

## **The International Woodworkers of America in British Columbia, 1942-1951**

Jerry Lembcke

Volume 6, 1980

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt6art05>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Lembcke, J. (1980). The International Woodworkers of America in British Columbia, 1942-1951. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6, 113–148.

## *The International Woodworkers of America in British Columbia, 1942-1951*

Jerry Lembcke

THE CANADIAN and American labour movements presently maintain a status quo arrived at during the 1940s. The central events of those years involved the separation of the communist left wing from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) unions. In the United States the left wing was supplanted by business unionism akin to the AFL unionism with which the CIO had parted company over a decade earlier; in Canada, progressive social democratic unionism was the successor. In order to understand the present situation of the labour movement it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the events that transpired during the 1940s.

Nowhere were the events which moulded our union movements more dramatic or the lines of conflict more sharply drawn than in the International Woodworkers of America (IWA); from the formation of the union in 1937 until the early 1950s, the IWA witnessed continual battles for political control of the union's leadership. Thus the IWA has been and remains a valuable laboratory for the study of those critical years.

Historians and sociologists have advanced numerous theses in their attempts to explain the political transformations that occurred during those years. Two of the more compelling theses have predominated in the existing literature on the IWA. The first, adopted by Vernon Jensen in a 1945 book which explores the departure of communist leadership at the union's international level, asserts that rank-and-file unionists rejected communism as a foreign ideology and through constitutional means removed communists from positions of authority and responsibility in the unions.<sup>1</sup> A version of this thesis reappears in Irving Abella's treatment of the late-1940s crisis of the IWA in

<sup>1</sup> Vernon Jensen, *Lumber and Labor* (New York 1945), 269.

British Columbia. Abella finds that the "native unionists in [B.C.] successfully repulsed the Communist tide" upon the occasion of the secession of the union's British Columbia District Council from the U.S.-based International.<sup>2</sup>

A second thesis, introduced by Abella, places major responsibility for the Communist defeat upon the Communists themselves. "Only a grievous miscalculation by the party" made defeat of the Communists possible, according to Abella.<sup>3</sup> Abella attributes major importance to the social, tactical, and judgemental blunders of the left at three crucial junctures. In one instance he cites a banquet incident where Harvey Murphy, left-wing leader of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, "perhaps having drunk a bit too much," exhibited behaviour that paved the way for the capture of the B.C. Federation of Labour by anti-communist forces.<sup>4</sup> In another instance, he criticizes IWA District President Harold Pritchett for a "fatal" tactical error on the floor of the B.C. Federation of Labour convention which "would end the domination of the left over the Federation."<sup>5</sup> Finally, "At the time of its gravest crisis," Abella asserts, "the union leadership failed it." The moment to which he refers, of course, is the movement of secession, in which the leadership "reacted rashly and irresponsibly" and "it cost them dearly."<sup>6</sup> This is Abella's final assessment of the period.

Jensen's use of rank-and-file anti-communism as an explanation for the early 1940 events in the IWA has been recently challenged.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the International's first President, Harold Pritchett, a Canadian Communist, was deported from the United States, coupled with the evidence of massive intervention of the CIO's national office into the affairs of the IWA for the purpose of dislodging the left-wing leadership, and the evidence of manipulation and abrogation of constitutional democracy by the IWA's White Bloc, provide a deeper and clearer insight into the events of the early 1940s and make Jensen's contentions untenable.<sup>8</sup>

Abella's use of the same thesis to explain the events of the late 1940s in British Columbia, however, have gone unchallenged. His use of "the left's own fault" thesis has also not been challenged. Abella's work leaves us with an

<sup>2</sup> Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>7</sup> William Tattam, "Sawmill Workers and Radicalism", M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1970; Jerry Lembcke and Wm. Tattam, "On Trial: Adolph Germer of the IWA". Paper presented to the Twelfth Annual Pacific Northwest Labor History Conference, 4-6 May 1979, Spokane, Washington.

<sup>8</sup> "White Bloc" and "Red Bloc" were terms used by the right and left-wing caucuses in the IWA. The exact origins of the terms are unknown but it was the right-wing opposition to the Presidency of Harold Pritchett which dubbed itself the White Bloc in 1940. Stewart Alsbury is said to have brought the term to B.C. and applied it to a group he was associated with in 1942 or 1943. "Left" was used interchangeably with "Communist" by Abella and the same is done here.

unclear picture; at best several theses on the demise of the IWA's left wing can be supported by his evidence and conclusions; at worst, Abella's account — like Jensen's — obscures the significance of the anti-communist campaigns conducted by the IWA's right wing, the CCL, the CIO, and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Canada. Consequently his account leads us to the conclusion that had the left wing not made the errors he has cited, things might have worked out differently, with the Communists retaining their influence in B.C. District One.

By examining evidence not available to Abella<sup>8</sup> and by reinterpreting some of his own evidence, a clearer picture of what actually transpired during those years emerges. First the period 1942-46 will be examined in order to locate the source of anti-communism, not in "native" rank-and-file sentiment, but rather in the social conditions where it took root and in the political currents extant in Canada during the period. Secondly, a re-examination of the crucial years 1946-48 will be made in an effort to establish that the secession move by District One was not the result of a leadership failure but rather the result of the anti-communist forces having successfully boxed-in the District to the extent that it had no other choice. Further evidence will make clear that the rank-and-file did not abandon its left-wing leaders, but that the successful employment of undemocratic and repressive techniques by the anti-communist forces and the state resulted in the separation of union rank-and-file and left-wing leaders.

## I

UNTIL THE organizing of loggers on Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlotte Islands between 1940 and 1942, the future of the IWA was problematic at best. A strike of Blubber Bay quarry workers which had been met with employer violence drained the union resources, forcing the young organization to begin anew. But the success of the Islands' drive secured the IWA's future as a major political and economic force in the province. The social relations of work in island logging camps and the radical political heritage of many of the Scandinavian loggers produced leadership that was decidedly left wing.

When the organizing of the islands was completed it was apparent to all individuals and factions not sympathetic to the Communist movement that the

<sup>8</sup> Chief among the newly available documents are the following: Congress of Industrial Organizations, *Proceedings of Investigation Committee CIO, Re: B.C. District No. 1 and Division of Organization, IWA-CIO* (Unpublished Transcript, 11-14 December 1945); International Woodworkers of America, Local 1-80, *Proceedings, Trial of John Ullander* (Unpublished Transcript, 14 January 1945); Complete transcripts of the 3 October 1948 Meeting of District Council No. 1, IWA and the founding convention of the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (WIUC); and a complete set of the WIUC newspaper, *The Canadian Woodworker* (later renamed *The Union Woodworker*).

left-wing power base being built in British Columbia would have to be reckoned with. As the organizers left the islands for the mainland, the anti-communists prepared to challenge the left for control of the District.



*Morgan's floating logging camp. Queen Charlotte Islands, circa 1943-44. Photo made available by Harold Pritchett.*

The first target of the mainland organizing drive was Fraser Mills, a company town complex which contained the largest sawmill in the British Empire. The mill, owned by the Canadian Western Lumber Company, was located on an Indian reservation leased from the federal government for 99 years. The mill was surrounded by a company-built shack town which housed the Chinese, Japanese, and East Indian immigrants who laboured there. Around the company property the town of Maillardville had grown up. Named after Father Maillard who had shepherded a "large flock of mothers, fathers and children from Quebec" to Fraser Mills upon the company's request, the town was home to French Canadian workers. During a 1931 strike, the church had vied for the loyalty of the catholic workers with the communist Workers Unity League.<sup>10</sup>

Bitter controversy accompanied the formation of the IWA's New Westminster local where Fraser Mills was located. The local began as part of Vancouver Local 1-217. During the Fraser Mills organizing drive in fall 1942, a group loyal to the union's District leadership and the Vancouver Local formed Local 1-357 and elected Harold Pritchett, then Secretary of the Vancouver Labour Council, as the president of the new local. At about the same time, a second

<sup>10</sup> Harold Pritchett, "Maillardville-Coquitlam Ratepayers," unpublished manuscript, 1978.

leadership faction sprung up when some Fraser Mills workers struck for a wage increase. George Mitchell and Stewart Alsbury, both employed at Fraser Mills, attempted to keep the men at work. Failing in their attempt, Mitchell and Alsbury — without union authorization — represented the strikers in negotiations before the company and labour board. The actions of Mitchell and Alsbury prepared the ground for a bitter fight within the Local and District.<sup>11</sup>

Mitchell and Alsbury were associated with a faction calling itself the "Old Timers Group" which issued a series of leaflets attacking the IWA B.C. District leaders. It accused Harold Pritchett, president of the District, of "using the IWA as a racket for his own personal profit" and called the IWA a "scheme to extend the influence of the Communist Party." Despite the deplorable conditions at Fraser Mills, the "Old Timers" leaflets contended the company was committed to the protection of "worthy employees" and, while it would not object to "a well governed union of its employees," neither Fraser Mills nor any other company could "reasonably be expected to willingly embrace the kind of an organization the IWA and its leadership had proven to be." The "Old Timers" encouraged the company to make no deal with the IWA.<sup>12</sup>

The "Old Timers" group was never accurately identified, but the similarity between its literature and that of the company was striking.<sup>13</sup> The District officers claimed that the "Old Timers" group was promulgating the company line in an effort to break the IWA organising drive because they had political differences with Pritchett and the Communist Party. At the time the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was engaged in a bitter struggle with the Communist Party for labour leadership in the province. Alsbury (whose brother Thomas was a leader of the CCF) and Mitchell were known to be supporters of the CCF. Alsbury had emerged as an opponent of left-wing union leadership during the 1931 strike at Fraser Mills;<sup>14</sup> he later admitted being part of a dissident faction which published a leaflet called "Union Facts," criticizing the B.C. District leadership.<sup>15</sup>

The anti-communist dissidents at Fraser Mills also had links to the IWA White Bloc faction across the border. Money for the "Old Timers" leaflets had come from the U.S.<sup>16</sup> and Ed Benedict, who at the time was International Secretary Treasurer, was said to have gone "into Fraser Mills and talked to those who are and have been at all times in opposition to the leadership of [the] district." Claude Ballard, a White Bloc stalwart from the Portland area who

<sup>11</sup> *Proceedings of Investigation . . . CIO*, 1945, II, 272-87.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 281 and leaflets that were entered as exhibits.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Pritchett, "Maillardville."

<sup>15</sup> *Proceedings of Investigation . . . CIO*, 1945, II, 395; in the exhibits see the "Union Facts" leaflets.

