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TAKING ON THE GRAND TRUNK:
*The Locomotive Engineers Strike of 1876-7**

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On December 29th, 1876 shortly after 9 p.m., the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers struck the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada. For 108 hours, a few hundred men scattered along a thousand miles of track challenged the power of Canada's most powerful corporation. By the end, they had to reckon with the military and legal power of the Dominion itself. Yet, in the face of such odds, they triumphed.[1]

A century later, the strike and its significance are virtually forgotten. Neither the engineers' struggle nor the Breaches of Contract Act which grew out of it feature in the standard chronologies of

*Research for this paper was assisted by a grant from the Ontario Arts Council.

[1]On the strike, the best source is Shirley Ann Ayer, "The Locomotive Engineers' Strike on the Grand Trunk Railway in 1876-77," M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1961 and James A. Pendergest, "The Strike of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers on the Grand Trunk Railway, 1876-1877," unpublished ms., Department of History, University of Toronto. The Brotherhood's side, with supporting documents, is found in P.M. Arthur, "The Strike on the Grand Trunk Railroad", *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, February 1877. Aspects of the affair are treated in Desmond Morton, *The Canadian General: Sir William Otter* (Toronto 1974), pp. 64-70; Gerald E. Boyce, *Historic Hastings* (Belleville 1967), pp. 158-166. On the wider issues, see K.W. McNaught, "Violence in Canadian History" in J.S. Moir (ed.) *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto 1970), pp. 66-84.

Canadian labour history.[2] In the standard histories of the Grand Trunk, the episode is hurriedly misinterpreted as a company triumph.[3] Yet Canada's first national railway strike merits a centennial recognition both as an epic struggle and because of its consequences.

The incredible victory of the Brotherhood not only entrenched the union in Canada but confirmed one of the first formal collective agreements to be negotiated between a major Canadian corporation and its employees.[4] As a precedent for the national custom of legislating inconvenient strikes out of existence, the Breaches of Contract Act should rival the better-known Trade Unions Act of 1872 as a landmark statute.[5] The most fascinating feature of the strike — its success in a period of almost unbroken labour setbacks — allows a glimpse at the strange coalition of allies the engineers could assemble when they took on the Grand Trunk.

Fighting was hardly the style of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers nor was capitulation the normal response of Joseph Hickson, the tough Yorkshireman who managed the Grand Trunk. Conceived as a demonstration of British engineering prowess and managerial skill for the benefit of slovenly American railroaders, not even scandal, corruption and bankruptcy could eliminate all the Grand Trunk's pretensions. Under successive managers, it preened itself as a firm but paternal employer, boasting of its reading room and library at the Point St. Charles shops and the temperance society launched by a senior official.[6] During the nervous 1860s, the company mus-

[2]See, for example, Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement in Canada 1827-1959* (Montreal 1959); H.A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1958) and Richard Desrosiers and Denis Heroux, *Le travailleur québecois et le syndicalisme* (Montreal 1973) all have no reference to the strike.

[3]A.W. Currie, *The Grand Trunk Railway of Canada* (Toronto 1957), pp. 152-4. Colonel G. R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways* (Toronto and Vancouver 1960), Vol. 1, *1836-1896*, ignores the episode. See P. 332.

[4]Reed Richardson, *The Locomotive Engineer, 1863-1963: A Century of Railroad Labour Relations and Work Rules* (Ann Arbor 1963), pp. 196-7. See also Gerald G. Eggert, *Railroad Labour Disputes: The Beginning of Federal Strike Policy* (Ann Arbor 1967).

[5]H.D. Woods, *Labour Policy in Canada* (Toronto 1973 rev. ed.) p. 337. See also Bernard Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour in the 1870's", *Canadian Historical Review*, 41 (June 1960), pp. 93ff.

[6]On Grand Trunk employees, see Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", pp. 6-10. Useful sidelights can be found in the annual reports on the Grand Trunk Brigade. See, for example, Canada, *Sessional Papers*, no. 7, 1871, "Report of the Department of Militia and Defence for 1870", p. 29.

tered its entire staff into a Grand Trunk Railway Brigade of infantry and artillery commanded by the general manager. For national defence, it was useless: even a minor crisis would require railwaymen to work, not fight. In fact, the Brigade helped reinforce the company's militaristic view of authority and discipline.[7]

Such a view was hardly unique to the Grand Trunk. As Alfred Chandler and Stephen Salsbury have pointed out, the complex administrative structures developed by most major North American railroads "sharpened the gulf between labour and management", creating barriers as formidable as those between officers and other ranks in the military services.[8] In the job of locomotive engineer, the aura of romance and a disciplined professionalism were uniquely combined. On the one hand, the engineer was the traditional man of the road, removed from the constraints of family and community, hard-drinking and feckless. On the other hand, on the engineer's competence, dependability and presence of mind in a crisis depended the safety of scores of lives and much valuable property.[9]

Boasting as its motto, "Sobriety, Truth, Justice and Morality", it was the professed goal of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers to transform the reputation of its members. Started at Detroit on 8 May 1863, with a Grand Trunk engineer among its charter members, the Brotherhood soon learned that it would survive only if it suited at least some of the purposes of the railroad barons. "The aim of our organization", insisted the Grand Chief Engineer in 1874, "has been to have the engineers attain a higher standard of excellence in their profession; to become better and more useful citizens, that they might occupy the more exalted positions in society, to provide for the widows and orphans. . . ."[10]

However significant its commitment to fraternal uplift, the BLE was also an example of the principles of the so-called "new unionism". It restricted membership to a highly skilled craft; it exacted high dues; it imposed a rigidly centralized administration and, by

[7]On the Brigade, see *ibid.*, no. 35, 1867-8, pp. 40-44; no. 8, 1870, pp. 51-3; no. 7, 1871, pp. 29-30; no. 8, 1872, pp. 58-9; no. 9, 1873, pp. cii-civ; no. 7, 1874, pp. 44-5.

[8]Alfred Chandler and Stephen Salsbury, "The Railroads: Innovators in Modern Business Administration" in Bruce Mazlish (ed.) *The Railroad and the Space Program: An Exploration in Historic Analogy* (Cambridge, Mass. 1965) pp. 158-9.

[9]Richardson, *The Locomotive Engineer*, ch. V-VI, pp. 89-136; Stevens, *Canadian National*, Vol. I, p. 35 and *passim*.

[10]*Monthly Journal*, April 1878, p. 176.

1867, it had applied the principle of mutuality by organizing an autonomous insurance association.[11] One principle set the Brotherhood apart from contemporary working class organizations: independence. In the 1860s and 70s, unions in both the United States and Canada abandoned localism to build broader organizations and to explore the first of a long succession of political nostrums. For the Engineers, there were no entangling alliances, not even with the firemen. As aristocrats of the running trades, weakly linked even to home communities, there was nothing to gain from the forlorn hopes and lost causes of other working class organizations, particularly in the depression years which followed the panic of 1873.[12]

The depression did force greater militancy on the Brotherhood. When Charles Wilson, the Grand Chief Engineer, repudiated striking engineers on the Pennsylvania Railroad, he was promptly deposed. His successor, a prudent, moralizing Scot named Peter M. Arthur, represented little change. A self-made man who recalled his childhood as an immigrant waif, Arthur resembled many of the railroad managers he faced. The Brotherhood, he insisted, was no labour conspiracy but a bulwark against misconduct, a guardian of the Sabbath and the benefactor, to the tune of a million dollars, to the grief-stricken dependents of its members.[13]

Like other international unions, the Brotherhood entered Canada through the network of a continental economy. The first Canadian division, no. 70, was formed at Toronto in 1865. Others followed at London, Brockville, Point St. Charles, Hamilton and Stratford. The youngest was no. 189, chartered at Belleville on 23 December 1875. In 1871, the BLE had chosen Toronto as a convention site, and in 1875, William Robinson of Toronto was chosen Second Grand Engineer. Since the union encouraged good behaviour, abhorred agitators and made no overt attempt to challenge the low pay and long hours common to the Grand Trunk, company officials had no reason to add labour strife to their innumerable problems.[14]

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 177; see Richardson, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 123-136 on the philosophy and benevolent structure of the Brotherhood. See also John R. Commons, *A History of Labour in the United States* (New York 1918) Vol. II, pp. 62-67; David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York 1967), p. 172ff.

