Labour/Le Travailleur

W.C. Van Horne and the "Foreign Emissaries:" The CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892

Hugh Tuck

Volume 6, 1980

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt6art03

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)
1911-4842 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Tuck, H. (1980). W.C. Van Horne and the "Foreign Emissaries:" The CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *6*, 73–87.

W.C. Van Horne and the "Foreign Emissaries;"
The CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892

Hugh Tuck

ON 16 MARCH 1892, the trainmen and conductors on the Canadian Pacific Railway's prairie section went on strike against the union-busting activities of the company. They were back to work just a week later, on 23 March. They had won a complete and unprecedented victory over Canada's largest and most powerful corporation and its dynamic president, William C. Van Horne, gaining union recognition and the first signed union contract on the CPR. This singular event has not received the attention it deserves for, in addition to the breakthrough in collective bargaining on the CPR, the strike confronted issues of a more general significance: could a Canadian corporation refuse to negotiate with union officials simply because they were "outsiders," and not company employees, or if they were "foreigners" from the United States, representing American-based "international" unions? In the 1892 strike, the answer to this question was in favour of the outsiders and foreigners. This was true not only for the CPR, but also for another Canadian railway which had become indirectly involved in the strike, the Grand Trunk. The strike, in other words, represented a major step towards placing international unions in the strong position which they were later to occupy in the Canadian railway industry.

The unions involved in the 1892 strike were the Order of Railway Conductors (ORC) and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT). Both had been founded in the United States and had their headquarters in that country. Their members filled a variety of positions connected with the actual operation of railway trains — conductors, brakemen, baggagemen, switchmen, and others in the line and yard service. Their jobs were often dangerous, and their unions reflected these circumstances, placing as much emphasis upon beneficial features such as insurance as upon labour-management problems. Through much of the 1880s, indeed, both unions forbade their members to strike, but grew rapidly at an average rate of over ten per cent per year, in spite of this.[1]

[1] This is discussed in more detail in Joseph Hugh Tuck, "Canadian Railways and the International Brotherhoods; Labour Organization in the Railway Running Trades in Canada, 1865-1914," Ph.D thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1975, Ch. 4.

Hugh Tuck, "W.C. Van Horne and the 'Foreign Emissaries;' The CPR Trainmen's and Conductors' Strike of 1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (Autumn 1980), 73-87.

Group of CPR employees, c. 1911. Public Archives of Canada PA 42814.

This expansion included Canada. The ORC entered the Dominion in 1880, and the BRT in 1885, and by the end of the decade, both unions had local branches from coast to coast on all three of the country's major railway systems, the Grand Trunk, the Canadian Pacific, and the Intercolonial. Although Canadians never made up more than seven per cent of the two brotherhoods' total membership, they proudly styled themselves as international organizations, and Canadian members enjoyed a certain prestige, if not influence, as living symbols of international status.[2] On their part, Canadian conductors and trainmen gradually developed a sense of loyalty to the brotherhoods which, as subsequent events were to prove, was stronger than any feelings of obligation they might have had for the companies which employed them, including the Canadian Pacific.[3]

The managers of the CPR in the 1880s, like most senior railway executives in North America at this time,[4] expected employees to give their first loyalty to the company. Employees might belong to any associations they wished, and

[2] *Ibid.*, 82, 94; *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, December 1891, 879.
[3] On this point, see Donald L. McMurry, *The Great Burlington Strike of 1888: A Case History in Labor Relations* (New York 1973), 28; Toronto *Globe*, 21 March 1892.
[4] *Ibid.*, 23-25, 28.

petition as individuals or in groups for the adjustment of grievances or increases in wages. But labour unions could expect no formal recognition as bargaining agents for CPR employees. Van Horne enunciated this policy most clearly in early 1892. He told a divisional superintendent,

> It has been one of our cardinal principles from the beginning never under any circumstances to enter into [signed] agreements . . . and although rates have been discussed with the men they have always been posted as our rates and have never taken the form of an agreement nor borne any signature but that of the General Superintendent.[5]

Van Horne did not go on to explain the rationale behind this policy. Perhaps he did not feel he had to. During the 1892 crisis, however, he suggested to another correspondent that unions should be resisted if they wanted the company's "rules and regulations suited to *their* wishes. . . ."[6] Union contracts, in other words, were undesirable because they encroached upon the prerogative of company executives to run the company exactly as they pleased. It was a question of refusing to give a measure of control over the company's operations to an organization whose primary concern was with something other than the company's profits.