<sup>16</sup> See *Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 3, 2; Minutes of "White-Bloc Meeting Held 25-27 September 1949."

would soon be International president, was reported to have been meeting with the B.C. dissidents and the International Director of Organization George Brown was charged with having been "hoodwinked" into complicity with the dissidents.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, within months after moving to the mainland, the effort to build a militant, industrial union among B.C. woodworkers was bogged down in a fight with a fifth column opposed to the Communist leadership of the District. The involvement of the International office and anti-communist dissidents from the U.S. in the Fraser Mills struggle already foretold that the B.C. woodworkers would not be allowed to resolve the dispute on their own. Within months, the controversy at Fraser Mills became a mere tributary in a torrent of national and international political movements.

If the social conditions of Fraser Mills provided the fertile ground for an anti-communist movement, the CCF provided the seeds, the nourishment, and the caretakers. The B.C. working class, its labour unions and political formations had matured rapidly during the depression years. With maturation came an increasing sensitivity to the nuances of political strategy, tactics, and goals — and disagreements. Socialism was a goal common to many B.C. workers, but a shared understanding of what socialism meant was missing.

Differences on these issues irritated older wounds. Socialist Party stalwarts had harboured grudges since the Russian Revolution had drawn thousands of their comrades to the Soviet cause. Some scores had been waiting 20 years and the time for settlement was nigh. The IWA in B.C. became a major battleground between the Communist Party and the CCF during the mid-1940s.

The CCF made political capital out of the CIO's arrival in Canada. "Many CCFers, especially members of the Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM), became CIO organizers. CCF units assisted striking workers by providing pickets and meeting places."<sup>18</sup> The CIO was called a magnificent opportunity, one the CCF "must not mess up" . . .<sup>19</sup> Pat Conroy, secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Congress of Labour during the 1940s "regarded the young CCFers who had helped to organize the new CIO unions as 'trade-union

<sup>17</sup> For the involvement of Ballard see *Proceedings of Investigation . . . CIO*, 1945, III, 363; for the involvement of Brown see II, 176-77. It isn't exactly clear why the Fraser Mill workers were receptive to the appeals of the anti-communist dissidents. Mill workers were generally conceded to be more conservative than loggers and indeed the respective organizing programs of the White Bloc and Red bloc were premised upon that fact (see, for example, the division over that question in other parts of this article). The conservatizing effect of the company town paternalism and the presence of the Catholic Church in the lives of Fraser Mills workers is probably an additional important consideration. Still, the left-wing Workers Unity League had successfully countered the Church's efforts to win the allegiance of the workers during the 1931 Fraser Mills strike.

<sup>18</sup> Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968).

<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Horowitz, *Ibid.*, 67.

illiterates' . . . whose primary motivation was not to build a labour movement but to capture it for the CCF."<sup>20</sup> Even so, Conroy and the other anti-communists in the Canadian industrial labour movement "valued the CCF's strength in the CCL as a bulwark against the Communist 'menace.' "<sup>21</sup>

Nationally the CCF was providing for political and labour organizations to become "affiliated" with the party. This allowed the organizations to participate on an official basis in CCF and electoral affairs. In British Columbia the Labor Progressive Party (LPP) applied for affiliation on 4 September 1943. Affiliation was denied because of the LPP's adherence to the principles of democratic centralism and supposed subservience to Soviet foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> The province's three largest unions (IWA, Mine, Mill and Smelter, and Shipyard Workers) were also turned down.

The IWA's 1943 convention voted for CCF affiliation. The terms of union affiliation, suspiciously adopted by the party's Provincial Executive on the same day it received the IWA's request for affiliation (28 January), required that "every delegate from [an] affiliated trade union . . . must not be a member or active supporter of any political party or political organization other than the CCF."<sup>23</sup>

When the IWA's District leadership rejected the terms of affiliation, CCF leaders in the union, including John Ulinder of Ladysmith, who was president of the Cowichan-Newcastle CCF district, and Lloyd Whalen, who was chairman of the CCF Trade Union Committee, began to attack the IWA's leaders.<sup>24</sup> Their campaign was part of a campaign launched by the CCF and the Steelworker's union to "rid British Columbia labour of Communist domination."<sup>25</sup> On 18 October 1943, national CCF leader David Lewis advised the party's Trade Union Committee in B.C. to "concentrate its efforts on wresting as many of the locals as possible from Communist control. . . . Shaky Robertson [Steel official, is being sent to B.C.] . . . with instructions . . . to start the ball rolling."<sup>26</sup> Robertson, joined by Eileen Tallman, also from the Steelworkers, made the anti-communist drive a "joint Steel-CCF enterprise." He was described as an ex-communist who "was so violent and single-minded in his anti-communism

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Fergus McKean to Provincial Council of the CCF, 4 September 1943; Secretary, CCF, to Fergus McKean, 13 September 1943; see leaflet "The CCF and the Labor-Progressives" by C. Grant MacNeil, M.L.A. Angus MacInnis Collection, University of British Columbia Special Collections Library.

<sup>23</sup> Chairman, CCF Trades Union Committee to B.J. Melsness, 4 February 1944. District Exhibit No. 27 in *Proceedings of Investigation . . . CIO*, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Whalen was associated with a Trotskyist faction within the CCF. He later became a leader in the B.C. Teamsters Union. The relationship between the Trotskyist movement and the CCF and the role of the Trotskyists within the IWA is addressed again in footnote 84.

<sup>25</sup> Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics*, 119-20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

that even [Steelworkers President Charles] Millard was horrified."<sup>27</sup> With Robertson's arrival, the history of the CCF struggle against the Communist Party converged with the crusade of the IWA's anti-communist International officers against the B.C. District's leaders.

On 2 November 1944 a letter circulated by John Ulinder, member of IWA Local 1-80 in Duncan, announced plans to "dislodge the LPP domination of the IWA." "A committee has been set up," according to the letter, "to clean house in the IWA." The letter promised expense money for "supporters" to attend a special meeting to be held at the Malaspina Hotel in Nanaimo ten days later.<sup>28</sup>

When George Grafton, Business Agent of Local 1-80, heard about the meeting, he, together with local members Owen Brown and Fred Wilson, went to Nanaimo, but Ulinder denied them entrance to the meeting. With Ulinder was Shaky Robertson.<sup>29</sup> Grafton then filed charges against Ulinder for disruption and for "knowingly promoting a secret and unauthorized meeting" at which "plans were laid to unseat officers and expel members of the union by improper means." Ulinder was further charged with "planning with other members of the Union and with persons not members of the Union to cause officers of the Union to lose their positions without just cause."<sup>30</sup>

Ulinder was tried by Local 1-80 on 14 January 1945 and found guilty.<sup>31</sup> At the trial Fred Olkovich, Local 1-363, testified that he had attended the meeting called by Ulinder. The purpose of the meeting, said Olkovich, was

to set up Committees in different camps, locals and sub-locals, to spread propaganda and unseat the present officers on the Executive, to bring out a strike policy, agitate the members in disrupting the present Executive, to bring out parts of the present contracts and the work that the Executive has done and to emphasize the weak points, to undermine the present Executive, to set up sub-locals, to break up the Local System, make it easier for the organization to take hold, to disrupt union meetings by walk-outs until such time as the membership of this organization was strong enough to take over.<sup>32</sup>

Olkovich was also informed at the meeting that "The International Officers would supply certain information if it was deemed necessary to unseat President Pritchett and would also supply information that would start this organization in a fight."<sup>33</sup> It was clear, Olkovich said, "that those present had organized

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Ulinder to Kierstad, 2 November 1944. Letter located in *Proceedings, Trial of John Ulinder*.

<sup>29</sup> *Proceedings, Trial of John Ulinder*, 1-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> Members of the jury were: Lorne Atchison, Scotty Sutherland, E. Whalley, J. Malbon, Geo. Hauk, B. Schofield, J. Stewart, Ben Farkes, E. Sandborg, K. Thornley, R. Yates.

<sup>32</sup> *Proceedings, Trial of John Ulinder*, 6-7. Olkovich named L. Whalen as the chairman of the meeting and Bill Kierstad, Robertson, Ulinder, Watson, Charles Widen, and Tom Barnett as persons attending.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

themselves into a group which had links with the CCF Party."<sup>34</sup> The strategy was, "To break up the larger locals of the IWA [B.C. District] into smaller units each of which would be chartered as a local by the International." In addition, it was planned "to attend Union meetings and there cause disruption and antagonism" and "to antagonize the Union's present leadership by questioning it on the no-strike policy."<sup>35</sup> Finally the White Bloc meeting in Nanaimo had discussed the "possibility of having all IWA members who were under the influence of [the White Bloc] leave the Union and resign their membership with a view to weakening the Union and confusing and disrupting it."<sup>36</sup>

Ullinder's conviction by Local 1-80 was sustained by the District Council on 7 March 1945 but overturned by the International Executive Council on 9 May.<sup>37</sup> Taking his case before the International Executive Board, Ullinder contended the local had convicted him on insufficient evidence and that he had not received an impartial appeals hearing before the District Executive Board. He went beyond his own case in his appeal, leveling charges against the B.C. District leadership for "collaboration with our employers," "defeatism," and "betrayal of trust" in negotiating the 1945 contract. He charged his own local officers with a host of violations of democratic principles including "toy[ing] with our funds."<sup>38</sup> Board member William Harris labeled the condemnation of the District leadership "irrelevant," but on a nine to five roll call the board voted to "sustain the appeal of John Ullinder and reverse the decision of the local union and district council."<sup>39</sup>

While Ullinder's case was being settled, the program of disruption planned by the nine-person Malaspina meeting was being carried out. A series of leaflets in the name of the IWA "rank and file" was issued. The leaflets, entitled "Union Facts" and "The Undercut" attacked the IWA's District leadership as "puppets, whose strings are pulled by a distant boss." Invoking the authority of the "rank and file" numerous times, the leaflets exhorted IWA members to

<sup>34</sup> Olkovich, *Statement by Fred Olkovich*, 2. This written statement is part of the trial documents.

<sup>35</sup> Agitation on the no-strike policy "was one of the chief ways in which the group hoped to drive a wedge between rank-and-file members and the Union leaders." Olkovich, *Statement by Fred Olkovich*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> "It was finally agreed, after a discussion, that since many of the [Malaspina] group's supporters had recently joined the Union if they suddenly left other members might believe that they had joined only to cause disruption. Consequently the proposed policy of having the group's supporters drop out of the Union was abandoned." *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Council Proceedings* (Portland, 9 May 1945), 25-69; International Woodworkers of America, *Proceedings of District Council No. 1 Executive Board*, 7 March 1945 (Vancouver 1945).