[12]On Arthur, see *Monthly Journal*, October 1877, pp. 459-463; November 1877, p. 507.

[13]Richardson, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 163-4.

[14]On the Brotherhood in Canada, I have accepted Forsey's location of

By the 1870s, with many American railroads paying their running trades by variants of the trip system, the GTR's reliance on a daily rate was a little old-fashioned. Since a day could run to the full twenty-four hours without a premium for overtime, the system was also open to abuse by the company. So was the grade structure — three ranks of engine drivers and two of firemen, depending on years of service. While the company had good reason to reward experience and dependability, it could also be tempted to employ men at the lower, cheaper grade. While most engineers were promoted from the rank of fireman, it was never a practice for them to revert to avoid lay-off. Engineers had other common grievances. Crews were paid only if runs were available and men were obliged to report for work only to find that there was none. Frequently, crews were detained without compensation by weather, accidents, or other circumstances. To meet these and other injustices, the enormously complicated work rules that characterize the railroad running trades emerged. The Grand Trunk and its employees would make their contribution.[15]

Even when predominant authority in the Grand Trunk had been switched by the 1862 Guarantee Act from Canadian directors to British investors,[16] employees had never been a special target in the ingenious attempts to squeeze out a dividend. That changed with the appointment of Joseph Hickson as General Manager in April, 1874. A man of modest origins who had handled the company's finances since 1861, he had doubtless grumbled from the familiar business office perspective at the prodigality of his masters.[17] Hickson was more than a bookkeeper. In his fifteen years at the head of the company, he would liquidate some of the GTR's worst liabilities (at much cost to Canadian taxpayers). In manoeuvring Grand Trunk tracks into the lucrative Chicago market, he outsmarted William Vanderbilt.[18] When the Grand Trunk's president, Richard Potter, attempted to impose a primitive incentive scheme for senior officials, Hickson

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divisions. See also *The Locomotive Engineer*, 21 May 1969; Logan, *Labour Unions in Canada*, p. 30; *Monthly Journal*, December 1875, pp. 596-7; Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", pp. 37-8. (Internal evidence in the *Monthly Journal* reinforces Forsey, not Logan.)

[15]Richardson, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 142-156.

[16]Stevens, *Canadian National*, Vol. I, pp. 297-302.

[17]On Hickson, see Potter-Hickson, 7 May 1874, Public Archives of Canada, Hickson Papers, and biographical note; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 28 November 1874; *Railway Journal*, 11 November 1881.

[18]Stevens, *Canadian National*, Vol. I, ch. XI.

moved deftly to have his boss removed.[19] Potter's successor was Captain Sir Henry Wattley Tyler, late of the Royal Engineers, still later Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Railways. Under Tyler, there were no more plans for managerial democracy. Under Hickson, pencils would be sharpened and economies would be made.

Within a year, it was the turn of the locomotive engineers. Grand Trunk engine drivers earned $2.25 a day. After 12,000 miles and a clean record, they advanced to a second class rate of $2.50; a further 12,000 miles should have brought third class standing and a maximum rate of $2.80 a day. On 30 March 1875, a company circular announced that the highest rate would be abolished and its members would revert to the second class. Brotherhood members consulted their constitution, formed a grievance committee and summoned the Grand Chief Engineer. Peter Arthur bustled to Montreal, met with both Hickson and the committee, and emerged with one of the earliest written agreements in the history of railway labour relations. In essence, it spelled out the status quo. Wages would not be reduced; engineers and firemen would be promoted promptly when they had completed their miles; rates for detention time were confirmed, ranging from ten cents for a third class engineer to six cents for a first class fireman. Best of all, men would receive a quarter-day's pay when their train was cancelled. The company covered its retreat by extracting a ten percent reduction from its other employees.[20]

For Grand Trunk engineers, the 1875 agreement was a model of how sensible arbitration could lead to the best of all possible worlds. Arthur celebrated by attending a special religious service at Point St. Charles, rode over the magnificent Victoria Bridge and set off on a triumphal visitation of BLE divisions from Brockville to Hamilton.[21] His intervention, he boasted to the 1875 convention, had prevented wilder elements — notably the firemen — from launching a strike. "Brothers", he declaimed, "we ought to feel proud that our society has adopted this policy of settling differences by arbitration if possible."[22]

[19]Currie, *Grand Trunk*, pp. 141-2, 144-152. See also Beatrice Webb, *Our Apprenticeship* (London 1926), p. 71.

[20]On the 1875 agreement, *Monthly Journal*, February 1877, p. 65; Jacob Perlman, "A History of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers up to 1903," Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1926, pt. III, ch. I, pp. 9-10; Richardson, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 196-7. (This may have been only the second written agreement in railway labour history between management and a representative union of employees.)

[21]*Monthly Journal*, 1875, pp. 322-3.

[22]*Ibid.*

Pride was a little premature. Described later by an admiring journalist as a man who "never failed to keep an arrangement to the letter",[23] Hickson had prudently avoided signing the 1875 agreement. That honour was left to Herbert Wallis, the mechanical superintendent and a man of coarser grain. Since Wallis had no intention of being bullied by his underlings or their sanctimonious Scottish spokesman, he promptly renumbered the grades, with first class henceforth being the highest. Now he could argue that all had indeed been advanced to the third class. Engine drivers soon complained that they suffered suspension or demotion on the slightest pretext. Delegates given leave to attend the BLE convention at Detroit had their permission revoked.[24]

Both Brotherhood philosophy and the climate of the times discouraged protest. The financial depression that struck the United States in 1873 had a delayed impact on Canada, but the Grand Trunk was affected almost from the start.[25] With both Jay Gould and the old Commodore, Cornelius Vanderbilt, competing with the Grand Trunk for Chicago traffic, a rate war was inevitable. By May 1876, Hickson had to direct his Chicago agents to stop seeking business. Canadian customers, who subsidized the GTR's American freight, had fresh reasons to curse the line.[26]

Desperate to prove himself to the Grand Trunk's investors, Hickson tried his own incentive scheme: superintendents would get fifteen percent of savings in their departments. By now, Wallis boasted the lowest locomotive costs per car mile in the company's history. Falling coal prices saved an extra $21,551.[27] Any further economies would have to be scraped from his employees. In September 1876, the mechanical superintendent announced additional classifications for engineers and firemen, each at a new low wage. When a grievance committee called on Wallis to protest, he brusquely announced that he was bound by no agreement and that he would do as he pleased. The committee dissolved in dismay. On orders from union headquarters in Cleveland, it re-assembled and approached Hickson. The general manager was more tactful. Of course he recog-

[23]Louis H. Tache, *Men of the Day* (Montreal 1890), p. 453.
[24]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 1 January 1877.
[25]Grand Trunk Reports, 30 April 1877, cited by Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 19. See also Currie, *Grand Trunk*, pp. 138-140.
[26]Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 17; Stevens, *Canadian National*, pp. 332-3. See also *Star* (Montreal), 29 December 1876, and *Daily Witness* (Montreal), 21 December 1876.
[27]Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 20.

nized the 1875 agreement; equally, the new ranks would stand.[28] In the best BLE tradition, the engineers submitted. Soon their worst fears were realized. New employees, hired in the low-paid classifications, got much of the work; higher-paid engineers and firemen stayed home unpaid.