The two brotherhoods did not challenge this policy during the 1880s. As the decade drew to a close, however, their general membership, both in Canada and the United States, became increasingly dissatisfied with the stress upon mutual benefits, and the corresponding lack of attention being paid to wages and working conditions. Declining wages during and subsequent to the depression of the mid-1880s were partly responsible for this dissatisfaction, but so too was the influence of the Knights of Labor, whose local and district assemblies of railway workers in the United States did not hesitate to strike for the rights of their members.[7] By 1890, the brotherhoods had become protective organizations which permitted their members to strike. By 1890, as well, conductors and trainmen had begun to co-operate by forming joint negotiating committees on a number of North American railway systems, in order to strengthen their bargaining position.[8] It was this new aggressiveness which led almost inevitably to the clash with the CPR in 1892.

The conductors and trainmen approached the CPR management jointly for the first time in 1890. There was nothing especially radical about their demands, which dealt almost exclusively with questions of wages and work rules, and there is little evidence that they were looking for union recognition at this time. Neither did they make any attempt to press for system-wide bargaining, even though this procedure had become common enough on American

[5] Public Archives of Canada, W.C. Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 39, 537, Van Horne to William Whyte, 4 January 1892.
[6] *Ibid.*, 146, Van Horne to Collingwood Schreiber, 15 March 1892. Emphasis added.
[7] Shelton Stromquist, "The Knights of Labor and Organized Railroad Men," paper presented to the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, Chicago, 1979, 5.
[8] Walter F. McCaleb, *History of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen* (New York 1936), 53-54; Edwin Clyde Robbins, *Railway Conductors; A Study in Organized Labor* (New York 1914), iii.

railroads.[9] Instead, the two unions accommodated themselves to the company policy which made divisional (i.e. regional) superintendents responsible for the staffing of divisions, and presented their requests to the various divisional superintendents through divisional committees of adjustment.[10] These requests, however, were expressed very firmly, and even aggressively, and this soon led to difficulties, especially in the CPR's two largest operating divisions, the eastern and the western.[11]

Of the CPR's five operating divisions, the western was the most important, stretching as it did from the lakehead to the Rockies, and taking in the key prairie section. It was managed by William Whyte, the most able — and the most stubborn — of the company's divisional superintendents. The conductors' and trainmen's committee presented Whyte with a number of demands, chief among which was a request for the elimination of a bonus system which had been instituted in the early 1880s, and the absorption of the bonuses into the general pay scales. CPR employees disliked the bonuses because they could be raised or lowered by local officials to suit current economic conditions, while the CPR management liked them for precisely this reason. A temporary agreement was patched up between Whyte and the committee only because Whyte made some concessions in other areas.[12]

A somewhat more satisfactory agreement was reached on the eastern division, the mainline section between the lakehead and Montreal, a few months later. This success, however, was accompanied by an unfortunate misunderstanding. When the initial negotiations had stalled, the union committee called in S.E. Wilkinson, the chief of the trainmen's organization. Van Horne, however, flatly refused to talk to Wilkinson, since he was an outsider and not a company employee.[13] At the same time, the CPR president made the committee a somewhat better offer, which they accepted. On their part, the brotherhoods concluded from this that Wilkinson's presence had forced Van Horne to back down.[14] Van Horne, however, concluded that his firmness in refusing to meet

[9] Stromquist, "Knights," 4-5.

[10] This administrative structure, pioneered by the Pennsylvania Railroad, was widely used in North America. See Alfred D. Chandler, *The Invisible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass. 1977), 176-181. Although not conceived for this purpose, it could have the effect of localizing labour disputes. The 1892 CPR strike was an example of its failure to do so, however, as was a subsequent strike of the CPR's telegraphers in 1896, which was in fact caused by the insistence of Vice President Shaughnessy that the telegraphers deal with their local superintendents and not Montreal headquarters. See Tuck, "Canadian Railways," 171-172.

[11] Order of Railway Conductors, *Proceedings*, 1891, 17.

[12] PAC, T.G. Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 23, 236-237, Shaughnessy to Whyte, 8 August 1890; *Ibid.*, 450-453, Shaughnessy to Whyte, 26 August 1890; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1892; ORC, *Proceedings*, 1891, 20.

[13] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 36, 660, 666, Van Horne to S.E. Wilkinson and C.H. Wilkins, 2 February 1891, 3 February 1891.

[14] ORC, *Proceedings*, 1891, 17.

