

# The Nine Hour Pioneers The Genesis of the Canadian Labour Movement

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# THE NINE HOUR PIONEERS:

## *The Genesis of the Canadian Labour Movement*

John Battye

BY CONFEDERATION the polarized character of Canadian society was fairly evident, at least as far as the ownership of property was concerned. Such an outcome was largely a consequence of governmental policies, both colonial and imperial, stretching back over the previous four or more decades. Capital accumulation, and its concentration in certain hands, was the result of legislative measures which had run the gamut of land companies, canal construction, railroad development and, finally, the beginnings of a system of protective tariffs designed to assist the new industrialist. This sequence of events, that had led to the creation of a class firmly in possession of the fruits of the erstwhile colonies and a class that merely had ambitions of possession, had scarcely been contested. Any divergence of interest between the classes had received little explicit expression; what few clashes there had been between the two were often exceedingly primitive and always extremely local.

Industrial capitalism, flexing its first muscles during the railway-building era of the 1850s, attracted to a new and fledgling industrial development Scots and English immigrant craftsmen who brought, along with their skill, a shrewd awareness of the value of trade unions. The associations they formed, in company with those few local unions already enjoying a precarious existence, provided some limited thrust of opposition to the unfettered ambitions of a nascent capitalist class though members of trade unions formed prior to Confederation were usually aware, when making demands on employers for improved conditions of employment, that a refusal on the part of an employer which brought on a strike would often be followed by a mass migration of the men. This tends to confirm Pentland's view that there was no severe shortage of workmen in the colonies<sup>1</sup> and also that union organization within a trade was never anywhere

<sup>1</sup> H.C. Pentland, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 25 (1959), 450-461. As the Ontario correspondent to a Pacific coast newspaper noted: "In Ontario the workingman has never been deemed of any other consequence than as so much motive power to accomplish so much labour. The employer has always found advantage in the increasing arrival of immigrants from older countries, whose poverty has always urged them to accept employment upon any terms compatible with the cost of living." *Mainland Guardian* (Vancouver), 13 April 1872.

near complete. The departed workmen were as aware that their ranks could be filled by others, skilled but non-union, as they were conscious of the difficulty of obtaining other employment in a locality once they had been involved in a dispute. For these men there was always, of course, the lure of the United States and some succumbed to it. Yet workmen who crossed the border were not always accorded an unqualified welcome and one Yankee source caustically noted that "the word Canadian was looked on as synonymous with scab."<sup>2</sup>

Prior to Confederation trade union activity seems to have been of an extremely local nature, as was also any conflict between employers and employed. With the exception of shoemakers, members of a trade union appear to have had little contact with those of their trade in other local unions and had practically no contact at all with union members of a different trade outside their own immediate area. Even within their own area trade unionists from different trades rarely met together unless, perhaps, at some social event such as an annual picnic.<sup>3</sup> Then, too, the affiliation of typographers, moulders and cigarmakers with American international unions during the 1860s seems to have brought Canadian trade unionists little closer than had the coming of the British Amalgamated societies of engineers and carpenters during the 1850s. Lines of communication were fairly well cemented between local unions and parent bodies in New York, Philadelphia and London, but were tenuous to the extreme within Canada. An indication of the extent of isolation from which Canadian trade unions suffered can be gathered by a perusal of the minutes of the Toronto Trades Assembly. Formed in March 1871, the Assembly had to wait exactly a year to receive its first communication from another Canadian labour body outside the city.<sup>4</sup>

The catalyst which brought about both a wider and closer contact among Canadian trade unionists, indeed, which served to give birth to a Canadian labour movement in the accepted sense of the term, was one with both British and American roots — the demand of workingmen for a shorter working day. In the United States agitation for an eight-hour working day, centred on New York, had continued throughout the latter part of the 1860s and underwent a resurgence in September 1871. Yet the event that caught the eye of Canadian

<sup>2</sup> *Workingman's Advocate* (Chicago), 15 July 1871. Strikebreaking was, of course, a two-way street. A "Buffalo" was the Canadian expression applied to Yankee scabs, for the reason that they entered Canada through that city.

<sup>3</sup> The organization of a Trades Assembly in Hamilton during the early 1860s was a pioneering effort in the formation of a central labour body. See the *Hamilton Evening Times*, 1 June 1864. It seems probable that the Assembly failed to survive the end of the decade and, if it did, it was certainly the most quiescent of bodies.

<sup>4</sup> The communication was from James Ryan, Secretary of the Nine Hour League, Hamilton. See Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 1 March 1872. Though previous to this the Assembly had received communications from Cleveland, Cincinnati, New York and London.

workingmen, partly because of the extensive coverage it received in the Canadian press, was the movement of British workmen for the nine-hour day. The five month struggle of the Newcastle engineers and their hastily created Nine Hour League, which while combining in its membership both union and non-union men was composed overwhelmingly of the latter, was followed with particular close attention and served as something of a model for Canadian workers.<sup>5</sup>

# I

THE CANADIAN Nine Hour Movement was born in the Mechanics' Institute in Hamilton on Saturday, 27 January 1872. It had been conceived, however, during previous weeks, at meetings held in Dan Black's club house by bodies of carpenters, machinists and blacksmiths.<sup>6</sup> Probably the Mechanics' Institute Hall had never held so many of the class for which it had been erected as it did on this Saturday evening. The seats in the main body of the hall had been removed to provide greater space, yet by the time the meeting was called to order at eight o'clock even standing room was at a premium.

On the platform were the presidents of the various trade unions in the city, as well as employers and a single clergyman, the Rev. W.H. Poole of John Street Methodist Church. Men who had taken a leading part in organizing the meeting, and in agitating the question, were also prominent on the platform: John Pryke who had a shoe shop on King William Street and was President of the Knights of St. Crispin, carpenter C.F. Cole, machinist James Ryan, who worked in the shops of the Great Western Railway, and Methodist Sunday-school teacher and boilermaker Robert Parker.

The chairman of the meeting, and opening speaker, was T.C. Watkins, proprietor of a popular Hamilton department store the Right House. There were two points they had to discuss, said Watkins, "the reduction of the hours of labour from ten to nine and the paying of workmen on Friday evening instead of Saturday." The first, he explained, was to benefit the mechanics, while the second was to enable the workmen's families to shop on Saturday morning, so the retail establishments could close at six, as they did on other evenings and not encroach upon "the Sabbath."<sup>7</sup> Thus the perennial early-closing movement of the merchants had joined forces with the first organized movement of the

<sup>5</sup> For the British nine-hour movement see E. Allen, *et al.* *The North-East Engineers' Strikes of 1871* (Newcastle 1971). See also the critical comments of some of my review in *Society for the Study of Labour History, Bulletin*, 25 (1972), 115-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 19, 25, and 26 January 1872. The account of the movement in Hamilton is taken mainly from this newspaper, apparently no files remain in existence for the *Hamilton Standard* or *Hamilton Times* in this period.

<sup>7</sup> The account of the meeting is taken from the *Hamilton Spectator* and the *Toronto Globe*, 29 January 1872.

working class in an attempt to reduce the length of the working week of both.<sup>8</sup>

James Ryan, who followed Watkins, pointed out that it was not an increase in wages they sought, but a decrease in the length of the working day. Increased wages were almost never a permanent arrangement, with a slow-down in trade came the inevitable wage reduction. A shorter work week, however, was considered to be a lasting proposition by the men as Ryan said: "This system once established cannot retrograde. The hours of labor may become *less* but never again *more*." In advocating the men's purpose Ryan claimed as allies of the working class "the public press, the mercantile interest, and lastly the intrinsic merit of the cause." He attempted to win the support of employers in his audience by explaining that the men wanted extra time to "study and learn," to become "more skillful" in the use of machinery, they wished time to "cultivate social and domestic virtues." Ryan would quietly insist: "The capitalist had profited by the labor and toil of his workmen, while the workmen themselves had not received a corresponding profit. It was deservedly his due that he should share with the capitalist in the advantages of machinery." Yet he also tried to assuage the fears of employers by assuring them that the men did not seek friction or conflict: "We want fair dealing, no strikes, no lockouts." To bolster the reasonableness of their cause he pointed to an example: "England has conceded the principle of our claim," he declared, "What is right *there* cannot be wrong *here*." He next voiced what was probably the view of most of the workingmen present: "There was no real antagonism between capital and labour," he told them, "but mutual dependence" and to show their agreement with this remark it was greeted with loud cheers. He finished with a plea to "Let mutual esteem and respect between employers and employed continue."

Ryan would try to avoid the charge that there were economic motivations behind the movement. As he had said, in a letter which appeared in both the *Standard* and the *Spectator*, "Our object is a social one." He would continue to argue that moral aspects of the cause which, he said, sought to promote "the welfare and elevation" of the working class.<sup>9</sup> Employers, however, would only consider economic arguments, they could rarely be inveigled on to the treacherous ground of moral debate and his appeals to the tenets of Christian fellowship generally fell on deaf ears. Profit was the thing! Indeed the following speakers left little doubt of this. Both Colonel William McGiverin — President of the Dominion Board of Trade, steadfast railroad entrepreneur, and local politician — who seconded one of the resolutions, and A.T. Wood — a local manufacturer and politician — expressed their agreement with the movement, but made it plain that this was only if it was "made universal." Wood spelled

<sup>8</sup> For an example of a move to obtain the early-closing of retail establishments in Toronto during the previous year see Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 6 June 1871.

<sup>9</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 29 January 1872.

out for the workingmen why this was necessary from the manufacturers' point of view. Unless other places adopted the nine-hour day also, he said, "Hamilton would not be able to compete with them." He then underlined the intent of his statement by warning, "the movement must be general or they would not succeed." The meeting concluded in usual fashion, with three cheers for the Queen, three for the cause, and three for the press, but not before passing unanimously three resolutions the first of which declared that "the nine hours labor movement had become a matter of urgent social necessity."<sup>10</sup>

On the Wednesday evening following the mass meeting, delegates from the various trade unions and workmen representatives from each of the manufacturing establishments in the city met in the Shakespeare Hotel. Here some 60 men thrashed out the details of what was announced as the "Nine Hour League." Based on the Newcastle model, the League membership was to include both union and non-union men. The latter would far outnumber union members, as Ryan was later to note.<sup>11</sup> Pryke was chosen as President of the League, Ryan became secretary, moulder John McGregor was to act as financial secretary, while engineer William Walton was to be treasurer. The meeting was a private one with the press barred, although one statement did emerge. The men sought "the binding together of the workingmen of Canada in Trade Leagues." This was seen as "an indispensable prerequisite to the success of the Nine Hour Movement."<sup>12</sup> The men hardly expected the employers to make the movement "universal" and, if this was to be a condition of success, they would attempt the task themselves.