Worse was to come. With freight still running well below capacity, Hickson decided on major staff cuts. On 7 December 1876, a circular announced a twenty percent reduction in train service forced by "a continued stagnation in business and the competition resulting from the construction of rival lines". In dismissing workers, the general manager commanded that "... care must be taken to give every consideration to the claims of the old employees, and that the reductions are spread over the various grades in equitable proportions."[29]

There was probably no way in which cuts could have been made palatable. Timed for 23 December, they would leave hundreds of Grand Trunk employees to face a grim Christmas and a bitter winter. Even in mid-summer, able-bodied unemployed had been forced to beg and now the Toronto *Mail* moaned: "one shudders to think of what a hard winter will bring forth."[30] For the craft-conscious engineers, aristocrats of labour, the sudden plunge into penury was intolerable. It was also apparent that Wallis had used the opportunity to pursue his vendetta against the Brotherhood. Layoff notices reached 66 of the Grand Trunk's 375 engineers and 71 of the 365 firemen but, according to complaints published in the Toronto *Globe*, Wallis had ignored Hickson's humane directive:

> He picked out the oldest and most reliable men, who had for years been on that road. By far the largest majority of these men were first-class paid men, and known to be members of the Brotherhood. Some he allowed to work out their fourteen days notice, and the Grand Trunk was generous for once, for it paid some of the men without working, so as to get rid of them for the purpose of having the opportunity to intimidate those who were left.[31]

In due course, the company would argue that, with so many engineers in the BLE, it was inevitable that many would be let go. Yet all but three members of the grievance committee that visited Hickson in September were selected for the first wave of dismissals. Eventually, a total of a hundred and fifty engine drivers were notified

[28]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 3 January 1877.
[29]The circular is reproduced in the *Monthly Journal*, February 1877, p. 66, and by Ayer, p. 241.
[30]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 20 December 1876.
[31]*Globe* (Toronto), 11 December 1876.

of their dismissal. Among them were John Eaton, the aggressive and articulate secretary of the Toronto division, and John Cardell, a nineteen-year veteran of the Grand Trunk who served as spokesman for the Montreal members. It was a crisis worthy of the Grand Chief Engineer.[32]

That summer, Peter Arthur had returned to Canada, rejoicing in the thriving state of his organization, commending the young divisions at Belleville and Stratford for purchasing regalia and building their finances.[33] His December visit was less jovial. Pausing in Toronto to collect members of the grievance committee, he hurried to Montreal. From a base at the Albion Hotel, Arthur proposed a meeting with the general manager. "Your engineers have sent for me and I have come", he announced a little grandly, "not in the spirit of coercion or dictation, but as mediator."[34] His answer was a note from Charles Drinkwater, Hickson's secretary, explaining that any differences had been long since settled and advising him to deal with Herbert Wallis. The mechanical superintendent was curt: he knew of no grievance and he knew of no business he could have with Mr. Arthur. Keeping his temper, the Grand Chief Engineer next despatched his Canadian grievance committee. This time, Wallis declared that he would deal only with men in the company's service. John Eaton, the committee chairman, was plainly unwelcome. Finally, Arthur returned to Drinkwater. Could Mr. Wallis's rebuff be reported to the general manager? Unfortunately, explained the secretary, Mr. Hickson was in New York. Could the committee know his address so that it might communicate directly? No, it could not.[35]

By now the engineers had almost had enough. Arthur announced that he was returning to Cleveland "to avoid expense as we had already incurred a heavy expense running after them."[36] Reporters, dogging his footsteps, promptly proclaimed that there would be a strike on 23 December. No, explained Arthur, the Montreal members of the committee would call on Hickson to offer the basis for a settlement: reinstatement of those dismissed, sharing of work, elimination of the new classifications and adherence to the 1875 agreement.

By now, it was hardly more than a polite fiction that the men

[32]On Eaton's dismissal, the notice is in *Monthly Journal*, February 1877, p. 66. See also *Globe* (Toronto), 16 December 1876.
[33]*Monthly Journal*, pp. 67-8.
[34]*Ibid.*, p. 67.
[35]*Ibid.*, p. 67 and Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", pp. 243-4.
[36]See Arthur in *Monthly Journal*, February 1877, p. 68.

could expect more from Hickson than from Wallis. When the general manager returned to Montreal on Boxing Day, he met the reduced committee and promised an answer next day. Instead, they were called back that evening. Why not summon the entire committee? Hickson promised passes. That would delay a decision until at least Thursday or Friday.[37]

Whatever the Montreal engineers believed, the majority on the committee now believed that Hickson was playing for time. They were probably right. Through such dependable mouthpieces as the Montreal *Star* and the *Gazette*, the Grand Trunk management earnestly reminded the public that the engineers' wages were as high as ever despite the company's financial straits and the greater ease and safety of the work.[38] For more than a week, officials had worked quietly to recruit extra engineers, promoting the more dependable firemen. Each day left the company less vulnerable to a strike. For their part, the engineers were not silent. In a letter to the Toronto *Mail*, John Eaton answered part of the Grand Trunk's argument. *Since engineers were paid only by the trip, what was the saving in* reducing their numbers?

> Now, where is the boasted charity of the officials in discharging us at this time of year, for the men up to the present have been compelled to make more than six days per week, and firemen have been promoted to engineers within the past two weeks. It is simply a blind. The real object of the Company is to stamp out the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.[39]

For the engineers, a strike was a gamble against impossible odds. All over North America, once-proud labour organizations, even the haughty ship labourers of Saint John, had been crippled or destroyed.[40] If unions had been legitimized by the Canadian Parliament in 1872, would-be strikers faced all the penalties of the General Railway Act, provincial Masters and Servants Acts and a variety of criminal proscriptions.[41] Yet it was obvious to Arthur that his Canadian members were determined to fight. An organization of 10,000 members could not cut and run. Members of the BLE's standing

[37]Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", pp. 59-60; *Gazette* (Montreal), 29 December 1876.

[38]*Star* (Montreal), 22 December 1876; *Globe* (Toronto), 23, 27 December 1876; *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 23, 25 December 1876.

[39]Eaton's letter is in the *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 26 December 1876.

[40]See Forsey manuscript, "Local Unionism, 1860-1880", pp. 23-43.

[41]Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour", pp. 122-5. The General Railway Act is 31 Vict. c. 68. Section 78 provides a penalty of $400 or five years imprisonment.

committee on grievances, crowding into the little back office in Cleveland, knew that they had recently dared and won against the Central Railroad of New Jersey. The Grand Trunk was far bigger but, as any railroader knew, it was also vulnerable. "Tell all the men for me to be loyal to the end and they will be right", Arthur wrote Eaton on the 26th, "I have written Portland and Detroit, and we have the best of them if the men will only strike. It is a life and death struggle with us..."[42]

Almost certainly the company was warned. A directive commanded local officials to exact an oath of loyalty from all employees. At Belleville, the engine drivers refused it *en masse* and waited for instant dismissal. It did not come — yet. On the morning of Friday, 29 December, Hickson issued a fresh circular, mixed warnings, promises of reinstatement for worthy ex-employees and a blunt threat: "if the men are so ill-advised as to take a step which will do damage to the Company, cause inconvenience to the public, and injure themselves, they must take the responsibility of it."[43]

By nightfall, a violent winter storm was sweeping across southern Canada. At six, Hickson cancelled all non-essential traffic and fifteen freight trains were sidelined between Sarnia and Toronto. At 7:30, the three Montreal members of the grievance committee arrived at Hickson's office to present a seven-point ultimatum. All classifications must be abolished. No engineer or fireman could be dismissed without a fair, impartial investigation. Every engineer and fireman given notice for 23 December must be reinstated. Any future layoff must be based on seniority. On and on they went, with an eighth demand obviously added as an afterthought: "We also recommend the removal of William Welch, foreman at Point St. Charles, and Adolphus Davis, foreman at Belleville, as it is impossible to work under them on account of their domineering and arbitrary conduct towards the men."[44] Without compliance, a strike would begin at nine o'clock that evening.

It was hardly in doubt. Hickson set off as planned to join Wallis and the Montreal superintendent, W.J. Spicer, in the telegraph room at Bonaventure station. The concourse was crowded with passengers and friends, most of them waiting for the boat train to Portland and the

[42]Arthur's message, found in Eaton's pocket on his arrest, was published *inter alia*, in the *Gazette* (Montreal), 1 January 1877.

[43]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 30 December 1876.

[44]*Daily Witness* (Montreal), 2 January 1877. This version includes the paragraph about foremen which does not appear in the *Monthly Journal*, February 1877, pp. 68-9.

