

The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905

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The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905

J. Hugh Tuck

OF ALL THE LABOUR disturbances which erupted in Canada during the turn-of-the-century strike wave, none were more spectacular or controversial than the British Columbia events of 1903. Beginning on a small scale in January with a strike of Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) clerks in Vancouver, the walkouts snowballed. Soon much of the rail and water transportation of the province was affected, as well as the Vancouver Island coal mines and the CPR lines on the Prairies. At the centre of the storm was the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees (UBRE), an industrial union with radical credentials whose members in the CPR offices and freight sheds had touched off the disturbances in January. Relatively new in the Canadian West, the UBRE had first come to prominence during a protracted and moderately-successful strike on the Canadian Northern Railway in Manitoba in 1902. Its 1903 strike, however, was a tragic failure, and this led directly to its subsequent collapse. The events of 1903 are, in general terms, familiar to Canadian labour historians, both the strikes themselves and the resulting royal commission in which the young Mackenzie King played a prominent part.¹ What is less familiar is the UBRE itself — the complex details of its birth and its disputes with the Canadian Northern and the CPR, the factors which contributed to its ultimate defeat, and its place in the overall development of the North American labour movement.

The story of the UBRE began in September 1898, when a small local union bearing that name was formed in Winnipeg.² Its origins are obscure. We only know that the last surviving Winnipeg local of the American Railway Union

¹ Some of the more recent accounts are Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1967), 37-41; Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* (Ottawa 1968), 112-21; A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), 44-8; Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle 1979); Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980), 246-52; Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982), 246-52.

² *Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 October 1899; *Western Socialist*, (Vancouver) 17 January 1903.

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(ARU), an earlier attempt to establish an industrial union for railway workers, had died the previous year, and we can surmise that the UBRE came into being to fill the void left by its passing.³ Winnipeg had a long tradition of labour unorthodoxy of this sort which had included the idealistic Knights of Labor of the 1880s, the ARU and which would climax in the general strike and the One Big Union after World War I. In its first several years, however, the UBRE was anything but unorthodox. It made no effort to live up to its name, which clearly implied a claim upon every worker in the railway industry, but limited itself to a few relatively skilled workers who had no unions, chiefly yardmen, bridge-men, and certain classes of track repairers on the CPR. Apparently small, loosely-organized, and unaggressive, it was the sort of labour body which only came to public notice during the annual Labour Day parade. It did not even affiliate with the Winnipeg Trades Council, the central coordinating body for local labour and, while it may have formed *ad hoc* committees from time to time to meet with CPR officials, it had no recognition from the company. It had no written contract and did not try to get one.⁴

This passiveness was understandable, given the circumstances. The CPR was in the midst of a long-drawn-out struggle to limit the unionization of its work force and, when the UBRE was formed in 1898, recognized only a handful of the very strongest labour organizations, mainly craft unions for firemen, engineers, conductors, and trainmen (the four so-called railway brotherhoods), and the telegraphers. The company was still a long way from admitting the right of all its employees to bargain collectively, and was still operating on the *de facto* principle that recognition should only be granted to those unions that were strong enough to fight a successful strike to gain it.⁵ In October 1899, the road's machinists proved themselves in this fashion, gaining recognition for their union, the International Association of Machinists, after a ten-day strike. During this strike, the machinists claimed the support of other unrecognized CPR unions, including the UBRE. There is no evidence, however, that the UBRE's leaders attempted to emulate the machinists' success with action of their own at this time.⁶

In 1901, however, the UBRE took on new vigour, and began to organize the CPR's freight handlers and clerks in Winnipeg. These men had genuine grievances including low wages, and it is difficult to be sure whether the UBRE moved into the freight sheds and offices to exploit this dissatisfaction, or whether the freight and office men simply took over and began to dominate the

³ A notice for this local of the ARU last appeared in the "Union Cards" column of the Winnipeg labour paper, the *Peoples Voice*, 24 April 1897.

⁴ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 October 1899; *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 September 1901; *Western Socialist*, 17 January 1903.

⁵ The writer is currently preparing a study of the labour policies of the CPR. But there is also relevant material in Joseph Hugh Tuck, "Canadian Railways and the International Brotherhoods: Labour Organization in the Railway Running Trades in Canada, 1865-1914" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1975), ch. 5-6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 184-5; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 14 October 1899.

UBRE. The latter is quite possible, since the new Master of the union in 1901 was William Gault, a clerk and ten-year veteran of the freight department.⁷ Indeed, Gault himself was apparently a new recruit to trades unionism, one of the many CPR workers flooding into the labour movement and giving it a new militancy at the turn of the century. The company's machinists had walked out successfully for a second time, in 1900, joined this time by the boilermakers and mechanics.⁸ And in 1901 CPR trackmen gained union recognition after a summer-long strike which disrupted railway traffic across the country.⁹ At the end of 1901, as a mark of coming of age, the UBRE affiliated with the Winnipeg trades council. Gault and his associates were determined to gain recognition for their organization too, despite considerable evidence of company hostility — labour spies, the dismissal of union organizers, and other anti-union devices.¹⁰ This opposition, however, also made it clear that the UBRE needed help from outside, the kind of support available to other CPR unionists who had ties with powerful international unions like the railway brotherhoods and the recently-victorious trackmen's union. In some fashion, the Winnipeg UBRE established contact with a new and expanding American organization also (and quite coincidentally) called the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees. On 25 April 1902, the Winnipeg UBRE became Division No. 70 of the American union.¹¹

The American UBRE had been formed in Oregon about a year earlier in January 1901. Like the American Railway Union (ARU) of the early 1890s, the UBRE represented an attempt to bring all North American railway workers into one big union in which (in the words of the old Knights of Labor motto) "an injury to one would be the concern of all."¹² The UBRE's founder and president, George Estes, was a man very much in the mould of Eugene Debs, the vigorous and magnetic leader of the ARU, who was now a leader of the Socialist Party of America. Like Debs, he had begun as a labour moderate, and was in fact a relative newcomer to trades unionism.¹³ A former telegrapher and

⁷ *Voice*, (Winnipeg) 3 January, 25 April, 2 May 1902; *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 May 1902.

⁸ *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists*, September 1900, 481-3; October 1900, 539-44.

⁹ On the trackmen's strike, see Tuck, "Canadian Railways," 191-6, and John T. Wilson, *The Calcium Light Turned on by a Railway Trackman* (St. Louis, Missouri, 1902), *passim*.

¹⁰ *Voice*, 3 January, 25 April 1902.

¹¹ *Western Clarion*, (Vancouver) 7 May 1903.

¹² William Kirk, *National Labor Federations in the United States* (Baltimore 1906), 124-5. Although the UBRE was not strictly speaking a revival of Eugene Debs' ARU, there was some overlap of leadership. When the UBRE sent three delegates to the 1903 American Labor Union convention, one of them, S.E. Heberling, was a former ARU member. *American Labor Union Journal*, 21 May 1903.

¹³ Much of what follows in this paragraph and the next is drawn from George Estes, *Railway Employees United: A Story of Railroad Brotherhoods* (Portland, Oregon 1921), *passim*.

station agent on the Southern Pacific Railway in Oregon, he had no connection with the labour movement until the late 1890s, when a shocking and humiliating experience changed his life for good. Not only did his employers deny him a promotion which he wanted very much and felt he was entitled to because of fifteen years faithful service, but they also exiled him for over a year to one of the remotest stations on the Southern Pacific line, at Grant's Pass, Oregon.¹⁴ Estes was powerfully affected by this experience, and discovered abilities within himself he had apparently never realized were there. In October 1898, deciding that "repetitions of such cases could only be avoided by a working agreement defining Telegraphers' rights," he joined the Order of Railroad Telegraphers (ORT), a union which had never been able to claim more than a handful of members on the Southern Pacific.¹⁵ Within two months, he had been elected the union's general chairman for the system. Since the telegraph lines, the operators' normal means of communication, were vulnerable to company "spotters," he advised a system of organizing the widely scattered telegraphers by mail. By April 1899, he had enrolled almost all the Southern Pacific telegraphers in the ORT. The railroad's management was highly impressed and perhaps a little frightened as well by this sudden upsurge of union strength, and granted the ORT a contract in May without putting up significant resistance. Estes' fellow telegraphers were as impressed as was management by Estes' achievements:

Bro. Geo. Estes . . . has performed almost a miracle in the wonderful rapidity with which he organized the line and created our schedule. . . . It is to be regretted that each line of road in America cannot produce an Estes, or even one to several lines of road.¹⁶

But Estes was to achieve an even greater success than this. In early 1900 the Southern Pacific management established a company Relief Department similar to those on a number of other North American railways (including the Grand Trunk in Canada). Relief Departments of this kind were ostensibly intended to provide compensation for on-the-job injuries, and were maintained partly by compulsory employee contributions. As almost everyone knew, however, the departments' real purposes were to undercut union insurance plans and restrict the access of injured employees to the courts. They were unpopular with railway employees everywhere, and were, in fact, outlawed in Canada early in the century by an amendment to the Railway Act.¹⁷ The Southern Pacific's action thus aroused its employees as never before. In April 1900, 55 delegates, representing all the unions on the railroad, met to protest to company president Collis P. Huntington. Estes was elected chairman of the committee of 55 and, using information supplied by the Pacific Coast managers of

¹⁴ Estes, *Railway Employees*, 22; *Daily Herald*, (Calgary) 20 April 1903.