Wilkinson had frightened the committee into renouncing their leaders and accepting the schedule, and that the influence of the brotherhoods among CPR employees had been seriously undermined as a result.[15] Both sides, of course, were wrong, but Van Horne's conclusion that the two unions were a pushover was to have the more serious consequences.

Late in 1891, the brotherhoods decided to re-open the negotiations on the western division. At the same time, they approached the superintendents of the CPR's Atlantic and Pacific divisions, and began to make preparations for meetings with the Grand Trunk management. Things soon reached the flash point on the western division. The union committee asked for an interview with superintendent Whyte in early February 1892. The men wanted an immediate answer to certain questions, especially the bonus question, and they refused to return to work when Whyte asked for time to consider matters. Whyte thereupon had each of them presented with notices from their immediate supervisors to return to work at once, or be fired. The committee wired union headquarters in the United States for help. When Whyte was confronted by union chiefs, Wilkinson of the trainmen and E.E. Clark of the conductors, he backed off. He politely explained to the two men that he would be in Montreal shortly on business and would take up the matter with Van Horne. The committee would be recalled on his return. He tried to convince Clark and Wilkinson, moreover, that there had been a misunderstanding about the notices served to the committee members. They had merely been asked to report for duty because of a manpower shortage, he declared. The union chiefs had heard of this kind of thing before, but accepted Whyte's explanation without comment. They advised the committee to wait until Whyte returned from Montreal but, at the same time, ordered a strike vote on the western division "in case such tactics were again resorted to by the company." The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of a strike if necessary.[16]

The talks resumed in early March. To the committee's dismay, however, the schedule which Whyte had brought back from Montreal involved actual reductions of wages in some job categories. The committee wired American headquarters again, and Whyte (who seems to have understood the seriousness of the situation better than Van Horne) immediately made a new and better offer. This offer was accepted by the committee, and only required approval from the Montreal headquarters of the company.[17]

But company headquarters rejected the agreement. Instead, President Van Horne instructed Whyte to present the original Montreal offer to the committee

[15] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 145, Van Horne to L.J. Seargeant, 15 March 1892, Private; PAC, Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 29, 4, Shaughnessy to Whyte, 30 September 1891.

[16] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, April 1892, 239-240, May 1892, 316; *Railway Conductor*, April 1892, 151; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 March 1892.

[17] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, April 1892, 240, May 1892, 317; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report," 10.

again. Whyte was to demand that the committee members accept this offer as it stood, and was to insist, moreover, that they give an affirmative answer to the question. "In case a strike is ordered, will you withdraw from your organization and prove loyal to the company?" All other western division conductors and trainmen were to be asked the same question. Anyone who refused to pledge his loyalty was to be "at once dismissed and paid off."[18]

Van Horne had decided to force the issue. He had become convinced, he wrote General Manager Seargeant of the Grand Trunk (who was having problems of his own with a brotherhood committee), that the two international brotherhoods were engaged in a conspiracy to impose their will upon the railways of Canada in a piecemeal fashion, beginning with the CPR's western division. The answer was to strike "the first blow" to disarrange these plans. There was little to fear from a strike:

> In our difficulty with our trainmen in the east a year ago we would not permit their leaders to enter our offices. Their dignity was in consequence much hurt. They denounced our men as poltroons because their presence was not made a condition to further discussion and the bad blood which followed resulted in a good many withdrawals among our men from the organizations.

It was not likely, therefore, that many men would refuse to pledge their loyalty to the company. In any case, it was always "the best policy" to have nothing to do with "the worthies from somewhere in Illinois or Indiana who figure as grand chiefs."[19]

Van Horne was aware that pressure from fellow workers might induce some conductors and trainmen to go back on their pledges to the company. There was already some evidence of this. But a "difficulty" with these men, he told Seargeant, "is not nearly so embarrassing as with the engine drivers. There are always a great many men who have had train experience who can be had in such an emergency."[20] He was also aware that labour disputes could get out of hand and become very violent affairs. His career as a railway executive had spanned the years which had seen the 1877 railway wars, the 1886 Gould Southwest strikes, and the 1888 Burlington strike. Van Horne had himself broken an engineers' strike on the CPR in 1883, an event described by the *Manitoba Free Press* as second only to the Northwest rebellion of 1885 in the "consternation" it caused in Winnipeg.[21] Such conflicts could cost railway companies millions of dollars in damages and destroyed equipment and property. But the CPR chief derived comfort from the fact that strikers in Canada

[18] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1892, 317; *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 March 1892.

