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Patterns in Four Case Studies

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The "Ingredients" in Violent Labour Conflict:

Patterns in Four Case Studies

J.A. Frank

THIS ESSAY WILL EXAMINE four violent labour conflicts, the Robin Hood Flour Mill strike of 1977, the Fleck Manufacturing strike of 1978, the Murray Hill struggle of 1968-69, and the Artistic Woodwork strike in 1973.[1] It will endeavour to investigate salient factors in each conflict and see how they affected the outcome of the incidents. These "ingredients" of violent labour conflict are: (1) the relative power and organization of the union (or movement in the case of Murray Hill); (2) the aims it pursues; (3) the type of collective action that it employs; (4) the attitudes of the employers and the authorities toward the workers; and (5) the policies and aims of employers, political leaders, and the police. The research will emphasize these aspects of the four conflicts. These have been chosen from among 286 incidents of collective

[1] The conflicts that we will be examining fall within our definition of violent incidents by involving at least 50 participants who cause physical injuries or property damage during the collective action.

The research is based on the following premises: 1) Conflicts like these are fundamentally political as unions struggle to improve the lot of their members against the opposition of employers and the authorities. 2) These conflicts unfold in a hostile environment where the legal system favours employers and occasionally supplements their side with police units. 3) The collective actions and that violence that perforce ensues from them are not mindless affairs, but are a form of violent "competitive *bargaining*." 4) *A union's ability to withstand repressive actions by management and* police depends largely on the quality of their organization, quantity of their resources and the astuteness of their leadership. And finally, 5) There are certain factors whose interplay determines the pattern and outcome of violent labour conflicts.

For a general discussion of the idea of collective action and violence, see these authors: Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Don Mills 1978), 58; Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs 1973), 28; William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Georgetown 1975), 137; and Walter Korpi, "Conflict, Power and Relative Deprivation," *American Political Science Review*, 68 (1974), 1570-71.

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violence that were studied in an earlier statistical paper.[2] They were selected because of (1) the amount of documentation available through printed media coverage, (2) the diversity of the repertoire of collective actions used by the protesters and strikers, (3) the level of violence that was associated with the incidents, and (4) the types of groups that formed part of the opposing coalitions. An additional consideration used in the selection of these particular cases is that in them were represented several types of organizations including a weak unaffiliated organization (the Mouvement de la libération du taxi — Murray Hill), a United Automobile Workers (UAW) affiliate (Fleck), a Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) union (Robin Hood), and a small union linked to the nationalist Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU) (Artistic Woodwork).

In reviewing each of the conflicts we will focus on five ingredients of violent labour conflicts that we suggest played a major role in their outcomes. A brief description of each of these factors will help trace the main aspects that are emphasized in the four narratives.

The first feature is the workers' organization and the relative power it can muster against the employer and his allies. Experienced, respected leaders, adequate strike funds, skillful use of mass media, the capability to make decisions and carry them out quickly with broad support, as well as powerful allies, are all important contributors to the development of a strong organization.[3] Another feature of the four strikes that will be highlighted in the analysis are the aims that the workers pursued in their confrontations with the employer or the authorities. In some cases they were limited to wage gains, improvements in working conditions, or the right to bargain collectively. At other times, the workers' demands went beyond narrow issues to challenge the policies of business and the government.[4] The line distinguishing them is hard to trace. Often, aims that appeared routine, in that they in no way involved rights not already provided by the labour codes, such as a first contract, nevertheless engendered bitter resistance from employers and police, and eventually became rallying cries for other portions of the community.

A third aspect of the four labour confrontations was the strategy that the

[2] J.A. Frank and Michael Kelly, "Street Politics in Canada: An Examination of Mediating Factors," *American Journal of Political Science*, 23 (1979), 592-614.

[3] Lists of characteristics of effective highly developed organizations include the following attributes: 1) bureaucratization that assures pattern maintenance, 2) centralization of decision-making, 3) written procedures, and 4) a formal membership. Cf. William A. Gamson, "Understanding the Careers of Challenging Groups: A Commentary on Goldstone," *American Journal of Sociology*, 85 (1980), 1051-2; Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, 90-3; Mayer A. Zald and John D. McCarthy, "Social Movement Industries: Competition and Cooperation among Movement Organizations," to be published in Louis Kriesberg, ed. *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, Vol. III (Greenwich, Conn.); and Paul A. Pross, "Pressure Groups: Adaptive Instruments of Political Communication," in Pross, ed. *Pressure Group Behaviour in Canadian Politics* (Toronto 1975), 13.