¹⁵ Estes, *Railway Employees*, 22.

¹⁶ *Railroad Telegrapher*, November 1899, 953.

¹⁷ See W.H. Allport, "American Railway Relief Funds," *Journal of Political Economy*, 20 (1912), 49-78, 101-34; *Railroad Trainman*, December 1906, 1122-3; *Firemen's Magazine*, February 1901, 633-4.

three national insurance companies, faced down the autocratic and unscrupulous Huntington and had the plan withdrawn. It was an exhilarating experience for the small-town telegrapher from Oregon. In later life he recalled these days of triumph as "the greatest events of my life."¹⁸

It was this episode which made Estes a convert to labour unity and, like many converts, he followed his ideas to their logical conclusion. Mere voluntary co-operation between existing unions, he decided, did not go far enough by a considerable margin, and this view seemed confirmed shortly after when the ORT lost strikes on the Santa Fe and the Southern Railroad. These strikes might have been won, Estes concluded, if other classes of railway employees had gone on strike as well, as part of one organization.¹⁹ At the ORT annual convention in autumn 1900, he ran for the union's presidency on a unity platform. When this move failed (as he may have expected it would), he took the same step that Eugene Debs had in the early 1890s. In January 1901, Estes and seven other railroaders met at Roseburg, Oregon, to lay the groundwork for Division No. 1 of a new union, the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, which would "bring all classes of actual railway employees in closer contact with each other, for their mutual benefit and improvement. . . ."²⁰ These men, however, had not yet begun to think of themselves as labour radicals. The "Preamble" to the UBRE's constitution, drawn up at this time, called for conservatism and "moderation in . . . dealings with employers," and declared that the new union would "refrain from declaring itself for, or pledging itself to any political party. . . ."²¹ Estes and his supporters soon found that others shared their views about the need for labour unity. A similar organization, the Railway Employees Amalgamated Association, had just been formed in San Francisco. Within months, the Amalgamated Association and the UBRE had coalesced under the UBRE name with headquarters in San Francisco.²² The new union's first efforts were directed at taking over the Order of Railroad Telegraphers' organization on the Southern Pacific. This failed, and Estes and UBRE vice-president B. A. Meyer were expelled from the ORT.²³ In early 1902, they applied for a charter from the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and were again rebuffed. "Such an organization," the AFL Executive Council declared, "would be in rivalry and necessarily in conflict with the railway brotherhoods. . . ."²⁴ It was only after this that the UBRE turned leftwards and

¹⁸ Estes, *Railway Employees*, 11; Kirk, *National Labor Federations*, 123.

¹⁹ Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia, "Report," Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1903, No. 36a, 28.

²⁰ Kirk, *National Labor Federations*, 123-4; United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, *Constitution and By-Laws* (n.p. 1902), 3.

²¹ UBRE, *Constitution and By-Laws*, 5. (The Preamble is dated 27 January 1901).

²² Kirk, *National Labor Federations*, 124; *American Labor Union Journal*, 3 September 1903.

²³ *Railroad Telegrapher*, July 1901, 601-2.

²⁴ American Federation of Labor, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention*, 1902, "Executive Council's Report," 47, 57.

began negotiations with a newly-formed rival of the AFL, the American Labor Union (ALU).²⁵

Formed under the guidance and with the support of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), the ALU was industrial in orientation and had close ties with the Socialist Party of America.²⁶ It was described by its leaders, with some accuracy, as a North American exemplar of the "new unionism" currently in vogue in England and Europe which concentrated upon industrial unionism and organizing the unskilled, and which emphasized the essential unity of the working class.²⁷ The new unionism was frequently associated with socialist and revolutionary movements, and its leaders spoke of sweeping economic and social reorganization. This placed it in oftentimes bitter opposition to craft unions, or at least those craft unions whose leaders had not been radicalized by new currents of thought.²⁸

At first and for some time, however, the UBRE's ties were more a matter of convenience than a meeting of minds. Estes himself did not become a member of the Socialist Party in 1902 or for some time after, and his views on social questions remained little more than a hotchpotch of current radical and reform ideas. Indeed, he could perhaps be more accurately described as a populist than a socialist (insofar as these terms have any precise meaning), and his involvement with the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s tends to bear out this interpretation.²⁹ Estes and the other UBRE leaders would almost certainly have preferred the strong if relatively conservative AFL to the more radical but also weaker ALU. The UBRE in fact, did not formally affiliate with the ALU until April 1903, a full year after being turned down by the AFL.³⁰

The UBRE's leaders and its newfound supporters in Canada were confident and optimistic in spring of 1902. The new union, a column in Winnipeg's labour newspaper *The Voice* proclaimed in early May, would "foster education and dispel ignorance, raise wages and lower expenses, shorten hours and lengthen life, increase independence and decrease dependence." It would "Make the World Better."³¹ But was this optimism justified? The founding of the ARU in 1893 had come after the collapse of the Knights of Labor in the late 1880s, and had resulted directly from the failure of a plan for federated action by the railway brotherhoods at a time when other railway unions were weak or non-existent, and depressed business conditions often meant reductions in

²⁵ Kirk, *National Labor Federations*, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *American Labor Union Journal*, 24 September 1903.

²⁸ Larry Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 41-7.

²⁹ *Western Socialist*, 10 April 1903; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 45. For a sample of Estes' views, see *Voice*, 20 February, 24 April 1903; *Western Socialist*, 10 April 1903. On Estes and the Ku Klux Klan, see George Estes, *The Roman Catholic Kingdom and the Ku Klux Klan* (Troutdale, Oregon 1923).

³⁰ *American Labor Union Journal*, 30 April 1903.

³¹ *Voice*, 9 May 1902.

wages.³² The ARU plan of united action was highly attractive to many North American railway workers under these circumstances and the members flocked in. But the ARU was a spectacular failure, a victim of the combined forces of government and management in the 1894 Pullman boycott. Its destruction, however, left a gap which the craft unions began to fill with increasing success after the return of prosperity in 1896.

These unions were adaptable, and drew sustenance from some of the same working class traditions which had nurtured the ARU. Under the leadership of the International Association of Machinists, the shopcraft unions grew in strength and confidence and learned to work together. Cooperation helped them win the strike against the CPR in 1900.³³ Other non-operating railway unions were beginning to enjoy success, most notably the trackmen's union which, like the ARU, took in many relatively unskilled workers.³⁴ Even the brotherhoods had partially healed the rifts which had destroyed the federation movement of the early 1890s and together with the telegraphers had begun to experiment with a new plan for united action — the system federation.³⁵ But most significantly, in Western Canada at any rate the successes of these unions had been made possible in part because of the encouragement and sometimes the covert assistance of non-striking unionists and their leaders. The CPR management was always very much aware during labour disputes of the bonds of sympathy between the various classes of its employees and their unions. The threat of sympathetic strikes was always present, a threat of combined action which was usually held in reserve but was nonetheless ominously real.³⁶ In other words, a flexible and relatively effective method of pressuring management had evolved since the early 1890s *within* the craft union movement on the railways. Of course the craft unions did not take in all railway workers and had other theoretical and practical disadvantages as well. And long-standing divisions within the craft union movement had by no means been eliminated, especially between the members of the railway brotherhoods and other railway

³² Donald L. McMurry, "Federation of the Railroad Brotherhoods, 1889-1894," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 7 (1953), 88-91.