<sup>38</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 9 May 1945, 22-31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

regain union control from the "fakers," "stooges," and "sellouts," who were in control of the District.<sup>40</sup>

Attempts were made to break up the large IWA locals. Charging the Duncan headquarters of Local 1-80 with being "used to further the political ambitions of a minority group," petitions were received from the Chemainus and Youbou sub-locals asking for separation from Local 1-80. The Youbou petition contained 150 signatures and the Chemainus petition seven, one of whom, Clarence Sharp, was alleged to have been a member of Pratt's detective agency, a leading union busting organization in B.C.

The petitions were considered by the International Executive Board at its 5 August 1945 meeting.<sup>41</sup> Director of Organization George Brown cited the long distance involved for the sub-locals' participation in local politics, dissatisfaction with the District's newspaper, the *B.C. Lumber Worker*, the no-strike policy, and the general political leadership of the District as the reasons for the petitions. "The District Council leadership up there has been furthering one political party," said Brown. "It's pretty hard to convince the members of the sub-locals that they're non-partisan when their own local union, that is the headquarters at Duncan, carried signs in front of the local union office 'Vote LPP' and the Secretary of 1-80, Will Killeen, acted as agent for the candidate running for office under the banner of the Labour Progressive Party."<sup>42</sup>

Board member Nigel Morgan questioned the validity of the names on the petitions and defended the sub-local structure.

The main reason that we formed a local and adopted a sub-local set up is for the same reason of my own local. My own local stretches about a thousand miles along the coast line; it takes in all the B.C. Upper Coast. The reason it does so is because there are no roads. The only way you can get to the camp is by boat, and they all ship out of Vancouver. The only mail contact is through town. It's a matter of administration. You have those all broken up into separate little sub-locals so that they can conduct their business. The cost would be so great and the problems of covering them — well, you have to maintain boats and you have to maintain cars.<sup>43</sup>

The Youbou and Chemainus petitions were turned back by the International but an investigation of the internal activities of Local 1-80 was called for.<sup>44</sup>

A third aspect of the Malaspina-CCF strategy called for the placing of its people into union organizing positions so that newly organized locals would get

<sup>40</sup> See the leaflets entitled "The Undercut" and "Union Facts" in the exhibits collection of *Proceedings of Investigation Committee . . . CIO*, 1945, exhibits 30, 31, and 32.

<sup>41</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 5 August 1945, 47-64.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64. On 12 August 1945, T.G. MacKenzie, Vice President of Local 1-367, recommended that sub-locals be abolished and locals be chartered in each area of the Fraser Valley: Hammond, Mission, Harrison Mills, Chilliwak, Hope and Harrison Lake. That plan never reached fruition.

off on the right foot — moving in the CCF's anti-communist political direction. The IWA's B.C. district, controlled as it was by the Communist LPP, offered few possibilities for CCF organizers to be hired. Besides, the most experienced and proven organizers — men like Ernie Dalskog, Mike Freylinger, and Tom MacDonald — were LPP supporters and available for further assignments. The CCF thus sought the assistance of the IWA's International office in gaining access to organizing positions. Sharing a disdain for communism, the IWA's international leadership and the CCFers merged their programs to disrupt District 1.

The hiring and firing of organizers became the lightning-rod issue of the fight. The first fired was Jack Greenall, Secretary of the District Council.<sup>46</sup> Greenall had been hired as an organizer under Adolph Germer and had continued under Germer's replacement, George Brown. Brown, however, charged that Greenall had interfered in an election in Local 1-347 and fired him. The specifics of the charge were that, when two men running for local office vilified the District Council leadership, the local began to question their background. Greenall told a local meeting that "one [candidate] had been a special policeman during the [1932] longshoreman's strike and that the other one had gone through the picket line during that strike."<sup>46</sup> The real issue, of course, was whether or not Brown, acting for the anti-communist International leaders, was attempting to aid the opposition to the district's left-wing leadership by allowing the less militant and possible pro-management candidates to run for office and merely using Greenall's actions as an excuse to get rid of a communist organizer.

The battle for control of the organizing program continued when an organizing drive was opened in the B.C. interior in August 1944. The first local, 1-405, was established in September.<sup>47</sup> Early in 1945 District 1 requested International Director of Organization George Brown, to transfer three organizers — Hjymer Bergren, Tom MacDonald, and Mike Freylinger — to the interior to assist the organizing drive. Bergren, who had led earlier organizing drives on Vancouver Island, was considered "the most competent and popular organizer in B.C." MacDonald also had impressive credentials having organized the Chemainus Mill, the Industrial Timber Mills, and mills in Victoria, Alberni, and Vancouver. Freylinger had "carried the banner of the IWA through the difficult and trying times in the Queen Charlotte Islands" and had

<sup>46</sup> Greenall continued to be an important figure in the IWA. In 1946 his election as International Trustee signalled the resurgence of the left in the International. In 1948 he was expelled from that office under the provisions of the U.S. Taft-Hartley law. His expulsion was the precipitating event of the "breakaway." Greenall has written a political analysis of those years, *The IWA Fiasco*.

<sup>46</sup> *Proceedings of Investigation Committee . . . CIO*, 1945, I, 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 315.

been "chosen to organize and consolidate the workers in the Fraser Valley."<sup>48</sup>

Brown, however, under the terms of the IWA's organizing agreement with the CIO, was not obligated to accept the recommendation and instead appointed Mike Sekora, Ralph New, and Nick Kaptey. These three were relative newcomers to the union and known opponents of the District's communist leadership. Sekora and New had been employed at the B.C. Fir and Cedar Company and had only joined the IWA in August and July respectively. Sekora had been a delegate to a recent CCF convention and had written a letter, published in the *Woodworker*, accusing District 1 President Harold Pritchett and International Executive Board member Nigel Morgan of not supporting the Canadian Congress of Labour's political program and thereby of having sold out "the workers to the capitalists and the bosses."

The B.C. District office "opposed the appointments on the grounds that these men had demonstrated no organizational ability" and that their appointment "would only lead to division and disruption among the members they were intending to organize and further, could only be expected to sow disruption within the IWA in B.C."<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Brown's organizers reportedly "didn't intend to concentrate on logging camps but rather were going to organize the mills first" and thereby establish small locals, financially dependent on the whims of the International organizers.<sup>50</sup> The District proposed a compromise slate of organizers — Al Parkin, Mel Fulton, and Bergren — the former two because they were from the communities being organized and Bergren because he was the District's outstanding organizer. Brown, however, rejected the compromise.

On 25 April 1945, the B.C. District Council convened a special Executive meeting to discuss the question of organizers in the interior. They voted to send one of their own officers to the interior to "[map] out an organizational program" and to protest Brown's appointments at the next International Executive Board meeting.<sup>51</sup>

Nigel Morgan, International Executive Board member from District 1, carried the District's protest to the 11 May International board meeting and asked for a policy of "cooperation between the District and International instead of disunity and disruption." He expressed concern that Bergren, Freylinger, and MacDonald would be laid off because the International's organizing funds could not support them plus the three men Brown had just hired.<sup>52</sup> The board also heard a protest from Local 1-363 in New Westminster, over the installation of International organizer George Mitchell in that local,

<sup>48</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 11 May 1945.

<sup>49</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *Special Executive Council Meeting of District Council 1*, 25 April 1945, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 11 May 1945, 71.

<sup>51</sup> IWA, *Special Executive Council Meeting of District Council 1*, 25 April 1945, 4.

<sup>52</sup> IWA, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 11 May 1945, 100.

when the operation was already well organized and the local had not been consulted on the appointment.<sup>53</sup>

Brown defended his appointments to the interior saying he would not "send any of the organizers that had been working in B.C. into the interior for the simple reason that the labor movement in Canada had developed into a political organization rather than a trade union movement." He thought it was "better to send new people in there rather than to carry the fight into that part of the country."<sup>54</sup> Brown further contended that Bergren, Freylinger, and MacDonald were still on the payroll and would remain so.<sup>55</sup> The Board voted approval of Brown's decision and ordered Morgan to convey the board's policy to Local 1-405.

Following the International Board's decision, the B.C. District held a special delegate meeting on 20 May 1945 in Nanaimo. At the meeting, with International President Claude Ballard present, Pritchett pleaded for unity:

We want to cooperate; we want to cooperate with the international officers . . . and nothing else. We are not concerned whether you eat spinach or cauliflower, whether you drink beer or straight water; whether you belong to the CCF, the LPP, the Liberals or the Technocrats. We are not concerned whether you are Jew or Gentile, East Indian or just plain Canadian. We have a job to do that requires the greatest degree of unity and anybody who gets in the way of that unity is going to get their toes stepped on . . .<sup>56</sup>

The delegates were angry, however, and voted to "condemn and vigorously protest the . . . appointment of these international lackeys and demand their immediate removal and substitution of men who have proven their ability in organizing this District and in building up our union into a powerful and respected institution."<sup>57</sup> International President Ballard proposed that the District and the International go to the CIO for resolution of the conflict.<sup>58</sup> The peace meeting was scuttled, however, when U.S. immigration authorities refused entrance to the Canadian IWA leaders.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell had been implicated in the anti-communist "Old Timers" group in the New Westminster local.

<sup>54</sup> IWA, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 11 May 1945, 93.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-101; IWA, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 2-4 August 1945, 40.