[19] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 143-145, Van Horne to Seargeant, 15 March 1892, Private; also *Ibid.*, 146-147, Van Horne to Collingwood Schreiber, 15 March 1892, Confidential.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Manitoba Free Press*, 19 March 1892.

would find it relatively difficult to employ violence or sabotage "in a country where the laws are so effective in preventing disorder."[22]

Van Horne, then, expected some trouble, but did not think it would amount to very much. The dispute would quite easily be brought to a safe and speedy conclusion by drawing upon the existing pool of unemployed railway workers, by preventing the strike from spreading to other classes of CPR employees, especially the hard to replace engineers, and by taking adequate measures to protect company property from violence.

William Whyte followed his orders from Montreal to the letter, although he must have had some misgivings about Van Horne's armchair analysis of the situation. He met the union committee on 13 March, and accused its members of not negotiating in good faith. They were part of a "conspiracy" to force a strike, he declared. He then interrogated the men one at a time, asking them if they would support the company in case of a strike. Several men gave unsatisfactory answers and were fired immediately. Out along the line, company supervisors began their own interrogations. By 16 March, some 100 men had been fired for "disloyalty."[23] Grand Chief Wilkinson of the trainmen, and Second Grand Conductor A.B. Garretson (who was near the beginning of what was to be a highly successful career as a labour leader) rushed to Winnipeg. When Whyte refused to talk to them, on orders from Montreal, they prepared to implement the strike vote taken in February. After a final ultimatum, the two brotherhoods struck the CPR's western division on 16 March at midnight. Contrary to Van Horne's expectations, almost the entire membership of the two unions on the division went out, plus a number of non-union CPR switchmen who struck in sympathy. In all, this amounted to several hundred men.[24] Strike votes were ordered on the other four CPR divisions.[25] Garretson was scathing in his criticism of the CPR management, which might have secured a settlement on the terms negotiated by Whyte. As for Whyte himself, Garretson declared,

[22] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 144, Van Horne to Seargeant, 15 March 1892, Private.

[23] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1892, 317; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15, 17 March 1892.

[24] According to the *Winnipeg Tribune* of 15 March 1892, there were between 400 and 500 conductors and trainmen on the western division. This total may be on the high side. *Henderson's Directory* for 1890 listed only 231 such men on the division. Perhaps the *Tribune* mistakenly included the engineers and firemen, listed by *Henderson's* at 171. But *Henderson's* total does seem low in comparison with its tally of 2100 western division employees of all classes. This is a ratio of one in ten. The ratio of conductors and trainmen on other nineteenth-century railways in North America was usually nearer one in five. In either case, Van Horne was faced with the task of replacing a substantial body of trained men, all at once. *Henderson's Manitoba, Northwest Territories and British Columbia Directory for 1890* (Winnipeg 1890), pp. 607-629. Walter M. Licht, "Nineteenth Century American Railwaymen: A Study in the Nature and Organization of Work," Ph.D. thesis, Princeton, 1977, 40.

[25] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1892, 318; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 March 1892.

There is an apology to be offered for him in his position and [sic] that he only takes the part of Punch and Judy in the show — the string is pulled, the figures move. "The skin is the skin of Esau, but the voice is the voice of Jacob." Mr. Whyte, no doubt, draws a good salary, but he certainly should take a good one, indeed, to console him for the untenable position he now occupies.[26]

Van Horne's precipitate action had thus transformed the dispute from a squabble over wages and rules, which might easily have been settled by compromise, into an all-or-nothing struggle over the right of the two brotherhoods to organize and represent CPR employees. Van Horne, indeed, was prepared to be especially uncompromising. Strikers would not be re-hired, he declared, and he was echoed by other company officials. This, of course, meant that the strikers could not desert their unions and trickle back to work. If they wanted their jobs back, the strike would have to be won, and their unions recognized.[27]

As the *Winnipeg Tribune* pointed out, the adamant refusal of the company to discuss matters with the officers of the two unions threatened a protracted tie-up of rail service, since only these men had the authority to send the strikers back to work.[28] This was not an easy policy to justify to the railway-using public, and company officials realized this. They fell back on an emotional appeal to patriotism and anti-Americanism. On 18 March, superintendent Whyte declared to the press that it was "a matter of regret that any of the employees and the American representatives should have brought about the strike at a time when it is likely to be productive of injury to the country." Vice President Shaughnessy was more succinct the next day: "I believe the men were unwilling as a body to strike and they were forced into it by orders of the labor agitators in the States." Other CPR spokesmen placed the blame for the strike squarely on the influence of "outsiders" and "foreign emissaries."[29] This approach, of course, had a certain correspondence with the public mood, and had been used with some success by the Conservative Party in the previous year's federal election. But it had definite weaknesses as well, partly because of the long and unpopular struggle of the CPR to maintain its monopoly position in the West against competing American lines, and partly because both Van Horne and Shaughnessy were Americans themselves. Shaughnessy was especially vulnerable to the charge of insincerity, since he swore his final oath of naturalization as a British subject on 18 March, just two days after the outbreak of the strike. He protested, probably in vain, that this was purely a coincidence.[30] The company's propaganda, however, had one important result. It had the effect of broadening the struggle from a strike for union recognition into a direct confrontation between the CPR and international unionism. Garretson