³³ *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists*, September 1900, 481-3; October 1900, 539-44.

³⁴ Gary M. Fink, ed., *Labor Unions* (Westport 1977), 205.

³⁵ Edwin Clyde Robbins, *Railway Conductors: A Study in Organized Labor* (New York 1914), 49-51.

³⁶ See the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 5 October 1899, the day after the outbreak of the machinists' strike: "The men say that if a conference or not soon arranged for there are indications that the strike will become general. They cannot hold themselves responsible for what may happen at any time now." On his part, CPR President T.G. Shaughnessy believed that the strike would fail, "provided that it does not spread to men in other branches of the service." Public Archives of Canada, (henceforth PAC) Canadian Pacific Railway, Shaughnessy Letterbooks, MG28, III 20, Vol. 69, p. 93, Shaughnessy to William Whyte, 5 October 1899, Personal. The writer intends to cover this point in more detail in his study of the CPR.

workers. But despite this, craft unionism must have become more attractive to practical-minded railway workers by 1900 than industrial unionism which, after all, had been tested and found wanting in the flames of Chicago in 1894. How these men felt emotionally about industrial unionism may be another matter. Eugene Debs was still a popular figure among North American workmen, and George Estes and his associates undoubtedly had some considerable understanding of the feelings of their fellow railway workers. This might make a difference at times. But the practical question still remained: what were the UBRE's chances in view of the new strength of the craft unions, not to mention the still-present possibility of governmental and management hostility on the same scale as in 1894?

But more immediate problems confronted Master William Gault of Division No. 70 in late April 1902. Two members of his division had just been dismissed from the CPR, including a delegate to the Winnipeg Trades Council, allegedly for union activity. Shortly after, moreover, Gault was himself brought before his superior in the CPR freight department "and told that to hold his position in the freight department he would have to sever his connections with the union." Gault had just been offered the position of UBRE vice-president for Canada. He decided to accept the offer, and presented his resignation to the CPR.³⁷

Although relations between the CPR and its freight handlers in Winnipeg had almost reached the breaking point by the end of April, Estes persuaded Gault and his men to hold their fire until it became clear whether they could depend upon other CPR employees joining with them in co-ordinated strike action. This seemed highly probable, since the machinists, trackmen, telegraphers, and conductors also had outstanding grievances with the CPR at this time. Estes and Gault soon discovered, however, that it was unwise to let the initiative slip out of their hands where the CPR was concerned. Within two months, the CPR had settled almost all its labour disputes, except with the UBRE, which was now isolated. The time to strike successfully had passed.³⁸

Certain promising developments on the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR), however, saved Estes and Gault from the humiliation of admitting failure, or the even more foolhardy course of taking on the CPR singlehandedly. By 1902 entrepreneurs William Mackenzie and Donald Mann had built the relatively new CNR into a solid rival of the CPR in some areas of the Canadian West. Like the CPR, moreover, they were doing their best to stave off unionization, and so far had succeeded. The company's tactics were fairly standard for the period. General Superintendent David B. Hanna persistently refused to meet union committees, and union committeemen were sometimes given 30-day

³⁷ *Voice*, 2 May 1902; *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 May 1902; *Western Clarion*, 7 May 1903.

³⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 April, 1 May, 9 May, 31 May 1902; *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, April 1902, 165-6; *Ibid.*, June 1902, 287; *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists*, June 1902, 347, 370; *Vancouver Western Clarion*, 7 May 1903.

suspensions or fined for leaving their jobs to interview management.³⁹ By early spring 1902, however, the company was on the verge of serious difficulties as a result of these tactics. The strongest unions of all, the operating brotherhoods and the telegraphers, abandoned their individual attempts to bargain with Hanna in April, and began inter-union negotiations for the amalgamation of their bargaining committees on the CNR. These negotiations went slowly. Old rivalries and the commitment to class autonomy made co-operation difficult. But once established, the resulting system federation could apply upon the company the combined weight of five of the strongest unions in North America.⁴⁰ The trackmen's union was also re-assessing its tactics, with the shining example of the recent CPR contract to give its members hope.⁴¹ Easily the most aggressive CNR employees, however, were the machinists and the other shopmen. These men, in keeping with a militant tradition in their craft which went back to the earliest days of railroading in Winnipeg and was to culminate during the 1919 general strike were the first to strike the CNR, on 17 May. There were between 40 and 55 strikers, including boilermakers, tinsmiths and helpers, as well as machinists. A substantial number were apprentices. They made it clear that they were striking for union recognition as well as higher wages.⁴²

The strike was a textbook illustration of the ineffectiveness of a strike of a limited number of employees against a large corporation. The men were easy to replace and the company claimed, probably correctly, that the strike had almost no effect on operations.⁴³ Other CNR employees were sympathetic to the strikers, but this sympathy was quite worthless as long as it was not translated into action. On 29 May, the frustrated strikers wired Deputy Minister of Labour Mackenzie King at Ottawa to intervene under the terms of the Conciliation Act. King's evasive reply was characteristic of the man. He had taken the matter under consideration and had consulted his minister, William Mulock.⁴⁴ A day or two later, the strikers' position deteriorated further, as the car repairers over-optimistically announced that their union, the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, was on the verge of reaching an agreement with the CNR, thereby ending the immediate possibility that they would strike too.⁴⁵ On 6 June,

³⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 April 1902; *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, July 1902, 398.

⁴⁰ Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, *Proceedings of the Ninth Biennial Convention*, 1904, "Grand Master's Report," 82; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings of the Sixth Biennial Convention*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 5.

⁴¹ *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, April 1902, 165-6, July 1902, 398.

⁴² *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 April, 16-17 May 1902; *Voice*, 25 April 1902; *Labour Gazette*, July 1902, 48-9. Winnipeg machinists and boilermakers struck the CPR shops for three weeks in February 1883, in protest against certain changes in work rules. They lost. Tuck, "Canadian Railways," 62-3.

⁴³ *Labour Gazette*, July 1902, 48-9.

⁴⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 May 1902.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 June 1902.

Mackenzie King finally arrived in Winnipeg to investigate the strike, but left again almost immediately, after a short talk with the strikers and a visit to the CNR offices. He had accomplished nothing.⁴⁶ The strikers began to lose all hope of real help from their international headquarters, the railway brotherhoods, or the government. The UBRE was the only alternative left.

On 9 June, George Estes arrived in Winnipeg. While no records exist of his subsequent discussions with the strikers, his investigations apparently convinced him that sympathy for the strikers was fairly general among railway employees in Winnipeg.⁴⁷ Moreover, he must have discovered as well that many of these employees had begun to lose faith in their own unions. For example, the chairman of the Trackmen's Committee on the CNR had recently complained to American headquarters about neglect, and asked sarcastically if the union's president had been too busy with more important matters to "attend to so small a branch as this is." He had warned headquarters that "we will have to fight for all we ever get from this company."⁴⁸ Moreover, some of the switchmen and yardmen in Winnipeg had only recently become affiliated, perhaps reluctantly, with the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen after the collapse of the Winnipeg local of the Switchmen's Union, and some yardmen were still unorganized.⁴⁹ Estes could read the signs. At a public meeting on 11 June, he announced that the UBRE would begin an organizing drive on the CNR and "carry through the movement for higher wages which was recently begun by the machinists of the road."⁵⁰ The UBRE organizers moved quickly. On 30 June, a UBRE committee attempted to present a schedule of rules and wages to Superintendent Hanna, but was not granted a hearing. The union thereupon struck the CNR at 4 pm.⁵¹

The strikers included a number of classes of CNR employees: wipers, switchmen, trackmen, freight handlers, clerks, and cleaning staff, about 220 men altogether.⁵² As vice-president Gault pointed out, all the "important branches of the service" were now on strike except the operating employees — the conductors, engineers, firemen, and brakemen. This latter group, he added, were "only a small portion and percentage of the CNR employees and . . . a strike could, if necessary, be carried out successfully without their aid, although it would be valued if given." Indeed, he was optimistic that the men in the running trades would go out shortly, because "there [are] a large number of individual sympathizers" among the train and engine crews of the CNR "who [are] only waiting for instructions from their own organizations to strike."⁵³

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 June 1902.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10, 12 June 1902.

⁴⁸ *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, July 1902, 398.