<sup>56</sup> IWA, *Special Executive Council Meeting of District Council 1*, 20 May 1945, 15.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> All during the 1940s the British Columbian communists were hampered by U.S. immigration officials, Nigel Morgan and Ernie Dalskog, who were both on the International executive board, were stopped numerous times and prevented from attending important functions of the International. The most important incident of harassment was at the time of the 1947 International convention at which the Taft-Hartley law was discussed. The Canadian communist delegates were unable to attend, although they were ultimately banned from holding office by its provisions. For a more lengthy treatment of this issue, see Jerry Lembcke, "International Woodworkers of America . . ." and Lembcke "Labor Radicalism and the State in the Pacific Northwest

The culmination of the fight over the organizing program came when Brown, despite his promise to retain Bergren, Freylinger, and MacDonald, fired Freylinger in mid-July 1945. Freylinger was fired for a letter he had written while an organizer in Local 1-357. The letter, inviting a union member to a meeting of the Labour Progressive Party, was allegedly passed to George Brown by T.C. McKenzie, a Vice President of the local, who subsequently moved to full-time work for the CCF. Brown appointed Mike Sekora to replace Freylinger.<sup>60</sup>

The events of the 1942-45 period are critical to our examination in three ways. First, we can see that the source of anti-communism among B.C. woodworkers cannot be so easily attributed to provincial nativism as author Irving Abella suggests. In fact, if one wanted to vulgarize the record, it would be much easier to establish that communist unionism was the predominant "native" tendency in the mid-1940s and that anti-communism was brought to B.C. by outsiders — CCF party leaders and rightwing IWA leaders from the U.S. But this formulation would still be an oversimplification. The uneven development of B.C. industry, the heterogeneity of its immigrant population, and the difference in social conditions from work in the woods to work in urban mills allowed for a variety of political currents to be generated. In short, both communism and anti-communism had roots in B.C. class relations. Second, evidence can be found in this period that the issues upon which the struggle against the left was conducted were not intrinsic to the concerns of B.C. woodworkers. The issue of breaking up large locals and the agitation around the wartime no-strike pledge were introduced to the rank-and-file through leaflets circulated by CCF organizers and paid for with money raised outside the province. The no-strike pledge was particularly bogus because while the District's leaders promoted productivity plans in support of the war against Fascism, they also supported strike activity when it was necessary. The *B.C. Lumber Worker* called for support of striking miners in December 1941 and striking steelworkers in January 1943. Most importantly the District was solidly behind the October 1943 strike by Queen Charlotte Island loggers which resulted in union recognition and a master contract. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the rank-and-file was actually opposed to the no-strike pledge. Third, implicit in the resort to undemocratic processes and red-baiting by the dissidents, is the conclusion that, in fact, the strong rank-and-file support for the communist leadership had rendered attempts to have the latter removed by democratic process ineffective. In other words, as of 1945, the very actions of

---

— The International Woodworkers of America (CIO)," Paper presented to the Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, San Francisco, 1 September 1978.

<sup>60</sup> IWA, *Proceedings of International Executive Board Meeting*, 2-4 August 1945, 40. The allegation that McKenzie passed the letter to Brown was made during the CIO investigation of the controversy over the organizing program. See *Proceedings of Investigation . . . CIO*, 1945, II, 237, 242-45.

the anti-communists constitute evidence that communists had not isolated themselves from the rank-and-file through support for no-strike pledges, undemocratic leadership, or other errors.

## II

THE 1946 STRIKE AND union elections provided still more evidence that the B.C. woodworkers and their left-wing leaders were not divided. But in 1947 the U.S. Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Law. The anti-communist provisions of Taft-Hartley were the opening Cold War salvo that brought the proud District One to its knees. At the peak of its power and influence in 1946, the District had the combined powers of the U.S. and Canadian states added to the array of reactionary forces it faced. Under attack by its own International, the CCP, and the state, the District seceded from the IWA in 1948.

In 1946 the first province-wide general strike was called by the IWA. Besides producing a major victory for the working class of Canada, the strike temporarily deflected the energies of the anti-Communist crusaders and strengthened the left-wing presence in the union. Early in 1946 the Canadian government announced its intentions to maintain war-time wage controls and fixed five cents as the maximum allowable wage increase. The B.C. IWA spearheaded labour's response to the edict. The employers, represented by R. V. Stuart Research, Ltd., opened negotiations on 21 March with a five cent offer. When the union refused it, the offer was raised to twelve and a half cents on condition the IWA drop its demands for the 40-hour week, union security, and the dues checkoff.

Through April the two sides remained deadlocked. On 7 May the IWA District Executive Board issued a strike call for eight days later. "What occurred at that moment," wrote Al Parkin, "constitutes one of the most amazing stories in Canadian labor annals."<sup>61</sup>

Sharp at 11 a.m. a province-wide industry employing 33,000 men and women . . . came to a halt. All along the Fraser River, from Hope to Mudpole in the False Creek industrial area of Vancouver and across on the north shore of Burrard Inlet, great sawmills which had never before been closed by strike action grew silent with their thousands of workers streaming out past the time clock gates even before the echoes of the plant whistles had died away. . . . By twelve noon on May 15, not one major lumber operation in these areas was working, while a few days later the lumberjacks of Prince George joined the mass walkout. Even in the Blue River country east of Kamloops, till then completely isolated from the union, small tie camps and the few larger operations were tied up in a spontaneous worker action uninfluenced by any direct connection with the IWA.

The IWA raised the slogan "25-40 Union Security" — 25 cents per hour wage increase, the 40 hour week, dues checkoff, and other union security provisions. There was no strike breaking because there were no scabs — the

<sup>61</sup> See Al Parkin's history of the IWA in *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 2 June 1947.

strike was total. Mass parades of pickets involved the public in the union struggle. When a "tag day" request was turned down by the Vancouver City Council, strikers defied the authorities and collected \$4000 from Saturday shoppers.

The 37-day strike reached its peak with a march of 3000 strikers on the provincial capital at Victoria.

... on D-day, June 13, the IWA-chartered Princess Elizabeth pulled out of Vancouver harbor, loaded with woodworkers on their way to Victoria, and to cheers and applause of 1000 people lining the pier rails.

On the boat were loggers, sawmill workers, and supporters of the union; spirits high and with a set determination to make the trek a success.

In Nanaimo, a town rich in labor history and tradition, the entire populace turned out to welcome the trekkers.

Cheering crowds lined the streets, the whole town mobilized to help in every way possible.

Taxi companies set aside cabs for use of trekkers, and restaurants opened extra early to accommodate woodworkers.

Friday morning saw a steady drizzle of rain. Woodworkers loaded into cars, trucks, to make their way down the Island to Victoria.

Busses, trucks, old jalopies and sleek new cars were all pressed into service to whisk trekkers to the capitol.

At Ladysmith, Chemainus, Duncan and many little settlements along the way, more woodworkers joined the trek. By the time the trek reached Victoria its numbers had swelled to over fifteen hundred, and there they were joined by fifteen hundred more.

In a continuous downpour, IWA members and supporters paraded through the streets of Victoria, singing labor's fighting songs and carrying banners stating their determination to win the union's demands.

As they swung past the front of the parliament buildings the air was filled with the chant "25-40 Union Security". . . . One old trade unionist standing on the steps of the parliament buildings murmured, "That's history being made right there." And thousands of people in the province silently echoed his words.<sup>62</sup>

Within a week after the Victoria trek, a series of fast moving events brought the strike to an end. On 18 June Dominion Labor Minister Humphrey Mitchell informed the IWA that Gordon Bell "has been appointed controller of those plants engaged in production of wooden containers, also logging camps which normally supply logs for such plants. Order requires that operators will open their mills at 12 noon June 19 and that employees shall return to work. Rates of wages will be the same as those which were in effect when employees stopped work."<sup>63</sup> The pretext for the government's partial seizure of the industry was the onset of the interior fruit harvest for which wooden crating was needed. The same message announced the appointment of Chief Justice Gordon Sloan as arbitrator "to bring about agreement on wage rates" for the rest of the province.

With some workers forced back to work and others out on strike, the IWA

<sup>62</sup> *B.C. Lumber Worker*, 22 June 1946.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

moved quickly to settle. On 19 June the executive board decided by unanimous roll-call vote to recommend a return to work as soon as possible. News of the settlement "was received by many rank and file members with some misgivings."<sup>64</sup> Union security was only partially obtained by the removal of the war-time no-strike requirement and the wage hike fell 10 cents short of the 25 cents demanded. Loggers, however, gained a 40-hour week for the second half of the contract and an industry-wide contract was obtained covering interior as well as coastal operations. Bigger gains were made on the organizing front. Ten thousand workers joined the IWA B.C. District during the strike giving it 27,000 members. With that growth the IWA became not only the largest union in B.C. but one of the three or four largest in Canada.<sup>65</sup>

On the strength of its organizing success during the 1946 strike in B.C., the left wing captured three International offices in the 1946 referendum elections. Karley Larsen from Washington, Ed Laux from Oregon, and Jack Greenall from B.C. defeated right-wing incumbents for Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, and Trustee respectively. B.C. provided the bulk of the left-wing votes and the Columbia River District Council accounted for the lion's share of the anti-communist vote. (See Table I).

The election was significant in two ways. First, it refuted the contention that the Communist Party's support for the war against fascism and the war-time no-strike pledge in industry had turned the rank-and-file against union leaders associated with the Party. In fact, the trial of John Ulinder and the documents and leaflets used as evidence there reveal that the no-strike pledge and the Moscow connection of the Communist Party were issues in the union only because the Trotskyists and CCF made them issues in an attempt to bait and discredit the communists. The 1946 elections proved that leaflets issued under the name "Rank-and-file" were frauds and that the real rank-and-file did not support the activities of a handful of anti-communist dissidents.

Second, the vote was quite literally a red flag to the White Bloc, touching off renewed attacks on left-wing leaders in B.C. and northern Washington. Adolph Germer, at the time a national CIO representative, wrote that a "certain group [was] was again coming to the front and trying to take over." He accused his followers in the IWA of acting like "children" and warned that they "will give them [the radicals] the organization."<sup>66</sup>

Once again the U.S. government came to the rescue of the White Bloc. Section 8(h) of the Taft-Hartley Act required trade union officials to sign affidavits swearing they were not members of the Communist Party and neither "believed in" nor "supported" any organization which advocated the overthrow of the U.S. government. Failure to do so disqualified the union and its

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> See Harold Pritchett's account of the 1946 strike in *The B.C. Lumber Worker*, 8 August 1946.

<sup>66</sup> Germer to Eugene Patton, 4 March 1946, in the Adolph Germer papers (copies in author's possession).

affiliates from the services of the National Labor Relations Board. The law was passed in June 1947.

On 22 July 1947 the International executive board met to consider the Taft-Hartley Act. President James Fadling recommended that the union "go on record to comply with the NLRB certification provisions" of the law.<sup>67</sup> Left-wing board members, Karley Larsen, Ilmar Kouvinen and Ernie Dalskog all spoke against Fadling's recommendation. Dalskog argued that the IWA should defy the law. "But at the same time," he added, "we must strengthen our organization so that we not only defy it, but defeat [it] . . . the emphasis should be on defying the bill rather than complying with it."

**Table I**

Results of membership referendum vote for IWA international officers, 1946

	1st Vice President		Secretary-Treasurer		Trustee	
	Ballard	Larsen	Benedict	Laux	Mitchell	Greenall
District 1 (B.I.)	737	5,205	933	4,950	599	5,277
District 2 (NW. Washington)	574	3,543	848	3,239	878	3,684
District 3 (SW. Washington)	606	402	662	342	569	378
District 5 (Columbia River)	1,931	209	1,915	190	1,791	289
District 6	302	44	292	47	249	78
District 7	204	315	218	303	180	315
District 8	197	22	208	15	196	22
District 9	839	1,228	724	1,415	817	1,203
District 10	395	417	407	402	384	410
District 11	125	69	144	46	134	53
District 12	33	1,157	41	1,154	73	1,114
Miscellaneous California	19	8	22	3	23	4
Provisional Southern	233	61	250	47	197	91
Locals	2,385	160	2,396	149	2,402	136
Total	8,580	12,840	9,061	12,302	8,492	12,554

SOURCE: Official Report of the International Tabulating Committee (Copy in the Adolph Gerner papers, University of Oregon Library.) Larsen, Laux, and Greenall were the left-wing candidates. Mitchell was a B.C. White Bloc leader.