[4] Zald and McCarthy, "Social Movement Industries," 1078.

workers used to gain their ends. The range of alternatives varied from legal action such as symbolic or informational picketing to mass picketing and sabotage. The gamut of types of action is enormous, the choice of tactics varied with the circumstance, especially the policies and tactics of employers and the police forces. This brings us to the last two aspects that will be emphasized in our analysis. They are both associated with the workers' adversaries in the four confrontations — the employers and authorities' attitudes toward the workers and their strategies for opposing the workers.

Employers' and police attitudes toward labour groups coloured the subsequent relations between the two sides. The labour group's political status is whatever attributes they ascribe to the organization and its allies. They obviously perceive their adversary in the light of their own interests. The authorities also attribute status according to reports and activities of *agents provocateurs*, police intelligence units, and uniformed policemen at the site. Together they provide "profiles" of labour groups which were reflected by the public statements and countermeasures that were taken by the authorities during the labour conflicts. An example of police attitudes toward labour can be found in their own publications. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) journal, *Scarlet and Gold*, for one, has warned about the "rebellious attitude of some sections of the labour movement."[5] Further confirmation of police hostility lies in the fact that labour unions and pro-labour organizations have at various times appeared on the RCMP's security investigation list.[6]

The last point to emphasize in analyzing these clashes is the power and policy of the employers and authorities. Their overwhelming strength and the resources they command set the parameters of the confrontation. They control the state's instruments of repression such as the police and armed forces. They are also often able to muster auxiliaries like private security agencies to crush the opposition.[7]

The paper suggests certain plausible relationships between these five elements. A well-organized labour group has a better chance at improving its position in relation to its opponents. It would probably be less vulnerable to repressive measures as it gained acceptance as representative for its constituents. With improved status it might adopt Gompersian aims and pursue forms of action that would avoid direct confrontations with the authorities. Its aims would be more moderate and its collective measures would be more disciplined because of its strong organization and its establishment of bargaining ties with

[5] *Scarlet and Gold* (1968), 45.

[6] Jeff Sallot, *Nobody Said No: The Real Story About How the Mounties Always Get Their Man* (Toronto 1978), 194.

[7] Ted Robert Gurr mentions possible responses that the authorities can make to protesters: 1) repression, 2) no response, 3) minimal response, 4) compromise, or 5) adoption of a policy congruent to the protesters' demands, cf. "On Outcome of Violent Conflict," *MSS* Final Draft, September 1979 to be published in *Handbook of Conflict Theory and Research*, 27.

the power brokers. Equally, it would be plausible to assume that weak labour groups that are engaged in their first collective actions suffer a contrary fate. Often just beginning to struggle for recognition as spokesperson for their members' interests and simultaneously opposed by employers and the public authorities for pursuing aims that their opponents perceive as totally unacceptable, these groups are vulnerable to severe repression. Furthermore, frequently lacking a strong organization and effective leadership, they are unable either to maintain discipline or reduce the impact of reprisals by company thugs or police. Nor can they sustain long drawn out conflicts; they must rely on dramatic non-routine actions. Let us now see to what extent these factors and their suggested relationships appear in the outcome of the violent labour confrontations that follow.

I

The Murray Hill Dispute 1968-69

"LET'S GO! (. . .) the police aren't around! (. . .) Let's bust up everything!"[8] The Mouvement de la libération du taxi (MLT) was on the move on the night of 7 October 1969. They were in the process of smashing the huge doors of the Murray Hill bus and limousine garage at Barré and Versailles Streets in Montreal. The attack culminated a bitter year-long struggle with Murray Hill, the company which monopolized limousine service at Dorval airport. The taxi drivers wanted a share of the business and an end to Murray Hill's monopoly.