⁴⁹ Switchmen's Union of North America, *Proceedings*, 1903, 171; *Journal of the Switchmen's Union of North America*, May 1903, 416.

⁵⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, 12 June 1902.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1 July 1902.

⁵² *Labour Gazette*, July 1902, 49.

⁵³ *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 July 1902.

Gault's optimism was not entirely unjustified. A significant number of brotherhood men were in favour of strike action and were co-operating closely with the UBRE. Some, indeed, were "double-headers" who had joined the UBRE while retaining their membership in their own unions. These men hoped to present joint UBRE-brotherhood schedules to the CNR management, and were apparently prepared to join the strike if necessary to enforce their demands. Indeed, a dozen or so members of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, mainly yard employees, went out with the strikers on 30 June.⁵⁴

Another group of train service employees, however, was against having anything to do with the UBRE. This faction was apparently small in numbers, but was nonetheless important because it included most of the executives of the local branches of the brotherhoods, and enjoyed the backing of international headquarters.⁵⁵ Yet the dominant position of this anti-UBRE faction obviously was conditional upon its being able to persuade the local brotherhood rank-and-file that there were positive advantages to remaining in the fold. The only way to do this was to match the promises of the UBRE by getting union recognition from the CNR for their own organizations, as well as a raise in wages and other benefits. The local brotherhood officials therefore immediately attempted to re-open the negotiations with the company which had been stalled since April.⁵⁶ Hanna's position was temporarily weak because of the strike, and he welcomed these initiatives. He could not afford to antagonize the brotherhoods as long as the UBRE strike was still relatively effective. The last thing he wanted was a sympathetic strike of the operating employees. He therefore toyed with the brotherhood committees until the company had hired enough strikebreakers to put the shops back into full operation. This took until 8 July. He then broke off negotiations with the brotherhood committees, declaring that he would not recognize their unions.⁵⁷

Hanna, however, had overplayed his hand. Since the UBRE had been effectively removed from the scene, and by his own efforts at that, the brotherhoods were now in a position to strike themselves, without appearing to support the UBRE. Moreover, the UBRE's strike had speeded up the negotiations between the brotherhoods, and federation papers were signed on 10 July. Telegrams immediately went out to international headquarters, and two brotherhood executives arrived in Winnipeg on 13 July.⁵⁸ CNR vice-president Mann had now arrived in town as well and took charge of the situation for the company. After

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 July 1902; *Winnipeg Voice*, 2 July 1902; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 6. The term "double header" (meaning a train hauled by two locomotives) was commonly used by railway workers at this time to refer to a man who belonged to two rival unions. See *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 July 1902; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Report of Grand Master," 5-6.

⁵⁶ *Railway Conductor*, October 1902, 765.

⁵⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, 1-4, 8 July 1902; *Winnipeg Voice*, 11 July 1902; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 5.

⁵⁸ Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, *Proceedings*, 1904, "Grand Master's

a certain amount of fencing, an agreement was reached on 15 July, giving the brotherhoods much of what they had been asking for, including recognition.⁵⁹ The strength of their position was evident during the negotiations. The CNR yard department was still having some difficulty getting replacements for the strikers. Mann wanted the yards to be included in the settlement, but was told by a representative of the trainmen:

that he had met with our committee and granted a schedule prior to the present trouble that the Brotherhood would most certainly have carried it out to the letter, and than even though some few of our members have refused to comply with the law of the organization, in other words, went on strike in violation of our laws, there was always a sufficient number of members of our organization ready to uphold the law to guarantee that any contracts made by us would be held inviolate.⁶⁰

The strikers were bitterly disappointed by this turn of events. Negotiations with the pro-UBRE faction in the brotherhoods had encouraged them to believe that the brotherhoods would co-ordinate their efforts with the UBRE and "that no agreement would be made until all schedules presented were dealt with and signed."⁶¹ Instead, the brotherhoods had grabbed contracts for themselves, leaving the strikers in the lurch. As one bitter trackman put it, "As soon as we 'shook the bush' the trainmen caught the bird and we were left to fight our own battle."⁶² At the annual convention of the Dominion Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) at Berlin, Ontario, in September 1902, the Manitoba delegates denounced the CNR settlement, and roundly castigated the officers of the brotherhoods for combining with "one of the largest capitalistic corporations in Canada" to oppose a union that had "the full sympathy of the old established unions. . . ."⁶³ The domination of the TLC by its eastern wing (and ultimately by the craft-oriented AFL) however, guaranteed that the position of the Manitoba delegates was not endorsed by the convention. The eastern wing of the TLC was moving in the opposite direction. Under its guidance, the convention

Report," 82; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 5-6.

⁵⁹ Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 6. Even after this time, the company's official position was that it negotiated agreements only with committees of its own workers, and did not recognize national or international unions. T.D. Regehr, *The Canadian Northern Railway; Pioneer Road of the Northern Prairies, 1895-1918* (Toronto 1976), 465. This, however, was just a face-saving fiction, which was accepted by the union since they knew it to be a fiction. As A.R. Mosher of the CBRE pointed out some years later, the names of the brotherhoods "have never appeared on any of their respective agreements... yet no one disputes that these railway men are recognized." *Canadian Railroad Employees Monthly*, November 1918, 637.

⁶⁰ Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings*, 1903, "Grand Master's Report," 6.

⁶¹ Dominion Trades and Labour Congress, *Proceedings*, 1902, 41-2.

⁶² *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, September 1902, 502.

⁶³ Dominion Trades and Labour Congress, *Proceedings*, 1902, 42.

expelled the Knights of Labor, which was an old rival of the AFL and which still had some strength in eastern Canada, and condemned all "dual" unions which competed with AFL craft unions. The consequence was to heighten western dissatisfaction with the TLC and the international craft unions, and provide opportunities for the further expansion of the UBRE and the American Labor Union in western Canada.⁶⁴ The CNR strike, in this way, served as a prelude to further industrial strife in the Canadian West.

The CNR settlement did not "officially" end the strike on the CNR, although the ranks of the strikers were somewhat thinned as a consequence. The shopworkers' unions and the UBRE remained out, but most of the trackmen returned to work about a week after the brotherhoods had settled with the company, convinced, as one trackmen put it, "that we had made a big mistake by not remaining where we belonged, in our own class organization."⁶⁵ There was, however, still much sympathy for the strikers in Winnipeg labour circles, and on 1 August 1902, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council placed the CNR on its "unfair" list by a vote of 35 to 5.⁶⁶ This had little immediate effect, however, and by late summer, the *Winnipeg Voice* was referring to the "recent strike" as a "moral victory."⁶⁷ The only thing which kept the strikers going was temporary employment elsewhere, such as harvesting, and the knowledge that the company was suffering from inexperienced help and rapid turnover of staff.⁶⁸ In January 1903, the CNR management began to think in terms of ending the dispute, and thus getting off the unfair list and getting back the "old reliable employees."⁶⁹ A settlement was reached, and the strike was officially ended on 24 January. The strikers were re-instated and granted schedules, and the company was placed back on the fair list by the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council. Only one thing was lacking in the settlement: recognition for the UBRE. The company was described as "inexorable" on this point.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, President Estes was overjoyed at this turn of events. He wrote the UBRE's Canadian organizer, Harold V. Poore of Winnipeg, "It is a wonderful victory, and we can now say we are an organization that has never lost a strike. . . ."⁷¹

Estes had great hopes for his organization in Canada in early 1903, foreseeing twenty local divisions by the summer. Thus far progress had been slow. The UBRE had organized a division at Toronto in spring 1902, and another at Vancouver in June. Divisions were organized at Calgary, Revelstoke, and

⁶⁴ Robert H. Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: A Study in American Continentalism before the First World War* (Toronto 1974), 85-97; Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 67-8.

⁶⁵ *Trackmen's Advance Advocate*, September 1902, 501.

⁶⁶ *Voice*, 1 August 1902.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 August 1902, 19 September 1902.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1903.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 January 1903.

⁷⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 January 1903.

⁷¹ Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 9.