Almost immediately the men were rewarded with a token of success when a Hamilton railway carrier named Hendrie became the first employer to grant shorter hours, in allowing his teamsters to leave work at two o'clock on Saturday afternoon.<sup>13</sup> The Rev. Mr. Poole preached a sermon on the moral aspects

<sup>10</sup> The resolutions were as follows and were usually copied almost verbatim by the movement in other localities:

1. That the workingmen of Hamilton, on Saturday evening, January 27, 1872, in mass meeting assembled, unanimously affirm that the nine hours labor movement has become a matter of urgent social necessity, and that they are determined by every legitimate means in their power to obtain it as soon as possible.
2. That the time thus gained, is necessary to enable us to improve our education, in order to fulfil with credit to ourselves and advantage to the State, the various duties and responsibilities of Fathers and Citizens.
3. That in order contractors may have ample time to finish existing engagements, the reduction of time shall not come into operation until three months' notice shall have been given to them, but the change of payments to Friday shall come into operation as soon as desirable. *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 22 May 1872.

<sup>12</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 1 February 1872.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 February 1872. Though Hendrie would sign the Hamilton Masters' Manifesto of February 1872.

of "Capital, Labour and Rest,"<sup>14</sup> and James Ryan busied himself by writing to workingmen in the major industrial centres throughout Ontario, urging them to copy the Hamilton example.<sup>15</sup> Hamilton's manufacturers were willing to adopt the nine-hour day and were only waiting for other cities in Ontario to acknowledge the system, he said. It was therefore up to workingmen to grasp hold of this opportunity and they would obtain the concession "without having recourse to violence, and without a strike." He was not unaware of the tendency employers displayed towards buying-off the claims of their workmen and cautioned, that "a rise of ten per cent given to arrest the progress of this movement may be lost again even before the agitation has ceased." The advantage of the movement lay in the fact, he told them, "that hours of labour once shortened become the permanent heritage of yourselves and children long after the rise of ten per cent has passed away and is forgotten." Again he stressed the goals of the movement; it was "a social revolution," he wrote, and asked his fellow workmen to "Remember that whatever helps to raise us as a class tends to elevate the national character, tends to increase trade by refining the taste, tends to lower taxation by improving morality, tends to produce talent by promoting intelligence, tends to assist emigration by increasing the privileges we possess, tends to augment the power of Christianity by improving men." Ryan was sharpening his argument a little, in the direction of the employers, by attempting to show that the moral, social and intellectual improvement of the working class could bring about an increased economic return to the community as a whole. Yet, of course, he was mainly seeking allies. It was now two weeks since reports of the Hamilton mass meeting had been carried in newspapers across the province.<sup>16</sup> Apart from a meeting at Brantford, some 35 miles to the west, there had been no indication that the movement had been taken up elsewhere.

Brantford presented a healthy picture of small scale industrial activity at this time and had not suffered a labour dispute of consequence since hordes of starving navvies had invaded the town looking for food almost twenty years earlier, the contractors having experienced a common occurrence of the time — running out of money. There was, perhaps, an air of novelty about those who assembled in the Town Hall on the first Wednesday evening in February. The Mayor of Brantford, cigar manufacturer William Patterson had agreed to be chairman of this meeting which had been called to discuss the "Nine Hour Movement." Here too there was a scattering of employers and clergy on the platform who looked out on an audience of some 500, large enough to shatter the nerve of workingmen making maiden speeches. The reasons advanced at this meeting, for requesting shorter hours, were again said to be for the purpose

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 February 1872.

<sup>15</sup> This letter appeared in the *Hamilton Spectator*, 12 February 1872.

<sup>16</sup> *Toronto Telegraph*, *Toronto Globe*, *London Daily Advertiser*, *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 January 1872. *Montreal Evening Star*, 1 February 1872.

of gaining "moral, social and intellectual improvement."<sup>17</sup> Fred Bromwich, who put forward these sentiments, admitted he was making his first public speech. He went on to warn his fellow workmen that they should strive for the improvement "not by combination of trades unions in getting up strikes, but by discussing the matter fairly and squarely with employers." Shoemaker Donald Buchanan thought that shorter hours were necessary so that workingmen might have "more time to improve their minds and consider the social and political questions of the day." This was Buchanan's first public speech also and he too warned that "he would not be a party to a strike," but would seek the change by "calm moral suasion." Both Alfred Watts, who owned a mill by the river, and Arthur Sturgis Hardy, a local lawyer who would later be Premier of Ontario, urged on the men the necessity of making the movement "universal in the Province," while the Rev. T. Lowry advised "a conference between the workmen and the employers."

The movement in Brantford appears to have surfaced quite independent of that in Hamilton, though the Brantford men were aware of what was taking place in that city and were spurred into activity through the example of the Hamilton men as the wording of their resolutions showed.<sup>18</sup> While little was accomplished at this first meeting, another was arranged for two weeks later. Yet so quiescent had past working class ambition been in Brantford, that the local paper could confidently claim, "if . . . it will embarrass the employers to grant what is asked, we do not think the workingmen will persist in asking it."<sup>19</sup>

## II

THE TRADE unionists of Toronto had begun moving towards the nine-hour day at about the same time as the men in Hamilton, but they had progressed at a somewhat slower pace. The members of the oldest union in the city, Local 91 of the International Typographical Union, had discussed the question at their monthly meeting on 10 January. Here, while some had been in favour of asking for a reduction to only 57 hours, final agreement revolved about the proposition "that 55 hours shall constitute a weeks work."<sup>20</sup> At a meeting of the Trades Assembly during the following week J.S. Williams, who had just been elected

<sup>17</sup> Brantford *Expositor*, 9 February 1872.

<sup>18</sup> The first resolution read: "We, the working men of Brantford, on Wednesday evening, Feb. 7th, 1872, in mass meeting assembled affirm that we heartily concur with the spirit of the resolutions adopted by the working men of the City of Hamilton, on the evening of Jan. 27th, 1872, and we unanimously affirm that the nine hours labour movement has become a social necessity, and we are determined to co-operate with them in securing for ourselves its speedy adoption by every legitimate means in our power." *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 February 1872.

<sup>20</sup> Toronto Typographical Union, *Minutes*, Vol. 2, entry date 10 January 1872.



President of the Assembly and was a member of the Typographical Union, left the chair to move that 55 hours be considered as a legal week's work. While the motion carried, it was decided that delegates should sound out the opinions of their unions and that the matter would be discussed further at the next meeting on 2 February.<sup>21</sup> By 2 February, the delegates were aware of the Hamilton movement. After defeating one proposal for a 51 hour week and another by John Hewitt that the number of hours be left open, they settled on 54 hours as the sought for goal. A committee was then appointed to acquire a hall where a public meeting could be held to "agitate the nine hour system."<sup>22</sup>

The first mass meeting in Toronto was held in the Music Hall on 14 February. No employers graced the platform with their presence. The chairman was trade unionist J.S. Williams, while behind him ranged a solid phalanx of trade unionists from the different unions in the city. The opening speaker minced few words.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the Hamilton unionists John Hewitt had not come to praise capital, but to preach the cause of labour. Nor would he suggest that the interests of the two were anything near identical. He was also from a trade which was suffering the effects of newly introduced machinery and this was his starting point.<sup>24</sup> In the hands of capitalists, he began, machines did nothing but "swell the ranks of non-producing humanity." In the hands of labour they could be made to "supply the world with food, clothes, etc., and still keep up a large non-producing mass." He reminded his audience that it was workingmen who paid most of the costs of society "and not only paid a large proportion of the taxes themselves, but in addition to that produced most of what paid the balance." This particular sally was met with appreciative applause from the vast audience which packed the hall. Hewitt then turned to

<sup>21</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 19 January 1872.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 February 1872.

<sup>23</sup> The account of this meeting is taken from the *Toronto Globe* and the *Toronto Daily Leader*, 15 February 1872.

<sup>24</sup> The coopering trade, to which Hewitt belonged, was the latest to feel the effects of mechanization, which resulted in the breaking down of a skilled task into a number of simple processes which unskilled, and low paid, labour could perform. The process is described as follows: "The barrels were raised by boys, clamped and trussed by machinery, the heads were turned by machines and put into the barrels by boys, and there was nothing left for the coopers to do but plane, shave up and hoop the package." *Coopers' Monthly Journal*, October 1872. It was primarily due to the efforts of John Hewitt that the Toronto Trades Assembly, the *Ontario Workman* and the Canadian Labor Union were formed. One of the most able leaders of the early labour movement, he was also one with much experience. During three years in the United States, in the late 1860s, Hewitt was a delegate to the National Labor Union in 1868 and was elected assistant to William Jessup, corresponding secretary of the Workingman's Union of New York City — a body which was in the forefront of agitation for the eight-hour day during the late 1860s. Jessup was the U.S. correspondent for the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association.

the nine-hour movement. The press in the city<sup>25</sup> had advised them to wait until it was granted in Great Britain and the United States, he said. Would they wait "until their fellow workmen of those countries received the great boon . . . and then come out and take what the latter had got for them?" He thought not, "they would move with their fellow working men of Great Britain and the United States" and success "would crown their united efforts." This appeal, to a unity that was international in scope, struck a responsive chord and he was again interrupted by applause from the floor. He next took a stab in another direction, Hewitt was not one to waste an audience. The franchise should be extended to every workingman, he said, "no one should vote merely as the mouthpiece of a house and lot," and he concluded by hinting at the political organization of the working class in declaring: "Workingmen must become a power in the land, and send to the legislature men who knew what ten hours of work was."

