was paying his IOUs.

I toured the picket line that night, two hundred miles of it until 5 o'clock in the morning, and the loggers were there, they stood firm in the face of the dictators, the police-state tactics, and the union was solid. On 12 March, the desperate premier decided to send his troops into action. There was a question of violence, as it was called, transgressions of the law. I know there was one fella who lost a key, or had a key taken from him, which was worth 50 cents; there were foolish acts by desperate men. How much can a man take, fighting for his union, fighting for his livelihood, fighting to be able to have that most precious of all things, to be able to stand up and look the boss in the eye as an equal with the dignity that loggers deserved. Sure there were some things, but there was a report by the magazine *Saturday Night*. That magazine sent investigating teams to Newfoundland and came back and took the position that there was such minor violence, nobody was in the hospital, nobody was really hurt, there had been people standing on the road and that old law of 1690 was invoked "watching and besetting." Its origin, I understand, was so that you couldn't put a spell on somebody, you weren't able to stand outside their house and cast the evil eye. We are people who were arrested for casting that evil eye, and many of us went to jail. Some of the loggers had done foolish things, as desperate men under these circumstances were bound to do, when they had thought to have a better life, the simple things of life that are given even in the banana republics. The filth and degradation of the camps of Newfoundland was something that should make every Newfoundlander bow his head in shame. Yes, there were incidents, but they didn't come from the leadership of this union, but the greatest incident of all was doing nothing, standing with the companies, not even calling the company and the union together, and saying let's sit down and try and work out a collective agreement, nothing was done, nothing but the iron fist of the state brought down upon the head of the workers who had stood just for simple things. There are times when I'm

RCMP with riot helmets herding striking loggers into buses in Badger, Nfld.

tempted to say more things than I should, that the violence was whipped up by the hysteria the like of which was never known in any part of this nation. And all violence wasn't treated in the same even-handed manner. I remember the night of 12 March at Badger, when the government had sent in seventy or more RCMP and Newfoundland Constabulary to a peaceful village of unarmed people, and proceeded to move in among people standing there as they had during those long many weeks, fighting for their union. There was a reporter there, Ray Timson of *The Toronto Star*, and he wrote:

> Marching three abreast, and carrying nightsticks, a column of 66 policemen waded into a throng of striking loggers last night, clubbed two of them unconscious, flattened dozens more while wives and children screamed for them to stop. I watched the attack on defenceless men for about an hour, one Newfoundland policeman was hit with a two foot long piece of birchwood in the face and is in hospital, one Mountie was punched in the face, both blows were struck after police started wheeling billies, nine of the loggers were arrested, most of them beaten to the ground, handcuffed, dragged to their feet, one unconscious logger was dragged to a patrol car by four officers. I watched the fight from start to finish. I was the only reporter on the scene along with *Star* photographer, Robert Lansdale. It was a dark hour for Canada's finest, and the beginning of violence that set all central Newfoundland aflame. Loggers by the hundreds after listening to union statement which reported the facts in the completely opposite manner from an earlier RCMP statement was said to be coming over to Badger to reinforce the pickets caravan. Attorney-General Curtis said in the radio report from St. John's that 250 citizens from Grand Falls had volunteered aid to the Mounties, and he was considering the possibility of swearing them in as deputies.

It goes on at another point:

A logger standing in a backyard bordering the road watched the police escorting hand-cuffed dazed loggers away. He shouted, "You sure have guts". An officer pointed to him and yelled, "Get that man!" The logger turned and fled and about 25 Mounties and police cleared the yard and fence like jackrabbits and chased him down towards a row of houses, where he was beaten to the ground, and arrested. One Mountie bounded into Mrs. Frances Pearcy and knocked her down, he never even looked back to see if she was alright. All through the attack Inspector Arthur Sargent, office of the RCMP divisions here, kept raising his hip pocket size black jack and shouting, "Go to your home, move out of here". As one logger was carrying a piece of wood not much thicker than a twig, began moving away from him, Inspector Sargent put a hand lock around his neck and wrestled him to the ground. Other younger and stronger Mounties took over and completed the arrest. The sparks were set off by a Mountie who spotted a logger standing in a crowd at the side of the road with a two to three foot piece of birchwood in his hand. "What's he got there?" the Mountie said, "Get that man, get that man there!" With that, the police all went into action; police patrols in Badger up to this point numbered 16 men travelling in groups of four. When the mob assembled yesterday and police asked headquarters in Grand Falls to reinforce them, more than 50 Mounties and members of the Newfoundland Constabulary were sent. Once in this hamlet they lined up military style and they began marching three to four hundred yards to where the pickets assembled. Seventy-five held their ground and of these 8 or 10 held bits of wood and one man carried a broken hockey stick. The 66 police in a column came swinging down the road and marched past the mass strikers, it appeared the march past was decided to strengthen, the strength of the assembly, the RCMP officer reported police were forced to use billies in the face of weapons such as hockey sticks, pieces of birchwood, pretty permittable weapons. The incident occurred. . . ."

And it goes on, I don't want to go through the whole horrible mess. The reason I'm telling you this is that this is not my report, this is from an impartial person, and the sad consequences you all know — all of us had a heavy heart, none of us, not one, was interested in the kind of outcome that came. But if it hadn't been for the manner in which someone shouted, "Get that man!" And the police not knowing which man to get, and all rushing in and swinging on every man, we probably wouldn't have had the end result we had. I am not making any excuses for any of the trespasses, that took place under intimidation. It was a sad day for all Newfoundlanders, because I had taken a very strong personal position at all times that the end does not justify the means, that under no circumstances were our people to be involved in violence. That is not always possible to carry out in the kind of operation we had, but why on earth was the overreaction of the Government of Newfoundland to send all those armed men against defenceless people standing around an old logging road. Some day the answer will probably be given. Did it have as its purpose the correction of a problem or was its purpose to destroy an organization that could not be destroyed by a fish and chip union, over a premier that had lost his way, while the workers, the loggers, stood firm.

But all violence wasn't treated the same. I remember coming back to

Newfoundland during the election campaign in July of that year. I was with my wife, my three children, and a student from Britain who was here on a Nuffield scholarship. I was to address a meeting at Springdale. We went in and the people at the hotel weren't overly friendly and we were the only ones sitting there in the eating spot. While I was sitting with my little family, a guy came towards me, he whipped out a gun and he shoved it in my belly, while my kids were screaming and my wife nearly fainted, and they took me off to a room in the hotel. And in the room there were five policemen, and they shoved me from one to another and told me that I would never get out of Springdale alive. If I spoke at the meeting that night, that would be the end of me. I told them I was going to speak. I went to the meeting after they eventually released me. Some of the people in Badger will remember it, and Springdale will remember it well, because when I was at that meeting and sitting waiting for things to start while the crowd was pouring in, I saw the same policemen coming in, sitting at the back. When I started to speak after a minute or two, one fellow jumped up and hollered, "Get him!" And about four of the policemen rushed down the aisle — and the most amazing thing happened, and you can put it down as "violence" again. The people sitting in the six front rows from one side of the hall to the other rose up as one, I didn't even know who they were, and they moved, and the policemen walked back to their seats. These were some of the broken and beaten loggers of Badger. They had anticipated a problem and come there and stood with us. Later we heard about them in another fashion, of course, as vigilantes, violent loggers controlling the meeting, but there we were. We got outside to get my car, and the wiring was pulled apart, and a rod was shoved through my radiator. The boys got the wiring fixed up a bit, we got the car on the road, and then when I started down the street towards Badger, the damned thing conked out on me. Right at that minute a police car came along. The policeman got out and read from a book: no vehicle can be on the high roads of Newfoundland unless they are in perfect order, etc., etc. Let me tell you one thing that happened prior to that, there is an RCMP station right next to the parking lot beside the theatre. I went up there and reported what had happened to me in the hotel to the RCMP. The guy says, "I'm on my way home, good-bye, and I don't want to hear no more about it." "But," I said, "I thought you were supposed to be the long arm of the law." He said, "Yes, for some people."

That night, they pushed the damned car all the way to Badger, I think about thirty miles. And we got there in the wee hours of the morning. The next day I got to Grand Falls and the police officer came to see me from the RCMP. He said, "I want you to know, Mr. Ladd, that we know what went on in Springdale last night, and I've come to apologize to you and tell you that this is not the position of the local group of RCMP." I thanked him for it. I think he was sincere. But what was done? Nothing. Violence in central Newfoundland, a phantom army of 800, and we're crushed with a gun in the belly. I say, too

bad. However, nothing can succeed if it takes a violent turn, and this has been my position through the years.

This strike was not only important here in Newfoundland, but its impact was felt all over. I remember an incident down in New Orleans, Louisiana, the old *Bestwood* had gone down there and somehow or other it didn't quite make it into harbour. The master, mates and pilots' organization wouldn't take it in, the firemen who ran the fire boats boycotted it. One thing led to another and President Eisenhower appointed a committee of one, his brother Milton, to go down there and see if they couldn't work out this problem. I'm not going to tell you all the rest of it because you can read it in my book. We also had the *Gladys Bowater*, and I was six days before the courts in New York, and I went there voluntarily, where they attempted to show that the IWA had intent to do damage to a boat. I don't know how in the hell we were supposed to get out there, but we did.

But the impact of this strike was tremendous. I was in London speaking with officials of the Trade Union Congress and they took me over to the Isle of Man to address that congress. After I had come back, there a train came from Scotland carrying hundreds of Scottish miners who had collected something close to 5,000 dollars in Canadian money and asked me if I would take it back to the Newfoundland strikers. I said, "No, you send it." But that day I got a phone call from Harry Van Arnsdale in New York saying, "We have a meeting tonight at the Roosevelt Hall, would you come, we have already paid for your fare, we've chartered that big new Pan-American Clipper, Big Jet. Get in as quick as you can and we also got a return because we know you are going back to Britain to do some work with the congress." I got to New York and I got there very late, and went down to the Roosevelt Hall. People had sat there since 8 o'clock at night, it was then past 10, and they were just still sitting quietly waiting. I addressed that mass meeting in Roosevelt Hall in New York City and I told them of the loggers' strike in Newfoundland, of the loggers' struggle for simple justice and decency. They passed the hat that night and the collection plate had over 5,000 dollars, some people threw rings in there, some people threw watches in the damn thing. The next day we had a meeting in New York of all the representatives of the New York Labour Council, the staff representatives, and to make a long story short, they gathered over 50,000 dollars for the Newfoundland strike. We gathered the money for Newfoundland from Alabama to Alaska, from Victoria through to this island. We gathered over a million dollars from ordinary common people that said, "We believe you're right, we will stand with the loggers of Newfoundland."