Allan Line steamer *Sarmatian*. At 9:15, the bell tolled to notify passengers but no locomotive appeared. To the three railway officials, it was the first intimation that their precautions might be failing.[45]

The strike authority spread to Brotherhood divisions by coded telegram. Excited knots of engineers and sympathisers rushed the news to yards and stations. Near Cobourg, the Montreal-bound express stopped, detached its cars, and crept a little closer to the town. Two hours later, a passenger from the stranded train found the engineer, Thomas McNab, eating his dinner in the station hotel. Two hundred Orangemen and their ladies, bound for a ball at Weston, were left at a Toronto level crossing and condemned to a frigid two-mile walk home. A mixed freight and passenger train bound for St. Hyacinthe went no farther than St. Hilaire. At Toronto, fifty men surrounded the Grand Trunk roundhouse, dowsed the lights, uncoupled the engine from an east-bound express and abandoned it half a mile from the Don station. Toronto police arrived in time to allow one train to pull out for London and another for Stratford.[46]

At Stratford, where a tenth of the population of 4,500 was on the Grand Trunk payroll, sympathies were overwhelmingly with the engineers. As an east-bound train prepared to pull out, men clambered into the cab and threw the engineer to the ground. A couple of constables saved him from further harm and the man fled. The local GTR superintendents, both popular with the townspeople, finally persuaded the crowd to allow the train to depart. There was a much fiercer welcome for the train from Toronto. Shouts and jeers turned to blows when the engineer and fireman scrambled from the cab. Again the local police intervened, rushing the two strikebreakers to the Stratford jail for their own safety.[47]

By dawn, the Grand Trunk was virtually paralyzed — but so was most of the rail system of the north-western United States. Had snow or the strike done more? At Portland, three-foot drifts covered the platforms. In the Montreal yards, where the morning temperature was a mere three degrees Fahrenheit, most of the locomotives were frozen hard. A west-bound passenger train had spent the night at

[45]*Gazette* (Montreal), 30 December 1876.

[46]*Globe* (Toronto), 30 December 1876; 1 January 1877; *Gazette* (Montreal), 1 January 1877.

[47]Matthew Hayes-Oliver Mowat, 18 January 1877, in Canada, *Sessional Papers*, no. 55, 1877, "Correspondence Respecting the Disturbance on the Line of the Grand Trunk Railway, January 1st, 1877" (hereafter "Correspondence") p. 34.

Point Claire, blocked by a bank of frozen snow. At Point St. Charles, foreman Welch reported that twelve train crews had reported for work. From Portland came word that everyone was working — if only because no one in that division had been laid off. Yet on the Canadian divisions, from Island Pond to Sarnia, nothing moved.

Rumours flooded into Hickson's headquarters. Toronto reported sabotage. Near Stratford, five cars of livestock were stranded. At Richmond, furious strikers prepared to block the line and from Levis came reports that the engineers had seized the station. A strikebreaker sent to pick up the train at St. Hilaire refused to obey orders and joined his fellow engineer in the local jail. "The strangest part of this affair", commented an unsympathetic Montreal *Witness*, "is that nearly all the men recently put on to take the place of those discharged, have been amongst the first to strike."[48] There was a reason. If the Brotherhood had any secret weapon, it was the funds to buy off would-be strikebreakers. It was a valuable substitute for the violence and intimidation which desperate workers might otherwise use to save their jobs.

Hickson could accept no such explanation for the effectiveness of the strike. Even when fresh reports disposed of most rumours of violence and mob action, he insisted that the railway was entitled to full backing from the forces of order. "We have large numbers of men ready to work", he telegraphed the Prime Minister early on Saturday afternoon, "but they are being intimidated by the violence of society men. . ."[49] It was obvious to the Grand Trunk manager that Ottawa must intervene. It was not equally apparent to the Prime Minister. Whatever his sympathy with Hickson in his plight — and it was intense — Alexander Mackenzie was nothing if not a strict constructionist of statute law. Maintenance of law and order was a municipal responsibility. The militia was a federal institution, but its services in aid of the civil power could only be requisitioned by two or more local magistrates. Even more important, the cost of their services was firmly attached to local rate-payers.[50]

In its moment of crisis, the Grand Trunk paid the price for its intense unpopularity, particularly in Ontario. Across that province, municipal voters went to the polls on New Year's Day. If the deed

[48]*Daily Witness* (Montreal), 30 December 1876.

[49]Hickson-Mackenzie, 30 December 1876, "Correspondence", p. 26.

[50]The Militia Act was 31 Vict. c. 40 and sections 27, 80 and 81 applied to aid to the civil power. See Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867-1914", *Canadian Historical Review*, 51 (December 1970), pp. 408-410.

could be accomplished without a whiff of anarchy, December 1876 found many respectable Canadians who ached to see the railway company humbled. At Stratford, despite the wild scenes on Friday night, Mayor T. Mayne Daly, a veteran Conservative, vouched for the good conduct of the strikers. There would be no trouble, he informed the provincial premier, Oliver Mowat, if no one tried to push through a train. "Can nothing be done towards a settlement without resorting to force? I think if men were treated with now, they would make a favourable compromise."[51] The local crown attorney explained that prudence had kept him from arresting the leaders of the Friday night affray. Later, he warned: ". . . if special constables are sworn in, their sympathies will be with the engineers and cannot be depended on in a serious emergency."[52] At Brockville, a city of 6,500, the mayor and local Liberal M.P., Lieutenant Colonel Jacob Buell, was eager to do battle with strikers; his council was not. While the passenger train from Pointe Claire passed through on Saturday with no more than a barrage of jeers, a small train from Kingston on Sunday was halted. The engineer, to Buell's disgust, sought sanctuary in the town jail. Summoning his council to authorize forceful action, the mayor discovered that most aldermen had refused to appear.[53]

To beat the strike, Hickson could push through a few passenger trains to prove that the line was operating. The waverers would capitulate; the rest could be dealt with at his leisure. For the strikers to succeed, the line must be paralyzed. Persuasion and money must suffice; any threat to public sympathy might be fatal. Already Thomas McNab had emerged as the villain of the strike for stranding "helpless women and children" in the snow.[54] Even the strike leaders confessed that he had obeyed their orders too literally. For all their precautions, the Brotherhood's leaders found that violence lay very close to the surface. At Toronto, the Grand Trunk billeted its strikebreakers at the St. James Hotel. After his night-long vigil at the roundhouse, John Eaton set out for the hotel on his mission of persuasion. His first encounter was with John Kay, a company loyalist. The two men exchanged words, insults and, finally, threats. Kay drew a revolver and fired it in Eaton's face. The hammer fell on an empty chamber. Another striker, William Johnston, grabbed the

[51]T. Mayne Daly-Mowat, 31 December 1876, "Correspondence", p. 18.
[52]Hayes-Mowat, 31 December 1876, *ibid.*, p. 19. See also *Beacon* (Stratford), 5, 12 January 1877.
[53]E.J. Senkler-Mowat, 29 January 1877, "Correspondence", pp. 42-3.
[54]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 3 January 1877.

gun and hurled it to the floor. A furious Eaton knocked Kay to the floor and left to swear out a warrant. So did Kay. Nursing a broken arm, he laid charges of grievous bodily harm against both Eaton and Johnston. The two strike leaders found themselves behind bars at the Don Jail.[55]

By Saturday afternoon, Hickson probably wished that fate on more of the strikers and a few Ontario mayors as well. In Quebec, the situation looked brighter. Police from Sherbrooke cowed the strikers at Richmond. Reports from Levis were an exaggeration. The boat train finally left at 2 p.m., driven by a foreman from the GTR shops. It reached Portland only eighteen hours late. According to a report repeated in the *Globe*, the company's French Canadian workers had not backed the walk-out.[56] Ontario was much more worrying. At Sarnia, when a foreman tried to bring in an abandoned train, he ran off the rails at a sabotaged switch. In Toronto, strike sympathisers hijacked an engine and sent it hurtling through an open switch. At Stratford, the mayor appeared to be in league with the strikers. To be accurate, most railway centres in Ontario were peaceful and most municipal officials hastened to offer their support to Grand Trunk officials. The essence of a trunk railway was that it could be paralyzed at any point. By Saturday night, that point was not Stratford but Belleville.

Alone among Ontario towns, Belleville had responded to the strike by calling out the militia. The elite of the former timber port took special pride in the railway. A local politician, John Ross, had been the first president; his law partner, John Bell, was still the Grand Trunk's solicitor.[57] A town of seven thousand, Belleville's ambitions depended on the railway line across its northern limits. On the other hand, the Grand Trunk could mean trouble. The newly organized division of the Brotherhood at Belleville brought pride, militancy and, perhaps, inexperience. The hundred engineers and firemen at Belleville had a special grievance against their sarcastic local foreman, Adolphus Davis. They could also count on reinforcements from a thousand local foundry and mill workers, at leisure over the winter holiday, ready to trade sympathy for excitement by thronging to the station.[58]

[55]*Monthly Journal*, February 1877, p. 77; *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 1,2,8 January 1877.

[56]*Globe* (Toronto), 3 January 1877.

[57]On John Bell, see *Canadian Biographical Dictionary and Portrait Gallery of Eminent and Self-Made Men* (Toronto 1880), vol. I.