[26] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1892.
[27] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 144, Van Horne to Seargeant, 15 March 1892; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 March 1892.
[28] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 16 March 1892.
[29] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15, 19 March 1892; *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 March 1892.
[30] Toronto *Globe*, 24 March 1892.

and Wilkinson were quick to sense this, and were soon referring to themselves, with heavy irony, as "foreign ambassadors," and "foreign emissaries."[31]

Of more immediate concern to the CPR was the possibility that the strike might spread to other classes of company employees. Rumours began to circulate shortly after the strike's beginning that the firemen and engineers would go out in sympathy, as some switchmen had in fact done. The firemen, in fact, received instructions from the American headquarters of their union to give all possible assistance to the conductors and trainmen, even to striking if necessary, "since there is a principle involved that interests all organizations."[32] The engineers, however, were another matter. These men were more concerned about the wages they were losing because of the tie-up. Their committee complained about this to Whyte, who recognized an opportunity. He offered to compensate the company's engineers, and the firemen as well, for their lost wages by paying them what they would have received had there been no strike. The offer was accepted and, while Van Horne continued to worry about an engineers' walk-out up to the end, it was clear that Whyte had effectively neutralized these men.[33]

This was the only real success which the company enjoyed during the strike, as plans began to go awry almost from the beginning. The company's first concern, of course, was to find enough replacements to run the trains. Unfortunately, Van Horne's snap decision had meant that there was no advance planning in this area. Moreover, there proved to be insufficient trained, or even half-trained, men in the Canadian west or the thinly populated American states south of the border. Men would have to be brought the hundreds of miles from the east. Company officials initiated a recruiting drive that reached as far as the Maritime Provinces. Especially valued were French-speaking Quebecers, since they presumably would be immune to the persuasive efforts of the strikers.[34] But the manpower problem remained more difficult to solve than Van Horne had expected. The unions' success in getting their members to go out meant that too many men had to be replaced in too short a time. Many recruits never even reached their destination, but were lured away by strike sympathizers at intermediate points like Rat Portage. Others had merely signed on to get free passage west, and some went to union headquarters as soon as they reached Winnipeg and offered to sell out for cash. Most such offers were scornfully refused by the strike leaders. Said Clark, "Sweet scented specimens they were. There wasn't a trainman or one who knew the slightest thing about a train in the

[31] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 17 March 1892; *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 March 1892.
[32] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1892; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, *Proceedings*, 1892, 77.
[33] PAC, Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 30, 489-491, Whyte to Van Horne, 21 March 1892; PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 200, Van Horne to J.W. Sterling, 22 March 1892, Confidential.
[34] *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, June 1892, 453; *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 March 1892.

whole lot. I told their spokesman that I wouldn't give him fifty cents apiece for them."[35] The company managed to keep some trains running, using company officials, local men, and the trickle of strike breakers from the east. But Van Horne's expectation of a quick end to the strike clearly could not be met in this fashion.[36]