John Hewitt's remarks, however, were not representative of those made at the meeting. Other speakers exhibited a bias towards the existence of a common interest between capital and labour and mixed a little soft-soap with their remarks. Robert Grant, a stonemason who had but recently arrived from England, "believed in honey not in vinegar" and advised the men to "try kindness" towards their employers. John Collins, who worked at the Jacques and Hays furniture factory "did not anticipate any collision with employers," while the President of the Bricklayers and Masons Union emphasized that he "did not believe in strikes, nor in quarrelling with employers." A member of the Coachmakers Union, John Walker, expressed the commonly held view that "the interests of the employer and employed were identical" and John Winnett, also of the Coachmakers, explained that the Trades Assembly was "not opposed to the interests of employers;" if trouble arose between an employer and his men "they always tried to settle the matter amicably."

While the employers had been held off the platform they could not be kept from the floor. Alderman Hallam rose to offer a few lines from Shakespeare — "Countrymen, I'm for simple justice" — and some advice. There was such a thing, he said, as the tyranny of workingmen as well as the tyranny of employers and, with one eye on Hewitt, he counselled those assembled "not to believe the clap-trap of designing agitators."

The meeting concluded in a rather nebulous fashion with Williams expressing the hope that "the next time they met they would have a more definite and settled object." This might have puzzled some who filed out of the hall who thought they had found that object in the nine-hour day. Such an uncertain call to arms, however, typified the cautious behaviour of the Toronto Trades Assembly.<sup>26</sup> An example of this collective diffidence was displayed at its next

<sup>25</sup> There had been a series of editorials in the *Telegraph*, 2, 5, 7 February 1872, the general tone of these being extremely negative from the workingmen's point of view.

<sup>26</sup> While Williams had suggested during the mass meeting that the Assembly would

meeting. Hewitt attempted to move his fellow delegates toward organizing Labour Reform Leagues in each ward of the city. These were to be "composed of working men" and would use "their united efforts for advancing the interest of labour."<sup>27</sup> Hewitt wished to incorporate both union and non-union, skilled and unskilled in his plan of campaign. Nor was this to be confined only to seeking the nine-hour day, but was to involve the working class in the full spectrum of political activity and the quest for the extended franchise. The Assembly, however, gave the nod to an amendment by Andrew Scott of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who moved "that the different trades direct their efforts to secure... the nine-hour system."<sup>28</sup> This meant that the movement in Toronto would revolve almost exclusively about men already organized and would involve few of those outside the ranks of trade unionists. Agitation would take place within a particular trade, and occasionally within a particular establishment, where it might include the unskilled. It would be a fragmented effort, rarely showing the unity of purpose that characterized the Hamilton movement. There would be little central direction. At best, the Trades Assembly might play the role of a reluctant godfather, but it would refuse to hold the baby.

The first of the associations in Toronto to press for the nine-hour day was one formed earlier in the shops of the Northern Railway Company. Three days after the mass meeting a carpenter, a blacksmith, a painter, three fitters and a coppersmith met with officials of the Company to put forward the claims of the men.<sup>29</sup> One of the fitters, James Gibson, a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, was spokesman for the workers' delegation. He began by pointing to the example of the "old country" where, he said, 54 and in some cases 51 hours constituted a normal week's work. He also remarked that employees on the Grand Trunk and the Great Western Railway were also asking for the same concession. In answer to a question from the Hon. J.B. Robinson, president of the company, he agreed that the men worked only nine hours a day in winter, but pointed out that their wages were reduced during that period also.

It was left up to Colonel F.W. Cumberland, the managing-director, to reply for the company. Only 30 minutes a day separated them, he said, as they worked until four o'clock on Saturday, making a total work-week of 58 hours. He acknowledged that most of the men present had been with the company for from eight to sixteen years and, he continued, the company intended to recog-

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accept individuals into membership as well as organized unions, it is difficult to see how this might have been accomplished, as even a suggestion to allow past delegates a seat and voice in the Assembly was allowed to lapse. *Toronto Globe*, 15 February 1872. *Toronto Trades Assembly, Minutes of Proceedings*, 12 March 1872, 61.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 March 1872, 56.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> This meeting was described in the *Toronto Daily Leader* and *Toronto Globe*, 19 February 1872.

nize long service. However, he suggested that if they were successful in their demand for a reduction of hours, "they might compel the company to employ the strongest and the most muscular men, without regard to length of service." In case this thinly veiled threat had not been clear enough, Cumberland next remarked that three of the seven had sons serving apprenticeships with the company and, drawing their attention also to the fact that they "had bought houses and lots," he asked, "was thirty minutes to be put against these facts." The blacksmith — Sloggett — with his temper barely in check, interrupted with the retort that they "were not content to work ten hours in Toronto while their fellow labourers were only working nine in the old country." To which Cumberland replied, in a rather pained tone of voice, that he had only "endeavoured to talk the matter over with them in a friendly and unofficial manner, as between man and man." The men then withdrew, with the promise that their demand would be put before the Board of Directors at their next meeting.

Cumberland, of course, had put his finger on one of the stumbling blocks to working class agitation. Workingmen who owned "houses and lots" were less likely to place their property in jeopardy through a strike, and were apt to act with greater discretion, than the propertyless. The acquisition of his own home was paraded before the workingman as being "the short road to independence."<sup>30</sup> With such an acquisition the workingman was "strengthened in the consciousness of the possession of property" and he began "to experience the self-reliance and prudence of the capitalist." More importantly, such individual ownership was claimed as being desirable "because it aimed to make every man a capitalist instead of robbing those who are."<sup>31</sup> Thus the illusion could be fostered of the workingman as capitalist, which was only a step from suggesting that the interests of the workingman and capitalist were identical. However, as the focus of events shifted back to Hamilton, the dichotomy between capital and labour was about to receive a more practical demonstration.

### III

TWO MEETINGS were held in Hamilton on the night of 13 February. One, in the Moulders Hall, saw the Central Committee of the Nine Hour League decide to submit memorials requesting the nine-hour day to all the employers in the city. The League gave the three months' notice promised at the mass meeting, which meant that the nine-hour day was to come into operation on 15 May.<sup>32</sup> Just two streets away from the Moulders Hall the capitalists of the city were also holding a meeting. Here strong complaints were heard from the building contractors, that the nine-hour movement had already injured business prospects for the

<sup>30</sup> *Oshawa Reformer*, 15 March 1872.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 13 February 1872.

coming season, by causing those intending to build to abandon that intention. A resolution, opposing the principle of the nine-hour day, was passed unanimously.<sup>33</sup> The main result of this meeting did not make its public appearance until 19 May, when the resolution was published in all of the Hamilton papers over a list of signatures representing 144 of the manufacturing and contracting businesses in the city.<sup>34</sup> It was an impressive display of class solidarity; apart from the Great Western Railway, scarcely a single employer of any consequence was missing from the list.

The employers' declaration was tantamount to an invitation to combat and the first skirmish occurred the morning of 20 May. Shortly after nine o'clock 130 men employed by Wilson, Bowman and Company, manufacturers of sewing machines, put on their coats and walked out of the factory. Parading through the main streets of Hamilton, the men tried to get other workmen to come out and join them, but without success. The cause of this walk-out was the discharge of Robert Bland, the delegate of the men to the Nine Hour League. On the previous day Bland had submitted a memorial to Andrew Wilson, on behalf of his fellow workmen, requesting the nine-hour day. That morning he had been dismissed and his crime, or so the *Spectator* said, was that of making himself "very conspicuous in the manufactory as an advocate of the scheme."<sup>35</sup>

The walk-out, termed a lock-out by the men and a strike by the employers, had occurred on a Tuesday. On the following Friday a letter appeared in the Hamilton papers, signed by George Webster and two other foremen, which revealed what had taken place in the factory.<sup>36</sup> The foremen had been asked to sign a paper, the contents of which they were not allowed to see, which would indicate their support of the company's action in "clearing the shop of all who had taken any active interest in the movement." This the foremen had refused to do and instead had defended the rights of the men to agitate the question. In their letter the foremen accused the employers of "petty tyranny" and of sacrificing "truth and veracity on the altar of a purse-proud position." What the letter did indicate, was the solid support of the men for Bland and of the foremen for the men.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 February 1872.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 February 1872.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 February 1872.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 February 1872. Also, in the same paper, was a letter from Colonel McGiverin. He now professed to have "no sympathy" for the nine-hour movement and was "utterly opposed to secret organizations . . . which were calculated to disturb that perfect harmony and those cordial relations which should always exist between employers and their employees." Of more import, he was "utterly opposed . . . to every movement calculated to retard the prosperity and interfere with the business relations of the country." McGiverin had been fishing for the political support of both employers and men and had now succeeded in alienating the good-will of both. Sir John A. Macdonald, always on the look-out for political ramifications in any situation, made the

On the Saturday evening another mass meeting was held in the Mechanics' Institute Hall.<sup>37</sup> Again the Hall was packed, with about 1800 men present, but this was a rather different meeting from the first. Absent from this second meeting were any comments on the "common interests" of capital and labour, and the only suggestion that strikes should be avoided came from T.C. Watkins, the only employer remaining from the previous meeting. Indeed, Ryan drew the attention of his audience to the departure of labour's "false friends" with the remark that "in spite of ignorant opulence — in spite of aspiring politicians — in spite of subsidized editors, the movement must go on." The meeting also saw the appearance of the first representatives from a labour body outside the city, in the persons of Andrew Scott and James Gibson, from the Toronto branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

By the following Tuesday, just a week after the walk-out, the dispute had been settled, but the mode of the settlement provided a lesson for the movement in Hamilton. The initiative was taken by three of the foremen, a different three from those who had written the letter to the press in the previous week, and who included H.N. Readings, president of the local branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. In a series of communications which passed between the foremen and the employers, the latter agreed to Robert Bland's reinstatement. However, there was a decided catch in the proceedings. Wilson, Bowman and Co., had hired men to replace some of those involved in the dispute and noted that they could hardly let these go in order to take all of the original employees back — "with anything like honour or consistency." The company offered, "in order to show that no vindictive feeling actuates us," to "leave it to yourselves to determine who shall and who shall not resume work."<sup>38</sup> This tactic was an attempt to turn the resentment, of those who could not be reinstated, away from the company and towards the nine-hour advocates. Yet the company also had one other score to settle. In the final letter from the employers, it was noted that George Webster's position of foreman in the adjusting department had been filled. The dispute was settled, but George Webster, who had taken pen in hand to defend the action of his fellow workmen, and about forty others, now had the difficult task of finding employment in a city where employers were decidedly hostile to even luke-warm supporters of the Nine Hour Movement.