The Murray Hill riot left two dead, seven injured, fourteen buses and automobiles destroyed as well as the garage burned — $2,000,000 damages in one night.[9] Significantly on the night of 7 October Montreal had been an open city; the municipal police had gone out on strike the day before, and, according to Lucien Saulnier, *President of the Montreal Urban Community government*, "the police strike was a good occasion to get [the MLT's] (. . .) issue before the public." The affair turned nasty, Saulnier believed, because "persons of ill-will" infiltrated the demonstration and "did some acts of terrorism."[10]

The demonstration had started peacefully enough. Approximately 50 taxis had assembled for an MLT cortège to protest against Murray Hill. Youths sporting "Québec Libre" sweaters piled in — four or five per taxi. They were escorted by a blue van belonging to les Chevaliers de l'indépendance which was emblazoned with "Le Québec au Québécois, Québec Libre!" The strange convoy even had "auxiliary police" directing traffic for them. This service was being provided by the "Popeyes," one of Montreal's motorcycle gangs. After going by the Hôtel de ville, the Hotel Windsor, and the Queen Elizabeth — both served by Murray Hill — and then smashing one of its limousines along

[8] *La Presse*, 8 October 1963.
[9] *La Presse*, 26 December 1969.
[10] Walter Stewart, *Strike* (Toronto 1977), 56; Lucien Saulnier, interview, Montreal, 17 April 1980.

the way, the strange convoy headed on towards the company's garage. Upon arriving there, they found its great doors closed. But outside, there stood four beautiful green and white buses parked in a neat row, and there were no security guards in sight! The demonstrators went at them with a vengeance. The demonstration shattered the buses' headlights, windows, and mirrors. The white incandescent illumination of the garage's flood lights was soon tempered by the orange and red flames from exploding molotov cocktails. The buses caught fire. Then bang! bang! a man collapsed. "They're shooting, (. . .) they're shooting!"[11] But instead of stampeding away from the garage in a panic, the demonstrators sullenly withdrew a short distance and regrouped.

Both sides exchanged fire, while the people in the crowd reformed and advanced toward the garage again. Advance, retreat, again and again in what a reporter described as a "combat ballet."[12] A crew of firemen arrived despite their own strike. "You're strikers too, don't get mixed up in this. Forget Murray!" shouted the protesters. The firemen replied, "We're only here to save lives, we won't touch the fire at Murray, but only the other ones."[13] The ensuing "entente cordiale" was respected by firemen and strikers. Meanwhile, shooting casualties mounted. The few police who showed up were driven off. Then, after shooting out the floodlights thanks to someone's expert marksmanship, the strikers made one last assault on the garage doors, pushing a bus as a battering ram. They set fires inside, and the whole garage was aflame.[14] A short while later the demonstrators were driven off and so ended the most serious incident of 1969, the most violent in recent years.

Among the casualties of the garage incident was a Corporal Dumas of the Quebec Provincial Police who was participating in the action of the demonstrators as an *agent provocateur* or police spy. He was shot to death by a marksman on the roof of the Murray Hill Garage. It was indeed a grim irony that the only death was that of a policeman, probably shot by a private agent of the company whose property he was there to protect. Another casualty of the conflict was Marc Carbonneau, a taxi driver and MLT militant who suffered shot-gun wounds to the buttocks and legs, and who one year later was one of the conspirators in the James Cross kidnapping.[15]

Why did it come to this? For an answer to this question, we need to retrace the rise of the MLT. The issues involved in it were broader than just Murray Hill's privileges. There were too many taxis per capita in Montreal, three times as many as in Toronto or New York. There was not enough business to go around. Drivers were making as little as a dollar an hour after expenses. "In my humble opinion," wrote one driver, "working conditions in the taxi business

[11] *La Presse*, 8 October 1969.
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid.*, 9 and 10 October, 25 November 1969; *Gazette*, 10 October 1969.

are comparable to those of workers in the 19th century."[16] The whole problem started during World War II. During this time Montrealers lacked private means of conveyance because of gasoline rationing. One alternative to the transportation problem was taxis. Lots of permits were issued by the city. But when rationing ended along with the war, and the citizenry turned to their own cars again, there were suddenly too many taxi permits in circulation. There were 4,200 when 3,000 would have been enough to provide decent incomes to drivers.[17] As drivers had a hard time making ends meet, they sold their permits to large companies which in turn rented out taxis to drivers. Furthermore, because of jurisdictional problems, they could not pick up fares outside of town at the airport. The Federal Department of Transport ran Dorval airport and had given a monopoly concession to Murray Hill.[18]