[58]Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 37. On Belleville, see Boyce, *Historic Hastings*.

Unlike other municipal politicians busy seeking election, Belleville's mayor, W.A. Foster, had been safely acclaimed. With John Bell, Major Mackenzie Bowell, the local M.P., and other officials, Foster could give his full attention to the crisis. The town police could not. The chief had been fired for drunkenness and the rest of the force had been cut from seven to six.[59] Only three men were available for duty at the station, too few to prevent the strikers from derailing snow plows at each end of the railway yard. When the station agent, William Gunn, sent men to guard his force of strikebreakers at a nearby boarding house, strikers forced their way in and persuaded thirteen of the men to desert. That night, they were spirited away to Shannonville. When Foreman Davis and an apprentice set out to run an engine to Napanee, they were surrounded. Glass shattered under a rain of stones, the apprentice fled and Davis heard a shot whistle past his head. Railway officials locked themselves in the station and sent word that they were besieged.[60]

For Mayor Foster and his advisors, it was time to call in the troops. A telegram to Premier Mowat in Toronto brought back no more than advice to use discretion.[61] Instead, the mayor turned to Lieutenant Colonel James Brown, another local member of parliament and commanding officer of the 49th Hastings Rifles. A rural battalion with men recruited from the surrounding townships, Brown's men were less likely to be friends or neighbours of the rioters.[62] In turn, Brown summoned Captain Edward Harrison's No. 1 Company. It was 9 p.m. on Saturday evening before Harrison received his orders, but within an hour, he and his lieutenant had rounded up twenty-two men, issued uniforms and rifles, and marched them to the station. Since he had no ammunition, Harrison persuaded a friend to lend him a couple of boxes. More serious in the bitter weather, most of the men were without military overcoats. Harrison's predecessor had lost them and the government had failed to provide new ones.[63]

On the edge of a large, expectant crowd, Harrison halted his troops, issued two bullets per man and offered the volunteers their

[59]See *ibid.*, p. 160.

[60]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 1 January 1877; *Daily Witness* (Montreal), 4 January 1877.

[61]Foster-Mowat, 30 December 1876, "Correspondence", p. 18.

[62]On the Belleville militia, see Lt. Col. Bowen Van Straubenzie — Adjutant-General, 7 February, 1877, "Correspondence", pp. 21-23. More generally see Canada, *Sessional Papers*, No. 7, 1877. "Report of the Departments of Militia and Defence for 1876," pp. i-ii.

[63]"Correspondence", p. 21.

first and only instruction in riot duty: "that the same was upon no account to be used without the clear and positive order of the officer commanding."[64] Throughout the night, the militiamen shuffled from place to place, fending off the crowd while sullen station hands levered derailed cars back on the tracks. Before dawn, they helped Davis bring out an engine which the foreman drove off to Shannonville to bring in the eastern express. At first light, Harrison sent for the rest of his men. A total of 38 appeared.

As Sunday morning wore on, the crowd grew. The train from Montreal now stood on the main track waiting for a fresh engine. Alfred Hartins, the company's sole remaining strikebreaker, was found. As Harrison's men deployed on either side of the locomotive, Hartins climbed into the cab and began to back out of the shed towards the waiting train. A roar came from the crowd. For the first time, the anger turned on the volunteers. Car bolts began cracking off the sides of the locomotive. "[W]ithin 15 yards of the train, one of the rioters, watching his opportunity, stepped up in rear of the hindermost volunteer, and deliberately passed an iron bar or pin into a portion of the machinery of the engine. This act was instantly followed by a sharp report and the breaking of some portion of the machinery was the result."[65]

With the engine disabled, the crowd's fury exploded. There were scuffles with the militiamen. A man, grabbing a bayonet, drew his hand back covered with blood. Hartins leaped from the cab and raced for the station. Seeing a gun in his hand, some hesitated and others gave chase. They burst through the door behind him, grabbed the terrified man and despite Colonel Brown and a magistrate, dragged him outside. A big railway signalman shouldered his way through the crowd, pulled Hartins to his feet and pushed him to safety.[66]

There was little that Harrison and his men could now do. After eighteen hours with little food and no sleep in bitter cold, they were exhausted. With the Mayor's permission, they trooped wearily off to Harrison's house, handed in the rifles and ammunition and went home.

Those hours in the Belleville station yard were an historic episode. For the first time, strikers and their allies had outmanoeuvred and out-lasted a force of armed, uniformed militia. Now would they do so again? Next it was the turn of Major S.S. Lazier's 15th

[64]Captain Harrison's report, *ibid.*, p. 5.
[65]*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
[66]*Weekly Intelligencer* (Belleville), 5 January 1877; *Daily Star* (Montreal), 6 January 1877. On Hartins, see Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 99.

Argyle Light Infantry, Belleville's own battalion. Commanded to bring two companies to the station, Lazier sent word to officers of all six of his companies to bring every man they could find. By Sunday evening, the captains had rounded up barely forty. Others had been captured by the spirit of New Year's Eve, many were reported to be working in the woods and others gave the reply the militia authorities dreaded. "A strong feeling of sympathy was expressed by many of the men for the men on strike", Lazier later acknowledged, "and while some positively refused to turn out, others, I have no doubt, kept out of the way to prevent being found or called upon."[67] At last the Major marched his shrunken contingent up the road to the station. A few strikers crossed over from a house opposite the station. There would be no trouble, they explained, if no trains moved. Lazier and his men settled down for a long, cold and uneventful night. Next morning, New Year's Day, Mayor Foster sent them home. The Belleville blockade stood.[68]

In Montreal, Hickson now had a much clearer idea of what was happening along the railway line. He also knew what must be done. A telegram couched in tones of growing exasperation sizzled along the wires to Alexander Mackenzie.[69] The Prime Minister remained obdurate. Delighted to emphasize his own humble roots, he was outraged by assertiveness in the class he had left behind. It was criminal that the locomotive engineers should dare to struggle against both their employer and the laws of supply and demand. Yet that same narrow-minded rigidity also applied to his interpretation of the law. To Hickson, he offered sympathy and a promise to remind the Ontario premier of the law; indeed, he had long since done so. More he could not do. Finally, on Sunday evening, Hickson announced that there would be no further attempt to move passengers or mail until the government provided protection.[70]

Hickson had other resources. In Toronto, Colonel Casimir Gzowski, the wealthy old railway contractor, was despatched to Mowat to outline the gravity of the crisis.[71] In Kingston, Lieutenant Colonel Penyman Worsley, former staff officer of the Grand Trunk Brigade, was pathetically eager to help his former patrons. At his orders, fifty men of the permanent artillery waited under

[67]Lazier-Worsley, 9 January 1877, "Correspondence", p. 15.
[68]*Ibid.*, p. 15; Boyce, *Historic Hastings*, p. 162.
[69]Hickson-Mackenzie, 30 January 1876, "Correspondence", p. 26.
[70]*Ibid.*, 31 January 1876, p. 27.
[71]Mowat-Mackenzie, 31 December 1876, *ibid.*, p. 27.

arms.[72] Unfortunately, he, too, needed the proper authority to act. In Belleville's neighbouring town of Napanee, Mayor W.S. Williams consulted militia officers and sounded the town bell to assemble the citizens on Sunday afternoon. According to the local crown attorney, the resulting crowd was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the strikers.[73] If any contingent left Napanee, the local stationmaster concluded, it was more likely to back the strikers than the company.

New Year's Day dawned bright, clear and very cold. Now Brockville had joined Belleville as a centre of resistance. The combination of holiday and election day brought crowds up to the station in search of excitement. At 2 p.m., a train from Kingston pulled in. While a couple of policemen watched, a group of strikers rushed out to uncouple the cars. Colonel Buell, escorted by police reinforcements, pushed his way through the crowd and climbed into the cab to assure the engineer that he would be safe. To his disgust, the man asked only for sanctuary in the town jail. Another train halted at Prescott. Brockville strikers despatched a delegation to win over the engine driver. For his part, Buell summoned a meeting of his council; with elections in full swing, a quorum failed to appear. Next morning, when enough aldermen assembled, they not only agreed that troops were not needed, but defiantly passed a resolution to that effect. Obviously consultation with the electorate had not turned Brockville politicians into friends of the Grand Trunk.[74]

In Montreal, Hickson was now almost beside himself with fatigue and frustration. He had appealed to Ottawa and all he got back were words, "The conduct of these men seems to everyone to be infamous", the Prime Minister had assured him, "and I trust it will not be necessary for the Company to make any arrangements at all with persons who have acted so badly."[75] Yet precisely because the federal government had refused to treat the engineers' protest as an insurrection, Hickson felt compelled to make those arrangements. On Tuesday afternoon, he summoned the Montreal members of the BLE's grievance committee.