Many of the conservatives expressed reservations about the blatantly anti-labour nature of the law. But the temptation to use it for their own political interests could not be resisted. Rationalizing their opportunism as mere

<sup>67</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Minutes*, 22-23 July 1947, 28-38.

acquiescence to the status quo, the White Bloc members of the council supported compliance. "The law has been passed. We have it now," argued Vice President Bill Botkin. With the three left-wing members of the council voting nay, the Council voted for compliance with the Taft-Hartley law.

What was most notable about the Council's action, was that it came at a time when the official national CIO position was non-compliance.<sup>88</sup> Surprisingly, the Executive Council reaffirmed its position at its 21 August 1947 meeting after being informed of the national CIO position. Although the CIO eventually did go on record favouring compliance, it was the premature actions like that of the IWA's White Bloc that encouraged it to do so.

On 21 August 1947, the Taft-Hartley issue went to the IWA's international convention in St. Louis. Two resolutions came out of the resolutions committee for consideration by the convention delegates. The committee majority recommended a resolution protesting the anti-labour character of Taft-Hartley but resolving that the IWA "comply with the NLRB certification provisions of the Taft-Hartley Law. . . ."<sup>89</sup> The committee minority recommended adoption of a resolution which called for the union "not to use the facilities of the new Labor Board" and "to resolve all issues between our union and the employers through bona fide collective bargaining and other peaceful means wherever possible."

## Shall 100,000 Wood Workers

*Be Deprived of*

## Their Chosen Leader

?

**All friends and members of organized labor are urged to protest to President Roosevelt and U. S. Departments of Immigration, Labor and State, the delay in granting permanent entry for Harold J. Pritchett**

*Poster issued by the National Committee of Gain Entry for Pritchett. Committee Chairman was Heywood Brown, President of the Newspaper Guild. From the Tom Burns Papers, Oregon Collection, University of Oregon Library.*

<sup>88</sup> Philip Murray's letter is reproduced in International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Minutes*, 21-30 August 1947, 13.

<sup>89</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Constitutional Convention* (St. Louis, 26-29 August 1947), 262-263.

The Canadian delegation to the St. Louis convention had been stopped at the border and "all known Communists were refused entry." Jack Greenall, who was already in the U.S. on other business, was the only known communist from Canada at the convention. How the absence of the Canadian communists affected the debate cannot be known, of course. As it was, the minority position was voted down and IWA compliance with Taft-Hartley was passed.<sup>70</sup>

The conservative International leadership quickly took advantage of Taft-Hartley. Larsen was asked to resign on 18 September 1947 by International President James Fadling. Fadling wrote to Larsen and Ed Laux, the International's left-wing secretary treasurer, elected with Larsen, asking them to sign the necessary affidavits or "tender your resignation[s] immediately." Larsen and Laux refused to sign the anti-communist affidavits, saying they did not want to become "a legal party with Taft-Hartley and the Labor Management Board in destroying Industrial unionism in the lumbering industry." Drawing a parallel with fascism in Europe, they said that Taft-Hartley brands "every one and every organization that has the courage to fight for the right of the common people, communists, the same formula used in Europe."<sup>71</sup> Larsen and Laux were the first CPUSA members to resign under Taft-Hartley giving the incident added national and international significance. Joseph Starobin has noted that Larsen's resignation was a sign that, nationally, the Communist Party's resolve to fight Taft-Hartley was weakening.<sup>72</sup>

On 8 October 1947, Jack Greenall was asked to resign his position as an International Trustee. Greenall was from British Columbia and a communist. When Greenall refused to resign, President Fadling suspended him on 25 October.<sup>73</sup> Fadling's action brought a demand for his recall from the Northern Washington District Council. The B.C. District joined the demand for Fadling's recall at its March 1948 Board meeting. Canadian organizers Tommy McDonald, Les Urquhart, and Mike Freylinger signed the petitions calling for the recall election and were immediately fired by George Brown, the International director of organizing. The petitions were declared invalid by the International Executive Board even before they were received.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-128. See also Jack Greenall, *The IWA Fiasco* (Vancouver 1965), 9. Greenall's work appears to be from a Maoist perspective. He is very critical of communist "revisionism" and of communist leaders like Pritchett and Larsen for having "sold out."

<sup>71</sup> Fadling to Larsen and Laux, 18 September 1947; Larsen and Laux to Fadling, 19 September 1947. Both letters are reprinted in *B.C. Lumberworker*, 22 September 1947. Today Larsen defends his resignation on the grounds that "we had no way to mobilize ranks in the field against the International and government." (Karley Larsen, interview, 23 February 1977). Jack Greenall (*IWA Fiasco*, 6) calls Larsen "the undisputed leader of all the progressive forces within the IWA."

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Berkeley 1975), 169.

<sup>73</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Minutes*, 18 November 1947, supplements 2-4.

<sup>74</sup> *B.C. Lumber Worker*, 28 January 1948, 8; *B.C. Lumber Worker*, 12 January 1948, 1;

At this point, the B.C. White Bloc faction opened a new attack on the District's leaders, charging there were district funds missing. The district officers ordered a complete audit of union books and, to their dismay, found \$150,633.15 missing. There was no evidence that the funds had been misused but neither was there evidence to the contrary.<sup>75</sup> The International Executive Board set up a three-member committee to investigate the financial affairs of the B.C. District. The district officers charged outside interference and refused to cooperate. When the committee released its report, "it accused the district of 'gross mishandling' of funds and 'wholly inadequate bookkeeping' but it could find no proof of any 'criminal activity.'"<sup>76</sup>

The International was openly intervening in the affairs of the B.C. District in other ways, however.<sup>77</sup> The International had established its own newspaper and radio program, *The Voice of the IWA*, to conduct propaganda against the district's leadership. In a 26 January 1948 broadcast over radio station CJOR, Al Hartung, First International Vice-President of the IWA, asserted that if Harold Pritchett, Ernie Dalskog, and Karley Larsen "are not on the bosses payroll, then the lumber operators are getting a lot of free help. . . ." He asked his radio listeners if it could be "that Joe Stalin feels it would hurt his cause if the workers received more wages and better working conditions."<sup>78</sup> He asked B.C. workers to "remove from office those who are against IWA policy . . . and back Brother Fadling to the limit."

The red-baiting got worse as the year wore on. By August the "Voice of the IWA" proclaimed that "communists should be criticized and exposed." It charged that working conditions for B.C. loggers were "almost paradise compared with conditions in the slave labor camps in communist controlled countries. When the communists get power you don't even have to open your mouth in criticism of them. If they merely suspect that you are not in sympathy with their reign of terror, you disappear. You may be killed or you may be sent to a slave labor camp. There you are expendable. You are fed just enough to keep you alive and working."<sup>79</sup>

The imagery of an international red-menace drawn by Hartung was part of the campaign to make a World War II ally, the Soviet Union, into a Cold War enemy — and it was a campaign that originated far from the union halls of

---

International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Proceedings*, March 1948.

<sup>75</sup> Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, 130; David Stone in "The IWA: The Red Bloc & White Bloc" says "subsequently the absence of vouchers was explained and duplicate receipts for all disbursements were obtained and filed with the International."

<sup>76</sup> Abella, *Nationalism*, 130.

<sup>77</sup> MacNeil, *The IWA*, 35; Abella, *Nationalism*, 130.

<sup>78</sup> Transcript of "The Voice of the International Woodworkers," 26 January 1948. Copy in possession of the author.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 August 1948.

woodworkers. United States foreign policy priorities at the time called for building a Western European bulwark against socialism. The Marshall economic aid plan was the instrument of this foreign policy; debate in North American trade union circles over the political meaning of the Marshall Plan was hot and heavy.

Adolph Germer, who had catalyzed the IWA's pre-war Cold War, which ended in Harold Pritchett's deportation from the U.S., brought the Marshall Plan campaign to the IWA. Germer had been serving as the CIO's ambassador to the World Federation of Trade Union meetings in Paris prior to appearing at the IWA's executive board meeting on 9 March 1948.<sup>80</sup> He told the board that the Marshall Plan was more than a "food for peace" plan. "If Russia doesn't stop sending her guns and arms into other countries to help the communists take over by force, the United States may be forced to supply some guns so the people of those countries can protect themselves against communist aggression." Then, in a statement which reveals a great deal about the link between the international Cold War and the repression of post-war radicalism in the U.S. labour movement, Germer connected the Marshall Plan's anti-communist imperatives with the Taft-Hartley Act's similar purpose for the domestic scene. Germer charged that "extreme leftists and extreme rightists" were colluding to defeat Taft-Hartley. "Extremes always come to a common level," said Germer. "The communists all over the world, those in the United States included, speak the same language and sing the same songs as the worst reactionaries in the United States, in and out of Congress."<sup>81</sup>

The significance of the 9 March Board Meeting goes beyond the fact that the Board decided to support the Marshall Plan. Its significance lies in showing once again that the IWA, like other unions of the time, was subject to political influences originating far from the woods and mills of North America. And, while men like Hartung and other White Bloc leaders were not simple pawns in an international Cold War, their actions and expressed ideologies can surely not be understood in isolation from the larger picture. The anti-communist crusade being conducted by the International was, of course, dovetailing nicely with that being conducted by the CCL and the CCF. Irving Abella has documented very thoroughly the struggle for power in B.C.'s labour unions which took place during 1947-48. Only a brief recounting of those events is necessary here.

The Canadian Congress of Labor (CCL) sent Steelworker organizer Bill Mahoney to B.C. "to take charge of a two-year campaign to rid the Congress unions in the Province of their Communists."<sup>82</sup> Mahoney set three targets for his campaign: the Vancouver Labour Council, the British Columbia Federation

<sup>80</sup> Lorin Lee Cary, "Adolph Germer: From Labor Agitator to Labor Professional." Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1968, 163.

<sup>81</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Proceedings*, 9 March 1948, 17-20. Germer's speech is a classic example of Cold War rhetoric.