Nelson in the fall. The union's organizers had still not been able to solve their most pressing problem, breaking the hold of the craft unions on their membership, and the UBRE was still basically an organization of clerks, freight handlers, men in the stores, and labourers — those who had been left out of the organizing drive of the craft unions on western Canadian railways. The UBRE had made a real impact, in other words, only where there was an organizational vacuum. Thus, while some of its existing western Canadian divisions expanded considerably in spring 1903, there were no new divisions.⁷² The ARU, by contrast, had drawn successfully upon a considerably larger and more varied pool of labour. This was true even in Western Canada, where its impact was noticeably weaker than south of the border. When ARU Local No. 243 in Winnipeg shut down a branch line of the Northern Pacific Railway in Manitoba on 1 July 1894 as part of the Pullman boycott, the majority of the 40 or so strikers were reported to be shop workers, locomotive firemen and engineers, and brakemen.⁷³ At its peak in fall 1894, Debs' organization had 17 Canadian locals to the west of Southern Ontario, an impressive total in comparison with the UBRE even if it only reflected the number of local activists who must have been involved.⁷⁴ Moreover, Estes' hopes of further growth in central Canada and the east proved completely unfounded. The UBRE headquarters was even forced to strike the Toronto division off its list in May 1903, "no reports having been received by the Grand Lodge for over a year." Railway employees in Toronto claimed that the Toronto division "was never in good standing, and . . . was looked upon generally with disfavour."⁷⁵

While reasons for this disappointing failure are not far to seek, and can be explained in part by the UBRE's failure to loosen the grip of the conventional craft unions on their members, it was a series of disastrous events in British Columbia in spring and early summer 1903 which gave the death blow to the UBRE's Canadian ambitions. The UBRE, in short, finally became involved in a test of strength with the CPR, and lost.

In November 1902, George Estes visited British Columbia on a speaking and organizing tour. One result was that a local union of CPR freight handlers and clerks in Vancouver affiliated with the UBRE's Vancouver division. This local, however, had had an agreement with the CPR which was to remain in force until June 1903, and the threat to this contract brought in the CPR's

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4-5, 7; *Daily Herald*, 19 May 1903; *Voice*, 20 February 1903.

⁷³ *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 July 1894.

⁷⁴ In addition to three locals in Winnipeg, the ARU established locals at Rat Portage, Medicine Hat, Swift Current, Moose Jaw, Regina, Broadview, Portage La Prairie, Fort William, Ignace, Nipigon, White River, Vancouver, Donald, and Revelstoke. *Railway Times*, 1 September 1894. There may also have been a local in Toronto. See *Railroad Trainmen*, 1 March 1896, 198. The Pullman boycott did not affect the CPR because it owned and operated its own sleeping cars. *Toronto Globe*, 29 June 1894; W. Kaye Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York 1977), 142-3. The story of the ARU in Canada is told in Tuck "Canadian Railways," 158-69.

⁷⁵ *Railway Employees' Journal*, 11, 18 June 1903; *Daily Herald*, 19 May 1903.

Special Service Department. This organization had been established only two years earlier. Although an important part of its work was the routine investigation of offenses such as theft and pilferage, it also had taken over the anti-personnel duties of the Pinkerton and Thiel agents who had been employed on a fairly regular basis since the company's earliest days.⁷⁶ The undercover investigations of this organization resulted in the almost immediate suspension of the secretary of the UBRE's Vancouver division, F.J. Halton, a clerk in the office of Divisional Superintendent Marpole, on the charge of revealing confidential information to the UBRE. On 5 January, a UBRE Grievance Committee took Halton's case to Marpole. Marpole, however, refused to recognize that these men had any status as an official union committee. The Vancouver division thereupon threatened to strike, and Marpole agreed to a private meeting with the committeemen and George Estes. The result was a letter signed by Marpole's assistant, which reinstated Halton after a face-saving week's suspension. The missive was clearly not intended by Marpole to convey anything more than the information that Halton had been taken back. But that night, at a mass meeting of the UBRE, Estes read the letter and claimed, "This is practical recognition." Marpole was much disturbed by this obvious misrepresentation. He visited CPR headquarters in Montreal to discuss strategy. It was decided in Montreal to "force the issue" with the UBRE, and to make arrangements for replacements when the expected strike occurred.⁷⁷

This was a carefully calculated decision to destroy the UBRE, and it is clear that it was based upon more than just exasperation at Estes' intemperate language or the fear that unionized clerks might reveal confidential information, although the latter was certainly disturbing enough.⁷⁸ To begin with, the UBRE had become a serious threat to the orderly progress of labour-management relations on the CPR. After the outbreak of the strike, Marpole pointed out that the company had formal agreements with "no less than 8 or 10" individual craft unions, and declared that he did not want to endanger relations with them by recognizing the UBRE.⁷⁹ He might have added as well, however, (and of

⁷⁶ James R. Johnston, "A Brief History of the Canadian Pacific Police," *The RCMP Quarterly*, 28 (1963), 257-8. References to private detectives in the T.G. Shaughnessy and W.C. Van Horne letterbooks are numerous but rarely informative, especially on anti-union activities. The most serious on-going problem investigated was the appropriation of fares by conductors, which required the use of spotters. See, for example, PAC, Canadian Pacific Railway, Shaughnessy Letterbooks, MG28, III 20, Vol. 32, p. 854, Shaughnessy to Geo. D. Bangs, 30 August 1892.

⁷⁷ *American Labor Union Journal*, 4 December 1902: Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 4-7, 10-11.

⁷⁸ See Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 4-5. As a pioneer in the unionization of white collar workers, the UBRE resembled one of its parents, the Order of Railroad Telegraphers. See Stuart Morris, "Stalled Professionalism: The Recruitment of Railway Officials in the United States, 1885-1940," *Business History Review*, 47 (1973), 324.

⁷⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 2 March 1903; "Minutes of Evidence of Royal Commission,"

course did not) that this arrangement also meant that a substantial number of CPR employees, including men the UBRE was trying to organize, were still not covered by union contracts because there were as yet no craft unions to represent them. After a decade of struggle with the craft unions, in other words, the CPR management seems to have become aware that this form of unionization could actually serve to limit the number of unionized employees. The agreements with the craft unions, in short, had become a new status quo which must be defended as long as the current wave of labour militancy continued from the ravages of allegedly socialist and revolutionary industrial unions like the UBRE.⁸⁰ A second factor, however, may have tipped the scales — the profitable exploitation of western resources. CPR president T.G. Shaughnessy pointed out to a British correspondent in April 1903 that the CPR had built an expensive network of branch lines in British Columbia to service the mining industry. Labour problems, among other things, however, had discouraged mine owners from developing these regions fully, and the CPR, as a result "had not been receiving adequate returns on the investment" in these branch lines.⁸¹ It was well known that the UBRE had close ties with the union which was causing much of the trouble in the mines, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), since both the WFM and the UBRE were affiliates of the American Labor Union. The eradication of the UBRE could thus serve the dual function of removing this troublesome union from the scene, and striking a blow at the American Labor Union and the WFM.⁸²

On his return from Montreal, Marpole set in motion a program of provocation and intimidation which in its singleness of purpose and sheer vindictiveness had not been seen in any previous CPR labour dispute, including the trackmen's strike two years earlier. Union officials were threatened with reprisals if they remained in the brotherhood, and union members were transferred or fired. The Special Service Department stepped up its activities, resulting in "a kind of secret warfare" between company spies and "disloyal" employees. In late January, the Department scored its greatest coup, subverting the UBRE's chief organizer in Canada, Harold V. Poore. A married man in ill health and financial difficulties, Poore must have found the Department's offer of CPR money an almost overwhelming temptation. Even so, he only gave in when Department officials threatened to reveal facts which company detectives had

1903, 1611, testimony of R. Marpole.

⁸⁰ Estes to H.V. Poore, 25 December 1902, Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 8-9; *Labour Gazette*, July 1903, 81. According to the *American Labor Union Journal*, 28 May 1903, "The C.P.R. would have settled long ago if the B. of R.E. would consent to abandon its plan of organization. Of course it would not consent as to do so would be to cease to have excuse for an existence as a union."

⁸¹ PAC, Canadian Pacific Railway, Shaughnessy Letterbooks, MG 28, III 20, Vol. 81, 135, Shaughnessy to P.H. Ashworth, 18 April 1903. See also *Ibid.*, Vol. 76, 352-7, Shaughnessy to Sir Richard Cartwright, 18 December 1901 (Personal).