The company's efforts to forestall violence were equally strenuous, and even more futile, although for a different reason. In every major centre serviced by the CPR, including cities which were never touched by the strike, the company had loyal employees and men especially hired for the occasion sworn in as auxiliary police. Almost everywhere, local police magistrates and other government officials were highly co-operative, an indication of just how widespread the fear of industrial violence had become within the middle and upper classes of late Victorian Canada.[37] In Winnipeg, on 17 March, for example, a magistrate made a special call to the company shops to swear in constables. In Toronto, a few days later, magistrate and pillar of the establishment George T. Denison inducted 50 men at once, each equipped with a revolver or other firearm, and "several hundred rounds of ball cartridges, batons, handcuffs and other accessories." These men were to accompany four trains headed west loaded with settlers and their belongings. Between 100 and 150 special police were sworn in on 22 March in Montreal, and sent west immediately. In addition, the mayor of the city agreed to a request from Vice President Shaughnessy to send 30 regular Montreal policemen plus some officers to the strike zone, each armed with a revolver and baton. The mayor said he could see "no reason why the request should not be complied with." To top off its Montreal forces, the CPR hired 45 men from a detective agency, who were described by a reporter as "a hardy lot of men, having been selected for their fighting qualities more than for good looks." The contingent from Montreal was supplemented in Ottawa by 100 more men who had been guaranteed "special pay if engaged in hostilities." This group was led by an ex-detective and an inspector of the Dominion Police. The North West Mounted Police was called upon to protect CPR property in the North-West, although the Mounties sometimes proved reluctant to place themselves directly under the orders of local CPR officials. Finally, on 23 March, responding to reports of a disturbance at Rat Portage, the commander of the Canadian militia authorized the despatch of troops from the western military district as far east as Port Arthur.[38]

[35] *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 March 1892; also *Winnipeg Tribune*, 23 March 1892.
[36] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15, 18 March 1892.
[37] On this point, see Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of the Social Order, 1867-1914," *Canadian Historical Review*, 51 (1970), 415, 421.
[38] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18, 23 March 1892; Toronto *Globe*, 23 March 1892; Montreal *Gazette*, 23 March 1892; Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 23 March 1892; *Calgary Daily Herald*, 22, 23 March 1892; PAC, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Records, RG 18, B1, vol. 1254, file 293-1892, E.J. Good, Inspector, to the Officer Commanding "A" Division, N.W.M. Police, 25 March 1892.

It is likely that this impressive display of police power outnumbered the strikers on the western division. Yet it was almost entirely a wasted effort. Violence was not part of the strategy of the unions. Experience had shown their leaders that no union was a match for the forces of law and order in a direct confrontation.[39] They made every effort to avoid civil disorder, and were largely successful. The affair at Rat Portage, for example, turned out on investigation to involve nothing more than snowballs thrown by children at a strike-breaker, and the loud reports of signal torpedoes which were interpreted as gunfire by inexperienced yard workers.[40]

But while the strike itself was comparatively uneventful, its impact upon the economy of the prairies was almost immediate. It was the off-season for the shipment of grain, but grain-dealers began to complain about the interruption of their business on 17 March, the day of the outbreak of the strike, as the company devoted its slender manpower reserves to keeping passenger trains running. The company stopped loading grain altogether on 18 March, and 75 carloads of freight were held up at Portage La Prairie, waiting for shipment.[41] Superintendent Whyte remained publicly confident, declaring that "the strike has not yet disturbed my sleep, nor destroyed my appetite." He added that not much grain was being shipped this time of year, so farmers should not "suffer materially." The strikers, said Shaughnessy the next day, had chosen a poor time to strike, when the railway's business was normally slack.[42] By 21 March, however, business in Winnipeg was reported to be "paralysed" by the strike. Freight was not moving well, and wholesale warehouses were clogged with delayed shipments for outside points. Agricultural implement dealers were particularly hard hit, and warned on the 22nd that if the strike "lasts a week longer the acreage put under crop in Manitoba and the North-West this season will be considerably less than it otherwise would have been, as the farmers require seeding machinery and cannot get it."[43] The wheat crop, of course, was vital to the CPR, but, in addition, by 22 March, it was also becoming apparent that the company was losing valuable freight business to rival railroads, especially the Grand Trunk and the Northern Pacific, which were taking advantage of the CPR's difficulties to lure away CPR customers.[44] Once lost, such business might be difficult to recover. Vice President Shaughnessy still talked confidently about winning, but there is no evidence that his optimism was no longer shared either by his subordinates or by President Van Horne.[45]

Indeed, the roof was beginning to fall in. On 15 March, during his initial

[39] *Railway Conductor*, April 1892, 153.
[40] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 22 March 1892.
[41] *Ibid.*, 17, 18 March 1892.
[42] *Ibid.*, 18, 19 March 1892.
[43] *Ibid.*, 21, 22 March 1892; *Calgary Daily Herald*, 23 March 1892.
[44] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 22 March 1892.
[45] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 200, Van Horne to J.W. Sterling, 22 March 1892, Confidential; Toronto *Globe*, 22 March 1892.