<sup>82</sup> Abella, *Nationalism*, 117.

of Labour, and the IWA. Mahoney was appointed in November 1947 and by January 1948 all 21 seats of the Vancouver Labour Council belonged to Congress-backed anti-communist delegates.<sup>83</sup> Next Mahoney tackled the provincial labour federation, a task which required a simultaneous attack on the IWA. Mahoney knew the IWA was not going to be a push-over. The 1946 International elections proved that rank-and-file support for their communist leaders was strong. Furthermore, the existing anti-communist leadership was said to be "basically Trotskyite" and apparently not to the liking of the CCF. In early March 1948, the B.C. White Bloc was "completely smashed" in District elections, winning a majority only in the New Westminster local<sup>84</sup> — the same local where White Bloc politics had taken root in 1942. Mahoney used the New Westminster local as his staging area, working closely with Stewart Alsbury



*"B.C. branch of Woodworkers' Union was Red-led until International president Jim Fadling teamed up with Mahoney in Communist purge." The Standard, 22 October 1949.*

<sup>83</sup> Abella, *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-120. The role played by Trotskyists in the campaign against the B.C. District has never been clarified. In 1946 Lloyd Whalen who was an active leader in the

and George Mitchell.<sup>85</sup> Together they exploited the tensions created by the International's suspension of Jack Greenall and the dissension over control of the organizing program to build a campaign against the District's leaders. Weekly radio broadcasts were established to publicize the Canadian Congress of Labour's line on the controversies in B.C. Every effort was made to involve anti-communist locals in the political affairs of the provincial labour council and a moratorium was put on organizing new locals unless they showed anti-communist potential.

At the September 1948 Federation convention the rightists captured control, but only because prior to the convention the CCL had suspended the International Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union, the IWA's major left-wing ally. But even with 22 left-wing delegates deprived of their seats, the IWA won most of the early convention votes by a single vote. Only after some convention-floor shenanigans by Mahoney, did a couple of key votes fall the other way. When the fight was over, the CCL-CCF delegates had captured five of nine executive seats.<sup>86</sup>

Mahoney was meeting with the IWA International officers at this point to coordinate strategies; rumours were circulating that the district was about to seize the District's assets and put it into receivership; anti-communist stalwarts from the Portland-based Columbia River District Council were mobilized to attend meetings in B.C. and to organize opposition to the B.C. District leaders.<sup>87</sup> As early as July 1948 the B.C. District had warned the International to cease its campaign of disruption or to face the possibility of secession. When the Port Alberni local passed a resolution calling for a referendum on the secession question, Fadling remained insensitive. Canadian Congress of Labour head Pat Conroy called the pending secession "extremely fortunate" since it would save expulsion proceedings. He instructed Mahoney to subtly encourage the move.<sup>88</sup>

Still additional developments decided the secession question for the District. The U.S. government had closed the border to District leaders again after allowing passage for a brief period in 1948. The closure appears to have been in direct retaliation for the vocal condemnation of the Taft-Hartley law by the Canadian communists. Secondly, for the second straight year, U.S. border authorities denied the entire left wing of the Canadian delegation permission to

---

anti-communist campaign left the CCF in favour of a Trotskyist faction along with two other prominent CCF organizers, R.W. Bullock and T.J. Bradley. According to Ruth Bullock, Mr. Bullock was "pulled out of the shipyards in 1946-47" to "defeat the Stalinist stranglehold on the IWA." For documentation of the relationship between the CCF and the Trotskyists, see the Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, University of British Columbia Special Collections Library.

<sup>85</sup> Abella, *Nationalism*, 119.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-32; John Ball interview, October 1976.

<sup>88</sup> Abella, *Nationalism*, 131.

attend the convention held again in the U.S.<sup>89</sup>

By an overwhelming margin, the B.C. District Council voted on 3 October 1948 to secede from the International Woodworkers of America and form the Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada (WIUC). A number of points can be made at this juncture using the evidence that Abella himself has assembled. First, is that the campaign against the IWA B.C. left-wing leaders was conducted by organizers either assigned to the task by union and political authorities in Toronto or recruited in the U.S. Second, at least one of the leaders identified by Abella, George Mitchell, had been resoundingly rejected by the rank-and-file in the 1946 election and, by Abella's account, the White Bloc had been "smashed" in an election only months prior to the secession. Third, the money for the propaganda campaign was coming from the International office.

On the other hand, Jack Greenall who was elected by the rank-and-file (over George Mitchell) was ejected from office, not by the rank-and-file, but by the U.S. government. Other left-wing woodworkers, elected as convention delegates by the rank-and-file, were kept from their duties by the U.S. government and, in the case of the B.C. Federation of Labour convention, the CCL. Finally with both the International and the CCL forcefully moving to strip the B.C. District of its autonomy, it is very difficult to join Abella in his findings that it was the rank-and-file which was "repuls[ing] the Communist tide" or that the union's left-wing leadership was failing. On the contrary, virtually all the available empirical evidence — of which the elections results are the most conclusive — point to the opposite conclusion. The rank-and-file and its communist leadership were unified at the time of the secession.



## WHAT'S IN LINE FOR '49?

A PROGRAM OF UNIONISM  
FOR B. C. WOODWORKERS

*"What's in Line for '49?" Issued by the National Executive, WIUC. Author's possession.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

The WIUC lasted only three years and eventually all the locals that went with it returned to the IWA. Official versions of IWA history have used the quick demise of the WIUC as conclusive proof that the rank-and-file did not support the union's communist leadership.<sup>90</sup> Abella is more temperate in his remarks about the period, drawing attention to the role of the state and the "relentless persuasion and pressure of the international and Congress organizers" in creating the downfall of the WIUC. Still, Abella argues that "union members found it difficult to transfer their loyalty from their union to their leaders" and the conclusion that few lamented the demise of the WIUC.<sup>91</sup>

Previous accounts of the WIUC have relied upon documentation from the organizations and individuals opposed to the WIUC; the WIUC's side of the struggle has never been told. What emerges from the WIUC's own documents is a record of unionism that was, from beginning to end, as democratic and rank-and-file oriented as any North American labour union has ever been. That the WIUC was unsuccessful cannot be disputed; but that it represents the "failure" of its leadership or an artifact discarded by its members can be.

The secession vote was taken at the regularly scheduled quarterly meeting of the District. Besides the District officers<sup>92</sup> the meeting was attended by International President James Fadling, board members from local unions, and 75 delegates. Soon after the meeting began, a floor fight erupted over a resolution condemning employers for raising board rates (the price charged loggers for their camp meals) subsequent to the recently settled contract negotiations. The resolution cited the officers of the New Westminster local and Fadling for having engaged in divisive activities which weakened the union's effort to gain a more favourable settlement and invited the heavy-handed action by employers on board rates.

Fred Wilson from Local 1-80 claimed "the bosses would never have [raised board rates] unless they were sure that they had the full cooperation of our International President, and Alsbury, and some of these guys in New Westminster."<sup>93</sup> The anger of the delegates boiled over when Fadling rose to answer Wilson's charges. Shouts of "Sit down! Sit down!" greeted Fadling. With considerable effort the Chairman quieted the meeting and allowed Fadling to speak. The International President called the resolution a "two-edged sword" which required delegates to condemn the bosses and their International leader at the same time. Despite Fadling's protest, the delegates did exactly that by passing the resolution.

<sup>90</sup> Previous accounts of the WIUC have been sketchy, at best. The availability of the proceedings of the disaffiliation convention, the first WIUC convention and the WIUC newspapers make possible the first detailed account of the WIUC's history.

<sup>91</sup> Abella, *Nationalism*, 135, 138.

<sup>92</sup> District officers at the time were Ernie Dalskog, Harold Pritchett, Hjalmer Bergren, Mark Mosher, and Jack Forbes. *Proceedings of the Third Quarterly Meeting of District Council No. 1, IWA-CIO*, 3 October 1948, Appendix 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Proceedings . . . Third Quarterly Meeting, IWA*, 3 October 1948, 32.

The gathering moved closer to the disaffiliation question by instructing the District Officers to "take any and all steps which in their discretion they deem necessary to fully protect and preserve assets, funds, and property of the membership at present contained in B.C. District Council No. 1, IWA." Then debate on disaffiliation began.<sup>94</sup>

The officers enumerated the reasons for disaffiliation in the resolution. They included violation of the District's autonomy by the International; use of organizing funds contributed by the District against the District; slander of District leaders; appointment of disruptive organizers who were paid with funds collected from the District; signing of the "yellow dog" Taft-Hartley anti-communist affidavits by International leaders; the setting up of underground White Bloc caucuses within the District; and the banning of Canadian workers from the International convention by the U.S. Department of Immigration.<sup>95</sup>

Lloyd Whalen was the first to respond to the disaffiliation resolution. He called it "a continuation of... a policy completely alien to the working class..."<sup>96</sup> Following Whalen, Stewart Alsbury accused the leadership of District One of having "a political axe to grind" and of trying "to take the woodworkers of B.C. out of the International Union and put them into the Third International..."<sup>97</sup> When Fred Fieber from Local 1-357 labelled the District Officers "a bunch of liars" for the charges they leveled, the debate intensified. Dalskog, chairing the meeting, demanded Fieber retract his statement. "Take it back! Take it back!" shouted the delegates.<sup>98</sup>

Eight speakers quickly rose to support the motion for disaffiliation. Edna Brown spoke for the Ladies Auxiliary: she credited the District One leaders with being "the first trade union people who have agreed that women are important in the trade union movement."<sup>99</sup> (Later Fadling attempted to dissolve the women's auxiliaries because of their opposition to the Marshall Plan and International secretary Carl Winn denounced women as good "to work in the kitchen and to service the American Navy.")<sup>100</sup>

Dalskog attacked the domination of the trade union movement by those who supported the foreign policy of big business and the U.S. Congress and then squared off with Fadling:

J. Fadling: Mr. Chairman, as International President, I...

Voices: Sit down. Sit down. The question on the motion. Sit down.

S. Alsbury: Bro. Chairman, give him five minutes.

Voices: Sit down. Sit down. Question. Question.

E. Dalskog: The majority of the delegates seem to want the question put now.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>100</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 1.

J. Fadling: As I understand, you are refusing me the floor.

Voices: Question. Question. Question.

J. Fadling: You haven't passed this resolution yet, you know. Do you refuse me the floor, Bro. Dalskog?

Following that exchange (Fadling was never given the floor), the motion was read once more and passed.

Immediately, Alsbury took the floor.

S. Alsbury: Bro. Chairman, on behalf of the New Westminster delegation, including the Board Member, we wish our vote recorded as being in opposition.