⁸² See *Ibid.* Vol. 81, 81, Shaughnessy to R. Randolph Bruce, 14 April 1903.

unearthed "regarding his career elsewhere." In late January, he signed a statement agreeing to work for the CPR, but asked if his assistance could be limited to making public statements in support of the company. The Special Service officer in charge, however, curtly rejected this request, and told him to stick to his present job and keep the service posted. Until his death from scarlet fever in April, the unfortunate Poore turned over copies of almost all the union's confidential correspondence to company officials. On 27 February the company's provocative activities finally achieved their first objective. When Marpole refused to reinstate a union member suspended on transparently flimsy grounds, the members of the UBRE's Vancouver local walked off the job, their patience exhausted. There were 154 strikers in all. Most of them were clerks in the freight, telegraph, ticket, and stores offices — men with scarcely any access to confidential information.⁸³

Despite what must have been ample advance warning, however, the UBRE was not particularly well prepared for a strike at this time, especially the all-out assault unleashed by the CPR. Estes had planned to have the CPR "organized solid" before confronting management, and had anticipated that this would not be possible before late June. At the same time, the UBRE's locals in the Canadian West had grown since the beginning of the year in spite of Marpole's intimidation, and Estes also believed he could count upon widespread sympathy and support from other unionized workers in the region as well.⁸⁴ When Marpole refused to consider negotiations to bring the strikers back to work as soon as possible, and announced instead that they had all been fired for leaving their jobs without giving notice, Estes raised the ante and called out the CPR's freight handlers on the Vancouver docks.⁸⁵ This set in motion a rapid and chaotic escalation of the strike, as other workingmen were drawn into the conflict. Longshoremen unloading the CPR liner *Empress of India* walked out on 4 March in support of the freight handlers, followed by the steamshipmen (who refused to load scab cargoes), CPR deckhands, and company telegraph messengers. Local teamsters refused to load and haul CPR freight. Meanwhile, the UBRE had called out its Nelson and Revelstoke locals, and some 50 mechanics at the CPR's Revelstoke shop struck in sympathy. About 25 of these men were members of the International Association of Machinists and one was a member of the boilermakers' union. Eventually about 1,000 CPR employees were on strike west of the Lakehead, plus a number of other workers who had walked out in sympathy with these strikers in British Columbia itself.⁸⁶

⁸³ Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 10-12; *Labour Gazette*, April 1903, 796; *Voice*, 24 April 1903.

⁸⁴ Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 7, 10-11; *Independent*, (Vancouver) 14 March 1903; *Vancouver Province*, 3 March 1903.

⁸⁵ *Vancouver Province*, 28 February 1903, 2 March 1903.

⁸⁶ *Labour Gazette*, April 1903, 796-7; Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 12-32.

The Vancouver Board of Trade, alarmed at the damage being done to the local economy, had been frantically trying to arrange a settlement from the beginning of the strike. On 5 March, the Board persuaded the UBRE to accept mediation, and on 8 March, an agreement was reached between Marpole and the strikers. CPR headquarters in Montreal, however, rejected the settlement. Estes then called out the union's Calgary and Winnipeg locals. Further efforts by the Vancouver city council failed to end the strike, as did a UBRE offer to accept minimal terms, including the re-instatement of the strikers, the right of CPR employees to belong to the union, and notice of dismissal. The company's management would only go so far as to offer an investigation of the dispute by company vice-president William Whyte and the Dominion Department of Labour.⁸⁷ The CPR management in Montreal was still determined not to end the strike until the UBRE had been effectively destroyed as an organization.

On 11 March, another ALU affiliate, the Western Federation of Miners, struck the Dunsmuir coal mines on Vancouver Island, adding a new complication to the already confused conflict. Spokesmen for the ALU and WFM claimed that the miners had gone out in order to aid the UBRE by cutting off the CPR's coal supply, and senior WFM officials clearly believed this to be an important reason for calling out the miners.⁸⁸ But the Dunsmuir mines had been seething with discontent for months, and the miners had good and sufficient reasons of their own for walking out. Aid to the UBRE was a secondary consideration, as far as the miners were concerned, and in any case their strike had little impact on the CPR's operations. The CPR was able to import coal by ship from Japan, and was only inconvenienced by the somewhat greater cost of this fuel.⁸⁹ The miners' strike, however, undoubtedly gave renewed heart to the UBRE strikers, further reducing the possibility of immediate settlement with the CPR. The last effort for some time to end the strike failed a few days later when both the CPR and the UBRE rejected a mediation offer by a committee of local CPR engineers, firemen, conductors, and brakemen.⁹⁰

The strike was now at its highwater mark. After this time, the position of the strikers steadily deteriorated. President Estes was arrested on 18 March, in the charge that he had tried to "incite" the crew of the CPR steamer *Charmer* to delay wilfully the passage of mail from Victoria to Vancouver. There was little evidence to support this charge, but Estes' case was not dismissed until three weeks later.⁹¹ In the meantime, the leaders of the various craft unions affiliated

⁸⁷ *Vancouver Province*, 7, 14 March 1903; *Labour Gazette*, April 1903, 797; *American Labor Union Journal*, 26 March 1903.

⁸⁸ *American Labor Union Journal*, 19 March 1903; Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*, 146-7.

⁸⁹ Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 116-7; "Minutes of Evidence of Royal Commission," 1903, 1669, testimony of R. Marpole.

⁹⁰ *Western Socialist*, 20 March 1903; *Labour Gazette*, April 1903, 797; *Vancouver Province*, 14 March 1903.

⁹¹ *Vancouver Province*, 19 March 1903, 7 April 1903.

with the AFL had begun to restore order in their BC locals. The first month or so of the strike had been almost too much for these men, but ultimately their work showed just how much authority the craft unions had come to exercise over their members. The CPR machinists had had their walkout approved at first by the senior vice-president of the International Association of Machinists, P.J. Conlon, perhaps because Conlon, a socialist, could see nothing wrong in supporting the UBRE which was, after all, a socialist union. But Conlon was overruled by his union's president, James P. O'Connell, a much more conservative man, who ordered A.W. Holmes, the IAM vice-president in charge of Canadian affairs, to travel the 3,000 miles from Montreal to get the machinists back to work. Holmes gave the striking machinists the "opportunity" of voting themselves back, and when this failed, ordered them back. All but four or five men returned. Holmes later accused the UBRE of neglecting to consult the IAM before striking, and pointed out that the IAM had a contract with the CPR which required 30 days' notice before a strike could be called. But it is doubtful if he or O'Connell would ever have approved a sympathetic strike with the UBRE in any case. After pacifying Revelstoke, Holmes visited Vancouver, where he found the local machinists "somewhat unsettled," but was able to persuade them not to join the strike as some had wished. He then went on to Calgary to perform a similar function there. By 8 April, he was able to report to headquarters that the situation in the West had returned to normal.⁹² Holmes' efforts were matched by Joseph Watson, secretary of the boilermakers' lodge in Vancouver and a TLC organizer. Faced by "a state of ferment" in the Vancouver shops, Watson pressured local boilermakers not to strike in sympathy with the UBRE, and fined a boilermaker who had struck at Revelstoke and ordered him back to work.⁹³ For some time, the blacksmiths in the CPR shops at Vancouver and elsewhere refused to work with replacements for the striking helpers. Not wanting the strike to spread any further, the company permitted the blacksmiths to report for work every morning and "go home at night without doing one tap of work because they had no helpers." Finally, after five weeks of this, the company appealed to the international headquarters of the blacksmiths union, which dispatched a vice-president to Vancouver to order the men either to work with replacement helpers or forfeit their union cards. "They went to work," Watson succinctly reported.⁹⁴ In Victoria, T.H. Twigl, an AFL organizer, persuaded local longshoremen to scab on the steamshipment.⁹⁵ On 28 March, the officers of several craft unions in Vancouver declared the CPR's

⁹² *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, April 1903, 410-11; *American Labor Union Journal*, 30 April 1903; John Laslett, *Labor and the Left* (New York 1970), 153-5. The CNR strike of 1902, a small scale affair affecting only a few machinists, had been almost ignored by the chief executives of the IAM. See *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, October 1902, 663.

⁹³ *Journal of the Brotherhood of Boilermakers and Iron Ship Builders of America*, June 1903, 274; *American Labor Union Journal*, 30 April 1903.

⁹⁴ *Journal . . . Boilermakers*, June 1903, 274.

⁹⁵ *American Labor Union Journal*, 3 September 1903.