I've been asked, "Do you regret it," and I say no, I'm proud of the part we played. Not just an attempt to get a few pennies more an hour, and not even just to reduce the hours of work per week, but the greatest contribution that the International Woodworkers of America has made, and I hope I was a part, was that we gave to the loggers that dignity of workers. Newfoundlanders no longer

looked down their nose at the loggers as the lowest on the totem pole. We raised them up and we gave them dignity and they could say, yes, we are only loggers but by God, we're people. That's what we gave them.

I wanted to talk here about many things, but time is limited. Before I stop, I want to say that I hope our contribution has been worthwhile to the loggers of Newfoundland and to the whole of people of Newfoundland. But I would like to pay a special tribute, a special tribute not only to a wonderful staff, a staff that had a pretty hard task master, and who responded with magnificence, the loggers who I learned to love and have never forgotten, whose story I will tell in a forthcoming book on the history of Newfoundland loggers' strike. Beyond that I would like to pay tribute to the unsung heroes of Newfoundland, those women in my little committees of five. With their pots and pans they stood their ground. One of the most heartbreaking scenes of all was when a number of loggers had been sent to jail or fined, and I took the position that we would pay no fines. I gathered the women together in Grand Falls and they came, every one of them. Christian, decent women, mothers, law-abiding people who had all their lives gone to their churches and abided by the law in every respect. There wasn't a barracuda among them, there wasn't a criminal, white slaver or anything. And I gathered them and I got up there and I said, "Sisters of the IWA, I have a message for you, I have the list of every man who has been fined, whether it was for stealing a key worth 50 cents or what it might have been and I want to meet with your husbands in just a few minutes and I'm asking each of you women to tell your husband to go to jail." The place was stunned silent, tears were rolling down the faces of these wonderful women. I said, "I'm asking you to do it," and I said, "I'm going to leave you and take a vote." I walked out of the room and there was an official of the Canadian Labour Congress at the back of the hall and he said, "Well, boy, you are the

Wives, sweethearts, and supporters bring food to loggers jailed in armouries during Newfoundland Loggers' strike.

hardest SOB I've ever known in my bloody life." I said, "Oh, they call me old softie Harve," but anyhow we went back into the room a short while later, and the women had voted unanimously. They gathered their husbands into that room and they said that the first thing that has got to be done is to win this strike and we can't afford to pay fines, "I want you to go to jail, darling," and they did. The magnificence of those women, the discipline, the steel will of that organization is something that has not been duplicated in too many places. So I take my hat off to these people, they were just a wonderful gang, we had a lot of support from a lot of good people. I know that it was twenty-four years ago and some of you are getting pretty grey in the head. I wish you would keep as young and vigorous as I am, but I guess the good Lord didn't mean it that way.

And so it comes down to the question, was it worth it? I said it was worth it to a number of people — it was worth it to the students of Memorial University. When the AND Logging Company could not improve the bunkhouses of loggers of Newfoundland they built beautiful bunkhouses for $500,000 on the campus. I looked them over the other day, and I had said to myself many years ago, if ever I get back to St. John's, I'm going up to look at the students' bunkhouses that were built on the backs of the workers. I don't blame the students, bless you, I'm saying to you, this was the kind of justice that was meted out, a hundred thousand dollars to the council in Grand Falls to fill pot holes in the roads, but nothing for the loggers. You asked me if it was worth it, yeh, it was worth it. Would you do things differently? We don't know as we go along the old road. It was a long and tough journey, we made it with wonderful people and if I had it to do all over again, you would find me here in Newfoundland and the loggers with us — you would find that still the hearts of the loggers of Newfoundland are with the IWA.

H. Landon Ladd lives in St. Catharines after an illustrious career in the Canadian labour movement. A leading militant and organizer, he led the eastern branch of the IWA from 1948-1969, and was International Vice-President from 1969-1975.

Quebec Workers in the Twentieth Century

Leo Roback

I

From 1900 to the End of World War I

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY OPENED turbulently in Quebec. The long depression cycle of the 1880s and early 1890s gave way to an almost unbroken surge of expansion and price inflation until the post-war depression. The industrialization of Quebec "took off" in the first decade of the century. The rapid growth of hydroelectric power and of major new industries based on cheap electricity and local resources such as pulp and paper, heavy chemicals, and metallurgy, added a new dimension to the existing structure founded on cotton textiles, clothing, shoes, tobacco products, sawmilling, butter and cheese factories, and grist mills.

The period also witnessed a spectacular increase in union membership and strike activity, both of which were to reach historic peaks in 1919.

Mobility was one of the hallmarks of the period. The population surplus in the rural areas of Quebec — intensified by the trend towards dairy farming which required much less labour than subsistence farming — moved to the quickly-growing cities of Montreal and Quebec, especially the former. The industrial development of Quebec and Ontario and the "wheat boom" in the west drew hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the United Kingdom and from central, southern, and eastern Europe. Most of them landed in Montreal and many, although not the majority, stayed in Montreal. They added their weight to the earlier "waves," notably the Irish who had been driven from their homeland by the potato famine in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Irish immigrants formed the early core of Montreal's urban proletariat, providing the unskilled labour for the port and for railway and canal construction. They were also prominent among the twenty killed by British troops on 11 June 1843 at St. Timothée, near Valleyfield, during the strike of the Beauharnois Canal builders.

During the early 1900s the working class in the major urban centres of

Quebec developed from four main streams. In their excellent *History of Contemporary Quebec*, Linteau, Durocher, and Robert identify these categories:

1. Former self-employed (artisans), ruined and displaced by the rise of capitalist production.

2. Unskilled workers already living in the cities. Masses of day labourers (men) and of domestic servants (women) were recruits for factory work.

3. Immigrants from Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Europe. Many of these were former artisans or highly skilled workers, but most were from rural and semi-rural backgrounds.

4. "Internal immigrants" from Quebec's farms and villages. Accustomed to subsistence living standards, possessing no technical skills, and too numerous to exercise bargaining power, they provided a ready supply of unskilled labour.

There existed a kind of stratification within the urban-industrial working class. At the top of the pyramid were the "aristocrats of labour," the skilled building and metal workers, and printing craftsmen as well as workers in the railway operating trades and those responsible for the maintenance and repair of machinery in all industries. They enjoyed wage levels and job stability considerably superior to conditions for the great majority of workers. They also formed the nucleus of the early trade union membership and leadership. Sharing a place at the top were those in senior clerical positions in private enterprise and public administration.

A second, lower stratum consisted of semi-skilled production workers, including the bulk of women factory workers. Effectively excluded from the established craft unions, their lot was low wages, long working hours, frequent bouts of seasonal and cyclical unemployment, and high exposure to industrial accidents and illness.

At the bottom of the ladder was the very large mass of unskilled labour. Barely literate, if at all, their employment pattern was of a casual nature, at whatever wages the employer was prepared to pay. They worked as day labourers on construction sites, in the port, in cartage, and in municipal services. With few exceptions, such as longshoring, they had little contact with unions.

French-Canadian workers — almost three-quarters of the labour force — were concentrated in the two lowest categories. The top stratum — skilled tradesmen, supervisors and "those who held posts of responsibility" in management and offices — was occupied to a disproportionate degree by those of "British origin" (the census expression). This situation was also associated with the imposition of English as the language of work in the larger enterprises, or indeed any plant or office where the "boss" spoke English. The overwhelming control of the private sector of employment by English-speaking industrialists and financiers was an important fact of life. The "language problem" was an abrasive factor in trade union life as well, particularly outside of Montreal, where international unions tried to organize a work force that

was almost entirely French-speaking. For decades, until the late 1960s, many thousands of French-speaking union members had to put up with a situation in which their unions "spoke" to them only in English, negotiated in English with English-speaking management, and published collective agreements in English. To add supreme insult to injury, French-speaking workers were fired in English!

The severe underrepresentation of French-Canadian workers in the higher brackets of the working class was also perpetuated by the underdevelopment of the public education system compared with that available to the majority of the English-speaking population. As late as the 1950s, Premier Duplessis reminded Catholic schoolboards that their mandate extended only to elementary schools! A study of "drop-out" rates in the two Montreal school systems during World War I showed that 75 per cent of children who had started in Grade 1 had left school by Grade 4 in the Catholic schools (mainly French-speaking), compared with 25 per cent in the Protestant schools. As Copp points out, the substantial French-Canadian "elite" were singularly uninterested in a public school system, for *their* children were educated in the "classical colleges," private schools modelled on the French lycée which, for decades, was the only avenue leading to university. In contrast, the bulk of English-speaking children of all classes, including those of the wealthy, were served by the Protestant public school system.

The thousands of children at work, about 6 per cent of the labour force in Montreal at the turn of the century, provided an auxiliary work force, exceptionally low paid and subjected to harsh discipline. Legislation restricting child labour was simply not enforced, nor, indeed, could it be enforced. Parents needed the extra income, and employers wanted the cheap little hands. In 1907, the law was amended to bar any child under fourteen from being employed, and to require all illiterate children under sixteen to attend evening school. The next year, Inspector Guyon reported that the new provision was difficult to enforce since there were either no evening schools available, or else those that did exist were for boys only! The children in the factories worked the same hours as did the adults. In the cotton mills this meant eleven hours a day plus five hours on Saturday, at 61/2 cents per hour. Montreal was, of course, the industrial and financial centre of gravity of Canada, and more particularly of Quebec. The port was a major stimulating factor, but it was also a restricting element. The closure of the port during the four winter months meant that much of Montreal's and Quebec City's economic activity functioned for only eight months of the year. Seasonal unemployment and wage cuts were annual facts of life, as regular as the snowstorms.

The industrial "take off" of the first two decades also saw the birth of new, large-scale industries located outside of Montreal. The pulp and paper mills in the St. Maurice Valley and in the Saguenay-Lac St. Jean regions began to flourish. Shipbuilding and railroad equipment expanded quickly in response to

the needs of the "wheat boom" and the war. Technological advances gave birth to the aluminum smelting industry at Shawinigan Falls and the electrical equipment industry, which produced motors and supplied the new "miracle" — the telephone.

The "boom" of the pre-war and wartime years produced quite a few millionaires and industrial-financial empires. The workers of Quebec did not share in those benefits. On the contrary, the available evidence shows that the majority of working-class families barely, if ever, made both ends meet. This was largely due to the combined effect of subsistence level wages and frequent unemployment. Cyclical recessions, such as the one of 1913-15, aggravated the situation at a time when the cost of living rose at a substantial clip even before the terrible inflation of the latter years of the war and in the immediate post-war period.