[72]Hickson-Worsley, 2 January 1877 and replies, "Correspondence", pp. 6-7. (Worsley had served as brigade major of the Brigade while Hickson was colonel from late 1870 until its disbandment.)

[73]W.A. Reeve-Mowat, 30 January 1877, "Correspondence", pp. 44-45.

[74]Senkler-Mowat, 29 January 1877, *ibid.*, pp. 42-3.

[75]Mackenzie-Hickson, 2 January 1877, Public Archives of Canada, Alexander Mackenzie Papers, M-198, p. 1493. [This letter is sometimes dated January 7th, thanks, it appears, to an error in Dale C. Thomson's *Alexander Mackenzie: Clear Grit* (Toronto 1960), p. 294]

Ironically, Hickson was wrong. Thanks to Ontario's Liberal premier, Oliver Mowat, the forces of order were finally in motion to break the strike. Curt instructions to Stratford advised officials that if local forces could not keep order, they should apply to Lieutenant Colonel W.S. Durie, the Deputy Adjutant-General at Toronto. Identical instructions went to Mayor Foster at Belleville.[76] (Technically, he should have applied to Colonel Van Straubenzie at Kingston since Belleville was in another district, but Ontario premiers could not be expected to master military minutiae.) On Sunday night, Foster, Mackenzie Bowell and a couple of other magistrates commanded Colonel Durie "to retain the force now at Belleville under your command." Next day, a more prolix but less confusing requisition was drafted by Senator Billa Flint, a venerable local Liberal, signed and wired to the militia office at Toronto.[77]

Close to the end of a long military career in which he had never seen a shot fired in anger, Durie was delighted, but cautious. Aid to the civil power was notoriously a treacherous business for a soldier[78] and it took much of Monday before he had checked with Mowat and Ottawa, verified the instructions from Belleville and issued his orders. With none of Canada's tiny permanent force at his disposal, Durie turned to his old regiment, the 2nd Queen's Own Rifles. Unlike the working class 10th Royals, the Queen's Own was recruited predominantly from Toronto's clerks, university students and young gentlemen.[79] By 6:30 p.m. on New Year's Day, the commanding officer of the Queen's Own, Lieutenant Colonel William Otter, had his orders: 17 officers and 200 men would muster next morning.[80]

Even with the crack Queen's Own, New Year's holidays played havoc with efficiency. At 7:30 a.m. on 2 January, Durie counted only 14 officers and 153 other ranks. It was also apparent that troops were shamefully ill-equipped for an expedition in mid-winter. Serge tunics,

[76]Mowat-Daley, Mowat-Foster, 31 December 1876, "Correspondence", pp. 18-19.

[77]See requisitions, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

[78]On regulations etc., see Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power", pp. 414, 424 and *passim*.

[79]On Otter and the Toronto militia, see Morton, *The Canadian General*, pp. 39-73. On QOR, Lt. Col. William Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada 1861-1961* (Don Mills, Ont., 1960).

[80]On the Belleville expedition, see *ibid.*, pp. 64-69; "Correspondence", pp. 10-12; Boyce, *Historic Hastings*, pp. 163-5; Lt. Col. W.T. Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada* (Don Mills 1960), pp. 41-42; *Gazette* (Montreal), 6 January 1877; Public Archives of Canada, R.G.9, II A 2 vol. 3, pp. 1628 ff.

Glengarry caps and threadbare militia greatcoats were sufficient for a summer bivouac at Niagara. With Durie's permission, Otter dispatched one of his officers to hunt for winter clothing; he returned an hour later with a sleigh-load of red mufflers. At the station, police and Grand Trunk officials waited nervously as an angry crowd of strikers and sympathisers spilled along the Esplanade. Posting guard on the two locomotives and on two pilot engines which would precede the train, Otter loaded the rest of his troops into the first six cars. Nervous passengers spread into the remaining and a knot of GTR policemen appeared, escorting a couple of young strikers caught the day before trying to disable an engine. They would be left for trial at Port Hope. At 11:30, the long train finally began to move.

All day, the train rolled slowly eastward. At Brighton and Cobourg, the strikers mobilized large, angry crowds to jeer at the troops; more often, stations were empty. At each stop, Otter ordered his troops out to form a cordon and to relieve the frost-bitten men on the engines. It was long after dark when the train reached Sydney, seven miles from Belleville. There, John Bell and Mayor Foster handed over a written copy of the requisition and shared the latest rumours. Eight hundred people were waiting at the station yard, some of them armed. As the officials and officers debated tactics, Conductor Frank Roadhouse intervened to insist that, for safety's sake, they must wait for dawn. That settled it. The train would push on.

At the frozen Moira, the train stopped again while a pilot engine cautiously tested the bridge. It was safe. The train moved forward again, approaching the sea of moonlit silent faces. As the engines slowed, officers with drawn swords jumped to the ground, leading streams of dark-clad soldiers. In seconds, a double cordon surrounded the engines and leading cars. At last, the people found their voices. Missiles began clattering off the engines and smashing glass. Behind the troops, station hands uncoupled the locomotives. At a command, the troops turned and marched with them up to the switch and back to the engine shed. Private George Cooper, an engraver by trade, fell sprawling. A car bolt had torn open his head. A chunk of ice dropped Major Augustus Miller. A striker named William Poole made a desperate lunge at the lead locomotive, trying to ram an iron bar into the mechanism. He was seized and hurled to the ground. At Foster's insistence, he was hurried off to the Belleville jail.

By 1 a.m., Wednesday morning, the train was ready to go on. At the insistence of Bell and Mayor Foster, Otter reluctantly detached his adjutant and twenty-five men to escort the train as far as Napanee. As the locomotives gained momentum, youths raced from the crowd,

dashed up the embankment and tried to board the last cars. The troops and Conductor Roadhouse flailed at them. In a cloud of steam and flying snow, the train vanished. The blockade was broken.

The desperate strikers had not yet given up. While Foster and Mackenzie Bowell pleaded with the crowd to disperse, Adolphus Davis and the yardmen moved the remaining two engines back to the shed. There was a crash as the first engine derailed. A valiant striker had knocked open the switch. Once again the militiamen formed a cordon. Now, they were losing their disciplined impassivity. Stones began to fly. At an order from Otter, the soldiers advanced, bayonets jabbing. A boiler washer, James McLaughlin, shouted to the crowd to stay. A rifleman lunged at him and McLaughlin fell stabbed in the groin. The crowd tumbled back. The injured man was carried across the road to the Brotherhood's meeting room. Surgeon Thorburn of the Queen's Own hurried after him, gave thanks that the wound was not fatal, and applied a dressing.

As the crowd drifted back down the road to Belleville, they knew that the locomotive engineers' cause was lost. All along the line of the Grand Trunk, Tuesday was the day when the machinery of order had finally swung behind the company. At Sarnia, the mayor swore in thirty special constables and arranged to call out the local militia.[81] At Stratford, the crown attorney organized two hundred railway employees as special constables and marched them down to the station to meet the first train through from Toronto.[82] At Brockville, Colonel Buell announced that he would call out the militia whether or not his council approved. In Ottawa, the youthful Postmaster General, Wilfrid Laurier, declared that mail might have to be sent through the United States though it was "much desired that the country be saved this humiliation."[83]

On Tuesday evening, the Toronto engineers made one more attempt to win public support. A hundred and fifty strikers and supporters gathered at the Brock Street Temperance Hall, made plans for a mass meeting on Thursday and then trooped two by two to the city council chamber at the St. Lawrence Hall to present their case. The strike had not been ordered from the United States, James Duffin explained, and the company would save no money by firing its engineers. As for violence, Duffin loudly deplored it: "We cannot, we did not, and will not recognize violence either towards the Company's property or the persons of those representing the Com-

[81]Julius P. Bucke-Mowat, 5 January 1877, "Correspondence", p. 32.
[82]Hayes-Mowat, 18 January 1877, *ibid.*, p. 35.
[83]*Daily Witness* (Montreal), 2 Januray 1877.

pany." For two hours, the aldermen listened patiently to the arguments. For another hour, they argued the merit of the case and then prudently refused to issue a statement.[84]

None of them knew that a statement was no longer necessary. As a wise accountant, Hickson had decided to cut his losses. Thanks to Mackenzie's inaction, he had a scapegoat. Moreover, the journey to New York had not been for pleasure. In quiet encounters with rival railroad magnates, he had discussed the disastrous consequences of rate-cutting and the failing health of Cornelius Vanderbilt. The old Commodore was very sick indeed — he would die on Thursday. The era of sensible, mutually profitable co-operation was about to begin. Soon there would be traffic and revenue enough for all and the Grand Trunk could not enter the new era crippled by a long strike.[85]

The strike had occurred largely because Brotherhood members believed that Hickson was bent on crushing their organization. Probably the general manager would have done so if he could, but he had also kept open channels of negotiation. On Saturday afternoon, he had met with John Cardell and other Montreal committeemen. Afterwards, he told the press that he believed they would settle for a ten per cent wage cut. If the men really wanted the fourth class engineer abolished, he would not object.