Vancouver shop to be "fair," and added that an arrangement had been made with the company to take back any employee of the shop ordered to strike by the UBRE. The union officers said they would fill the places of men who did not go back to work by 1 April. Some strikers, indeed, had already returned to their jobs, when it became clear to them that they might be expelled by their international unions and lose the right to have their union cards recognized elsewhere on the continent.⁹⁶

The role of the railway brotherhoods during the strike was ambiguous, but ultimately anti-UBRE. On the one hand, some local train service employees were sympathetic to the strikers, and this had resulted in their offer to act as mediators in mid-March.⁹⁷ Moreover, relations between the CPR and the brotherhoods were somewhat strained in spring and summer 1903. All four brotherhoods were attempting to re-negotiate earlier contracts, and found the CPR singularly resistant to their demands. In mid-May, indeed, there was some talk of a strike of the company's conductors and trainmen.⁹⁸ At the same time, the train service staff included some of the highest paid employees in the company's service, and their organizations provided them with what were probably the best insurance and pension plans of any unions on the continent. These men had little in common with the underpaid strikers, and some of them undoubtedly "scabbed" on the striking Freight Handlers and Office Employees," as the socialist journalist G. Weston Wrigley later claimed.⁹⁹ The chief executives of the brotherhoods, moreover, had been utterly opposed to the UBRE since its inception, viewing it as a revival of an old and dangerous foe, the ARU.¹⁰⁰ The net result was that CPR trains continued to run throughout the strike. This permitted the company, among other things, to import the strike breakers and special police which had been recruited in central Canada and the United States.¹⁰¹ As a result, it seems likely that the company's operations were never seriously affected by the strike, except perhaps for two to three weeks on the Vancouver and Victoria waterfronts. One of the brotherhoods was of service to the CPR in an unusual way. A few days after the strike began, the CPR's Special Service Department published, in pamphlet form, an anti-UBRE editorial from the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, and distributed it widely in Western Canada. The editorial described the UBRE as a "dishonest and traitorous organization" run by "a set of revolutionists" who could only destroy existing unions and "break up their agreements. . . ."¹⁰² It is difficult to assess

⁹⁶ *Vancouver Province*, 24, 28 March 1903; *Journal . . . Boilermakers*, June 1903, 274-5.

⁹⁷ *Vancouver Province*, 14 March 1903.

⁹⁸ *Western Clarion*, 19 May 1903.

⁹⁹ *American Labor Union Journal*, 3 September 1903.

¹⁰⁰ Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, *Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention*, 1901, "Report of Grand Master," 69.

¹⁰¹ McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 46; Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 11, 25.

¹⁰² *Voice*, 20 March 1903; *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, September 1902, 735-9.

the impact of this kind of propaganda, but it certainly did not help the strikers.

The Special Service Department's mandate in any case was to break the strike. That its agents were quite prepared to go beyond provocation, subversion and propaganda to achieve this was shown in mid-April, when Frank Rogers, a prominent Vancouver labour leader, was shot in a late night confrontation between strikers and Department agents. He died in hospital two days later. A longshoreman and official in the fisherman's union, Rogers was much admired by Vancouver workingmen, and his funeral procession was accompanied by numerous representatives of local unions, including the UBRE and the machinists. There were, however, no representatives of the railway brotherhoods in the procession, an indication of how deeply the strike had divided the British Columbia labour movement.¹⁰³ A Special Service agent and a strike-breaker were subsequently tried for Rogers' murder. They were defended by a CPR lawyer, E.P. Davis, and acquitted.¹⁰⁴

The federal government had finally been drawn into the dispute by this time. In early April, BC labour troubles were debated in the House of Commons, and labour MPs Ralph Smith and Arthur Puttee, among others, called for a royal commission to investigate the difficulties.¹⁰⁵ The suggestion was congenial to Minister of Labour William Mulock, who believed that a properly conducted investigation might be useful in educating Canadian workingmen against the dangers of American unions in general.¹⁰⁶ The Commission was set up in May, and the commissioners were carefully chosen opponents of radicalism. Chief commissioner Gordon Hunter was a British Columbia Supreme Court Justice, and he was assisted by a Protestant minister, the Reverend Elliot S. Rowe. The key man in the investigation, however, was the commission's secretary, Deputy Minister of Labour Mackenzie King. As a university-trained economist and recognized labour expert, King could hope to exert considerable influence upon the commission's findings, especially after his discovery that Rowe's intellectual powers were not great, and that Hunter's opinions on labour and reform matter were similar to his own.¹⁰⁷ As Paul Craven and others have shown, King's views on unions were complex and, despite his preference for the company of the rich and famous, by no means identical with those of the contemporary Canadian managerial class. In contrast with the absolute opposition to unions of some Canadian manufacturers, for example, he differentiated between "responsible" craft unions which accepted modern free enterprise and attempted to adapt themselves to the existing managerial structure, and radical or socialist unions like the WFM, the ALU, and the UBRE which were critics of the free enterprise system and hindered the devel-

¹⁰³ *Vancouver Province*, 18 April 1903; *Winnipeg Voice*, 17 April 1903.

¹⁰⁴ William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia* (Vancouver 1937), 63-4.

¹⁰⁵ *Vancouver Province*, 3 April 1903.

¹⁰⁶ PAC, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG 26 G, Vol. 259, Mulock to Laurier, 4 April 1903.

¹⁰⁷ Mackenzie King, *Diary*, 1 May 1903.

opment of Western Canada,¹⁰⁸ King's views, in other words, were remarkably congruent with the *de facto* labour-management arrangements which had evolved on the CPR since 1892 and had been defended by CPR officials since the beginning of their dispute with the UBRE. With the establishment of the royal commission and the appointment of King as its secretary, corporate and state coercion thus met and joined forces. The orientation of the commission was made quite explicit by Hunter a month after the commission began its hearings, when he declared that as far as he was concerned the UBRE was "on trial."¹⁰⁹

In late May, the UBRE leaders renewed their attempts to settle the strike. Clearly it could no longer be won. The strike leaders selected a committee of "six representative citizens of Vancouver," and in early June this committee proposed an agreement which was satisfactory to the CPR but not the UBRE rank and file, who had apparently not yet accepted the inevitability of defeat.¹¹⁰ At this point, the royal commission began its hearings in Vancouver, and the commissioners (presumably under the guidance of Mackenzie King) offered to assist in the negotiations.¹¹¹ A break in the ranks of the strikers had just occurred to ease the way. On 9 June, the steamshipmen who had struck in sympathy with the UBRE called their strike off. Their walkout had had almost no effect upon company operations, since the company had no trouble finding replacements, and their organization had been almost destroyed as a consequence. Not only did the CPR refuse to recognize the Steamshipmen's Union, but members had to leave it to be re-employed.¹¹² The terms of the settlement between the company and the UBRE, reached on 12 June, were little better, and indicated just how successful the CPR (with the aid of the craft unions and the Dominion government) had been in achieving its main objective of destroying the UBRE.

The agreement was "confidential," and consisted of three related documents. The first was a typewritten statement of the company's position on unions, dated 9 March 1903. It was initialled by E.P. Davis, the CPR counsel at the commission hearings, and J. Edgar Bird, the counsel for the UBRE. The statement declared that the company had no objections to unions as such, but would not "permit its clerical force who practically occupy confidential positions, and have access to documents of an official and confidential nature, to be members of unions, and be in a position to furnish information of a confidential character respecting the Company's business and affairs." The second document was entitled "Terms of Settlement," and was signed, significantly, only by Davis. The company agreed to pay back wages owed to strikers from before the strike, and to withdraw legal proceedings against any strikers. The strikers,

¹⁰⁸ PAC. William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers. MG 26 J, Series 1, Vol. 3, p. 2426. King to Henry A. Harper, 18 November 1902; Craven, *Impartial Unipire*, 123, 134-5.

¹⁰⁹ *Vancouver Province*, 5 June 1903.