In 1900, an average working-class family of five in Montreal needed a minimum of $9.64 per week for the basic essentials of food, shelter, and clothing, and $13.77 for its total needs. In that year, average annual earnings of workers (excluding the very lowest) came to $7.78. In 1911, when the department of labour's "Family Budget" was $12.82 for essentials and $18.31 for total family needs, annual weekly earnings of heads of families ranged from $10.21 for construction labourers to $13.70 for skilled workers in the construction industry. Only railway trainmen had earnings over the "poverty line" at $18.67. From 1900 to 1913, the cost of living rose by about 43 per cent. But from 1915 to 1920, the official index went up 80 per cent.

The economic context and the social conditions of the workers were favourable to union organization and militancy. Added to this was a crucial ingredient — the consolidation of the AFL unions following the effective elimination of the rival Knights of Labor, first in the United States and then in Quebec, the major remaining bastion of the Knights. The pre-war years were, in fact, active ones for organizing and strike activity, notably in the building and railway industries, but also in the mass-production sectors of cotton textiles, clothing and shoe manufacturing, and sawmills, as well as among longshoremen in the port of Montreal. Under the conditions of the time, when employers had free rein to stop or destroy unions, with the support of the police and judicial apparatus, the life expectancy of unions was understandably brief at times. However, it appears that the number of local unions in Quebec doubled between 1901 and 1911, while membership rose to over 15,000 in 1911, probably three or four times the 1901 level. The explosive year of 1919 saw more than 500 locals in existence and more than 60,000 members.

The nature of strikes in this period reflected economic conditions. "Offensive" strikes, for wage increases and union recognition or reduction in working hours, were typical of the "prosperous" years — 1901, 1903, 1907, 1910, and 1912-13. The "defensive" conflicts — against wage cuts or increased hours — characterized the recession years, such as 1902 and 1908.

Two of the major conflicts involved the machinists' union (IAM) against the railways. In 1905, the strike at Grand Trunk Railway lasted nine months before it was lost. In 1908, 8,000 members of the machinists' and the railway carmen's unions took on the CPR to stop wage cuts and preserve the right of workers' committees to meet with management. Again, scabs were used to break the strike.

In 1903, more than 2,000 longshoremen in Montreal were on strike for six weeks in a conflict that developed into a minor "civil war." Regular army troops were mobilized from Toronto to relieve the Montreal militia. The shipping companies brought a thousand scabs from the United Kingdom to unload the ships. In the end, solidarity by longshoremen in the main ports of eastern Canada and the American Atlantic seaboard proved decisive, and the union won recognition and a 10 per cent increase.

The bitter and bloody sawmill strike in Buckingham in autumn 1906 involved some 400 workers, members of the carpenters' union. Private security men shot and killed two strikers and wounded many more, while one agent was killed. Militia were sent from Ottawa (about fifty miles west) and army regulars from St. John's, Quebec. The strike was lost.

The cotton textile industry was the scene of at least forty strikes and lockouts between 1900 and 1908. Some were for recognition of the AFL union which grew overnight all over Quebec in 1906 and died as quickly when its fourteen locals left to form a Canadian organization.

The conflict in the Quebec City boot and shoe industry in 1900 and 1901 is of special importance because it produced the beginnings of what was to become the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL), now known as the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU/CSN). The industrywide lockout by some twenty firms, most of which were owned by French-Canadians, followed the employers' refusal to continue recognition of the union, a former affiliate of the Knights of Labor. The dispute was ended through the intervention of Archbishop (later Cardinal) Bégin, who acted as arbitrator. The prelate ruled that the workers' right to unionize was a "natural right," as set out by Pope Leo XIII in his *Rerum Novarum* of 1891. However, this "right" was contingent on the union's acceptance of "just" objectives such as the recognition of a "natural harmony of interests" between employer and workers, and the rejection of the notion of class struggle. The union was required to adopt a new constitution embodying these elements of the Church's new social doctrine, and to accept a chaplain with considerable authority on all matters involving doctrine and morality, such as the question of strikes, which were to be avoided at all costs.

From this modest and fragile beginning, Catholic trade unionism developed slowly and uncertainly until the end of World War II, although it was formally structured as the CCCL in 1921. The founders and pioneers of the movement

have had considerable difficulty in recent years in recognizing the present-day CNTU as their offspring.

In its initial period, the Catholic union movement was essentially that — an ideological movement. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of Catholic workers and employers for the social doctrine expounded by Leo XIII. Quebec was seen as a supremely fertile soil for the new initiative because of the relative homogeneity of its population and the preponderant moral authority of the Church. Early on, however, the ideologues and organizers ran into serious problems. The established pattern of labour relations in Quebec was like that in the rest of North America. The majority of French-Canadian union members were in the "neutral," "socialistic," "foreign" international unions. On the other hand most of the French-Canadian employers had decided, like their peers, that "the only good union is a dead one." Furthermore, the *religious* cohesiveness proved elusive, since English-speaking Catholic workers turned to the internationals. As a result, the Catholic unions became based, in fact, on an ethnic-language identity, as indicated by the growing use of the term "national" in the name.

In practice, the infant Catholic unions received a great deal of assistance from the Church. In Montreal, the bastion of the international unions, contractors and suppliers who built churches, schools, hospitals, and other Church-controlled institutions were required to provide a kind of "closed shop" for members of Catholic unions. Similar arrangements existed in the printing industry.

The first two decades were also marked by two major developments of great significance. The Quebec Labour Party was founded at the very start of the century. The prime movers were the rival trades and labour councils of Montreal, but a network of "workers' clubs" in the working-class quarters were a dynamic element in the QLP. The party's programme was one of reform. Special emphasis was laid on legislation to protect workers from super-exploitation and to improve the condition of the working class. Compulsory and free education, a network of public libraries, a firm ban on child labour, workers' compensation, old age pensions, and health insurance were among the major planks in the party's programme.

The QLP made its political début in a federal election in Ste-Marie riding and lost. However, in 1906, the party elected its first (and last) MP in the person of Alphonse Verville, leader of the plumbers' union local 144, and President of the Trades and Labor Congress. Internal divisions during World War I and the post-war years led to its demise in the late 1920s. The vacuum left by its death has never been filled.

The agitation in Quebec over the imposition of conscription in 1917 is a well-known part of Canadian history. Remarkably, the anti-consciption movement did not obtain massive participation by the labour movement, although the Montreal Trades and Labour Council expressed violent opposition to con-

scription and even helped to organize at least one demonstration before the act was adopted at the end of August 1917.

Undoubtedly the wishy-washy stand taken by the TLC and the strongly pro-war and pro-conscription position of Gompers and the leaders of the AFL unions in the United States were important factors in damping the anti-conscription campaign among Quebec locals and members of international unions. The Winnipeg General Strike did receive support from the Montreal Trades and Labour Council in spite of the coolness, even hostility, of some of the top Montreal leaders. R.J. Johns, president of the Winnipeg council, spent weeks in Montreal, and a large outdoor rally was organized by Montreal Council in Jeanne Mance Park in July 1919, at which both Heaps and Bray were the featured speakers. After the strike ended, $100 was donated to help the families of strikers still in prison. However, it is fair to say the support was far below the level hoped for by the Winnipeg leadership, and indeed, what might have been expected for that historic struggle. The explosion of working-class and union militancy in the last year of the war and the immediate post-war period — especially marked in western Canada — was never joined with the anti-conscription movement in French Canada.

Founding convention of the CTCC at Hull, Quebec, September 1921.

II

From the End of World War I to the End of World War II

HOLLYWOOD HAS CELEBRATED THE 1920s as the "Roaring Twenties." For the workers and the labour movement of Quebec, Jamieson's description, the "Torpid Twenties" is much more apt. From the severe "recession" of 1921-2 to the onset of the Great Depression in 1930, the 1920s were years of down-

ward pressure on wage levels, bouts of unemployment — in short a never-ending struggle to make ends meet. Meanwhile, entrepreneurial and investment incomes flourished.

This was another period of major industrial expansion. New industrial centres blossomed overnight. New one-industry company towns like Noranda, Arvida, Baie Comeau, Drummondville, and Riverbend, based on copper, aluminum, pulp and paper, and synthetic textiles, were carved out of the countryside. American capital and management were responsible for a good deal of the investment boom, along with Toronto-based firms which were particularly active in the metal mining region of northwestern Quebec. In fact, apart from the lower north shore and Chibougamau areas — whose boom started after World War II — hardly a region was left untouched by the penetration of American capital during the 1920s.

Undoubtedly, the principal attraction was the existence of enormous natural resources, both cheap and easily accessible. These included hydroelectric power for aluminum and chemicals, and forest resources for newsprint and synthetic textiles. Another attraction was the "cheap labour" provided by Quebec's prolific mothers, and supposedly made docile by the Church. The Canadian government of the early 1920s set out to "sell" this valuable "resource" to potential investors in the United States:

> Possibly nowhere in America are labour conditions more stable and satisfactory *from the manufacturer's point of view* than in . . . Quebec. The supply is ample. . . . The French-Canadians . . . as a race [sic] are industrious and thrifty, while their religious teaching influences them against *detrimental associations with international organization*.

The industrial expansion of the 1920s created close to 25,000 additional jobs in manufacturing, an increase of 12 per cent. Most of the gain occurred in the later part of the decade, following the disastrous recession of 1921-2 when employment in manufacturing dropped by 40,000 jobs, nearly 25 per cent!

The expansion outside of Montreal, in regions hitherto hardly affected by large-scale industry, touched off a sizeable movement of population from farms and villages into the new plants. This was a major new accession to the working class. Unlike Montreal, these new industrial workers were almost entirely French-Canadian although the management and many of the supervisors were English-speaking, some imported from outside the province. This was also true of the overwhelming majority of the professional-technical staffs of the new industries. At the end of the decade, French-Canadians were still an absolute minority in the engineering profession and seriously underrepresented in occupations such as office employee and key skilled trades such as tool-and-die makers, patternmakers, metal inspectors, stationary engineers, and photo-engravers.

This was to be expected, given the "language stratification" system and the pitiful lack of development of public education for French-speaking children. In 1926, while Ontario was spending $5.29 per capita on education, and health and social welfare, Quebec was spending exactly $1.00.

The chronic "deficit" between annual earnings (affected by short time and unemployment) and the cost of the family budget continued throughout the 1920s. During the 1921-2 recession, average earnings of working-class family heads in Montreal ranged from $960 per year for construction labourers and $1,130 for skilled building workers to $1,565 for low-level supervisors. The cost of the family budget was estimated to be $1,600. In the "boom" years of 1928-9 when unemployment was relatively low, two-thirds of adult wage-earners in Montreal, working full-time, made less than $1,300, substantially under the $1,590 estimated need for the average family.

Copp's "profile" of the Montreal industrial working class — applicable as well to the other Quebec centres — appears singularly apt: "A culture of poverty, created primarily by subsistence incomes and an absence of job security."