One of the most noticeable features of the Nine Hour Movement in this first month was the prominent part played by members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners. It was

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most pertinent comment on this particular incident. In a letter to a Hamilton supporter he noted, with some relish, "McGiverin is reaping the just reward of his double dealing." Sir John A. Macdonald to W. Gillespy, 29 February 1872, Macdonald Papers, PAC.

<sup>37</sup> This meeting is described in the *Toronto Globe* and the *Hamilton Spectator*, 26 February 1872.

<sup>38</sup> All the letters were printed in *Ibid.*, 27 February 1872.

amongst the members of these unions, employed to a very large extent in the shops of the various railway companies, that enthusiasm for the movement was first kindled. Indeed, so obvious had this become that in more than one quarter cries were being raised of a deliberate plot to "import" the "trade disputes of the old country." This source argued that "there would have been no nine hours agitation at all in Canada but for the fact that certain individuals were sent out by the unions in England, not as ordinary emigrants . . . , but as emissaries to stir up discord."<sup>39</sup> Apparently some of the more active Hamilton men were late arrivals in the Dominion which caused the story of the "plot" to surface.

The obvious point was that the largest employers in the country were the railway companies and, because they employed a great many skilled tradesmen, these workers tended to be members of well-established unions. It was no accident that the pioneers of the movement in Hamilton should be carpenters and machinists, members of the first two British unions to penetrate the Canadian labour scene.<sup>40</sup> In attempting to extend the movement, they appealed to men similarly employed with other railway companies. Ryan, in writing to the workmen of the Grand Trunk Railway in Montreal, did so through the columns of the *Montreal Star*.<sup>41</sup> This again confirms how intensely local, union activity had been and what little intercourse, between unions in widely separated areas, had existed in the past. It also argues little for a conspiracy which had to be promulgated through the pages of the commercial press!

Thus the early wave of support for the nine-hour day came from industrial centres, some of them small, which boasted establishments of one of the railway companies. Men employed by these companies, experienced in the ways of union organization, played leading roles in the formation of local nine-hour leagues. At a second meeting in Brantford, in late February, a Nine Hour League was formed. Of the five members who made up the Executive of the League, three worked in the shops of the Grand Trunk Railway.<sup>42</sup> By mid-February the nine-hour principle was being pressed in two places where no future Leagues would blossom and where little further agitation would take

<sup>39</sup> *Toronto Telegraph*, 21 February 1872.

<sup>40</sup> The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had a long tradition in Britain of being in the forefront of the campaign for a shorter working week.

<sup>41</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, 8 February 1872. Ryan also wrote, sometime later, to the Montreal branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. *Ibid.*, 6 March 1872.

<sup>42</sup> Edwin Davies, a millwright, was president of the League; carpenter King Vann was vice-president; while treasurer George Campbell was a blacksmith. The corresponding secretary was a local shoemaker, Donald Buchanan, and the secretary, Alex Shaw, who enrolled 125 men as members of the Brantford Nine Hour Workingmen's League at this meeting, was an engine-fitter employed by C.H. Waterous and Co. Brantford *Expositor*, 1 March 1872.

place. At Stratford in the Grand Trunk shops<sup>43</sup> and in the Great Western shops in London,<sup>44</sup> delegations of workmen met with company officials to demand the nine-hour day. The spread of the movement to Dundas at the end of the month appears to have come about through the efforts of James Ryan who was present at the first meeting there.<sup>45</sup> Finally the movement took root in Montreal where again the leading supporters were railway company employees from the Grand Trunk shops. Possibly spurred on by the letter from Ryan, a meeting was held in Perry's Hall on 2 March with representatives present from about 20 establishments.<sup>46</sup> Three days later the Montreal Union Nine Hours' Labor League was formed. Again based on the Newcastle model, it was to include both union and non-union men, the League was to give central direction to the movement in Montreal. The chief officials of the League worked in the Grand Trunk works and were members of one or the other of the Amalgamated Societies.<sup>47</sup>

The tensions created by the February events were to last for some further months. Yet there was to be no quick transition away from the view, held by most workingmen, that there existed a harmony of interest between capital and labour towards one which saw such interests in opposition. Workingmen hardly strove to topple the capitalist; they merely wanted to share in his often newly acquired affluence. Employers would readily admit, as did the *Globe*, that "the present is a time of great prosperity; trade is brisk, money plentiful and cheap."<sup>48</sup> It was a part of this good fortune that workingmen wished to enjoy and Ryan had urged them on, to "claim your share in the prosperity you so greatly help to make."<sup>49</sup>

Yet the workingman desired more than just a greater share in the wealth of his society; he sought also to "elevate his social position" in a society in which, he complained, "dry goods clerks . . . are held in higher esteem than the mechanic."<sup>50</sup> One of the points Andrew Scott would make was that "the workingman was destined to rise to a position vastly superior to that which he now occupied;"<sup>51</sup> this was a major goal of the nine-hour movement; it was "a social revolution" as Ryan had said, because it was designed to bring "employers and workmen socially upon a more equal footing."<sup>52</sup> The emphasis in all of these

<sup>43</sup> Stratford *Beacon*, 16 February 1872.

<sup>44</sup> London *Daily Advertiser*, 6 May 1872. See also letter from "Labour," *Ibid.*, 5 February 1872.

<sup>45</sup> Dundas *True Banner*, 7 March 1872.

<sup>46</sup> Montreal *Gazette*, 4 March 1872.

<sup>47</sup> James Ryan was elected president, William Moore first vice-president, Thomas Shaw was chosen as corresponding secretary. *Ibid.*, 6 March 1872.

<sup>48</sup> Toronto *Globe*, 16 February 1872.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton *Spectator*, 12 February 1872.

<sup>50</sup> St. John *Telegraph*, in London *Free Press*, 6 February 1872.

<sup>51</sup> Toronto *Globe*, 15 February 1872.

<sup>52</sup> Hamilton *Spectator*, 12 February 1872.



articulations of workmen's aspirations, however, was not on antagonism towards capitalists, but on a desire to share in and emulate the life style of that class. When a writer penned, only a year later

Thank God the time is coming fast  
When we the toiling masses,  
Will swing our banners to the blast,  
Among the higher classes.<sup>53</sup>

the key word was "among." This thrust, towards the establishment of a more egalitarian society, was most clearly expressed by workingmen, in a phrase that owed more to Bakunin than to Marx, on the masthead of the *Ontario Workman*: "The Equalization of all the Elements of Society in the Social Scale Should be the True Aim of Civilization."

#### IV

WITH THE spread of the movement to Montreal, agitation for the nine-hour day was being carried on in three of the four largest industrial cities in the Dominion. Agitation was confined to Central Canada and there appears to have been no attempt to carry the movement to the Maritime Provinces, the lack of railway linkage being an inhibiting factor here. Still, while no concerted movement appeared in the Maritimes, shipwrights and caulkers in Halifax demanded and received the nine-hour day.<sup>54</sup>

At the meeting on 5 March, which saw the formation of the Montreal League, James Black told the 1500 present that the movement was a necessity because they "did not receive a return for their labours equal to what the capitalist received for his capital." Yet, he continued, if employers could not make a fair profit under the nine-hour system he was "sure that the workmen would not require the enforcement of the rule." At the same time, Black recognized the need for a strongly organized central League. As he told those assembled, it was necessary if only for the purpose of assisting the men of Hamilton who had announced their intention of striking on 15 May if their requests were not conceded.<sup>55</sup>

As in Hamilton, employer reaction came within a week. At a meeting of some 50 of the more prominent industrialists in the city, said to employ between them up to 10,000 men and chaired by C.J. Brydges, managing-director of the Grand Trunk Railway, the nine-hour movement was unanimously condemned. A resolution, passed at the meeting, expressed the view that "in the interest of both employers and workmen, it appears to be undesirable to take

<sup>53</sup> *Ontario Workman*, 17 July 1873.

<sup>54</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, (Halifax), 2 May 1872. This demand followed another successful one for an increase in pay to \$2.50 per day.

<sup>55</sup> The meeting is described in the *Montreal Gazette* and *Montreal Evening Star*, 6 March 1872.

any course which will tend to decrease the ability of the manufacturers of Montreal to compete with the rest of the country."<sup>56</sup>

There now developed a concerted plan of action which was to involve the larger centres of Montreal, Hamilton and Toronto. The instigator of this move appears to have been James Ryan and it was he who unveiled the details to a meeting of league delegates, from the various industrial establishments in Montreal, which met on 16 March. Ryan was seeking financial support for the workmen of Hamilton and Toronto and began by reminding those at the meeting that: "He was not there only as a delegate from Hamilton but as a representative of Toronto." He then outlined the plan by noting: "Hamilton will take the first step on the 15th of May, and Toronto the 1st of June."<sup>57</sup> The principal idea was that men in the largest industrial centres, Montreal and Toronto, would support in a financial way those in the smaller centre, Hamilton, if the men there were forced to strike. If Toronto was also forced into strike action on 1 June, Montreal was again to provide the necessary pecuniary aid. Aware of the fragile financial basis of the movement, for the Toronto Trades Assembly had already informed him that they were "unable from want of funds to assist the Hamilton Nine Hour League,"<sup>58</sup> Ryan concluded his address to the Montreal delegates with a phrase that was both an appeal and a warning: "Resistance without funds is useless."<sup>59</sup>

Such an arrangement was probably the soundest that could have been constructed under the circumstances of rather elementary and hurried organization. The plan had some chance of success because, by the end of March, the Montreal League could boast some 2,000 members<sup>60</sup> and the formation of a league for French-speaking workmen had commenced.<sup>61</sup> It was not expected that the men in Montreal would have to strike if the movement stood firm in Hamilton and Toronto. As Ryan had said to the delegates at the Montreal meeting: "If your employers become convinced that your opposition is firm and not to be shaken, it will break the back of their combination." Appealing to their self-interest, he had remarked: "here, doubtless, the masters will frankly offer you the boon, without driving you to resistance."<sup>62</sup>

Support for the movement developed in other areas also. The employees of Jacques and Hay, cabinet-makers, had met in Toronto's Temperance Hall early in February. Richard Nye<sup>63</sup> had been appointed secretary of a nine-hour league

<sup>56</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, *Montreal Evening Star*, 12 March 1872.