The MLT was created in 1962 to change the situation. Its aim was to monopolize representation of the 4,200 taxi drivers of Montreal, but after eighteen months of effort it could only muster a membership of 170.[19] These members were able, however, to recruit other *ad hoc* supporters for collective actions. Thus, as early as January 1968, they managed to organize a strike by 600 drivers who were protesting "exorbitant" leasing fees payable to fleet owners.[20]

By now, the city taxi drivers were in fact divided among four organizations of which the MLT was probably the smallest and most millitant. The other three, more moderate than the MLT, were in the process of merging into one organization, to be called the Association des employés du taxi de Montréal (AET). The organization had 3,000 members and distrusted the MLT for its "undesirable elements."[21] One of the leaders of the moderate drivers called the MLT "syndicalist adventurers." Their organization and its program were "weird, vague and dishonest."[22] The moderates claimed that the MLT's collective actions were "disgusting," and that their actions were hurting the political status of the taxi industry.[23]

On 30 October 1968, the MLT launched a collective action against Murray Hill by blockading the road to Dorval. This operation led to a pitched battle with the RCMP and local police. Several vehicles were burned or overturned, many demonstrators were arrested and there were numerous casualties. The other drivers promptly dissociated themselves from the MLT action. Thus, isolated in its own industry and viewed as a radical "pariah," the MLT could

[16] *Ibid.*, 26 April 1969.
[17] Actually there were 24,000 permits circulating around Montreal at the time, but only 4,000 were in use on a full-time basis (*La Presse*, 25 November 1969).
[18] Saulnier, interview, 17 April 1980.
[19] *Gazette*, 9 October 1969.
[20] *Montréal Matin*, 19 January 1968.
[21] *La Presse*, 25 November 1969.
[22] *Ibid.*, 22 January 1970.
[23] *Gazette*, 1 November 1968.

not receive a hearing from any of the authorities. But it was able to find allies elsewhere. Montreal politics in the 1960s were becoming increasingly radicalized with the rise of the civic reform movement (the Front d'action politique [FRAP]), the birth of community action organizations in poor neighbourhoods, the rise of the separatist Parti Québécois, and the terrorist Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ). The CSN and FTQ were also radicalizing the labour movement, while high school and university students were turning toward the left under the banner of the Union générale des étudiants du Québec (UGEQ).[24] Even reformist elements of the federal government were swept up in the leftward environment, and they were funding the Company of Young Canadians in order to harness the reform spirit abroad in the land into "acceptable" forms of collective actions and aims.[25] In this environment, the MLT sought and gained allies for its fight with the political authorities and Murray Hill.

A broad amorphous coalition arose to support the MLT. In a general sense the separatists took an interest in the cause of labour.[26] The radical Chevaliers de l'indépendance, the FRAP, and the UGEQ came out publicly for the MLT as the "sole spokesman of the taxi drivers."[27] Other radical groups like the Mouvement de libération populaire, and the Jeunesses révolutionnaires du Québec also provided moral and physical support.[28] In response to the support of all its allies on the left, the MLT proclaimed that they could "count on the support of the students and all those who thirst for liberty."[29]

The resulting coalition was obviously perceived by the authorities as politically "unacceptable." Lucien Saulnier, president of the Montreal Urban Council, blamed the MLT's "radical" friends for the property destruction that accompanied its collective actions. In at least one case, he shifted the blame entirely away from the drivers. The vandalism in St. Catherine Street on 7

[24] Manuel Castells, *Luttes urbaines et pouvoir politique* (Paris 1973), 53-5.