Based on historical precedent in earlier periods of expansion, the 1920s should have seen a high level of union organizational activity and militancy. In fact, the very opposite was true in Quebec as in the rest of Canada and the United States. The general tendency was towards a decline across the board — in relative size (membership as a proportion of the work force), in militancy, and in effectiveness.

Apart from the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, the Quebec trade union movement consisted of the AFL-TLC organizations. The other "national" unions and the CCCL were still of marginal importance. Why then did the established international unions (with the exception of those in the clothing industries) show so little interest and expend so few resources on organizing the unorganized in Quebec?

There were objective circumstances unfavourable to large-scale unionization. The dominant "free enterprise" ideology supported by government and the media helped to create a climate hostile to unions. In addition, the expansion came chiefly in young, fast-growing, mass-production industries characterized by concentration of capital and a highly-developed division of labour. The vast majority of workers in the new giants — automobile, electrical equipment, rubber, glass, chemicals, food processing, aluminum, and copper — as well as older ones such as steel, were semi-skilled or unskilled. The employers were firmly opposed to unions and were able to make their opposition effective.

However, there were also "subjective" factors at work. A serious effort to organize these workers required not only a strong commitment by the established unions, but also a radical change in their structures and orientation. The "new" industrial working class simply did not fit into the craft unions' scheme

of things, which was based on maximizing the number of jobs for their skilled members through guild-like lines of jurisdiction demarcation. This was amply demonstrated in the United States in the years immediately before the creation of the CIO. In fact, it led directly to the birth and rapid growth of the CIO.

In Quebec, an additional "disincentive," if one were needed, was the constant demand from local union officers for French-speaking organizers. This would have involved additional expense and implied a sort of special status for unions in Quebec, both of which were anathema to the AFL union leadership.

The 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the development of company unions, a new employer tactic for keeping their plants "union-free." Ironically, the scheme boomeranged later, as a number of the "plant-wide" company unions — industrial unions in *form* — entered the bona fide trade union movement. In Quebec and Ontario, several important steelworkers locals were former company unions. In this respect, the Catholic unions were also able to profit from their industrial union type of structure, one which had been adopted early as being most appropriate for an ideological movement seeking to reach every worker in the shop, regardless of occupation.

Not surprisingly, the few major strikes during the 1920s occurred in the traditional sectors, clothing and shoe manufacturing. In Quebec City the first Catholic union, created in 1901 by Cardinal Bégin, was destroyed after a bitter strike carried on against the wishes of the leadership and the Church. The industry was to remain "open shop" for another twenty-five years. In Montreal, the militant Amalgamated Clothing Workers led as many as 5,000 workers in a series of strikes over a ten-month period in 1926-7.

The Great Depression lasted ten years. During those terrible years, hardly a working-class family in Quebec escaped its devastating blows. At its low point, the unemployment rate in Montreal was at least 25 per cent, while in the working-class quarter of St-Henri (below the hill from upper-class Westmount) it was closer to 50 per cent. More important is the fact that the overwhelming majority of workers were unemployed at one time or another, and generally for long periods, while an untold number were literally out of work for years. Those who lived the disaster can not forget the constant, ever-growing assault on human life, health, and dignity.

There was, of course, no unemployment insurance. As the Depression began to bite, Prime Minister King stated in April 1930 that his government would not spend a nickel on the "so-called unemployed." It was left to charitable organizations to deal with the catastrophe. The soup kitchens of the various Catholic benevolent societies had to feed thousands each week. When these efforts also collapsed, the municipalities were obliged to bear the main burden of providing direct relief. In October 1934 38,000 families in Montreal had to apply for relief. Heavy snowstorms were welcomed as providential for they "provided work for the unemployed." The privileged few who could get work

removing the snow banks were paid 50 cents per wagon-load, but had to supply both the wagon and the horse.

Between 1930 and 1933, wage rates dropped about 15 per cent on the average, while the cost-of-living index declined by 22 per cent. The figures are of little use, since the trend in rates does not take into account the effect of prolonged unemployment and short time. In any case, the wage rates did not necessarily reflect the effective wages paid. Even in unionized trades, workers were forced to kick back part of their wages to the employer.

The established unions, already in decline before the Depression, virtually disintegrated during the worst years of the crisis. Once-powerful international unions like the United Mine Workers, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and others had almost disappeared by 1933.

In the absence of effective resistance by the established unions, the Communist Party's Workers' Unity League (WUL) had a near-monopoly on strike activity during the worst period, 1930-34. Even in Quebec, far from being the focus of WUL action, the loggers' strike, the strike against Noranda Mines, and the walkout by several thousand workers in the Montreal ladies' clothing industry were the major conflicts in Quebec in 1934. During its brief but stormy life before it was dissolved and its units "integrated" into the existing unions, the WUL did not produce any immediate results of major importance. It did, however, develop, train, and "blood" a surprising number of rank-and-file militants and professional organizers. They were to play important roles in the later revival of the unions, especially in the CIO, until the anti-communist purges in 1949-52 at the height of the Cold War. The CPC's organizations for the unemployed also produced a number of people who were to become union leaders a few years later.

The dramatic weakening of the internationals in Quebec had the effect, among others, of increasing the *relative* influence of the CCCL. In 1934, under the CCCL and Church pressure the Quebec government finally adopted the Collective Agreements Act, unique at the time as it still is today. In essence, the legislation was designed to enforce a degree of uniformity in wages and working hours, based on those contained in union agreements in highly competitive industries such as construction, printing, and clothing which had a long history of union-negotiated working conditions. In the early 1930s, these industries were a jungle, and the few unionized employers could no longer compete with the open shops. True, the underlying "corporatist" inspiration of the new act was anathema to the craft unions and their "bilateralist" philosophy. However, the circumstances forced them to go along in order to provide a minimum of protection to their few remaining members and to "their" employers.

The watershed was 1935. The modest, hesitant beginnings of recovery, and especially the Roosevelt New Deal and its "Wagner Act" (National Labor Relations Act), which obliged employers to recognize and negotiate with cer-

tified bargaining agents supplied both the necessary context and the spark for a veritable explosion of organizing and militant action. "CIO" became a household word in both official languages as Quebecers heard of millions of workers in the mass-production industries flocking into the industrial unions and "hitting the bricks" or "sitting down."

In Quebec, as in Ontario, absence of a similar legislation and political climate prevented the U.S. example from being followed immediately. Union organizing continued to face the same employer resistance as before, still had to resort to strike action to obtain recognition, and had to stand up to the inevitable intervention by police and the courts. As a result, breakthroughs in major industries were limited to those sectors where the union had been established before the Depression. Even there, it required strike action. Such was the case in the ladies' garment industry in Montreal in 1937. A strike by 5,000 workers forced the employer association to come to terms. Final, lasting agreement was won only by a second strike in 1940.

The most spectacular developments in the latter half of the 1930s occurred outside of Montreal, and involved the anti-strike, "class-harmony" Catholic unions. CCCL unions were established in the large cotton mills, in the asbestos mines, in the aluminum smelters in the Saguenay region, and in the shipbuilding and steel plants of the Simard family in Sorel. While a number of the strikes were really "wildcat," the province-wide strike in 1937 by 10,000 Dominion Textile workers was authorized and supported by the Catholic clergy through collections after Sunday Mass. Eventually, Cardinal Villeneuve intervened and persuaded both Premier Duplessis and Dominion Textile to accept a settlement. The "settlement" ended the strike — and the union. The bitter disillusionment and resentment among the strikers was to keep the CCCL out of the mills for several years.

The early "class-harmony" orientation of the CCCL and its unions did not disappear overnight. There were a number of bitter conflicts with the internationals in which employers "used" CCCL groups, or where CCCL unions made "sweetheart deals" with employers. Nevertheless, the transformation that began to show itself in the pre-war years was a real one, which was reinforced and extended in the post-war period.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the Catholic union movement in Quebec has adopted, as it has in France, Italy, and elsewhere, the behaviour patterns of the dominant labour organizations in order to survive and to be relevant. This was particularly true in the North American context, where employers did not want any serious union, while workers, of course, expected their unions to act like serious unions.

The new CIO unions were not particularly active in Quebec before World War II. Consequently, the bitter rivalry between AFL and CIO in 1938 in the United States which led to the expulsion of CIO affiliates from the TLC in 1939 (following an ultimatum from the AFL) had relatively little impact in Quebec.

However, the founding of the Canadian Congress of Labour in 1940 by CIO unions and the national unions of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour provided the potential for a more solid base for organization among the unorganized and for the rivalry with AFL-TLC and CCCL affiliates.

The political climate changed dramatically during the pre-war years. The Liberal Taschereau government was defeated in 1935-6 by a strange coalition. The "odd couple" consisted of the Quebec Conservative Party, led by Maurice Duplessis and a nationalist, "young Turk" group of intellectuals and former Liberal politicians who had broken with the corrupt Taschereau machine. The programme of the new coalition, called "Union Nationale," called for nationalization of the electric power corporation and a number of other populist-nationalist measures. Once in power, Duplessis discarded both the "radical" promises and the men who had formulated them, and settled down to create a new regime even more conservative, anti-labour, and corrupt than that of his predecessor. However, Duplessis cannily retained a certain kind of rhetoric, nationalist-autonomist (anti-Ottawa) and populist in tone. The rhetoric did not prevent him from inviting American and other "foreign" capitalists to feast on huge give-aways of Quebec's natural resources, tax deals, and other lucrative privileges, not excluding the services of the provincial police and the government apparatus against unions and strikes. Duplessis also developed anti-Communism and "red scare" to a fine pitch, and used them on any and all occasions, even to the point of accusing Jean Marchand of being a red!

Large-scale union organizing in mass-production industries really got underway in Quebec about 1940. The war had absorbed most of the unemployed, and thousands of new factory jobs were opened up, including many for women. Another wave of "immigrants" from the countryside streamed into Montreal and other centres where mass hiring was taking place. Super-giant plants employing 10,000 or more were built almost overnight. Since the war-plants were intended solely for the duration of the war, and wage controls were in the offing, managers were less determined to fight unionization than those in the "peacetime" industries. Order-in-Council PC 1003, inspired by the American Wagner Act came only in 1944, but government pressure on management to recognize and negotiate with unions was a factor even before PC 1003.

In Quebec, the weakness of the CCCL unions in Montreal and that of the infant CIO-CCL meant that the AFL-TLC unions had a clear advantage if they cared to use it, and particularly if they were prepared to adopt industrial union structures and methods. This, in fact, is what did occur. As it happened, Robert Haddow, a talented organizer, member of the IAM, and a long-time militant of the CPC, who had acquired a solid mastery of union strategy and tactics in his native Scotland, persuaded the IAM to launch a major organizing campaign, chiefly, but not exclusively, in the Montreal area. In a relatively short time,

some 50,000 workers joined the union. A number of volunteer organizers, members of the CPC (then LPP) or Young Communist organizations went into the plants to work and to organize. Plants with thousands of workers were signed up from the inside. The drive in the war plants spilled over into peacetime industries. Textile, meatpacking, chemical, tobacco, and electrical equipment workers were organized. The pulp and paper unions were revitalized and re-established in most of the largest mills.