E. Dalskog: The motion is carried.

S. Alsbury: Inasmuch as we are no longer members of the International Woodworkers of America, we will have to leave. (Loud cheers and applause)

Voice: Take Bro. Fadling with you. (At this point a number of delegates left the meeting.)<sup>101</sup>

The remainder of the meeting dealt with administrative details: the [ex] B.C. District officers were made temporary officers of the WIUC, 23 October was set for the first WIUC convention, and temporary by-laws were passed.

A unanimous standing vote for a declaration of independence launched the "October Revolution."<sup>102</sup>

The WIUC leaders viewed its first convention as a sequel to the 1937 IWA break with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBCJ).<sup>103</sup> "We are living in a period of change," said Harold Pritchett to the first WIUC convention, "and anybody who flies in the face of change is either unintelligent or has a purpose for [it]." Pritchett drew parallels between Bill Hutcheson, the reactionary leader of the Carpenters union in 1937 and Fadling. He pointed out that conservatives opposed the movement to go CIO in 1937 and were presently leading the opposition to the WIUC. But, said Pritchett, "in spite of what Fadling in 1937, and in spite of what Fadling said in 1948, and in spite of the bosses, the Woodworkers' Industrial Union is here to stay and to grow and to represent the best interests of woodworkers across the length and breadth of this great country."<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Proceedings . . . Third Quarterly Meeting, IWA*, 3 October 1948, 79.

<sup>102</sup> The Declaration of Independence reiterated the charges against the International officers, reviewed the worsening international political scene and declared " . . . disaffiliation from the International Woodworkers of America, and our existence from this moment as an autonomous industrial union of Canadian woodworkers, pledged to the progressive and militant traditions of our past, pledged to the ceaseless struggle for the rights of labor and the workers in lumber. *There can be no defeat for the workers of the world! Forward to the Organization and Victory of all Woodworkers in Canada and the United States!*" *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>103</sup> The first WIUC convention was held 23 and 24 October 1948 and was attended by 244 credentialed delegates, 41 fraternal auxiliary delegates, and 48 visitors. Local 71 with 50 delegates had the largest representation.

<sup>104</sup> Woodworkers' Industrial Union of Canada, *Proceedings of Constituent Convention*, 23-24 October 1948, 55.



*"Riding high in Communist heydays were Nigel Morgan, Harold Pritchett and Ernie Dalskog, all LPP officials." The Standard, 22 October 1949.*

Constitutional considerations took up most of the convention's time. The document governing the WIUC reflected the members' respect for democratic organization. Among its provisions were those setting officers' salaries at \$65 per week with increases tied to wage gains in the industry; providing for referendum election of all officers; allowing referendum recall proceedings to be initiated by 20 per cent of the members with a simple majority vote needed for recall; making stewards elected at the local level; banning discrimination by reason of race, color, sex, religion, or political belief.<sup>105</sup>

Ernie Dalskog summed-up the spirit in which the new constitution was adopted and called attention to the national scope of WIUC plans

We don't want an organization where they have a business agent that handles everything; we don't want to have an organization that is run from the top — we want to have an organization in which the membership is the determining factor. That is the type of organization that the Woodworkers' Industrial Union of Canada is going to back and that is the kind of an organization that will extend not only to the Province of British Columbia, but into all of the other Provinces of Canada in the very near future.<sup>106</sup>

Enthusiasm surrounded the convention. Bert Melsness called it a "great day for the woodworkers in British Columbia and Canada." Alex Shouldra from Local 71 predicted a membership increase from 27,000 to 40,000 in British Columbia. Thomas McDonald from Local 423 said the IWA would go down in history "as one of the greatest unions . . . but that is going to be only a shadow of what we will do under the Woodworkers' Industrial Union of Canada."<sup>107</sup>

The WIUC called for all woodworkers to revoke their IWA dues check-off and begin paying dues to the new organization. In operations where a majority of workers had joined, applications were to be made for certification. The key

<sup>105</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 1; I, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Proceedings, 1st Constitutional Convention*, 43.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 12, 28.

to WIUC success was said to lie with the job stewards and their aggressive pursuit of grievances.<sup>108</sup>

While enthusiasm prevailed at the convention, more ominous clouds were already on the horizon. The Canadian Congress of Labour had already rejected proposals for affiliation; companies with whom the IWA had held contracts refused to recognize the WIUC as the bargaining agent; organizers reported confusion and defections among the rank-and-file. Most importantly, the employers were doing everything they could to wreck the WIUC. Organizers reported numerous instances of employers attempting to intimidate WIUC members and harass the new unions' organizers.<sup>109</sup>

The IWA, despite its legacy of struggle against company unionism, allied itself with the employers and the latter quickly availed themselves of the service. On 9 October 1948 British Forest Products Limited announced its contracts with the IWA remained in full force and that it "would recognize and deal only with [the IWA]." IWA organizers were granted special privileges by the employers including escorts by "superintendents and foremen and even the Manager" when entering company property. In one case "IWA administrator Claude Ballard and Lloyd Whalen were granted permission to bring their sound truck onto company property and space was cleared in the yard, by the company, for the meeting." In late October the IWA collaborated with radio station CJOR to seize the District's weekly radio program, "Green Gold" and proceeded to broadcast under the name "Green Gold" "in the same time slot using the same sound effects" as had the District.<sup>110</sup>

The International appointed anti-communist leaders to the B.C. District offices enabling them to continue even though most of the membership had in fact disaffiliated. The Left charged that the "provisional" locals and District Council apparatus were really paper organizations designed to disrupt the WIUC. One individual taking office in a "paper local," Joe Morris, eventually rose to the presidencies of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Morris recalled "[moving] into the office that had been vacated by the WIUC people [and starting] with a borrowed typewriter, a borrowed mimeograph machine, an old table, a chair and a couple of packing cases. We had no records and no money."<sup>111</sup>

The fight between the IWA and WIUC waxed violent at Iron River, a MacMillan logging camp south of Campbell River on Vancouver Island and a WIUC stronghold. In early November MacMillan fired two loggers, Anton Johnson and George Nichols "on the excuse they were not cutting enough timber." When the crew struck to enforce the seniority rights of the fired loggers, the IWA, represented by Alsbury, Whalen, and Tom Bradley attempted to settle the

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42; Supplement 14.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 13, 16-18, 30, 36, 49; Supplement 14.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, Supplement 14; *The Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Joe Morris, "Communism in the Trade Unions" (Unpublished Speech delivered at Queens University, c. 1965, copy in possession of the author), 44.

dispute by negotiating directly with the employer and encouraging the crew to return to work.<sup>112</sup>

On 15 November 1948 100 WIUC loggers struck the entire MacMillan operation. Upon the IWA's request, the Labour Relations Board declared the strike illegal<sup>113</sup> and the International moved to break the strike. On 8 December 1948 the IWA and the fledgling WIUC met in what the WIUC paper labelled "one of the most outstanding and shameful incidents in Canadian labor history."<sup>114</sup>

"We very carefully laid our plans and developed our strategy," recalled Joe Morris of the IWA, "and decided that we would escort our people to work. . . ." The IWA strike breakers arrived before daylight and the ensuing melee took place in the glare of automobile headlights. "When we drove into camp with our people, [communists] stormed across the road and into the camp," said Morris. "The provisional President of the Regional Council [Stewart Alsbury] was kicked so badly that we had to take him [and two others] to the hospital. However, we were successful in getting our people in the crew-cars and out to the job. . . ."<sup>115</sup>

That night a force of 150 "thugs," few of whom were loggers and many of whom were reportedly from Oregon and Washington, were bused into the district. "This mob," according to a *Canadian Woodworker* account, "was escorted to the picket line . . . by 26 provincial police. . . . Unable to provoke a fight with the token picket line of 14 men and three women facing them, they burned down the lean-to shelter used by strikers."<sup>116</sup> For the second straight day only 25 scabs went to work.

Five Iron River strikers were tried on charges of having assaulted Alsbury and Tom Bradley.<sup>117</sup> The WIUC "defendants" proudly turned the courtroom into a political forum. Mike Farkas took the stand and testified that "he had beat up Alsbury and probably broken [Alsbury's] ribs when he threw him over his shoulder to the ground because Alsbury had tried to lead scabs through a picket line." A defense witness, Danny Holt testified "he had seen Farkas beat up Alsbury until he yelled for mercy. . . ." Holt testified: "I told Farkas, 'Hit him again Mike,' and Mike did."<sup>118</sup>

The trial and its aftermath revealed further details of the IWA's conspiracy to disrupt the left-wing WIUC movement. Alsbury admitted that he had been "invited" to herd scabs to the Iron River site by the company. The use of strikebreakers from the U.S. had been planned as early as the IWA convention

<sup>112</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 2. See also Joe Morris, "Communism in the Trade Unions."

<sup>113</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Morris, "Communism in the Trade Unions," 47-48.

<sup>116</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 4.

<sup>117</sup> The five strikers charged were Mike Farkas, George Stevens, Otto MacDonald, Alex Armella, and Lang Mackie.

<sup>118</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 6.

in October when a call for "volunteers" and White Bloc loggers to infiltrate the Vancouver Island operations had been given. Evidence also indicated the right-wing provisional leaders had used District strike funds to finance the scabbing operation at Iron River.<sup>119</sup>

Both sides claimed victory at Iron River. And while a standoff was not a satisfactory result for the WIUC's first major confrontation, the new union saw no alternative to pursuing a course of independent unionism for Canadian woodworkers. The campaign was conducted on two fronts: organizing in the mills and woods while fighting through the legal channels for its right to exist. Newsletters issued in Vancouver, New Westminster, Prince George, Cranbrook, and Victoria hammered at the worsening conditions of employment and the rapidly accumulating unresolved grievances. They attacked the IWA leadership for loyalty to the companies and expenditure of dues money collected in British Columbia across the border. As details of the International's disruption campaign in B.C. became available, they too were reported in the newsletters. The WIUC began a province-wide newspaper, initially called *The Canadian Woodworker*, and renamed *The Union Worker*, in March 1949.<sup>120</sup>

The International took overt steps to assist the paper locals in the B.C. District. On 15 February the Executive Board noted that the breakaway had "compensated" the IWA through "the elimination from our ranks of certain undesirable, corrupt and mentally diseased individuals" and moved to exonerate the paper locals of debts incurred to the international during their fight with the WIUC. The action cancelled per capita dues, the cost of dues stamps, office supplies and debts incurred by the locals prior to the breakaway, an indication that the fight against the WIUC was, in effect, still being subsidized by the International.<sup>121</sup>

The courts provided the WIUC with additional challenges. By mid-December 1948 locals in Cranbrook, Nanaimo, Courtenay, and Port Alberni had applied to the Provincial Labour Relations Board for certification in 14 operations. By mid-February the applications numbered 34 yet only one election, in Victoria, had been held. The IWA won that election by one vote.<sup>122</sup> Following the Victoria election, the IWA asked the courts for an injunction to halt Labour Relations Board action on other WIUC certification requests. That move was blocked by reciprocal WIUC court action, and in early April, the Labour Board moved on the WIUC applications. The progress was slow, however, and by the end of May 1949 the WIUC was certified in only nine operations.<sup>123</sup>

By the second WIUC convention it was becoming clear that disaffiliation

<sup>119</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 5; 1, 4; 1, 9; 1, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Copies of all these papers are in possession of the author.