[25] He ultimately blamed the Company of Young Canadians. "The main feature of his notorious file on the CYC proved to be an eight-page blueprint for armed revolution allegedly written by convicted terrorist Pierre Vallières. It was not connected with the CYC in any way that was ever made clear. Also in the file were documents that supposedly showed connections between some volunteers and extremist groups, which in turn allegedly had connections with the blueprint. The file was padded out with such evidence as photographs showing the wall of a volunteer's apartment with a portrait of Che Guevara on it. Saulnier's explanation for the tenuousness of these links between the CYC and 'armed revolution' was, apparently, his statement that the Company was 'only one element,' in a network of subversion. He followed this by a call for a Royal Commission inquiry into the whole horrific scene. Even the more conservative members of the Commons committee were skeptical of Saulnier's dire warnings." Margaret Daly, *The Revolution Game* (Toronto 1970), 228.

[26] Pierre Bourgault, interview, Montreal, 23 April 1980.

[27] *La Presse*, 9 October 1969.

[28] *Ibid.*, 8 October 1969.

[29] *Journal de Montréal*, 3 September 1968.

October 1969 during an MLT taxi cortège, "was not done by Taxi Cab drivers. How could they drive their cars and throw stones at store windows. Someone else was involved," he claimed, "especially later at the Murray Hill garage."[30]

Whatever the extent of "radical" influence on the MLT, the group and its supporters were labelled a "bunch of hoodlums, toughs and trouble-makers" by Murray Hill. Because the MLT accepted such support it disqualified itself as an acceptable group whose demands should be given consideration by the authorities. Given the prevailing climate of condemnation of its aims, the MLT could expect little mercy from the police and political authorities. And, in fact, each time it organized a demonstration, the placards and chants of the demonstrators were monitored by the police and the press. Slogans at MLT demonstrations like "C'est la révolution!" or "Le Québec au Québécois" further stiffened the resolve of the government not to yield to such a group.[31]

Nor did the MLT repertoire of collective actions particularly appeal to the authorities. There was no question of it engaging in peaceful picketing and holding peaceful strikes. The dispersal of taxi drivers and the lack of organization made disciplined forms of collective action impossible for the MLT organization. For two years they held cortèges, called strikes, held meetings, marched in demonstrations, organized blockades, and carried out sabotage and hijackings. At different points in its short turbulent career, the MLT fought every repressive force that the authorities could mobilize against it. In addition to massive mobilization of police forces, the authorities used court injunctions and raids on the MLT leaderships to paralyze and disorganize its rudimentary organization and to repress its radical allies.

The Murray Hill affair concluded a year of street politics involving violent strikes, demonstrations, and terrorist bombings. People were concerned. Claiming Montreal had just been faced with a "gory revolt," federal MPs wanted to know what would be done to protect Montreal. Laws were needed "to bring the [subversives] into line."[32] On 12 November 1969 the municipal authorities enacted a by-law which in effect banned demonstrations and public assemblies. The measure was supported by the federal Créditiste leader Réal Caouette and Prime Minister Trudeau.[33]

After the 7 October incidents, the MLT fell on hard times. A new taxi organization, called l'Association d'aide aux exploités arose to challenge it. "Only discussion and cooperation can get the Montreal taxi business out of a terrible mess (. . .). We have no affiliation with organized labour, or politics," said its leader, Mr. Polquin.[34]

Murray Hill finally allowed two taxi companies to share its concession at

[30] Saulnier, interview, 17 April 1980; see also footnote 25.
[31] *La Presse*, 19 December 1968 and 8 October 1968.
[32] *Debates of the House of Commons*, 14 November 1966, 822-3.
[33] *Debates of the House of Commons*, 24 October and 13 November 1969, 50-776; Normand Caron *et al.*, *La police secrète au Quebec*, (Montreal 1978), 18.
[34] *Montreal Star*, 29 October 1969.

Dorval after some urging from local politicians, but neither was from Montreal and thus the MLT continued to be excluded from the airport.[35] In desperation, the MLT threw its support to the separatist Parti québécois in the 1970 provincial election, but the dominant Liberal party led by Robert Bourassa won with one of the largest majorities in recent memory. The last the press saw of the dying MLT was the expulsion, *"manu militarii,"* of some of its members from the Québec Assemblée Législative where they had been demonstrating against government inaction over the plight of Montreal taxi drivers.[36]