By the end of the war, union membership in Quebec was about four times the pre-Depression level. More importantly, unions were now established in every corner of Quebec and in most of the major basic industries. In the public sector, municipal and local transit workers now had solid unions in Montreal and a few other centres.

The communists and their allies held strong positions in several AFL-TLC unions, were a substantial opposition in the Montreal TLC — the nominal power centre in Quebec, the Quebec Provincial Federation, being relatively marginal — and exerted influence in the Trades and Labor Congress itself. However the position of the Communists was far more fragile than it appeared. Their strength was concentrated in a few unions, and they were not in the picture in the railway unions, nor in the pulp and paper internationals and the influential printing unions. They were also absent or weak in the great majority of building-trades locals. As the war-plants were phased out, the huge locals that Haddow had built vanished into thin air. When the crunch came soon after the end of the war, the relationship of forces proved to be one-sided. The heavy artillery of the international headquarters went into action, strongly supported by the Duplessis government and its apparatus. The internal union purges and the government's "outlawing" of unions suspected of being communist-led were able to isolate the communists and effectively eliminate them and their influence in both wings of the non-Catholic union movement.

III

From the End of World War II to the Present

THE MOST REMARKABLE AND radical transformations in Quebec's labour movement were concentrated in the two decades between 1950 and 1970. Developments since 1971 have reinforced and accentuated the earlier tendencies. It may well be that future historians will identify 1983 as another watershed, but it is still too soon to say.

The CCCL continued on its new path which first became apparent in the mid-1930s. In 1946, the forces within the CCCL in favour of a radical break with the "founding 'fathers' " (no pun intended!) took over the leadership. Under Gérard Picard as president and the youthful Jean Marchand as secretary, a new staff of young, university trained, left-leaning French-Canadians gave the confederation competent technical services for the first time. The

CCCL itself was radically restructured to make it the most centralized organization in Quebec, if not in Canada. The famous asbestos strike in 1949 marked a sharp break between the CCCL and Duplessis. For the rest of his career and life, it was the anti-communist CCCL that became the premier's principal adversary and favoured target. Numerous and bitter strikes, and harassment by the government began to take their toll.

By 1956, when the TLC and CCL merged to form the Canadian Labour Congress, the CCCL was still alive and kicking, but just barely. Its membership had remained stationary for several years, always a serious danger for a dynamic union organization. The CCCL 1956 convention voted in favour of organic unity, to be achieved by the affiliation of the CCCL en bloc to the CLC, with the status of a "national union" like the CBRE. However, several years of fruitless negotiations made it clear that there was serious resistance to the proposal from some international unions as well as from within the CCCL. At that crucial moment, Providence took the matter in hand. Duplessis died suddenly on Labour Day 1959. The end of an era was at hand, hastened by the equally sudden death of his successor, Paul Sauvé, after a 100-day "New Deal" type of regime. In June 1960, the Liberal government under Jean Lesage took power and the "Quiet Revolution" began, with the enthusiastic support of the overwhelming majority of the labour movement, most particularly of the CCCL under Marchand. The new political climate was now favourable to labour. The CNTU (ex-CCCL) benefitted most from the situation, but all unions felt the "breath of fresh air." Some were perhaps carried away by their uncritical endorsement of the regime, especially since René Lévesque was looked on as labour's "man" in the cabinet.

The long Duplessis regime (1944-59) followed a "divide-and-rule" strategy in its dealings with unions. By the end of his era, however, his unbridled anti-labour, anti-working-class policies and actions, such as the brutal police strikebreaking at Murdochville (Noranda Mines) against the steelworkers, had actually helped to bring together rival and conflicting labour organizations and groups. His own supporters in the unions were silenced and isolated. A possibly analogous situation may be developing now with regard to Parti québécois supporters in the unions.

The growth of union organization between 1946 and 1959 was slower in Quebec than in Ontario. However, to paraphrase Dr. Johnson, the wonder is that Quebec unions were able to achieve as much as they did in the face of the incredible obstacles thrown up by the employers in collusion with the government apparatus. Volumes could be written on the antics of the Labour Relations Board which certified company unions without hesitation, refused certification to unions with proven majorities, and decertified unions even before it was requested to do so, without hearing the union concerned.

In 1960, at the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, total union membership stood at about 400,000 members. The CNTU had about 100,000, while CLC

affiliates accounted for 250,000. By the end of the Lesage régime in 1966, the total was up to 520,000, an increase of 25 per cent. But the CNTU had doubled its membership. This was due largely to the influx of tens of thousands of public sector workers, notably in the civil service and the hospitals. By 1973, before the internal crisis and secession movement in the CNTU, the latter's membership had reached a high of 350,000, out of a Quebec total of close to 900,000.

Meanwhile, the Quebec Federation of Labour, founded in 1957 as a result of a shotgun marriage between the TLC and CCL federation, was gradually growing in size and relevance. Its long struggle for special status within the CLC, finally achieved in 1974, has crystallized its growing importance and authority, while that of the CLC had declined in Quebec. At the present time, the QFL's affiliates number about 425,000 members, compared with the CNTU's 225,000 (not taking into account the effect of recent lay-offs and plant closures).

The third major group in Quebec's labour movement is the Teachers' Union (CEQ). Between 1946 and 1971, this organization had evolved from a loose-knit federation of local Catholic teachers' associations into a highly-structured and well-equipped central body, considered by some to be the "left-wing" section of the labour movement. From being the PQ's most important single constituency in the early 1970s, the CEQ has become the PQ's "public enemy no. 1." Paradoxically, the Quiet Revolution's programme of urgent reforms to enable Quebec to catch up with the needs of a modern industrial society coincided with labour's own demands, for which it had struggled throughout the Duplessis régime. In effect, the Quiet Revolution had "stolen labour's script" and left the latter without much to say. By 1965, a year before its defeat in the elections, the Lesage-Lévesque government was showing signs of exhaustion and staleness. Retrenchment became the order of the day, and collisions with labour more frequent.

This period of hesitation and doubt coincided with the birth of pro-independence parties and movements. When Lévesque founded what was to become the PQ out of a merger of the various groups — some right-wing, some on the left — he was able to reach a substantial audience of intellectuals and union members and officers, especially in the ranks of the Steelworkers' Union, the CEQ, and the CNTU. Lévesque's tremendous personal popularity among workers and trade unionists was a major factor in crystallizing the various nationalist currents and sentiments in large sections of the working class.

Some years earlier, the initial enthusiasm in Quebec unions for the NDP when it was founded in 1961 began to cool as the debate on the "national question" heated up. Was Quebec one of ten provinces or one of two nations? The Quebec convention in 1963 which was intended to found a Quebec section of the NDP, based largely on strong support from the unions, did not found a party. Instead, it foundered on the practical implications of the "question" for

the structuring of the Quebec NDP and, above all, its autonomy in relation to the federal party. The NDP has never gotten off the ground in Quebec. The place it was intended to occupy was soon filled by the PQ. The latter's social programme and democratic structure were compatible with those of the NDP, but without an organic connection with or input from the organized working class.

In 1970, a series of joint regional conferences on political action and policies was organized by the three major union bodies. The series was supposed to culminate in a meeting in Montreal in the autumn. There was even talk and hope in some quarters that it be the launching pad for a Quebec labour party. The conference was never held, because of the October Crisis. However, the joint stand of the three organizations against the proclamation of the War Measures Act, and their reactions to a developing recession and its inevitable mass lay-offs eventually led to a remarkable development. Each organization in turn — within a few months of each other — published a "manifesto." These documents were critical analyses of the present system and proposals for a radical transformation of Quebec society in the direction of a "socialist Quebec" of a new and original character.

In short, the union bodies have sought to fill the ideological-political vacuum in Quebec caused by the absence of an authentic "Labour" party, an integral element of the labour movement. There is no doubt that this new departure is not accepted by some sections of the trade union movement. The secession in the CNTU which took almost half of its members out of its ranks in 1972 and 1973, and led to the creation of a new federation (CSD) invoked the new, left-wing, political tangent of the CNTU as its reason. However, neither in the CNTU nor in the teachers' union (CEQ) has there yet developed substantial rank-and-file support for the creation of a new labour party. As a result, there is currently a kind of political vacuum in Quebec.

The confrontation between the Common Front (QFL-CNTU-CEQ) of public sector unions and the PQ government, which began in summer of 1982, developed into a major defeat for the unions and a serious loss of popularity and support for the PQ, including a decline of almost 50 per cent in its membership. Special legislation adopted by the National Assembly included measures which unilaterally extended collective agreements, imposed wage deductions of up to 20 per cent for three months, and decreed new working conditions in place of negotiated contract renewals. The ultimate blow, early in 1983, was the adoption of Bill 111. This measure provided for, among other things, the reduction of seniority for striking teachers at the rate of three years for every day of "unauthorized absence from duty," and the presumption of guilt. Maurice Duplessis must have been blushing at his own moderation by comparison. Today, in spite of court decisions invalidating some elements of these laws, there are still hundreds of cases pending against individual teachers and their unions.

It must be said that Levesque succeeded in his "divide-and-rule" tactic, with the assistance of miscalculation by the Common Front leadership. A highly sophisticated and expensive propaganda campaign directed at turning workers in the private sector against their "fat cat" brothers and sisters in the public sector paid off handsomely in the short term. In the CNTU and especially in the QFL, private sector unions were singularly unsympathetic to the plight of the unionized teachers who were the chief target of the government's offensive. In this regard, the contrast between Quebec and British Columbia is striking.

The Levesque government, like the Trudeau regime in Ottawa, is actively seeking to re-establish a *modus vivendi* with the unions, under the general theme of "concertation" in order to facilitate economic recovery and job creation. The QFL has responded positively, and is receiving encouragement and financial assistance for its newly-launched Solidarity Fund, a worker-financed scheme for providing needed capital to business enterprises as an employment-support measure. The CNTU is deeply divided on the concertation issue, while the CEQ is still reluctant to go along.

It is too soon to tell to what extent and in what forms the concertation strategy will develop, and whether the nationalist-sovereignty appeal, and the reappearance of Robert Bourassa at the head of the Liberal Party, will prove effective in overcoming or even neutralizing the resentment, disillusionment, or disappointment vis-a-vis the PQ which is now so evident in the ranks of organized labour. What is clear is that the 1976 honeymoon is over, and in its place there is doubt, distrust, and hostility. The turbulent history of Quebec workers and labour movement is due to resume its course.