<sup>57</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, 18 March 1872. Ryan also attended a mass meeting in Montreal a week later. *Ibid.*, 25 March 1872.

<sup>58</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 12 March 1872.

<sup>59</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, 18 March 1872.

<sup>60</sup> See letter signed by James Black and others. *Ibid.*, 28 June 1872.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 20 April 1872.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 March 1872.

<sup>63</sup> Nye would later lose his job with the company because of his active role in the movement. *Toronto Leader*, 4 April 1872. See also his letters in *Ibid.*, 3, 9 April 1872.

formed at the factory and he immediately set about contacting other workmen in cabinet shops in Bowmanville and Oshawa.<sup>64</sup> As a result of Nye's efforts the Oshawa Nine Hour League was established and Nye, along with Andrew Scott from the Toronto Trades Assembly, J.S. Williams from the Toronto Typographical Union and James Ryan from the Hamilton League, addressed a meeting on 27 March, described as "the largest ever held in Oshawa."<sup>65</sup> In St. Catharines meetings were held during the last week in March which led to the organization of a nine-hour league in the town,<sup>66</sup> while a league was formed in Sarnia during the first week of April.<sup>67</sup> James Ryan addressed a meeting of workmen in Ingersoll and a league was formed there early in April.<sup>68</sup> Shoemakers led the agitation in Perth, although there is no evidence of a league being formed there;<sup>69</sup> members of the Montreal League were in communication with workmen in Sherbrooke, Brockville and Kingston,<sup>70</sup> but an attempt to carry the movement to Quebec City failed to take hold.<sup>71</sup> Guelph was the last centre to organize successfully, during the last week of April, and members of the league formed in the town pledged themselves "to aid our sister Leagues in their struggle for their rights."<sup>72</sup>

With support for the movement in Central Canada now well planted in many of the industrial centres, and a means of co-ordinating the diverse energies of the various leagues in existence, all appeared to be going well. Unfortunately, the strength of this co-operative arrangement was more apparent than real; the weak link was Toronto where no central league existed, and where the Trades Assembly evinced no sign of filling the leadership role. Instead of the focus of public attention being on Hamilton, where the struggle was to commence in mid-May, the spotlight of public interest suddenly shifted to Toronto. There approximately 180 men, a recognized elite among Canadian workmen, in pressing their particular claim would shake attempts to fashion class solidarity around the plan outlined by James Ryan.

While the printers' strike has been extensively documented elsewhere,<sup>73</sup> the

<sup>64</sup> See copies of his correspondence in *Toronto Daily Leader*, 29 March 1872.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Oshawa Reformer*, 15, 29 March 1872.

<sup>66</sup> *St. Catharines Evening Journal*, 26 March, 10, 16, 25 April 1872.

<sup>67</sup> *Sarnia Observer and Lambton Advertiser*, 29 March, 5 April 1872. See also letter to the *Toronto Daily Leader*, 5 April 1872.

<sup>68</sup> *Ingersoll Chronicle*, 11 April 1872. For the report of a further meeting in Ingersoll see *Toronto Daily Leader*, 2 May 1872.

<sup>69</sup> See *Ontario Workman*, 25 April 1872; *Perth Courier*, 19 April 1872; see also letter from Alex McLeod, secretary, K.O.S.C., Perth in *Toronto Daily Leader*, 23 April 1872.

<sup>70</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 6 April 1872, *Montreal Evening Star*, 11 May 1872.

<sup>71</sup> *Morning Chronicle* (Quebec City), 22 May 1872.

<sup>72</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 2 May 1872. For further activities in Guelph see *Guelph Evening Mercury*, 21, 25, 29 May 1872. Hewitt and Ryan were speakers at a mass meeting in Guelph on 28 May. *Ontario Workman*, 6 June 1872.

<sup>73</sup> B. Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals, and Labour in the 1870's", *The Canadian*

lack of sodality evinced by the printers has not received mention. In the wake of the first Toronto mass meeting the printers held a meeting of their union three days later. There it was quickly decided that "a week's work consist of 54 hours" while, for those on piece work, 33 1/3 cents per 1,000 ems was to be the new pay scale for men working morning papers and 30 cents per 1,000 ems for those who worked on evening and weekly publications.<sup>74</sup> At a further meeting of the union on 2 March, members decided to ask for the new terms to come into operation on 18 March.<sup>75</sup> A few days after the meeting the plans of James Ryan and the Hamilton League became known in a letter to the Trades Assembly. The printers were being asked to delay their request until 1 June, a move they were loath to do. Ryan also asked the Assembly to appoint a delegate to visit the industrial centres of the country, a request the Assembly had to refuse through lack of funds, and so Ryan would attend the Montreal meeting on 16 March representing both Hamilton and Toronto.<sup>76</sup>

On 11 March De Vere Hunt, job office foremen at the *Daily Leader*, sent a letter to the president of his union which pressed forward the case of those who worked for daily rates of pay, rather than by the piece. In the letter, signed by 74 printers, Hunt asked union authorization for immediate action towards obtaining the nine-hour day stating that it looked "cowardly and purile" to put off their request and besides, he added, casting solidarity firmly aside, "we can get it now as readily as in Summer."<sup>77</sup> Delegates to the Trades Assembly met on the following evening and discussed the possibility of declaring a date on which the nine-hour day might take effect in Toronto; while no decision was taken, a motion by J.S. Williams of the Typographical Union, that the printers determine for themselves when to demand it, was carried unanimously.<sup>78</sup> It was only through the efforts of John Hewitt that the Assembly was forced to take notice of the larger question. At a mass meeting on 15 March called to hear an address by Richard Trevellick, president of the U.S. National Labor Union, Hewitt pressed through a motion to "empower the Trades' Assembly to memorialize the employers of labour of the city for the adoption of the Nine Hour System, . . . to come into operation on the first Monday in June."<sup>79</sup>

By 17 March, when the printers met again, no employer had conceded the

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*Historical Review*, 41 (1960), 93-127; D.G. Creighton, "George Brown, Sir John Macdonald, and the 'Workingman'," *Canadian Historical Review*, 24 (1943), 362-376; S.F. Zerker, "George Brown and the Printers' Union," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 10 (1975), 42-48.

<sup>74</sup> Toronto Typographical Union, *Minutes*, 17 February 1872.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 March 1872.

<sup>76</sup> The letter from Ryan was read at a meeting of the Trades Assembly on March 6, but was not dealt with until the following meeting on March 12. Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*.

<sup>77</sup> Toronto Typographical Union, *Minutes*, 17 March 1872.

<sup>78</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 12 March 1872.

<sup>79</sup> Toronto *Daily Leader*, 16 March 1872.

new terms and the men decided to give notice on the following day that they would strike on 25 March if the terms had not been acceded to.<sup>80</sup> During the week, while the men were working their notices, a Master Printers Association suddenly materialized. The moving spirit behind this Association was George Brown, proprietor of the *Globe*.<sup>81</sup> Besides newspaper proprietors, the Association included in its membership all of the master job printers in the city and thus brought to more prominent attention the fact that some of the book-binders had been on strike for the nine-hour day since the beginning of February.<sup>82</sup> Also, the only newspaper proprietor missing from the Association, and the first to concede the nine-hour day, was James Beaty, MP for East Toronto and owner of the *Tory Daily Leader*.

The new financial terms for piece workers, demanded by the union, were immediately conceded by the master printers; while the rate for job printers was set at \$10 to \$15 per week, depending on skill, which compared favourably to the \$11 per week demanded by the union. What was not conceded by the master printers was the nine-hour day for job printers and union insistence that both piece workers and job printers alike would strike if this condition was not met both amazed Brown and confirmed him in his long-lived anti-union stance.<sup>83</sup> Brown's persecution of members of the Printers' Vigilance Committee, in causing their arrest for conspiracy, was countered some three weeks later by Prime Minister Macdonald's enactment of a bill to legalize trade unions. Almost an exact copy of the British Act of the previous year, Macdonald's pragmatic response was the outcome of an attitude expressed to T.C. Patteson of the *Toronto Mail*. In a postscript to a letter advising Patteson how to deal with United States' political affairs, Macdonald added the caution: "You must take great care not to offend the employers of labour, in the 9 hours movement. When the present excitement is over you must look to them and not to the employed for support." Macdonald then rammed home the heart of the lesson in concluding: "At the same time there is of course no necessity for your running your head against the navvies in the way that the *Globe* is doing."<sup>84</sup>

The printers' strike created a number of problems for the nine-hour move-

<sup>80</sup> Toronto Typographical Union, *Minutes*, 17 March 1872.

<sup>81</sup> See letter of Master Printers Association dated 19 March 1872 in *Toronto Globe*, 22 March 1872. A master job printer named Burns was president of the association.

<sup>82</sup> *Toronto Telegraph*, 3 February 1872. The Book-binders Union had only been in existence a few months. Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 3 November 1871. See also letter on the Book-binders strike. *Toronto Daily Leader*, 27 March 1872.

<sup>83</sup> An editorial in the *Globe* stated: "It is said, but we are not yet prepared to believe it, that not only the hands in the Job offices, but those in the daily newspaper offices, *who got all they demanded*, will strike at the bidding of the wire-pullers of the Society — though opposed to the movement." (Original emphasis), 22 March 1872. See other editorial comment on the strike in the *Globe*, 25, 26, 22 March 1872.