The relationships that were suggested in our model are clearly evident in the Murray Hill dispute. The MLT had engaged in its campaign while only representing a minority of taxi drivers. It was a weak organization. It was obliged to seek allies where it could and had to accommodate its aims and tactics to theirs when it conducted collective actions. Also, its very weakness required non-routine actions. Given the heterogeneous, isolated, and dispersed work force in the taxi industry, it was not possible to organize effective industry-wide strikes. Only one-fourth of the drivers worked full-time. Some owned their own cabs. Others leased them. Still others were employees. There were also ethnic and linguistic barriers since taxi drivers were often recent immigrants with few marketable skills. Thus the MLT could only recruit a small core of militants who were not numerous enough to shut down all taxi service, but were nevertheless capable of relatively effective "guerilla warfare" street tactics, that is non-routine forms of collective action. Consequently, it was branded a radical unacceptable group, its demands were not met, and its desperate collective actions met fierce police resistance.

Such is often the plight of weak groups that are perceived as a threat by those who hold power. A successful challenging group must break out of this repressive cycle. It must somehow emerge strengthened from conflicts by dint of its own increase in power or by divisions among the ruling groups. The MLT failed in this effort.

II

The Shooting at the Robin Hood Flour Mill, 22 July 1977

ON 22 JULY 1977, SECURITY GUARDS at the Robin Hood Flour mill in east-end Montreal pulled twelve gauge shotguns out of their car trunks and opened fire on demonstrating strikers and sympathizers. The shooting culminated ten years of bitter labour relations between the Phoenix, Ogilvie, Maple Leaf, and Robin Hood mills, and the 500 workers of the four unions affiliated with the CSN.

The escalation leading to the shooting went back six months to the previous January, when the federal Anti-Inflation Board (AIB) had ruled that the collec-

[35] *La Presse*, 14 November 1969.
[36] *Ibid.*, 26 June 1970.

tive agreement between the CSN locals and the mills was invalid because the unions were to receive wage increases of 11 per cent the first year and 10 per cent the second, thus exceeding the 1974 wage and price control law. The AIB declared it would only authorize 8 per cent the first year and 6 per cent the second year. It thereby demanded a 40 per cent roll-back.[37] The reduction in wage-cost was conveniently accepted by the mills, but the CSN unions decided to take on the mills *and* the federal government. One by one, the unions went out on strike shutting down 80 per cent of Quebec's flourmilling capacity in the process.[38]

Montrealers began hoarding bread, and some stores spoke of setting up a rationing system.[39] But the first to feel the impact of the strike were the bakery workers. Bakeries began to shut down. Olivier Gadbois of the association of bakers forecast 6,000-8,000 lay-offs.[40] Millers and bakers were soon appealing to politicians to use the power of the government to prevent impending disaster![41]

Having gained considerable strength during a period of emerging nationalism in Quebec in the 1960s, the CSN was challenging an alliance of powerful corporations, the federal authorities, and a hostile press. The strike was a risky undertaking. It involved a direct challenge to governmental economic policy. The government would have every reason to resist and to test whether or not the CSN was powerful enough to force the government to back down. If the federal authorities backed down, they would jeopardize their whole economic policy as well as the credibility and power of the federal authorities in the eyes of the labour movement. CSN Montreal headquarters also realized that the strike would lead to a bitter conflict "because we were taking on the government," said Pierre Mercille.[42] In spite of these unfavourable odds, the CSN proceeded on the strategic assumption that by shutting down Montreal's mills and preventing imports and then playing on fears of a bread shortage in Montreal, public pressure would force the government to come to terms.[43]

To achieve these objectives, the CSN would have to maintain solidarity among its locals. Simultaneously, it would need to mobilize a large coalition to increase its power against the economic and political authorities. This implied gaining support from the provincial separatist Parti Québecois government, the federal socialists, and other unions in Canada. Although unsuccessful in its lobbying for Provincial government support, the CSN was able to obtain help from other labour organizations. The idea was to gain broad enough support eventually to launch a general sympathy strike. In the meantime, it would

[37] *Le Droit*, 12 February 1977.
[38] *Le Devoir*, 10 February 1977.
[39] *Le Soleil*, 11 February 1977; *Gazette*, 5 and 11 February 1977.
[40] *Le Devoir*, 10 and 11 February 1977; *La Presse*, 7 February 1977.
[41] *Le Soleil*, 11 February 1977.
[42] Pierre Mercille, CSN, interview, Montreal, 24 April 1980.
[43] *Le Devoir*, 18 February 1977; *La Presse*, 30 July 1977.

attempt to get help from other unions to prevent the delivery of out-of-province flour to local bakeries. The CSN sought aid from Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ), the Teachers Federation of Quebec (CEQ), the affiliates of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and even from United States unions such as the Teamsters to prevent foreign deliveries.[44] They needed all the help that they could get because the government and business leaders were determined to "hang tough" and oppose this challenge to their authority.