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"Taking It":

Ontario Workers' Struggles

Bryan D. Palmer

ONTARIO LABOUR, LIKE LABOUR across Canada, enters the 1980s under attack. In the north, at Sudbury, Inco workers are living through the worst crisis of unemployment in the young mining industry's history. To the south, the Golden Horseshoe manufacturing belt stretching from Niagara Falls to Oshawa is experiencing years anything but golden, its workers feeling far from lucky. Thousands of jobs disappear weekly, and have been doing so for more than two years. Tens of thousands have been laid off at Stelco and General Motors alone. The 1980s are the years of the bust, of repressive wage guidelines imposed by federal Liberals and provincial Conservatives alike, of employers digging in their heels and threatening plant closures, of demands for massive concessions at the bargaining table. Once known as a region of steady work and high wages, Ontario is no longer the promised land. The wage cut or the giveback are now the norm. Ontario is beyond the six and five society. It is now the sick and die society. Ontario workers do not face restraint, but emptiness. Empty pockets, empty lives without work, empty union halls, where organizations like the Steelworkers and the Autoworkers have seen their memberships dwindle by 40 per cent in one brief year. Workers in Ontario face, not six and five, but zip and zilch.

Nineteen eighty-one signalled this most acutely. It was the year of collapse. A wave of working-class protest rolled over the province: sit-down strikes, plant seizures, and movements of the unemployed. At an auto parts factory near Brampton, workers faced a shutdown with an occupation of their workplace; they sat down on the job and stayed put, demanding some protection from what appeared to be capital's growing propensity to strike against labour. One worker spoke bluntly of how he and others had seized the initiative. "We had nothing," he noted. "All we had were the people behind us. We really had to take it."

Ontario workers in the twentieth century have truly lived the words of that 1981 sit-down strike. "Taking it" — that's the theme I want to explore here, to pursue in analyzing workers' history in Ontario in the twentieth century. For

Ontario's workers have indeed taken it for eighty years and more. They have been on the receiving end time and time again, but they have always managed to come back, to dish something else out besides: they will have to continue in that way if they hope to survive the current onslaught when so much is arrayed against them in the age of zip and zilch.

In Ontario, government legislation banning teachers from the right to strike provoked a massive demonstration.

Historically, Ontario's workers have taken much from capital, employers, the state, and the politicians, from the various policies that these two forces and these two agents have implemented and institutionalized. The history of the twentieth century is, at one level, the history of capital's concentration in large and powerful corporations, often organized as multinationals. Parallelling the emergence of the branch plant economy has been the rise of the interventionist state which, from Mackenzie King in 1907 to Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1975 and 1982, has structured labour and capital relations along certain paths in Ontario as well as in the rest of the country.

The twentieth-century history of Ontario workers is also one of the fundamental reorganizations of work and of the remaking of the labour force itself. First, technological change and managerial innovations have revamped the character of life in Ontario and Canadian workplaces. From scientific manage-

ment or Taylorism, which struck Ontario workers with force in the pre-World War I years and concentrated workplace power increasingly in the hands of efficiency experts, foremen, and impersonal managers, to the microchip revolution of the 1980s, jobs have been becoming increasingly routinized and alienating. As well, the work force has been infused with new social groups, often very difficult to organize, often easily isolated from the labour movement as a whole. Non-English-speaking workers, for instance, came in great numbers as immigrants in the years 1902-13 and again in 1946-61. Both waves of immigrants were slotted into the lowest-paid, most unskilled segment of the labour market, and both were only reluctantly and tardily organized into unions. In Hamilton for instance, a steel-mill town, such immigrant workers often lacked even names at the workplace: they were given impersonal pay numbers in some of the plants. One of these workers died at work and nobody even knew his name. By 1918 foreign-born workers comprised 10 per cent of the labour force in the metal shops of Hamilton and they did the worst work for the lowest wages.

Equally significant in terms of transforming the job was the entry of women into waged work, and the resulting creation of low-paid female job ghettos. These were hard to organize because of their close supervision by male supervisors and the isolation of female work settings. Since the women themselves were also often ignored by male unionists, who took the woman's question to be a question for the home only, organization was often slow to develop. As women entered certain work sectors, and as technologies like the telephone and the typewriter appeared, once high-status occupations became devalued. A Toronto bank increased its female staff from 200 to 8,000 workers in two brief years prior to 1914: clerical work, which had become feminized, was no longer highly valued, nor was it highly paid. In the post-World War II years these kinds of processes continued with the influx of women into the public sector. The civil service experienced a similar downgrading.

Now all of this restructuring, all of this economic concentration, all of this expansion of the role of the state — this has been taken by Ontario's workers. It has been dished out by other forces. They have been forced to react to the rules of the game. These have been revamped time and time again. And workers have not always reacted well to the dizzying pace of change that has often left them behind, taken them by surprise.

Workers have also actively taken: they have resisted employers; they have battled in the political realm for a piece of the state, a slice of the economic pie. Their response to twentieth-century developments can be neatly, if incompletely, chronicled through an explanation of their organizational and political attempt to secure social as well as economic rights. In such efforts to improve its lot, labour has not only taken what it has been given but it has actively seized what employers have attempted to deny and what the state has moved to undercut.

Organized labour in early twentieth-century Ontario was overwhelmingly centred in the international unionism of Samuel Gompers' American Federation of Labor. Since the 1880s, with the rise of the Knights of Labor and the consolidation of international craft unions, it had become apparent that there were really two paths that labour could follow organizationally. The Knights of Labor advocated a form of industrial unionism, proposing the creation of assemblies of workers which would embrace skilled and unskilled, male and female, immigrant and native Canadian. Craft unions, although not necessarily opposed to this kind of labour reform movement in the 1880s tended to be more capable of withdrawing into themselves, into their own constituency composed largely of male skilled tradesmen, and they could retreat into themselves when employers and the state opposed labour's far-ranging demands with hostile reactions. The crafts concentrated, as well, on preserving some forms of autonomy for workers with respect to the workplace, wages, and job conditions.

The depression of the mid-1890s undercut the strength of the Knights of Labor in Ontario, although a few remnants of the Noble and Holy Order remained. The craft unions sucked in their belts and rode through the economic crisis. By 1897, with the economy recovering, labour organization picked up. By 1902 over 600 AFL craft unions thrived in Ontario, almost 60 per cent of the country's entire international unions. To Sam Gompers, and to many of his Canadian allies, this resurgence of power within the AFL unions meant that the time had come to settle the question on which labour body would control Canada's labour movement and the direction of its trade union practice. For years, in fact from 1897, jurisdictional disputes, ideological disagreement, and competing union labels had been the visible points of contention which separated out Gompers' AFL craft unions, a small number of separate Canadian unions, and the remaining locals of the Knights of Labor, centred mostly in Quebec. All of these bodies had co-existed, not always peacefully, in the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada. That central body had been in existence representing Canadian workers since 1883. At the 1902 Berlin, Ontario meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress, 150 delegates decided the organizational fate of Canadian, and Ontario, workers, for almost three decades to come. After much argument Gompers' Canadian lieutenants won the day, and international craft unionism triumphed. The AFL's salaried organizer, Hamilton's John A. Flett, was elected president of the TLC and those labour bodies not affiliated with the American Federation of Labor were driven out of the congress. In the years to come, with the AFL firmly in control of Ontario labour and of the national labour body, AFL unions would experience substantial growth, and by 1914 approximately 1,050 locals existed across Ontario, averaging seventy-five members each. Leading the way was the large metropolitan centre of Toronto where, by 1920, 165 locals supported almost 26,000 unionists.

Gompers' hold on Ontario's workers in this early period of the twentieth century confined them somewhat. It tended to limit their struggles to the bread-and-butter issues of wages, union recognition, and job conditions. These were areas that defined his conception of the parameters of labour activity. There were, of course, whole groups within the working class which were left out of Gompers' vision of unionism — the unskilled, the immigrant, the women — and these people were likely to be outside of the union movement in the early twentieth century. To this day Ontario, along with Nova Scotia, has the lowest proportion of its female workforce organized. These were serious deficiencies and serious limitations. But it would be wrong to conclude that the Ontario labour movement of the early twentieth century was little more than a simple captive of American pragmatism, of craft exclusion, or of bureaucratic unionism. Indeed, in the United States this was never the case, nor would it be so in Ontario. In countless struggles craft unionists battled employers, and in ten south-central Ontario cities between 1901 and 1914, Gompers' AFL craft unions and skilled workers participated in almost 290 strikes and lockouts. Moulders, printers, machinists, blacksmiths, carpenters, painters, and brick-layers led the bulk of these conflicts. But the AFL also opened its doors willingly to semi-skilled railwaymen, street railwaymen who fought a mammoth struggle in Hamilton in 1906 for union recognition, to labourers who formed federal labour unions in a number of industrial cities, and, less enthusiastically, and ambivalently, the AFL also at times extended its hand to women operatives who began to challenge corporate tyranny at Bell Canada and Eaton's.

During World War I, craft unionists in fact fought their own internal domestic war for democracy, most visibly in Ontario in the munitions industry. Sixty per cent of munitions production, involving a total of 185,000 Canadian workers, was located in Ontario. Hamilton was the strategic centre of such wartime production and in June 1916, 2,000 munitions workers struck over thirty plants engaged in the production of war materials. Among the work-places affected were the Steel Company of Canada, Canadian Westinghouse, Dominion Steel Foundry, and the National Steel Car Company, a representative sample of monopoly capital's leading firms. In the end the machinists and munitions workers were defeated by employers hostile to their demand for the nine-hour day, but from the limited foundations of what was admittedly a narrow craft unionism, these workers mounted a major offensive in 1916. Less radical than actions in the west, where the One Big Union was about to become prominent, or in the eastern coalfields where militancy was reaching towards the upheavals of 1922-25, struggles such as these pushed craft workers towards a new awareness of their power and importance. "If the machinists of the world were to strike today," said the oldest member of Hamilton's International Association of Machinists, "this war, large as it is, would immediately

cease, and the world would stand still," he continued, "because this is a war of machines and an age of the same."

By 1919, as the well-known radicalism in the west built up to the Winnipeg General Strike, a militant minority within Ontario's craft unions encompassed and embraced an uncompromising opposition to capital. In Toronto for instance, 5,000 marched under a banner that proclaimed "We Fought for Democracy — Not for Capitalists." Jack MacDonald, an activist in the patternmakers' union and a future communist leader, placed the demands of the hour squarely before the workers' movement. "We want the world for the workers," he yelled, "and we are going to have it." Strikes erupted among many of the skilled crafts, and on 30 May 1919 a general strike was called. Twelve thousand Toronto workers responded, although four days later they would be back at work. MacDonald insisted that the struggle was far from over. Labour, he claimed, was "fighting for control of the means of production."