<sup>84</sup> Sir John A. Macdonald to T.C. Patteson, 30 March 1872, Patteson Papers, Ontario Archives. The first issue of the *Mail* was published 1 April 1872.

ment. Throughout its duration the energies of Nine Hour Leagues across central Canada were fully deflected towards assisting the Toronto men.<sup>85</sup> Further, with the major political forces of the nation now apparently choosing sides, it became increasingly difficult for a Liberal workingman to look a Conservative workingman firmly in the eye.<sup>86</sup> Having conceded the new piece rates early in the struggle, the *Globe*, *Telegraph*, and some of the weekly newspapers and master job printers were still refusing to recognize the nine-hour day at the end of June and printers had earlier begun leaving the city to look for work elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> The printers' strike exhausted both the meagre financial resources and the enthusiasm of workers in Toronto for further agitation. The strike provided mixed results for nine-hour advocates, but for employers Brown had provided the inspiration and example for antagonism.

## V

OPPOSITION to the aims of the nine-hour movement was immediate, unremitting and firm. During the first six months of 1872 in Canada, and for the first time on such a scale, the fact that the interests of the capitalist and those of the working class were divergent was paraded for all to observe. Within two weeks of the movement's founding in Hamilton, the capitalists of that city had met and published over their collective signatures a statement which indicated their "duty to oppose this movement, and not lessen in any wise the number of hours now constituting a day's work."<sup>88</sup> Employers in Montreal had also met within a week of the movement's emergence there and created a committee "to protect their interest."<sup>89</sup> Canadian capitalists would be supported in their endeavours by both pulpit and press; nor would the barriers of party, religion or race generally impede this united effort. "We may hope," stated the main organ of the Grits "that the time is not very far off when the possessor of capital will be no longer regarded, by those who work for the wages he pays, as having interests antagonistic to theirs."<sup>90</sup> From an artful stance of paternalistic concern, Tory papers advised "Ours are still 'infant manufactures'," in urging workingmen

<sup>85</sup> Funds were directed to the Toronto printers from many centres, including Hamilton, Montreal, Oshawa, St. Catharines, and Ottawa. *Montreal Gazette*, 28 March 1872, *Montreal Evening Star*, 6, 13 April 1872, *Toronto Daily Leader*, 4, 5, 9, 11 April 1872, *St. Catharines Evening Journal*, 11 May 1872.

<sup>86</sup> See series of letters in *Toronto Globe*, 10, 13, 16 July, 7, 17 August 1872, involving Terence Clarke and John Hewitt.

<sup>87</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 3, 9, 24 April 1872. Bookbinders were also leaving Toronto, see letter from Wm. Berwick, secretary of the Book-binders Union, *Ibid.*, 24 May 1872. For an indication that the Typographical Union adjusted its wage scale in line with that of the master printers, see letter from John Armstrong, vice-president of the union in *Ibid.*, 18 June 1872. See also Zerker, "George Brown."

<sup>88</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 19 February 1872.

<sup>89</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, *Montreal Evening Star*, 12 March 1872.

<sup>90</sup> *Toronto Globe*, 16 February 1872.

not to disturb the "manufacturing interests" of the country and, continued the writer, "when we speak of 'manufacturing interests' we beg to state most emphatically that we include under that term the interests of the employed as well as the employers."<sup>91</sup> The Protestant churches collectively confirmed this notion, that the interests of capital and labour were synonymous;<sup>92</sup> while in Quebec, a circular from the Roman Catholic Archbishop condemning strikes was read from the pulpit of churches in the province. In Quebec City, a Father Racine felt impelled to emphasize his archbishop's criticism of labour agitators. During a lengthy sermon, he asked his congregation the question: "Est-ce le fait d'un ami de son pays de tromper les classes ouvrières? Est-ce le fait d'un bon citoyen, de leur faire croire qu'elles sont opprimées, écrasées et de leur conseiller le trouble, la révolte, le renversement de l'ordre social?" Supplying his own answer, Racine concluded, "Assurément non et ces agitateurs politiques sont la peste de la société."<sup>93</sup>

The first capitalist class offensive came with the printers' strike and the formation of the Master Printers Association during March. Yet this had been merely the forerunner of an association which combined employers from a variety of trades and from numerous centres across the province. Capitalists from the various iron trades in the province had held a series of meetings in Toronto during March and April.<sup>94</sup> Attended by upwards of 50 employers, these meetings culminated in the production of a capitalists' manifesto, addressed to "The Employers of Labour," and published in the *Globe* on 8 April. The aims of the nine-hour movement were claimed to be "antagonistic of the interests of their Employers" and "entirely unsuited to the wants of a young and struggling country like Canada." The interests of the general public would be harmed, noted the employers, because the cost of living would be increased; trade would be disrupted and the productive capacity of the nation would be decreased; the movement would also be injurious to employees in that their wages would purchase less than before. Turning more specifically to their own interests the manifesto continued:

To the Employers it would be a serious injury to restrict the use or reproductive power of this limited capital. Capital which in nine cases out of ten is the sole product of their own *extra time, labour, and energy of character*, and any attempt on the part of the Employees to dictate to them in what way, or to what extent they shall lawfully use their own resources, is not only an unwarranted interference with the rights of others, but a very transparent attempt to introduce amongst us the Communistic system of levelling.

After claiming that the movement was "sought for only a mere faction" and

<sup>91</sup> *Toronto Telegraph*, 2 February 1872.

<sup>92</sup> See the anti-labour tone of the excerpts from the *Christian Guardian*, *Montreal Witness*, and the *Church Herald* on the nine-hour movement quoted in S. Crysdale, *The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics in Canada* (Toronto 1961), 18-19.

<sup>93</sup> *Le Courrier du Canada* (Quebec City), 28 May 1872.

<sup>94</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 23, 26, 30 March, 4 April 1872. For details of other meetings of master metal workers held in Toronto and Hamilton see *Ibid.*, 27 April, 4 June 1872.

was led by "emissaries of the National Labour League of the United States . . . who have but little interest in common with the great body of our people," the manifesto concluded by noting the determination of employers "to resist any attempts on the part of our Employees to dictate . . . how many hours shall constitute a day's work."

Brown's action, in causing the arrest of the members of the Printers' Vigilance Committee, came in the wake of a third meeting of employers in the Agricultural Hall. Brown, at his apoplectic best, was reported to have hurled at those gathered the cry: "Crush out the aspirations of employees! Stamp out the movement! Ostracize union men! Drive them out of Canada!"<sup>95</sup> Brown's apparent rage might well have been fostered by a meeting some three days earlier of some 10,000 citizens of Toronto demonstrating in favour of the nine-hour principle.

Following the termination of the printers' strike, leadership of the capitalist opposition to the nine-hour movement passed to a master iron-founder named Dickey, who became chairman of the employers' combination, and master iron-founders across the province now took united action to destroy the workers' movement.<sup>96</sup> Workers who were employed in one or other of the foundries found themselves suddenly confronted with a document which they were forced to sign. The wording of the document varied, but usually followed the form of that used in the firm of Goldie, McCulloch and Company of Galt:

I, the undersigned, agree to work for Messrs. Goldie, McCulloch and Co., of Galt, at my usual calling or trade, and will not in any way agitate or contribute pecuniary aid to such as are agitating, for the reduction of the present hours of labour now constituting a day's work while I remain in their employment.<sup>97</sup>

This form of agreement was used in Galt because workmen there were not demanding the nine-hour day, but had agreed to financially support those elsewhere who were. All except two of the workers at the foundry refused to sign the agreement and were locked out of the foundry on 13 May.<sup>98</sup> In Brantford at the foundry of Waterous and Wilkes 89 workmen were locked out on 10 May after refusing to sign the document;<sup>99</sup> while in Hamilton during the same week workers struck at McCombe's marble works, at L.D. Sawyer's agricultural works and at all the foundries in the city except one, bringing the number on strike or locked out in Hamilton to about 800.<sup>100</sup> In Hamilton, and

<sup>95</sup> *Ontario Workman*, 25 April 1872.

<sup>96</sup> Master wagon-makers from across the province had held a series of meetings in Hamilton earlier for a similar purpose. See *Hamilton Spectator*, 1, 7 March, 4 April 1872.

<sup>97</sup> *The Galt Reporter*, 17 May 1872.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 May 1872, *Ontario Workman*, 16 May 1872, *Brantford Expositor*, 17 May 1872.

<sup>100</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 10, 11, 13 May 1872, *Toronto Daily Leader*, 11 May 1872.



later in Toronto,<sup>101</sup> the document would be worded somewhat differently from that used in Galt, for these were active centres of agitation for the nine-hour day, but the intention was precisely the same — to eliminate support for, and participation in, any concerted movement aimed at lessening the daily hours of labour.

The instigation of the "document" by employers was met with firm resistance from the workmen, but its attempted application again shifted the main endeavour of the movement away from its primary goal. Still, when members of the Master Metal Workers Association met in Hamilton on 15 and 16 May, they decided to withdraw the "document" and resort instead to the subterfuge of substituting a series of "shop rules." The circular, distributed to master metal-workers detailing the change, indicated that the masters still intended their particular will to prevail for the most significant passage in the circular was one which noted: "It will not be necessary to have men sign an agreement as at first proposed, their working under these rules will render them quite as liable as though they had signed them."<sup>102</sup>

The main thrust of the employer offensive had been to deter the Hamilton men, but on 15 May some 1200 men struck work in Hamilton for the nine-hour system. Some 2000 men, half of them employed by the Great Western Railway, had already received the shorter working day earlier in the month.<sup>103</sup> At meetings of the Toronto Trades Assembly on both 3 and 10 May, John Hewitt tried to interest those present in organizing for their strike on the first Monday of June, but he failed to obtain a seconder for any proposal he tried to make. Nor would the Assembly contribute financial aid to the Hamilton League, a position it had made clear to Ryan earlier.<sup>104</sup> At a further meeting on 17 May, with Hewitt absent in the United States attending the annual Coopers International Union convention, the Assembly decided to leave the matter to individual unions, whose representatives were to report back to the next meeting as to what action they intended to take. The next meeting, on 21 May, produced no reports from any union and no comment on the strike; the two major items of business being a discussion of the Trades Union Act and another over the question of purchasing 24 spittoons.<sup>105</sup> The nine-hour movement was dead in Toronto.

That Toronto was a key element in the movement is apparent from a speech made by William Moore, an executive member of the Montreal League.