Early on Monday evening, the two sides met again. By now, the Montreal delegates were nervous. They knew that the strike was failing in Quebec and it had never even begun in the American divisions. As Hickson scolded them for the violence and anarchy in Ontario they timidly explained that they had despatched members to Belleville and Brockville to end the trouble. In fact, as the meeting drew on, Cardell may have finally realized that, far from imperilling the strike, the tough resistance in Ontario was now the only leverage the Brotherhood possessed. Hickson emerged to tell journalists that the strike would be over but for a few hotheads in Toronto.[86] Without their consent, Cardell had insisted, there would be no settlement.

As the telegrams headed out to grievance committee members and strike leaders from Island Pond to Detroit, it was John Eaton, still

[84]Duffin's speech appeared in the *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 3 January 1877 and was reprinted in the *Monthly Journal*, February, 1877, pp. 71-78.

[85]Currie, *Grand Trunk*, 156-8; on alliances see Chandler and Salsbury, "Innovators". The Grand Trunk did not enter the federation until 1878. See Alfred D. Chandler, *The Railroads: The Nation's First Big Business, Sources and Readings* (New York 1965), pp. 161, 173.

[86]*Weekly Witness* (Montreal), 4 January 1872.

in a Toronto jail cell, who spelled out the latest terms: henceforth, there could be only two classes of engineers and firemen; detention time must be paid at twenty cents an hour; when Arthur came, he must be received by the general manager. Most important, all discharged men must be reinstated and the company must "overlook the conduct of all men who left their work in accordance with general orders issued relative to the strike, and to withdraw all warrants issued against the latter men except in case of personal violence."[87] Eaton's message, composed on Wednesday morning, reached Hickson by noon. He took little time in replying: "The men must resume their work at once, that being done, I accept and will carry out their proposals wherever it shall not be satisfactorily shown to be impracticable or unfair to do so."[88]

News of the settlement spread rapidly. At Brantford, the local committee member, Thomas Hollindrake, was chatting with the mayor when the first rumours arrived. By Wednesday afternoon, drivers and firemen at the Point St. Charles yards were busy thawing engines and clearing tracks. At Toronto, a cab brought Eaton and Johnston from the Don Jail straight to the house of Magistrate MacNabb where they were each released on a thousand dollars' bail. By 7:30 p.m., Otter and his weary militiamen had boarded a special train for Toronto.[89]

At noon Thursday, when Peter Arthur reached Toronto from Cleveland, the railway yards were steaming with activity, but there were enough jubilant ex-strikers on hand to give the Grand Chief Engineer "a splendid entertainment" that afternoon. In the evening, he and committee members started for Montreal at Grand Trunk expense.[90] On Friday, there were meetings and negotiations, first at the Grand Trunk offices, then at the reading room in the Point St. Charles shops. There, on Saturday morning, the formal agreement was signed by Herbert Wallis for the company and by Arthur, Eaton, Edwin Taylor from Belleville, Hollindrake from Brantford, Cardell from Montreal and seven other BLE members. In essence, the settlement was the 1875 understanding with modifications. There would be only two grades of firemen and engineers. Shunting engineers would earn $1.75 a day in their first year and $2.00 thereafter. Dis-

[87]Eaton-Hickson, 3 January, 1877, reprinted in *Monthly Journal*, February, 1877, p. 69.
[88]*Ibid.*, p. 69.
[89]*Gazette* (Montreal), 6 January, 1877; On delay at Belleville, see *Weekly Intelligencer* (Belleville), 3 January, 1877.
[90]*Daily Mail* (Toronto), 4 January, 1877.

putes which could not otherwise be settled would be arbitrated between the company and a committee of engineers, with the general manager, not Wallis, as final arbiter. The discharged men would be brought back, warrants would be withdrawn and, as Eaton had insisted, the company would "overlook" the conduct of those who had struck against it.[91]

This time, the company kept its bargain. At St. Hyacinthe, Cobourg, Port Hope and even at Belleville, charges against strikers were dropped when the Grand Trunk refused to prosecute. Eaton and Johnston, whose arrest had delighted critics of the Brotherhood, were discharged by the magistrate when John Kay failed to appear at their trial.[92] Among the engineers, the strike passed rapidly into heroic memory and then into oblivion. So far as future relations between the Brotherhood and the Grand Trunk were concerned, Peter Arthur could preach the blessings of partnership and arbitration until his sudden death in Winnipeg in 1902.

For the Grand Trunk and for Canadian businessmen, there were different memories. Later, the company estimated that the walkout had cost it almost sixty thousand dollars. The money was soon recovered with fresh business and higher rates. What could not be repaired so easily was the righteous sense of authority that every Canadian employer regarded as his due. "The *men*", complained the Toronto *Mail*, "had simply made up their minds to force the Company to comply with their wishes"[93]. In partial rebuke to the apparent neutrality of Toronto's aldermen, William Howland (a future reform mayor and friend of labour) led the Board of Trade in proclaiming that "... the men have put themselves beyond the pale of sympathy by their illegal action..." George Brown's *Globe* agreed.[94] The *Canadian Monthly and National Review*, self-proclaimed organ of the country's elite, began by claiming neutrality and ended, in a crescendo of rage, by charging that the engineers had "levied war on all Canadians."[95]

One theme, purveyed among the absentee owners of the Grand Trunk, was the American leadership of the Brotherhood. In London, Sir Henry Tyler depicted Peter Arthur as a man whose powers would have been envied by "Kings, Emperors, Czars, Sultans and Popes",

[91]*Monthly Journal*, February, 1877, pp. 69-70.
[92]On the settlement, see *Gazette* (Montreal), 4, 5 January 1877. On possible renewal of the conflict see *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 16 January 1877.
[93]*Ibid.*, 2 January 1877.
[94]*Globe* (Toronto), 3 January 1877, cited by Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 134.
[95]*The Canadian Monthly and National Review*, 2 (January 1877), p. 100.

a man who "issues his ukase and, at a certain hour of a specified night, the traffic of a country is stopped."[96] This fantasy, like Tyler's depiction of the strikers as "burglars and garrotters", could sound plausible across the Atlantic but even in Canada the strike raised the traditional business bogey, the American labour agitator. F.H. Henshaw, articulating the indignation of the Montreal Board of Trade, described the portly Arthur as a man who "had come across the line and created dissension and dissatisfaction . . . amounting to riot and violence, to bloodshed and almost to murder."[97] The *Canadian Monthly* offered patriotic readers a nightmare vision: "If there be a power in the United States whose fiat, like that of the General of the Jesuits or the head of the Carbonari, is binding upon our railway engineers, then our neighbours have a most powerful weapon of war ready at hand."[98]

If employees in a vital industry were irresponsible and if Americans had secured a malignant influence, someone must be blamed. To the *Globe*, on guard for its Liberal friends, the obvious villain was the Grand Trunk's general manager: " . . . either Mr. Hickson refused to make a just concession at the right time, or has now failed to exhibit firmness enough to resist unjust demands. He should have had no strike or he should have fought it out to the end."[99] Tory newspapers joyfully carried Hickson's reply. If he had been compelled to "make some compromise with the mutinous men who were openly violating the law in various parts of the country", it was because the federal government had failed in its duty.[100] It was absurd to expect the railway to wait while twenty or thirty municipalities made up their minds to enforce the law. "The inaction of the Government", insisted the Montreal *Gazette*, "was almost the most formal act of sympathy for the rioters that was possible under the circumstances."[101]

The apparent weakness of the militia at Belleville was an even more obvious line of attack. While the *Globe* could blame the performance of the local militia on town officials, it was hard to explain the lack of ammunition and overcoats or the pathetic need to provide the Queen's Own with mufflers. Montreal's mayor and the city's

[96]Currie, *Grand Trunk*, p. 153; Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", pp. 110, 112.
[97]*Ibid.*, p. 133; *Gazette* (Montreal), 10 January 1877.
[98]*Canadian Monthly*, p. 100.
[99]*Globe* (Toronto), 4 January 1877. See also *ibid.*, 5, 11, 18 January 1877.
[100]Hickson-Mackenzie, 3 January 1877, "Correspondence", p. 30; *Gazette* (Montreal), 4 January 1877.
[101]*Ibid.*, 5 January 1877.