¹¹⁰ *Labour Gazette*, June 1903, 78.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 81; Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 21.

however, were not guaranteed re-instatement. The company would only promise "in the case of all vacancies now existing or which may occur, to give preference to former employees. . . ." Finally, company superintendents would continue to receive employees' grievance committees as in the past, but only if the committees represented "properly constituted" class (that is, craft) organizations. This last provision, of course, was aimed directly at the UBRE, but the third document was even more explicit in this regard. It was a brief, handwritten paragraph scribbled by Davis on the stationery of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and signed by Davis and Bird, which read,

It is understood that the settlement is conditional so far as concerns the Company on the men's signing a statement before being employed by the Company that they are not members of the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, recognizing that any future membership of the Order will be sufficient grounds for dismissal.¹¹³

The stringent provisions of this last document seem never to have been put into effect by the CPR, and it apparently remained "confidential." Company officials probably realized that it was unnecessary to require CPR employees to fore swear an organization on the verge of collapse. Moreover, the company's Special Service Department obviously knew who the "troublemakers" were, and these men simply would never be considered for re-employment. The chief significance of this document, then, is as a sort of official death certificate for the UBRE, to be placed, for the record, in the royal commission's files.¹¹⁴ The edited version of the settlement released to the strikers, however, should have been sufficient to indicate to them that they had lost, and that their union had been smashed. The CPR, this version declared, "does not recognize the UBRE in this settlement."¹¹⁵ The strikers, however, admitted defeat slowly and reluctantly. It was not until 27 June that the majority of them agreed to accept the company's terms, and the UBRE executive declared the strike over.¹¹⁶

G. Weston Wrigley later judged that the strikers had lost nearly everything "but the right to hunt for work again."¹¹⁷ The confidential nature of the settlement, however, made it possible for the UBRE's *Journal* to twist the truth almost completely out of shape, and present the strike to the outside world as a qualified victory. The settlement was "satisfactory to the strikers," declared the *Journal*, "and 1,000 men go back to work after bravely battling for four months for the right to organize. . . ."¹¹⁸ It must have been clear to Estes and his associates, however, that things had gone almost as far wrong in Canada as could be imagined. Estes himself became seriously ill in fall 1903, and this was

¹¹³ Canada, Department of Labour, Library. "Confidential. Agreement re strike between C.P.R. and U.B.R.E. (Department of Labour)," in "Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia, 1903, Exhibits."

¹¹⁴ Canada, Department of Labour, Library, Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, *Record Book*, 121.

¹¹⁵ *Daily Herald*, 16 June 1903.

¹¹⁶ *Labour Gazette*, July 1903, 81.

¹¹⁷ *American Labour Union Journal*, 3 September 1903.

¹¹⁸ *Railway Employees' Journal*, 3 July 1903.

probably the consequence of the strains and disappointments of that spring and summer.¹¹⁹

The UBRE organization in Canada had begun to disintegrate by this time, assisted perhaps by the findings of the royal commission which, not surprisingly, condemned Estes and his union unconditionally. According to the commission's report, the UBRE, the Western Federation of Miners, and the American Labor Union were foreign, socialist organizations engaged in a dangerous conspiracy to damage the western economy and to destroy legitimate trade unions. Even the devious activities of CPR officials, police, and spies were used as evidence against the UBRE and its sister organizations.¹²⁰ The UBRE's Calgary lodge disappeared in July 1903, and its charter was revoked shortly after.¹²¹ Representatives of various AFL craft unions (which the royal commission report had not condemned) began to move into Western Canada in hopes of enrolling former UBRE members.¹²² Within a year of the end of the CPR strike, the UBRE was all but extinct in the Canadian west. At the organization's biennial convention in San Francisco in May 1904, the office of Canadian vice-president disappeared, and no Canadians were elected to any executive office.¹²³ In early 1905, the official UBRE "Directory of Divisions" listed Winnipeg as the only Canadian division, and neither of the two Canadians listed on the Executive Board of the parent American Labor Union had any connection with the UBRE.¹²⁴

The UBRE had fared little better in the United States, and by late 1904 was a shadow organization, claiming an inflated and largely fictitious membership. The American Labor Union, moreover, had also gone into decline, and had become little more than a front for the Western Federation of Miners. Opposed to the AFL brand of unionism, but needing allies because of a series of defeats in the Colorado mining region, the Western Federation's leaders therefore invited a number of anti-AFL unionists and radicals to a conference in January 1905 to plan an organization which would replace the ALU, the Industrial Workers of the World.¹²⁵ At the IWW's founding convention in June, the convention's committee on credentials credited the UBRE with only 2,087 members, an indication of the low level to which the union had fallen.¹²⁶ George Estes was involved in the early planning stages of the IWW, and was one of the signers of a manifesto in January 1905 announcing the founding

¹¹⁹ *American Labour Union Journal*, 26 November 1903, 21 January 1904.

¹²⁰ Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, 1903, "Report," 9-10, 67-70, 75-6.

¹²¹ *Bond of Brotherhood*, (Calgary) 3 July 1903, 12 September 1903; *Railway Employees' Journal*, 10 September 1903.

¹²² *Independent*, 11 July 1903.

¹²³ *American Labor Union Journal*, 2 June 1904.

¹²⁴ *Voice of Labor*, (Chicago) January 1905, 12, 21. The two Canadians apparently represented the Western Federation of Miners and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Toronto branch. *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Industrial Workers of the World, Proceedings*, 1905, 6, 85.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

convention.¹²⁷ He did not, however, attend the convention, and the other UBRE delegates offered no explanation for his absence. He had apparently gone home to Oregon, his career as a labour leader ended. When next he comes into view, it is in the 1920s, as a writer, publisher, and rabidly anti-Catholic supporter of the Ku Klux Klan in Portland, Oregon — a sad comedown for a man whose labour career had been dedicated, however imperfectly, to the rights of all men.¹²⁸

The principal reason for the collapse of the UBRE in Western Canada was its defeat by the CPR. Never before had this company fought a union with such resolute determination or (from the corporate point of view) such good reason. The UBRE had organized an unacceptable class of CPR employees, the clerks; it was a threat to the network of agreements with the craft unions which had been painfully put together in the preceding decade; and it was allied with enemies of untrammelled western development, the ALU and the WFM. The CPR thus was prepared to do most of the dirty work in destroying the UBRE. Its allies in this operation, the craft unions and the Dominion government, were only required to play supporting roles as a result. To some considerable extent, however, the UBRE was also a victim of its public image as a radical industrial union, an image which did not entirely reflect reality. In practice, the UBRE was only able to organize certain categories or classes of Western Canadian railway workers with any real success, principally clerks, freight handlers, and labourers. These were men who currently had no other large national or international unions to turn to, and who in later years would throw in with the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks or the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (which was more careful about its image than the UBRE, despite its title). Moreover, the UBRE was not in some important respects a "new union" like the ALU or its successor the IWW. This can be seen in its early endeavours to work within the existing union structure, and in Estes' later reluctance to identify himself publicly as a socialist. The UBRE might more accurately be described as the last major attempt to work within an older tradition of industrial unionism which, in its moral idealism, differed from the hard-nosed radicalism of the new unionists, and which had manifested itself earlier in the Trainmen's Union of 1877, Martin Iron's Knights of Labor organization in the 1880s, and the ARU. Industrial unionism of this type represented an evolutionary path which was denied repeatedly to North American railway workers (whatever their personal preferences might have been) before 1900, in favour of an alternative which was less threatening to management and government, organization by craft. In Canada, the fork in the road probably came even before the appearance of the ARU, with the Conductors' and Trainmen's strike of 1892. This successful walkout was followed by further craft union victories

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²⁸ George Estes, *The Roman Catholic Kingdom and The Old Cedar School* (Troutdale, Oregon, 1922). The latter is an attack upon Catholic separate schools, and has a forward by Luther I. Powell, King Kleagle, Pacific Domain, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

on the CPR in 1896,¹²⁹ 1899, 1900, and 1901 which placed them in an almost unassailable position on Western Canada's largest and most important railway. In 1902, George Estes clearly was misled by the CNR affair and the general militancy of Western Canadian workers into believing that Western Canadian railways were ripe for industrial unionism. This was a fatal error. The strength of the craft unions on the extensive CPR lines meant first, that it would be very difficult for anyone to establish a broad-based industrial union among Western Canadian railway workers; second, the UBRE would face the all-out hostility of craft-union leaders and organizers during the CPR strike; and third, that the CPR had acquired a stake in maintaining the status quo with its unionized workers, would fight for it, and could expect the co-operation of the Canadian government in this endeavor. The UBRE's attempt to organize the Canadian west was thus a tragically futile effort to re-open a door which had been closed and locked not long before.

¹²⁹ The 1896 strike earned union recognition for the Order of Railroad Telegraphers. Tuck, "Canadian Railways," 170-83.



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