<sup>101</sup> The "document" was applied in Toronto towards the end of May where again men left their employment rather than sign. *Toronto Daily Leader*, 21 May 1872, *The Patriot*, 22 May 1872. The document had been used before by Ontario capitalists; for example, it was used against the moulders by Gurney, Beard & Co., in 1871. See *Toronto Globe*, 21, 23 December 1870, 20 January 1871.

<sup>102</sup> Copied in the *Toronto Daily Leader*, 4 June 1872, *Ontario Workman*, 6 June 1872.

<sup>103</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, *Toronto Globe*, *Toronto Daily Leader*, 15, 16 May 1872.

<sup>104</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 12 March, 3, 10 May 1872.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 21 May 1872, pp. 86-87, 89.

Returning from a meeting of League representatives held in Hamilton during May, Moore told a Montreal audience that "The principal conflict was anticipated to occur at Toronto."<sup>106</sup> The collapse of this expectation dealt a major blow to the movement. Though plasterers and bricklayers struck work in Toronto during June, ostensibly for the nine-hour system, they quickly displayed a propensity to settle instead for a few cents per hour increase,<sup>107</sup> as had printers, saddlers and harness makers in Hamilton, carpenters in Kingston and London, shoemakers in Perth, and a variety of workers in other parts of the province earlier.<sup>108</sup>

Not only did the Trades Assembly fail to generate any enthusiasm for the movement among Toronto workers, it did nothing to organize financial support for the movement elsewhere. It was therefore left to the workmen of Montreal to aid the Hamilton men on strike and they rallied valiantly. Members of the Montreal League each pledged 25 cents per week towards the Hamilton strike fund, while workmen in the Grand Trunk shops, who had already obtained the nine-hour day, promised a day's pay per week.<sup>109</sup> Yet with no sign of a supporting strike in Toronto on 1 June, the Hamilton men began to drift back to work and the Montreal League finally terminated financial aid at the end of June.<sup>110</sup> During the summer months, many of the shops that had earlier granted the new system began to re-introduce the ten-hour day.<sup>111</sup>

The nine-hour movement which had begun so buoyantly in January and justly earned for the Hamilton workmen the plaudits of poets:

Honour the men of Hamilton  
The Nine-Hour pioneers . . .<sup>112</sup>

finally petered out in Montreal. There, League members addressed a curiously worded manifesto to employers at the end of June. Noting that 11 firms employing 1500 men had granted, or had promised to grant, the nine-hour day, the manifesto included the phrase: "We do not beg for sympathy; we offer no threat." Yet the missive went on to conclude with the words: "Should the employers force us to extreme measures we cannot be responsible for the

<sup>106</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, 11 May 1872.

<sup>107</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 5, 19, 21 June 1872.

<sup>108</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 13 May 1872, *Daily British Whig* (Kingston), 4 May 1872, *Perth Courier*, 19 April 1872, *Belleville Daily Intelligencer*, 23 April 1872, *London Daily Advertiser*, 2 March, 4 May, 4 July 1872.

<sup>109</sup> *Montreal Daily Witness*, 28 May, 1 June 1872. *Montreal Evening Star*, 28 May, 1 June 1872.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 June 1872.

<sup>111</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, 10 July 1872. Besides Hamilton this also occurred in Oshawa and Montreal. *Oshawa Reformer*, 1 November 1872, *Montreal Daily Witness*, 7 August 1872.

<sup>112</sup> From a poem "The Nine-Hour Pioneers" by Alec H. Wingfield, first published in the *Ontario Workman*, 23 May 1872.

issues. . . . The blame will be upon their own shoulders."<sup>113</sup> This can only be interpreted as a warning to employers not to engage in the tactics used by employers in the Ontario centres of labour agitation. In any case, the "document" was not used in Montreal during the nine-hour movement of 1872. The manifesto was also the last shot fired by the Montreal League, although brassfinishers, roofers and tinsmiths carried on the fight for the nine-hour day, finally capitulating in the face of obdurate employer opposition during the first week of August.<sup>114</sup>

The nine-hour movement of 1872 failed to deliver the blessings of a nine-hour working day to Canadian workers generally and the only long-term beneficiaries of the movement were those skilled workers employed by the various railway companies throughout the central provinces.<sup>115</sup> Railway company officials were induced to grant the nine-hour day chiefly because it meant only a minor concession. Skilled workers employed by the companies already enjoyed a nine-hour day during the winter months, so that a reduction by thirty minutes of the nine and one-half hour day worked during the summer was all that was needed to meet the demands of the men. There is also evidence to suggest that, in some cases, wages were reduced in proportion to the reduction in time granted.<sup>116</sup> For those unskilled workers employed by the railway companies, and for other Canadian workers, the struggle for the nine-hour day would continue well into the present century.<sup>117</sup> Some, however, would heed the limerick warning of the capitalists on the nine-hour movement:

And now its gone dead, and sad are our fates,  
We'd better clear out for the U-nited States.<sup>118</sup>

The west-bound train was taken by, for example, bookbinders, printers, machinists and blacksmiths in Toronto, foundry workers in Galt, and stonemasons in Hamilton.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>113</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, *Montreal Gazette*, 28 June 1872, *Northern Journal*, 29 June 1872.

<sup>114</sup> *Northern Journal*, 6 July 1872, *Montreal Daily Witness*, 7 August 1872.

<sup>115</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 13 April 1872, *London Daily Advertiser*, 6 May 1872, *Toronto Daily Leader*, 13 April, 6 May 1872, *Montreal Daily Witness*, 4 May 1872.

<sup>116</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, *Montreal Gazette*, 6 May 1872, *Montreal Daily Witness*, 6, 28 May 1872, *Belleville Daily Intelligencer*, 10 May 1872.

<sup>117</sup> Some of the unskilled workers, employed in the freight sheds of the railway companies, obtained a reduction in their working hours from eleven to ten per day during the course of the movement. *Toronto Daily Leader*, 23 April 1872. For later nine-hour agitation see Bryan D. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft, Culture, and Conflict in a Canadian Community, 1860-1914," Ph.D. Thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1977, 409-11.

<sup>118</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 8 June 1872.

<sup>119</sup> *Toronto Leader*, 24 April, 24 May 1872, *Ontario Workman*, 30 May 1872, *Galt Reporter*, 31 May 1872, *Hamilton Spectator*, 13 May 1872.

## VI

THE NINE-HOUR movement failed primarily because of the primitive condition of the organization of labour in Canada, a condition the movement itself did much to remedy. Despite the intense efforts of men such as James Ryan in Hamilton, John Hewitt in Toronto, and James Black in Montreal, labour organization was far from complete, largely untested in conflict on any scale, inexperienced in the art of negotiation, and financially incapable of supporting sustained strike action. These deficiencies were soon acknowledged by the main participants themselves: "ORGANIZE! ORGANIZE!" declared the headline of an editorial in the *Ontario Workman*,<sup>120</sup> while next day the Toronto Trades Assembly found agreement around a motion from John Hewitt that "all organizations cease any active measures for the present in the short time movement to enable the various unions to organize more efficiently."<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps the best assessment of the movement at the time was that made by John Carter of the Painters Union. In a letter written to the *Leader* in July, Carter acknowledged "it is true that we have not many signal victories to record," but, continued Carter, the main result of the movement was "not so much in the direct success that has attended our efforts as from the steady and lasting impressions that have been made upon the minds of the classes." Specifically, Carter was pointing to the fact that "The working class all through the struggle, have gained for themselves, through their leaders, a systematic, yet pure and simple education into the principles of unionism."<sup>122</sup> Carter, who would be the first president of the Canadian Labor Union formed in the following year, was pointing to the development, not of a class consciousness, but to a growth among the working class of a trade union consciousness. To some extent this was manifested in the organizational activity apparent during the nine-hour struggle; carpenters in Belleville, mechanics in Kingston, machinists in Oshawa, carpenters and printers in Ottawa, bricklayers, masons, tinsmiths, lathers, harness makers, and painters in Toronto, and tinsmiths, boiler makers and harness makers in Hamilton all organized, or sometimes reorganized, themselves into trade unions.<sup>123</sup> In Hamilton, the Nine Hour League ably demonstrated the value of a strong central organization and, on its demise, this appears to have encouraged a revival of the Hamilton Trades Assembly, which was certainly active during July;<sup>124</sup> a coalition of trade unions in Ottawa,

<sup>120</sup> 20 June 1872.

<sup>121</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 21 June 1873.

<sup>122</sup> Toronto *Daily Leader*, 19 July 1872.

<sup>123</sup> For example see: Belleville *Daily Intelligencer*, 28 March 1872, Kingston *Daily News*, 23 April 1872, Oshawa *Reformer*, 1 March 1872, Ottawa *Times*, 5 March 1872, Ottawa *Citizen*, 15, 21, 22 March 1872, Toronto *Globe*, 6, 13 February, 6 April 1872, Toronto *Daily Leader*, 27 March, 23, 29 April, 8, 30 May, 6 June 1872, Hamilton *Spectator*, 22, 28, 29 February, 6 March 1872, Ontario *Workman*, 30 May 1872.

<sup>124</sup> Hamilton *Spectator*, 15 July 1872.

brought together to provide financial aid to the Toronto printers during their strike, led to the formation of a Trades Assembly in the capital city.<sup>125</sup>

The *Ontario Workman*, itself a child of the nine-hour movement, continued to trumpet the value of trade unionism throughout the summer months. Editorial writers underlined "the urgent necessity of associating together for mutual protection and support;"<sup>126</sup> they pointed to the fact that "the causes that have acted so detrimentally to the interests of the workingmen of this country could be traced to the want of proper organization among the operative classes;"<sup>127</sup> finally, in an editorial entitled "The Lesson Workingmen Must Learn," they provided an examination of recent agitation which was both a criticism of the past and a guide to the future:

The lesson of all lessons inculcated is the absolute need of thorough organization. . . . We cannot imagine a more suicidal policy than for an unorganized body to encourage or embark on a *strike*. Their failure is simply a question of time. . . . Without a dollar in their treasury, with the press arrayed against their interests, always ready and willing to misrepresent their designs and mislead public opinion, with dissensions often in their own ranks, and withal living from hand to mouth, without even acquainting their fellow craftsmen through the country of their intentions, is it any wonder that they invariably fall an easy prey to the machinations of Capital!<sup>128</sup>

Nor were the problems of political organization neglected. The more advanced working-class leaders were aware, early in the movement, of the need for political organization. Hewitt's failure to move the Trades Assembly to action in March only spurred him to greater effort and he was the prime mover behind the creation of the Canadian Labor Protective and Mutual Improvement Association, formed in Hamilton on 3 May.<sup>129</sup> By coincidence or design, workingmen met in London on the same evening and formed the *Workingman's Progressive Political Party* to pursue a six-point programme<sup>130</sup> that probably confirmed Prime Minister Macdonald in his suspicion regarding the "Chartist proclivities"<sup>131</sup> of Canadian workingmen. Finally, in Montreal, workmen met to transform their nine-hour league into a branch of the Canadian Labor Protective and Mutual Improvement Association, with the objects of

<sup>125</sup> This same coalition was involved in a presentation to Prime Minister Macdonald during the federal election. *Ontario Workman*, 5 September 1872.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1872.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 July 1872.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1872.