In a mundane sense, craft unions had indeed been struggling for that control in their workplaces for many years. They had, between 1860 and 1920, restricted output, limited the number of apprenticeships that employers could bring into the shops, and exercised considerable authority over issues like hiring and firing. But this was all extremely localized, done at particular workplaces, and it had to be wrung in times of prosperity as a concession from employers. By 1919 a post-war recession was well underway, and panic gripped employers and politicians alike. With a growing radical presence in the west and a militant minority in the east phrasing labour's demands in the language of revolutionary change, capital and the state reacted with repressive rigour, catapulting labour in Ontario into the doldrums of the 1920s.

Over the course of that decade labour was in constant retreat, and the rhetoric of 1919 — weak in Ontario at the best of times — sank in the stormy sea of defensive need. Most craft union struggles of the 1920s turned on resistance to wage cuts, as was the case in an Ottawa general strike of building tradesmen in 1921. Other struggles were aimed at securing modest increases or union recognition. Where 1919 had seen a militant minority in the crafts demanding that the workers' movement step beyond Gompers' pure and simple unionism, the 1920s forced labour to back away from many large demands. It was primarily among the newly-formed Communists that a rekindled interest in industrial unionism and in organizing the unorganized emerged in the late 1920s. Communists, for example, led immigrant lumber workers in the Algoma District of northern Ontario, auto workers in Windsor, and needle trade workers in Toronto along the path of industrial unionism in the years from 1927 to 1929. Such efforts prefaced the surge of industrial union activity prominent in Ontario during the 1930s.

Communists, like Ontario metal workers Tom McEwen and Tim Buck, gave this movement towards industrial unionism a push in 1930, forming the

In 1933, furniture workers in Stratford, Ontario, conducted a successful four-week strike against their employers.

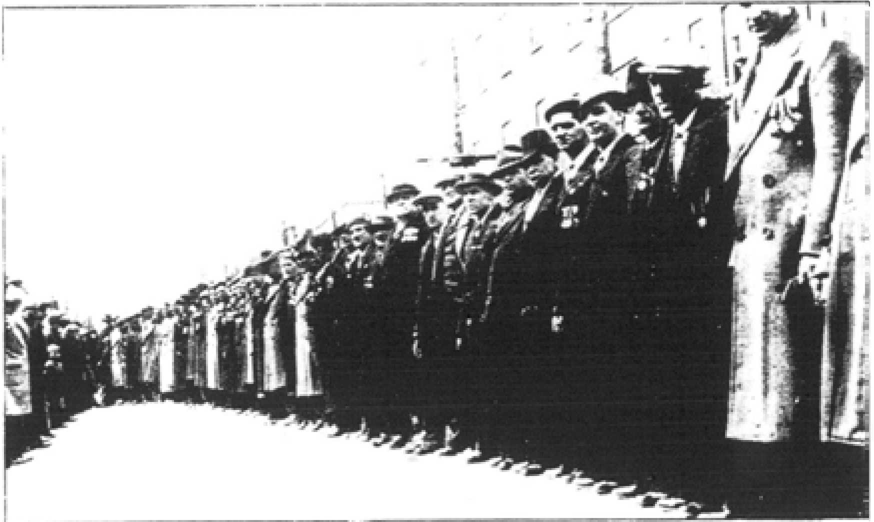
Workers Unity League. It was a body dedicated to organizing those workers virtually locked out of the craft unions. From 1930 to 1935 these people left their mark on the textile workers of Toronto, the furniture workers of Kitchener, the chicken pluckers of Stratford, the miners of northern Ontario, the shoe workers of London, the foundry workers of Sarnia, and on automobile, rubber, electrical, and steel workers from Windsor in the west to Brockville in the east. Such activities raised, once again, the spectre of dual unionism before the eyes of Samuel Gompers' ideological heirs in the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada. By this time the presidency of that body had passed to Tom Moore, a labour statesman who condemned the Winnipeg General strike as "semi-revolutionary madness," urging its outright suppression. He, and his many disciples, would have as little regard for industrial unionism in the 1930s as they had previously expressed for industrial militancy in 1919.

But at the very moment that the Workers Unity League appeared on the threshold of an organizational breakthrough in the mass production sector, new imperatives appeared in Moscow, where the threat to labour was now arbitrarily identified as fascism rather than conservative craft unionism. Demanding an end to dual unionism and labour movement divisions in the economies of the capitalist west, Stalin issued a decree that the WUL liquidate itself and transfer its members back to the appropriate unions associated with the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada. Many of the workers who had once been organized into the Workers Unity League, of course, had nowhere to go. Chicken pluckers and migratory Finnish lumber workers were not welcome

human material in the halls of the craft unions of the 1930s, for by this late date years of skill dilution, employer hostility, and worsening economic times had pushed the craft unions to a point of cautious and conservative retreat.

The call to return to the mainstream of the labour movement coincided with developments of immense significance in the United States. There the miners' leader, John L. Lewis, was championing the cause of industrial unionism within the AFL, advocating the organization of the unorganized. He met with staunch resistance. Always cognizant of the impact of symbolic gestures, Lewis crossed the floor of the 1935 AFL convention to land a punch on the nose of William "Big Bill" Hutcheson, president of the craft-conscious and exclusivist Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. That seemingly rash but indeed very calculated act announced the birth of the Congress of Industrial Organization, the CIO.

The CIO had no official presence in Canada, but communist activists and rank-and-file workers were captivated by the great breakthroughs that the CIO very quickly was beginning to make in the United States — sit-down strikes at Flint, massive victories on west coast waterfronts, and the organization of previously unorganized sectors in rubber, chemicals, and engineering. The CIO idea attracted the very workers once organized by the communists in the Workers Unity League. Sit-down strikes broke out spontaneously in Chatham, Windsor, Oshawa, and Sarnia in 1936-37. As Ontario Premier Mitchell Hepburn struggled to keep the CIO out of what he called his province, Oshawa



Oshawa, 1937. GM strikers display medals won for valor in First World War. Workers displayed medals after Mitch Hepburn, Ontario Premier, stated that strikers were alien invaders of their own country.

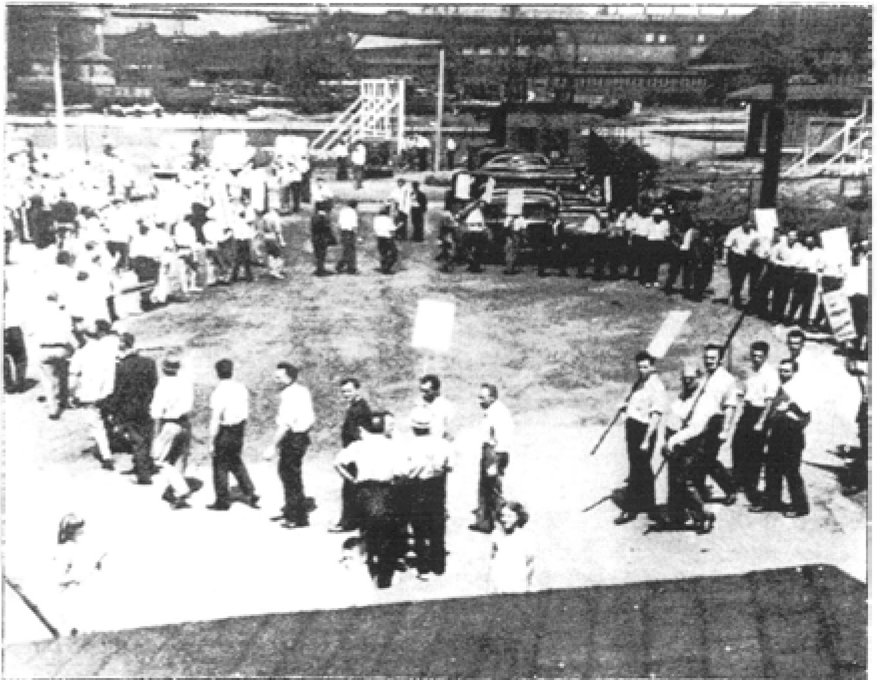
In 1941, Mitchell Hepburn sent most of the province's police force to Kirkland Lake to battle the miners.

workers challenged him directly and won an organizational victory for the United Automobile Workers in April 1937. But success was to fade quickly, by 1939 employers had seized the initiative once again. Not until the 1940s would the euphoria and promise of the early CIO years again spread among Ontario workers, leading to militant action and dramatic advances for the working class. In a case of history repeating itself, the Trades and Labor Congress expelled the CIO unions from its ranks in 1939, forcing the industrial union advocates to set up their own competing body, the Canadian Congress of Labour.

Nevertheless, in spite of the stalling of the CIO drive and the expulsion of the newly-forged industrial unions from the TLC, the war years were ones of great advances for Ontario workers. In the Trades and Labor Congress and Canadian Congress of Labour unions membership expanded, although it was among the industrial unionists that successes were most dramatic. The number of organized workers in Ontario doubled between 1939 and 1945. Of critical importance in the upsurge of CIO unionism was the struggle of the Ontario locals, largely in the north, of the Mine-Mill and Smelter Workers. As in logging, these workers, concentrated in the company towns of northern Ontario's mining frontier, had a tradition of radicalism to draw upon, the constitution of Mine-Mill freely borrowing from the language of the old IWW stronghold, the Western Federation of Miners. Kirkland Lake's Local 220 of the Mine-Mill & Smelter Workers' Union led a momentous clash in 1941-42 that, although lost, placed labour's demands for union recognition at the very centre of the domestic context of a Canada at war. One union militant, Bob Miner, remembered the events of 1941-42, not in terms of defeat, but in terms of accomplishment. "I always said," he noted, "that the Kirkland Lake Strike was one of the most advantageous, for the working class as a whole, that ever took place. As a result of what was won there we obtained labour legislation in Ontario in 1943, which made recognition of unions compulsory once a majority backed the union."

The legislation that Miner remembered was PC 1003. To curb the mounting number of worker-days lost to recognition strikes in 1942-43 the government enacted Privy Council Order 1003. Like all orders-in-council, PC 1003 applied federally and was meant to remain in force only until the war was over. But it would have a decisive impact in Ontario for it appeared to legitimize the right to organize which had previously been denied, and to bargain collectively, which workers had always been able to wring from employers only with a great deal of effort and at great cost. Moreover, PC 1003 promised procedures for the certification and compulsory recognition of trade unions with majority support in the workplace, just as it defined a host of unfair labour practices and established an administrative tribunal to enforce the order. PC 1003, while extending organizational rights to Canadian workers during 1943-44, had been enacted like a host of other orders-in-council and like Mackenzie King's earlier Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907, in order to "keep the lid on industrial unrest." Its ultimate impact was not in what it did, but in what it stimulated.