<sup>121</sup> International Woodworkers of America, *International Executive Board Proceedings*, 15 February 1949, Supplement 3.

<sup>122</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 4; 1, 7.

<sup>123</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, 1, 12.

from an International union was easy to declare, but difficult to consolidate. The convention, held 2 and 3 April 1949, called for the "re-uniting of woodworkers' ranks" based on "rank and file control and full trade union democracy."<sup>124</sup> The IWA's International paper, reporting on the WIUC convention, claimed Pritchett was seeking reaffiliation with the IWA.<sup>125</sup>

On 17 April 1949, the strike at Iron River, which had been maintained through the winter months, was called off. The first major strike conducted by the WIUC had been lost. WIUC ranks were further demoralized when Vice President Ernie Dalskog was jailed for contempt of court a week after the convention. Dalskog refused to obey a court order that he turn over \$130,000 in strike funds to the IWA. He had been entrusted with the funds at the disaffiliation convention. Now, the IWA International and the Provisional District Council claimed the money was rightfully theirs and that Dalskog and the "reds" had stolen it. Vancouver newspapers headlined the "theft" for weeks. When imprisonment failed to change Dalskog's mind, the court attacked the entire WIUC leadership. Harold Pritchett, Jack Forbes, Hjalmar Bergren, and Bert Melsness were ordered to appear in court. The WIUC's principal organizers were thus tied to a court docket when they needed to be in the field organizing.

The WIUC never relinquished its claim to the strike funds. Yet the fact of the matter was that the IWA had won the jurisdictional battle and represented the bulk of B.C. woodworkers. Furthermore the IWA was going into contract negotiations with employers. Thus, if the WIUC was to act in the interest of the rank-and-file it had no choice but to place the strike funds at the IWA's disposal. In early May the \$130,000 was handed over to the court and Dalskog was released after spending nearly a month in jail.

A second step toward unity was taken in June when the WIUC National Council voted unanimously in favor of supporting IWA members "in any action that may be necessary — up to and including strike action — to win the demands laid down for the 1949-50 contract."<sup>126</sup> The strike fund was turned over to the IWA without further court action. The WIUC newspaper editorialized on the need for unity and proposed a "shoulder to shoulder fight" against the deteriorating working conditions in the industry.

The WIUC was clearly on the defensive, its position weakened by the anti-communist offensive launched throughout the CIO and CCL. Reporting on the expulsion of the United Electrical Workers and Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Unions from the CIO, the *Union Woodworker* pointed out, "A year ago, the main bulk of the labor movement was more or less united in a common front. Today, it has been riven asunder, transformed into warring factions, with the remnants of the CIO raiding and wrecking in obedience to Murray's policy of 'divide and conquer.' A united CIO movement no longer exists."<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 10.

<sup>125</sup> *The International Woodworker*, 13 April 1949.

<sup>126</sup> *The Canadian Woodworker*, I, 13.

<sup>127</sup> *The Union Woodworker*, I, 21.

Other problems arose when employers began refusing to accept revocations of IWA dues-checkoffs submitted by WIUC supporters unless they were signed in the presence of company officials — a policy designed to intimidate workers.<sup>128</sup> The Labour Board allowed the procedure and eventually began siding openly with the IWA and employers. In one case, at Columbia Contracting Company's planer operation, the Board granted the IWA certification without holding an election.<sup>129</sup>

With the employers, the State, and the international labor movement allied against the WIUC, the movement for unity was accelerated. Polemics against the IWA subsided in late 1949 and in May of 1950, the *Union Woodworker* endorsed an IWA proposal for a union shop. In July the paper stated:

... a decisive turn has now to be made in our work and ground prepared for the next step forward. There is much to be done and done quickly.

Today, trade unionism is at a lower ebb in the lumber industry than it has been for years. In many operations, no union of any kind exists, although the workers have amply demonstrated a willingness and readiness to fight. In other operations, one or both unions exist in name only. Only in a few places is there actual organization on the job. This situation must be remedied without delay.

It is with this situation before us that we must face the issue of how to unite and rally the workers to fight for their immediate needs and for the future.<sup>130</sup>

In August 1950, the WIUC officers advised woodworkers to "join hands together as workers having common problems by building one powerful industrial union for the lumber industry."<sup>131</sup> With a few parting shots at the IWA leadership, the *Woodworkers Industrial Union of Canada* was abandoned. Slowly, all the WIUC locals drifted back to the IWA, the last being Local 405 in Cranbrook. In the end, the prophecy of CCL leader Pat Conroy that the "October Revolution" might actually be a blessing in disguise for the anti-communists, proved to be correct. Nevertheless, the WIUC left a record that refuted many of the charges made against its communist leaders. The little independent union, founded by a delegated body, had staked its future on aggressive organizing of rank-and-file woodworkers and an uncompromising anti-employer line. The WIUC was a model of union democracy — elected leadership at the job steward level, referendum recall, officers salaries tied to wage increases in the industry, and no discrimination, even on the basis of political preference. The latter provision is important because communists had technically been constitutionally banned from membership in the IWA since 1940 and the clause had been invoked more than once by the IWA's right wing. In the end the WIUC acquitted itself admirably. When in 1949 it became apparent that its own survival might weaken the hand of rank-and-file woodworkers

<sup>128</sup> *The Union Woodworker*, I, 18.

<sup>129</sup> *The Union Woodworker*, I, 21.

<sup>130</sup> *The Union Woodworker*, I, 26.

<sup>131</sup> *The Union Woodworker*, I, 27.

at the bargaining table, the WIUC made a move for unity by returning contested strike funds — an action which afforded WIUC leaders honour and nothing more. The most popular historical accounts of the IWA in B.C. have utilized the notions of rank-and-file rejection of communist trade unionism and errors made by communist leaders to explain the departure of communist leadership from the union in the post-World War II period. This article has challenged the popular wisdom in several ways. First, the idea that either communist or anti-communist ideology are necessarily "native" to B.C. has been rejected in favour of an analysis that locates the origins of both in the material conditions of the province's logging camps and company mill-towns. Secondly, the article has challenged the conclusion reached by Irving Abella that the rank-and-file B.C. woodworkers "repulsed the Communist tide." By any empirical evidence available, they did not. Indeed the initiative for the anti-communist campaign as well as the resources to sustain the campaign came from outside British Columbia. For six years the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the IWA's International office, and the governments of both Canada and the United States waged a relentless campaign to defeat the left-led IWA District One. In fact the massive effort expended on separating the rank-and-file and its communist leaders is itself a testimony to the strength of the bond between them. The fact that the campaign against the left had to resort to structural changes in the union, e.g. breaking up large left-led locals, use of anti-labour laws for its own ends, such as Taft-Hartley, and finally, vicious red-baiting, is itself evidence that the "simple" strategy of organizing the members to vote the communists out was untenable.

Finally, the article has questioned the conclusion that Communist Party errors were decisive in the demise of District One's left wing. Certainly, there is no evidence in the events prior to the secession to support such a conclusion. Despite the polemics and propaganda about the fealty of communist leaders to Moscow and the "sell out" of the no strike pledge supported by the communists, the rank-and-file consistently returned its left-wing leaders to office — and resoundingly defeated their critics. This leaves the WIUC period. Was the WIUC a mistake or was it a bold, last ditch attempt to salvage the District's autonomy? It certainly is not clear that if the District had waited passively for the axe to drop that things would have turned out any differently. The International and U.S. border authorities had already severed the District from its parent body — except in the legal sense which, of course, meant the District's assets could be seized at any time and all would be lost. Mistake or not, the secession was probably not the decisive event. The boxing-in of the District by its enemies during the six years prior to secession and the refusal of the courts and Labour Board to give the WIUC a fighting chance after the secession were much more critical than the actual secession itself.

The importance of divisiveness among union and political leaders should also not be overlooked. Even in its most unified form, the working class of Canada and the United States faced enormous opposition in the post-World War

II period. From the shop floor to international politics, capital had embarked on a campaign to smash labour militancy and solidarity. Capital's resources were magnified by the coordination of the state apparatus of the major capitalist countries. The working class faced tremendous odds in the fight to preserve gains made during the 1930s and the defense of those gains called for maximum solidarity. Instead, the ranks of labour were divided by the cold war. Some union leaders saw an opportunity to advance themselves by joining the anti-communist crusade promulgated by employers and governments. Rather than acceding to the leaders elected by the rank-and-file, they secured their own futures by helping to spread division.

Thus, we must conclude that the important lessons from the experience of IWA's District One during the 1940s are less about the failures of the people who led the District or about the political attitudes of B.C. woodworkers than about the resourcefulness of state and corporate interests to determine the course of the labour movement at this historical juncture.

*The author is grateful to several individuals who read earlier drafts and made valuable suggestions. They include George Brandak, Curator of Manuscripts, UBC Special Collections Library, Carolyn Howe, University of Wisconsin, and the readers for Labour/Le Travailleur. Bill Tattam, Portland, Oregon provided valuable insights during the period of research and writing. Also assisting the research were Harold Pritchett, Clay Perry, IWA Region I Education Department, Frank Fuller, B.C. Teachers Federation, and the International research and education staff of the IWA.*

## FORWARD

A Marxist newsmagazine specializing in news and analysis of interest to socialists in the NDP.

Recent issues have reprinted important documents of the NDP left in Ontario (by Jan Duszta, Floyd Laughren, Simon Rosenblum and others), and reported on NDP opposition to Ed Broadbent's coldwar electioneering. Recent full-length features include: Martha Macdonald's assessment of the struggle against the Michelin Bill in Nova Scotia, Henry Milner's review of a new study on the Parti Québécois, Norman Penner's review of David Lewis' writings on the CCF, David Malacha's recollections of the 1935 Regina "Riot," Harry Kopyto's exposé of the Macdonald Commission, and Ross Dowson's testimony before the Krever Commission on the security of health records. As well: running coverage on the union movement and U.S. imperialism of Canada.

Subscriptions are \$1.50 for six issues. Send to Forward Publishing Association, Box 778 Adelaide St. P.O., Toronto M5C 2K1.