<sup>129</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 4 May 1872. Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 3 May 1872.

<sup>130</sup> *London Daily Advertiser*, 4, 11 May 1872, *Ontario Workman*, 16, 23 May 1872. The six points were: 1. Household Suffrage; 2. An Income Franchise of \$300; 3. Vote by Ballot; 4. No Property Qualification for Members; 5. An Elective Senate, Elected by the People; 6. A Liberal Land Policy.

<sup>131</sup> Macdonald used the expression in referring to miners at Bruce Mines. "They are Englishmen, newcomers to the Country and of rather Chartist proclivities." Sir John A. Macdonald to Bishop Walsh, 2 July 1872, Macdonald Papers.

"the mutual, social, and political education of workingmen" and "the improvement of their condition."<sup>132</sup>

The treacherous arena of party politics, however, was not one to be ventured into lightly by politically inexperienced workingmen. "Too long had the workingmen been the tools of capital," Hewitt had said to the Hamilton meeting in pointing to the need for an Association; "All the influence that had been brought to bear on their education had flown from sources under control of capitalists, so that the masses were unable to trace effects, back to causes."<sup>133</sup> It was an understatement of the case, for within months Hewitt and the Toronto Trades Assembly would find themselves involved in a presentation to Lady Macdonald and firmly in the pocket of the Tory party. Hewitt would plead the case for the Assembly in declaring that "if these men are going to make political engines of the working men, we in turn could use them to gain our ends."<sup>134</sup> Yet such a statement underestimated the practised paternalism of the Tories, in proffering the Trade Union bill as a timely change which, in the end, served only to preserve the established state of things.

That class consciousness was inhibited rather than advanced during the movement is illustrated by events in Toronto during the printers' strike. "A rampant Tory orator,"<sup>135</sup> E.K. Dodds, accompanied by prominent Tory politicians such as A.W. Lauder, MPP, and James Beaty, MP, for East Toronto, claimed pride of place on workingmen's platforms at demonstrations held in April and May. This occupation would continue until after the Federal election had been held during the summer months. The involvement of these politicians meant that the ire of workingmen would be directed, not against the actions of a class, but against the "irresponsible" actions of a Grit "renegade reformer;" working-class discontent was personalized and diverted towards the figure of Brown, an easy target; it was canalized, not along lines of class, but into the legitimate arena of bourgeois party politics. Politically, the nine-hour movement served, not to confirm class consciousness, but to sow the seeds of its deformation.

A further restraint on the development of class consciousness was immigrant ambition, though it seems to have furthered the growth of trade unions. This notion was broached by Friedrich Sorge who, in writing from New York

<sup>132</sup> *Montreal Evening Star*, 8, 26 August 1872.

<sup>133</sup> *Toronto Daily Leader*, 4 May 1872.

<sup>134</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 5 July 1872. For an account of the presentation to Lady Macdonald see D.G. Creighton, "George Brown, Sir John A. Macdonald and the Workingman."

<sup>135</sup> Dodds was so described in the *Lindsay Post*, quoted in the *Toronto Telegraph*, 24 April 1872. Macdonald certainly appreciated Dodds' qualities. In a letter to a supporter he remarked: "Mr. Dodds of Toronto is one of the best stump speakers in Canada and I have retained his services to help our friends until the elections are over. . . . You must pay him well and I will settle with you hereafter." Sir John A. Macdonald to A.P. Macdonald, Glencoe, (Private), 12 July 1872, Macdonald Papers.

to the Conference of the International Workingmen's Association held in London during fall 1871, mourned the fact that North American workingmen were "quite unconscious of their own position towards capital and slow to show battle against their oppressors."<sup>136</sup> Sorge believed this to be so because:

The great majority of workingmen in the Northern States are Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, England, etc. . . . having left their native countries for the purpose of seeking here that wealth they could not obtain at home. This delusion transforms itself into a sort of creed, and employers & capitalists . . . having gained their wealth in a former period, take great care in preserving this self-deception among their employees, and so the German, the Irish & every other labourer works on in the belief of finally arriving at the desired goal, until time and experience show its utter vanity, the Capitalists themselves rendering its realization more & more impossible. This visionary idea has been the cornerstone in founding the Trades-Unions — in this country at least — whilst now it is the stumbling block over which they fall & perish. . . .<sup>137</sup>

This statement by Sorge would also fit the Canadian experience. Trade unions were seen primarily as vehicles through which members might improve their material condition, and perhaps incidentally their social class position, but were not seen as agents for changing the social basis of North American society. Trade unionism was based on the concept of class-for-itself unionism rather than class-in-itself unionism.

The failure to confirm its own independent political structure; the ease with which fledgling working-class leaders were induced into a collaborative alignment with middle-class leadership and into the realm of established bourgeois politics; the careless indulgence with which political and pecuniary palliatives were accepted during the nine-hour agitation, argues against anything but an inchoate sense of class consciousness among Canadian workers during the early 1870s.<sup>138</sup> There certainly was developing a class identity; while working-class spokesmen, such as Hewitt, displayed an obvious sense of awareness in regards to the conflicting interests of capital and labour, but we cannot impute consciousness to Canadian workers as a class based on the apparent consciousness of some few of its leaders. Yet to talk of the making of the working class is not to imply that it is ever finally made. It is continually changing its occupational composition, its internal and external relations, and with these its conception of itself; its present and its future; and its class consciousness. Nor is class consciousness necessarily ever complete.

Finally, yet another external influence needs to be considered. During the course of the struggle for the nine-hour working day in Canada through the first six months of 1872, workers prominent in the movement were quickly labelled

<sup>136</sup> Papers of the North American Central Committee. Memorandum of the North American Federation to the Conference of the IWA in London in 1871, International Workingmen's Association Papers, State Historical Association of Wisconsin.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> See S. Langdon, *The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement*, (Toronto 1975), esp. 14-15.

"revolutionist demagogues" and were variously accused of preaching "the doctrine of Chartism" and of favouring "the principles of the French Communists,"<sup>139</sup> while one employer-sponsored publication, in referring to the nine-hour movement, went so far as to make the sardonic claim:

Its sire was a Communist missionar-ee,  
An immigrant, late from the Old Count-ree,  
Sent out by the great International band  
To enlighten the darkness of this savage land.<sup>140</sup>

Memories of the Paris Commune were still vivid in some minds as was evident in the sermon one priest hurled from the pulpit in Quebec City. Condemning labour agitation as revolutionary and criminal he admonished his flock: "Pour une minute, promenons notre regard sur l'Europe: regardons la France, Paris incendié. Quelle main sauvage a promené la torche sur ses monuments, chefs-d'oeuvre de la pensée humaine. Qui a créé la commune, la hideuse commune? La coalition du travail."<sup>141</sup> While the links between the Canadian nine-hour movement and the International Working Men's Association may have been more apparent than real,<sup>142</sup> Canadian workingmen, in pressing their particular cause, did so around a number of the key elements of the International's declared policy. Further, following the Conference of Delegates of the IWMA in September 1871, there was an exchange of correspondence between the secretary of the International and John Hewitt, corresponding secretary of the Toronto Trades Assembly.<sup>143</sup> Hewitt, in the first months of 1872, was the prime mover in an attempt to bring about the political organization of the Canadian working class. In doing so he followed, wittingly or unwittingly, the intent of a resolution passed at the September Congress of the International which urged the formation of the working class "into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes."<sup>144</sup>

Despite its failures the nine-hour agitation served to establish a labour movement of a quite different nature from that observed previously. During the course of the movement local unions developed contacts with fellow unions in other parts of the country; union activity increased, even in centres not touched directly by the nine-hour movement; most importantly, labour leaders obtained experience in the arts of struggle — negotiation with employers, explanation to

<sup>139</sup> *Hamilton Spectator*, 23 February 1872.

<sup>140</sup> The verse appeared in the *Lightning Express*, a burlesque pretense of being the first issue of a new morning paper, and was copied in the *Hamilton Spectator*, 8 June 1872. A following verse left little doubt that the "Communist missionar-ee" was James Ryan.

<sup>141</sup> *Le Courrier du Canada* (Quebec City), 28 May 1872.

<sup>142</sup> Though the link was made in an editorial "The International," *Montreal Gazette*, 21 March 1872. See another editorial comment in this regard in *Ontario Observer*, 28 March 1872.

<sup>143</sup> Toronto Trades Assembly, *Minutes of Proceeding*, 1 December 1871.

<sup>144</sup> *Resolutions of the Conference of Delegates of the IWMA*, 17-23 September 1871, London.



an often hostile press, and motivation of those who looked to them for leadership. The movement also provided, in the first labour newspaper written by and for Canadian workingmen, a vehicle through which working-class aspirations could be expressed without depending upon the doubtful and selective favours of the commercial press. From out of the Association formed by Hewitt and others in Hamilton grew the Canadian Labor Union, the parent, or perhaps the grandparent, of the present Canadian Labour Congress. Although the effort to obtain the nine-hour working day failed, the fraternal experience of struggle, the creation of organizational linkages, the confirmation of class cleavage, and the articulation of working class aspirations, ensured that the essential nature of Canadian labour was radically changed after the event from what it was before.

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