period of confidence, Van Horne had decided to order loyalty pledges on the Pacific and Eastern Divisions as well.[46] The brotherhoods organized a successful strike vote on the Pacific division and pulled their men off the job on the 20th.[47] This doubled the number of men who would have to be replaced by strike-breakers. Then, on 21 March, any hopes that Van Horne might have had that the Grand Trunk would stand firm in a common front against the brotherhoods were dashed. Negotiations between the Grand Trunk and the brotherhoods had gone badly, and brotherhood officials called a strike vote. At this, company officials panicked, and offered better terms. These were accepted by the unions. Ironically, the final results of the strike vote a few days later showed the men against going out. But this happened too late to help the CPR; the Grand Trunk was out of the picture.[48] Finally, on 22 March, the brotherhoods completed a successful strike vote on the CPR's Eastern Division, and tied up another 752 miles of track before the sun was up. The men on this division had no outstanding grievances against the company. They had voted against Van Horne's loyalty pledge. Strike leaders now began to talk confidently of closing down the entire CPR system, from Atlantic to Pacific, and the men in southern Ontario were reported ready to go out when ordered.[49] Rumours began to circulate that the strike might spread to American lines connecting with the CPR, including the Soo Line, which had recently come under the company's control.[50]

Certain thoughts must have been going through Van Horne's mind as he sat in his Montreal office on the morning of the 22. The strike had become a very risky enterprise, with constantly escalating costs. The responsible behaviour of the strikers, on the other hand, was one of the few bright spots in the strike — perhaps he should reconsider his decision never to take them back.[51] In any case, it was clear that the strike must be brought to an end, for the good of the company. He wired his acceptance of an offer by the engineers' committee in Winnipeg to mediate the dispute.[52] The committee spent the early morning hours of 23 March shuttling between superintendent Whyte and union officials Clark and Wilkinson. Agreement was reached at 5:00 a.m. and approved by

[46] *Ibid.*, 143-144, Van Horne to Seargeant, 15 March 1892; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21, 22 March 1892.

[47] Vancouver *Daily World*, 21 March 1892; *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, May 1892, 440.

[48] BRT, *Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report," 34.

[49] *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21, 22 March 1892; *Toronto Daily Mail*, 22 March 1892.

[50] *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 March 1892; W. Kaye Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York 1977), 167-168. The *Manitoba Free Press* was at this time owned by a consortium headed by W.C. Van Horne. PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 42, 526-527, Van Horne to John Mather, 10 January 1893.

[51] See the statement to this effect by an unnamed CPR official in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 22 March 1892.

[52] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 205, Van Horne to Seargeant, 24 March 1892.

Van Horne at 11:15. Whyte placed the company's telegraph service at the unions' disposal, and a pre-arranged signal was sent out: "The smoke has cleared."[53]

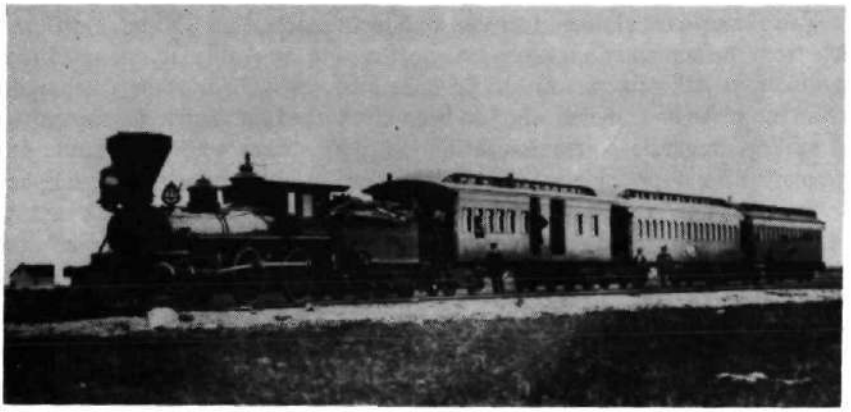
Van Horne later claimed that the settlement reached on 23 March differed little from the company's last pre-strike offer[54] but, in reality, it amounted to a capitulation. All strikers were to be reinstated, as well as those discharged before the strike and anyone who had been discharged for showing sympathy to the strikers, regardless of union affiliation. Any striker who had assaulted a company official, or damaged company property, would not be taken back, but the final decision in each separate case was to rest with the engineers' committee. The engineers' committee, moreover, was to act as a committee of arbitration on disputed points in the schedule, and its decision was to be binding. Finally, the somewhat higher rates for the Western Division were to apply to the Pacific Division as well. The engineers' committee produced the new schedule two days later. Wages were raised across the board, and several other contentious issues were decided in favour of the men, including the bonus question. A contract embodying these terms was signed by Whyte, who acted for the company, by the general chairman of the union committees, and by the two "foreign emissaries," Clark and Wilkinson.[55]