The authorities perceived the CSN as a rising radical challenger to their power; though it had declined during the five years prior to the strike, the CSN's strength had been rapidly increasing, going from 94,114 members in 1960 to 204,361 in 1966.[45] The federal, provincial, and municipal authorities had labeled the CSN an unacceptable radical group and launched investigations of its activities.

The CSN was also highly suspect as far as the mill operators were concerned. There had never been a peacefully settled wage agreement in their ten years of labour relations with the CSN.[46] Ogilvie, Maple Leaf, and Robin Hood were determined to take a strong stand in support of the government for obvious reasons.[47] Hired toughs began to appear opposite the picket lines.[48] Management and the authorities received press support. Editorialists accused the CSN of trying to "starve the people in order to win points against the government."[49]

The authorities, bolstered by press support and fearful of the effects of the strike, launched a multi-pronged campaign of repression against the unions. First, they obtained a special permit from the Canadian Wheat Board to import supplies of wheat from the United States and Ontario, but the winter weather paralyzed truck traffic during the first months of the strike.[50] Next, the flour mill owners got injunctions backed up with individual fines of $5,000 per day and $50,000 per day against the unions and enforced them by deploying the Montreal riot squad.[51] At the same time, security guards and strikebreakers appeared.[52]

[44] *Le Droit*, 8 February 1977; *Gazette*, 16 February 1977; *Le Devoir*, 18 February 1977; *La Presse*, 11 February and 25 April 1977; *Montreal Star*, 16 February 1977.

[45] By 1982, in the midst of the country's worst economic crisis in 40 years, when membership should have been going down, the CSN had increased its membership to 230,000 (*Globe and Mail*, 6 May 1982); Louise-Marie Tremblay, *Le syndicalisme québécois* (Montreal 1972), 39.

[46] *La Presse*, 25 April 1972.

[47] Only Phoenix appeared ready to maintain the initial collective agreement in contradiction to AIB policy (*Le Devoir*, 10 February 1977; *Le Soleil*, 11 February 1977).

[48] *Le Soleil*, 11 February 1977.

[49] *La Presse*, 15 February 1977.

[50] *La Presse*, 8 and 25 February 1977; *Montreal Star*, 5 February 1977.

[51] The Montreal Citizens Movement, a reformist municipal party, through its city councillors Paul Cliche and Arnold Bennett demanded an inquiry into police tactics during the strike (*Montreal Star*, 9 June 1977).

[52] *Globe and Mail*, 25 March 1977.

Of the four, Robin Hood mills had the toughest policy according to CSN union spokesmen. They fired the strikers, hired guards, and decided to keep operating no matter what. It was a "damned provocation" complained a union leader. To make matters worse, the guards they hired were aggressive. Insults, beatings, threats, cars ramming picket lines were all commonplace.

The union coalition fought back as best it could. They took the offensive against the parent companies of the Montreal flour mills by calling on their 165,000 members to boycott Steinberg's foods (Phoenix mills) and Labatt's beer (Ogilvie mills). They also tried to block the flow of supplies, but despite their efforts, supplies got through. Finally, in mid-July, a face-saving compromise was found for the unions, in which the strikers would accept the AIB pay cut but the difference (40¢ per hour) would be put in escrow or in a pension fund.[53] The Unions and two of the mills, Ogilvie and Phoenix, accepted the arrangement and Maple Leaf was ready to fall in. That left Robin Hood, the last hold out. The CSN called for a demonstration at noon on 22 July in front of Robin Hood to pressure the management to hire back its strikers and accept the compromise.[54]