English-language dailies echoed the suggestion in the *Witness*: "we almost think an organization of national police would be a better arm for quelling internal disorders than local forces. . . ."[102]

Behind the normal defensiveness of politicians in power, Mackenzie and his colleagues were every bit as concerned at the apparent breakdown in the system of public order as were their critics. The Department of Justice was ordered to find out "if the means for repressing such acts of violence are inadequate or that there has been some miscarriage of the use of those means."[103] In the Militia Department, where Major General Edward Selby Smyth had already identified "Communist" subversion as a threat to national security,[104] staff officers were commanded to submit thorough reports. Colonel Worsley returned from Belleville with a depressing tale of disorganization, malfeasance and decay, but he also found almost no evidence to support Major Lazier's claim that militiamen had refused to turn out because of their pro-strike sympathies. After thorough investigation, he reported only two examples: an Indian named Frank Clanse, who had risked a twenty-dollar fine by refusing to serve, and a sergeant who had been permitted to remain with a dying horse.[105]

The obvious weakness in using militia to crush strikes was the reluctance of mayors and councils to call them out; the most common reason was cost. At Sarnia, Brockville and Stratford, municipal politicians had been unwilling to risk heavy expenditure by protecting an unpopular company from its employees. At Belleville, where the mayor and magistrates had acted, the newly-elected council refused to pay the bill and Colonel Otter was obliged to take the corporation to court to collect his men's pay.[106] When Parliament met in 1877, it amended the Militia Act so that henceforth when a dispute en-

[102]*Daily Witness*, (Montreal), 3 January 1877. On the state of the militia, see "Correspondence", pp. 21-25, 46-52; *Daily Mail* (Toronto), 5, 9 January 1877; *Daily Witness* (Montreal), 2 January 1877; *Evening Telegram* (Toronto), 12 February 1877. On the need for a national police: *Gazette* (Montreal) 9 January 1877; *Daily Herald*, (Montreal), 6 January 1877; Ayer "Engineers' Strike", p. 128.

[103]Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 2 7a, vol. 15, p. 392 "Privy Council Report", January 8 1877.

[104]See Morton, "Aid to Civil Power", p. 415, and Morton, *Ministers and Generals*, pp. 38-9.

[105]Worsley-Adjutant General, 19 February 1877; "Correspondence", pp. 47-48 and table, p. 49.

[106]Morton, *Canadian General*, pp. 69-70; Adjutant-General-Durie, 17, January 1877, Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 9, II A 2, vol. 3, p. 1671.

dangered passage of the mails, and when they were not of local or provincial origin, the federal treasury could meet all or part of the cost of the troops involved.[107]

There was also an alternative approach to the problem: railway strikes could be outlawed.

That was not the major purpose of the Breaches of Contract Bill which the Liberal Minister of Justice, Edward Blake, introduced in the 1877 session. On the contrary, the legislation was another of those small acts of service to the labouring masses which had begun with partial repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1876.[108] Now it was the turn of the Masters and Servants Acts, an array of provincial statutes from pre-Confederation days which provided criminal penalties of up to thirty days in jail for workers who broke their contracts of employment. Better by far, insisted Blake, to transfer such disputes to the civil law.

However, there must be exceptions. "The House", he insisted, "would be asked to declare it a crime when any person had a reasonable cause for believing that the consequences of his breach of contract would be serious bodily injury, danger to human life, or destruction of valuable property." It was only logical to insist that "in these modern times, the enormous inconvenience of stopping the whole system of communication between one part of the country and the other was very apparent . . . and any man who produced such a result by wilfully breaking his contract was guilty of a crime".[109] Such criminals, Blake proposed, should face a penalty of $100 in fines or three months in prison.

In a Parliament in which business, property and farming were the dominant influences and in which not a single working man held a seat, this feature of the new bill should have commanded near-unanimous support. In fact a minority led by Aemilius Irving, from the working class constituency of Hamilton, and David Blain, M.P. for the non-industrial riding of York West, both of them Liberals, condemned the legislation for blatant class bias. Both men were improbable friends of labour — corporation lawyers with glowing futures in banking and high finance — but both at least temporarily defied class stereotypes and the outrage of fellow members. "If the question of strikes was to be taken hold of", Blain insisted, "no one

[107]See Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 4 April 1877, pp. 1152-8. The amendment was 40 Vict. c. 40.

[108]Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour", p. 122-5.

[109]Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 20 March 1877, pp. 856. See also pp. 872-4; 27 March 1877, pp. 1010-1019.

class of men should be singled out. The country should know whether men who chose to band themselves together for their mutual elevation and support were to be subjected to such class legislation."[110]

Even more surprising among the minority ranged in support of the engineers was the Hon. John Beverley Robinson, heir of the Family Compact, and for eighteen years, president of the Northern Railway. When a clutter of Liberals and Tories had raged against Irving and Blain, Robinson followed with a confession that he had "never met a more manly, intelligent and respectable body of men than the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers." These men, he suggested, "had made up their minds that they were being driven to the wall, and treated unjustly and that they were fighting for their livelihood, without a chance of common justice or fair representation being afforded them."[111] His fellow Conservatives, Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Charles Tupper, also offered the engineers a more circumspect sympathy. Irving's motion to give Blake's bill the six months' hoist drew support from three Liberals and forty-two Conservatives; twenty Tories, including Belleville's Mackenzie Bowell, supported the government.[112]

Paradoxically, so did the remnants of Canada's union movement. Although Canadian members of the Brotherhood had obviously briefed Blain, Peter Arthur had come to Ottawa in person to inspect the legislation, had pronounced it good and so informed his union.[113] When the dying Canadian Labour Union met in Toronto in 1877, one of its resolutions offered Blake "the best thanks of this Congress for his remedy of the Masters and Servants Acts ...in spite of the opposition of the Capitalist classes of the Dominion."[114]

With passage of the Breaches of Contract Act, the engineers' strike became no more than a footnote in Canadian history, an isolated exception to the pattern of defeat and despair in the 1870s. Still it leaves questions. Who were the faces in the crowds which gave muscle to the protests of the few hundred engineers? No one at the time chose to ask and in the anonymity of their kind, they have faded

[110]*Ibid.*, 20 March 1877, p. 863.
[111]*Ibid.*, p. 868.
[112]*Ibid.*, p. 874. For Tupper's remarks, see pp. 870-872 and for Macdonald, see 27 March 1877, pp. 1015-1016.
[113]*Monthly Journal*, April 1877, pp. 217-218; Ayer, "Engineers' Strike", p. 183.
[114]Leslie Wismer, *Proceedings of the Canadian Labour Union Congresses, 1873-77* (Montreal 1951), p. 91. See Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour", p. 127.

from knowledge.[115] Their ally, as Hickson plainly understood, was the hostility to the Grand Trunk which pervaded all levels of society in most of the towns along its line and which neutralized the normal responses of mayors and aldermen. Mayors who took a leading part for the company suffered at the polls. Brockville's Mayor Buell, normally acclaimed, lost his election in 1877 and his seat in the House of Commons in 1878. Mayor Foster did not seek re-election in Belleville.

For 108 hours over the New Year's week-end of 1876-7, Canada experienced her first major railway strike. Governments and people had to choose sides between a powerful corporation and its workers. The division was more even than anyone could have expected.

[115]See, for example, the *Intelligencer*, (Belleville) 3, 11, January 1877.