The role of the engineers' committee in settling the strike was widely commented upon, since it was, as the Montreal *Witness* said, "absolutely unique."[56] Van Horne and other CPR officials tried to save face by pointing out that the committee members were "our own employees," and therefore could be "trusted to secure the best interests of the road."[57] Yet the engineers' committee had never concealed its affiliation with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which was just as much a "foreign" organization as the two striking unions.[58]

The strike marked the beginning of union recognition and modern collective bargaining on the CPR, and is historically important for this reason. Within a year, a similar agreement was signed between the company and its engineers and firemen and, in January 1893, the conductors' and trainmen's contract was renegotiated, as promised, for a four year term with somewhat higher wages. Wages were renegotiated upwards again when this contract expired in 1897.

[53] ORC, *Proceedings*, 1893, 22.
[54] PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 205, Van Horne to Seargeant, 24 March 1892.
[55] The agreement appears in full in the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1892, 320-321, and is summarized in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 March 1892. See also BRT, *Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report," 11.
[56] Quoted in Vancouver *Daily News-Advertiser*, 25 March 1892.
[57] Toronto *Globe*, 24 March 1892; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 24 March 1892; PAC, Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 40, 205, Van Horne to Seargeant, 24 March 1892.
[58] *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, May 1892, 460-461.

The four train service brotherhoods also began to receive formal signed contracts with the Grand Trunk on a regular basis at the same time.[59]



CPR traincrew. Public Archives of Canada PA 27990.

These developments brought about a fundamental shift in the wage policies of the CPR and the Grand Trunk.[60] The mid-1890s were a period of seriously depressed business conditions, and it was normal procedure at such times for railway companies to reduce wages. The Grand Trunk had done so in the mid-1880s.[61] In the depression of the 1890s, however, the Grand Trunk maintained its wage levels for employees working under union contracts, and the CPR went even further. Pay reductions on the CPR in 1895 applied only to employees making more than $1,000 per year, which excluded all blue-collar workers except for a few highly-paid locomotive engineers.[62] It is quite possible, of course, that the managements of the two companies were motivated in

[59] *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, January 1893, 92; *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1893, 417; ORC, *Proceedings*, 1899, "Report of Grand Chief Conductor," 13, 18. The famous signed contract which ended the 1876-77 Grand Trunk engineers' strike was much ahead of its time and seems to have had no immediate offspring. It is not even clear, moreover, whether the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers still had a signed contract with the Grand Trunk in the 1880s, when the company reduced the wages of its engineers for almost two years. *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, June 1886, 392.

[60] On the Intercolonial railway, the situation was somewhat different, since labour disputes were referred to the Minister of Railways or his deputy. In mid-1895, however, the trainmen were able to negotiate better terms on this railway as well. *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, January 1894, 74, June 1895, p. 506.

[61] *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, May 1886, 328; *Railway Conductors' Monthly*, May 1884, 241.

[62] PAC, Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 42, 570, Shaughnessy to G.M. Bosworth, 20 March 1895.

part by kindness and sympathy for their workers. This cannot be entirely ruled out, at least for the CPR, because Van Horne and Shaughnessy had always shown a genuine concern for the welfare of CPR employees.[63] On the other hand, one cannot discount the claim of the *Railway Conductor* that Canadian railway officials were afraid of union strength and had not forgotten the 1892 strike.[64]

As far as union recognition was concerned, union strength was all-important on Canadian railways in the 1890s. In the Darwinian atmosphere of the day, the international brotherhoods had recognition because they had proven their right to it in 1892. Other unions would have to pass the same test. Commenting on the failure of a strike by a Canadian-based union of trackworkers on the Grand Trunk in 1899, the Toronto *Globe* pointed out that a railway company might be willing to acknowledge the benefits of a union for its employees, but no union could expect to be recognized "until it is strong enough to force it."[65] International unions clearly had this strength. By 1901, American-based organizations for CPR telegraphers, machinists, and trackmen had also proven themselves by winning strikes of their own for recognition. "Foreign" unions had become a major force on Canadian railways, and signed contracts with them had become commonplace. The 1892 strike broke the ice, and set this process in motion.

[63] See PAC, Van Horne Papers, *Letterbook* 28, 147-149, Van Horne to Daniel Spencer, 7 November 1888.
[64] *Railway Conductor*, July 1894, 357.
[65] Toronto *Globe*, 30 May 1899.