In fact PC 1003 blew the lid off labour-capital relations, serving as a prelude to a 1946-8 strike wave, in which Ontario's workers would try to seize the initiative, to take the opportunities presented by the existence of PC 1003 to secure real union recognition.



On the picket line, Stelco strike of 1946.

At Hamilton steel mills and Brockville electrical engineering plants, CIO workers led the 1946 upsurge demanding recognition for the newly organized workers in the mass production sector. A sense of purpose spread across the province, as rubber and furniture workers joined their brothers and sisters in the steel and electrical industries: 30,000 workers in those days marched off their jobs in protests that led to two million working-days lost. One participant in this 1946 upheaval captured the sense of labour's new mood. "In those days," he claimed, "the union was evangelical, it was missionary, we had the feeling we were building something for posterity."

At Stelco in Hamilton the Steelworkers Organizing Committee challenged managerial prerogatives and in the words of one early union leader, won benefits "which could not be measured in dollars and cents." He said they experienced "the feeling for the first time of freedom that came from breaking the hold the company had over us." By 1951 Ontario-based unions like the Steelworkers and the United Electrical Workers had memberships of from 20,000 to 55,000, and in other sectors such as the auto industry successes were also registered during these years.

In these organizational drives and post-war victories it was often communist organizers who had championed industrial unionism, communist leadership that had won strikes and recognition battles. Within the Canadian Congress of Labour, the centre of the CIO, a third of the membership was affiliated with unions closely associated with the Communist Party, and half of the early CIO organizers were reputed to be communists. Yet for all of their successes, these communists made significant errors, including a rather slavish adherence to Moscow directives. This, and the escalating Cold War ideology of North American society in the post-1948 years, sealed the fate of the pioneers of industrial unionism. Like the Knights of Labor and like the first CIO unions themselves, the communists were to be driven out of the Canadian labour movement. Between 1946 and 1951, Ontario's labour movement, like that of British Columbia and other provinces, was a seething cauldron of factionalism and battles between communists and non-communists. In unions like the Canadian Seamen's Union the drive to exorcise the communist influence plummeted to new depths with the importation of criminal elements like Hal Banks. Other unions did the dirty work themselves and by 1951 the communists were either gone or forced into retreat and quietude. Such communist purges from the unions, however, often had to be accompanied by entire suspensions of union membership, and as unions were suspended their constituencies went up for grabs. This precipitated a troubling round of raiding by both the Canadian Congress of Labour unions and the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada unions. By 1952 the old debate between advocates of industrial unionism and craft unionism was resurfacing as both the TLC and the CCL attempted to consolidate the particular gains they had made during the 1940s. To overcome the divisive and counterproductive results of such raiding, the two central

bodies merged in 1956, formally ending their two-decade-long rivalry by establishing the Canadian Labour Congress that exists to this day. But in merging they had not frontally addressed the contentious problem of the twentieth century: was craft or industrial unionism the better course to follow. In the formation of the Canadian Labour Congress in 1956 this issue had been shunted aside, craft and industrial unions co-existing in the same central labour body.

If the organizational direction of labour was problematic, and indeed it was in the years 1900 to 1980, so too was the political identity of workers. The class was, at best, schizophrenic, dividing its loyalties among Grits, Tories, and labour advocates, with only a very small minority of Ontario workers reaching towards socialism. Within the early Trades and Labor Congress and among Gompers' AFL unions a policy of non-partisanship prevailed early in the history, many craft workers believing strongly that labour's friends in the established parties should be rewarded, and their enemies punished. They didn't want to cast their lot into independent politics; they didn't want to alienate one party or another by identifying directly with the opposition.

The marriage of the AFL and the CIO submerged the militancy of 1946-8 in a coalition largely concerned with the consolidation of past gains. By the mid-1960s, with the rise of public sector unionism, three new groups of Ontario workers would fight their employer, the provincial government, and old conceptions of what unionism was, to revitalize the Canadian labour move-

In the bitter cold, 35,000 workers demonstrate against wage controls, March 1976.

ment. Hospital workers, nurses, and teachers, many of them women, challenged state authority in 1973-74 to extend the social rights of labour and to include the right to strike in the public sector. Unions like the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation and the Ontario Nurses Association, like the federally organized Canadian Union of Public Employees and Canadian Union of Postal Workers, signalled the increasing strength of the public sector and its growing militancy. This process often exacerbated old tensions as the long-established craft unions saw their power and authority waning. Building trades workers expressed the new resentments most forcefully, refusing to pay dues to a Canadian Labour Congress they felt was dominated by the increasingly militant public sector unions. Eventually they left the body, forming the Canadian Federation of Labour. Where, in 1902, 1939, and 1948-51, dissidents had been expelled from the central bodies of Canadian labour, during the crisis of the 1980s they would walk out on their own. Just when solidarity was most needed, it proved in fact most evasive.

By 1907, however, Ontario craft workers were drawn by the potential of an independent labour party, heartened by the election of Independent Labor Party candidate Allan Studholme in Hamilton in 1906. Just as the war stimulated militancy in the workplace, it also gave independent political activity an added impulse and impetus: by 1917 there were a host of local labour parties united under the auspices of the Hamilton-based Ontario Independent Labor Party. Farmer-Labour cooperation for the first time swept the Conservatives from office in the October 1919 provincial election. The United Farmers of Ontario won the election with forty-five seats, and the ILP won an unprecedented eleven seats with particularly impressive showings registered in Hamilton and London. Two labour cabinet ministers would actually serve in the new provincial government.

Such gains at the polls proved short-lived with the subsequent collapse of the Farmer-Labour coalition and the disintegration of the Ontario-based Independent Labor Party in the early 1920s. We know little about the politics of labour in the aftermath of the 1919 victory, but what we do know suggests that labour politics deteriorated into factional debate and schism, with Tories and Grits picking up the pieces. A moderate socialist alternative, which had been centred in the Ontario Socialist Party, was largely eclipsed by the World War I years, and labour politics, where it continued to thrive in the 1920s, would be at its healthiest in municipalities. Labour could still muster significant numbers of votes, and would actually elect mayors in places like Sault Ste. Marie, Fort William, and Port Arthur.

As was the case in the industrial realm, the one group to register some political presence during the 1920s, although it was often problematic and divisive, was the communists. Communists were active in the Canadian Labor Party, and contributed to municipal campaigns in places like Toronto. Their increasingly sectarian stand toward the end of the decade weakened their

impact, but they did establish the Canadian Labour Defence League to protect labour's rights in the legal and political realms.

But it was in the 1930s with the emergence of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation that a political alternative for Ontario workers was truly born. Ironically enough, the 1930s would see little in the way of CCF success among industrial workers in Ontario. That success was postponed until the 1940s, when industrial unionism registered its first truly marked advances. While the CCF cultivated its earliest and strongest support in the west, the home of J.S. Woodsworth, William Irvine, and the Regina Manifesto, it would be in Ontario that the labour movement cast its lot most unambiguously with social democracy. A spate of trade union affiliations to the CCF resulted from a 1942 convention linking the party and the trade unions, and the 1943 Ontario provincial election saw workers in the province's industrial cities, mill towns, and mining communities rally to the CCF banner. They elected thirty-four members of parliament to the legislature; more than half of them were trade unionists. The Liberals were crushed by this CCF electoral wave and the Tories only narrowly retained their hold on the province: the CCF, in 1943, with labour's backing, became the official opposition in the country's leading industrial province, increasing its share of the popular vote by an overwhelming 405 per cent. The future appeared to look very bright indeed.

But in fact the CCF was a young organization, unskilled in the arts of politics and political organization. Many of the union affiliations were allowed to lapse, large employers bankrolled anti-CCF campaigns, and now-embittered relations between communists and CCFers split labour constituencies, allowing traditional candidates to emerge victorious in the later 1940s. Since workers feared the election of an anti-labour Conservative government, and because the communist Labor Progressive Party followed a course detrimental to workers' interests in forging a Communist-Liberal coalition, the labour vote slipped through the CCF's hands. Two short years after the CCF had seemed on the verge of assuming power in Ontario, the party was in retreat. In the 1945 provincial election the CCF lost a substantial amount of the ground it had gained; its seats dwindled from thirty-four in 1943 to a mere eight in 1945. The Tory machine of George Drew had once again preserved its power, its authority, and its control over politics in Ontario. In the 1945 federal election, the CCF coffin was nailed shut in Ontario and not a single CCFer won office. Four years later in 1949 the record was little better and all that David Lewis could record was, "This is all very depressing."

Over the course of the 1950s the CCF continued to decline in influence until in 1958 the Canadian Labour Congress called for "a fundamental realignment of political forces in Canada." This led to the creation of the New Democratic Party in 1961, with over 2,000 delegates from unions, the CCF, and various party clubs meeting in the Ottawa Coliseum. But the New Democratic Party, like the CCF, has never proved capable of winning Ontario's workers, or

voters, to its support in a strong, unambiguous way. Ontario labour leaders, like those in other regions, have indeed cast their lot with the NDP, but they have also experimented with other forms of political action, including massive political pressure, as developed in the CLC-led Parliament Hill demonstration against interest rates in 1981, or the brief flirtation with tripartism in the mid-1970s. But politics, while a vital realm for Ontario workers, has provided them with a few long-term victories, with few answers. The state, which is often perceived as up for grabs, has been a slippery entity to get a hold on.

In conclusion, Ontario's workers have learned that, organizationally and politically, nothing, *nothing at all*, is easily won from capital or from the state. Concessions and victories are seized, but they are seldom permanent and long-lasting. For behind the back of labour's activity, capital and the state are themselves restructuring working-class life, taking something out of labour. Outside of organization and political action lie developments like economic collapse, so devastating in the early 1930s and early 1980s. New divisions within labour's ranks are reproduced time and time again, between craft and industrial unionists, between the skilled and unskilled, and between low-paid unorganized women and immigrants and higher-paid Anglo-Canadian workers. These are constantly surfacing as a barrier to labour unity. They are what the labour movement has to take and deal with. Yet amidst the forces of division and the forces of opposition, Ontario workers have always had, as well, in the words of the 1981 sit-down striker that began this discussion, "the people outside backing us," the potential strength and power of the working class.

Stratford unionists prepare to march.

That power, so long weakened by labour taking what capital, the state, and technology lays on its head, will reach toward its potential only when, organizationally and politically, Ontario workers reach out and take and demand their social as well as their economic rights. The history of twentieth-century Ontario workers, then, leaves one message, stretching forward from the machinists' struggles of 1916 through the miners' battles of 1941-2 and into the sit-down strikes of 1981. Taking it is a two-way street. Ontario's workers are now at a point in their history where they must stop being driven and take the wheel themselves. As that 1981 sit-down striker asserted, "They have nothing. They have to take it."

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