About 200 people from the other three mills and assorted supporters assembled at the Robin Hood mill fence to show solidarity with their union brethren. It was supposed to be a routine symbolic show of support that was only expected to last a half an hour. But a series of actions by police, security guards, and company managers turned things ugly. First, the company insisted on keeping its operations going with strikebreakers who were in turn guarded by hired toughs. It also decided to bring trucks in and out of the plant whether or not there was a demonstration in progress at that particular moment of the day. Pretty soon the trucks were having a hard time getting through. Things got even uglier a half an hour later when the company called in the riot squad to clear the way for the trucks. They accomplished this, but left in their wake a rapidly deteriorating situation. After the riot squad withdrew, seven policemen remained to keep a lid on things.[55]

The trouble was the police did not intervene between the protagonists. They stayed to the side sitting in their cars to "avoid being provocative."[56] Unfortunately the security guards were far more active. There were 20 of them from the Bureau des détectives industriels, a company run by an ex-wrestler named Paul Leduc. Wearing bermuda shorts and tee-shirts under their professional accoutrements, namely truncheons, crash helmets, and riot shields, they

[53] *La Presse*, 16 July 1977.

[54] Mercille, interview, 24 April 1980; *La Presse*, 30 July 1977.

[55] Why they suddenly left is questioned to this day by union leaders. Sergeant Hogues of the SPCUM claimed they were called away to an alleged "riot" at the Bourdeau jail (30 April 1980). Lt. Lionel Dionne claimed it was to go to another strike at the Institut Pinel (*La Presse*, 23 July 1977).

[56] Lieutenant Dionne, *Globe and Mail*, 23 July 1977.

exchanged provocative gestures and insults with the 125 demonstrators on the other side of the fence.

After a number of incidents, a group of 30 strikers ventured onto the company property. All the guards would have had to do in this situation was to close the doors to the plant.[57] But they did not. Instead the guards went for their guns. They fired 32 caliber-size shot gun pellets at the pavement in front of the strikers. However, the pavement inclined downward toward the crowd. Consequently, the slugs ricocheted too low and struck eight people.[58]

The shooting appeared to strengthen the resolve of the CSN-led coalition and weakened that of the defending coalition. The other flour mill locals, who had been on the verge of settling with Phoenix, Ogilvie, and Maple Leaf threatened to continue their strike until Robin Hood agreed to come to terms with its strikers. The CLC, throwing its support to the CSN, launched a boycott of all Robin Hood products.[59] Radical groups such as En lutte, the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste, the Ligue socialiste ouvrière, and SOS Garderies demonstrated their support by carrying out a sympathy march, 2,500 strong, in support of the CSN, singing the International and threatening to "Soak the rich."[60]

On the other side of the spectrum, federal and political leaders had to condemn the shooting but they and their economic partners began to disagree over the severity of the repression. Nevertheless, sufficient pressure was finally brought to bear on Robin Hood management that it finally had to agree to shut the plant down and to negotiate with the strikers.[61]

The CSN's strike coordinator, Pierre Mercille, acknowledged years later, "If I had to do it again, I wouldn't have started that strike.... It obviously wasn't a victory." While their security guard tormentors were acquitted, the flour mill strikers who were involved in the fracas were each fined $500.[62] The company, however, did agree to negotiate, but 55 of the 92 strikers who remained were never rehired. Meanwhile, Robin Hood cut 114 other jobs and transferred part of its operations elsewhere.

As was the case with the Murray Hill dispute, we find some evidence in this strike of patterns of relationships hypothesized between the attributes of groups involved in incidents. The CSN had thrown down the gauntlet to the economic

[57] Mercille found it strange that on this particular occasion the gate was left unlocked. The company had always locked it when routine picketing was going on, but this time they left it open (24 April 1980).

[58] Sergeant Jacques Hogues, SPCUM Division No. 4, interview, 30 April 1980.

[59] *Montreal Star*, 4 August 1977; *Ottawa Journal*, 19 August 1977. Provigo and Co-op grocery stores with 100 outlets agreed not to reorder Robin Hood products such as its cake mixes and flour, Bicks pickles, Stouffer's frozen foods, Coorsh prepared meats and Rose Brand preserves (*Gazette*, 1 September 1977).

[60] *Le Devoir*, 25 July 1977; *La Presse* and the *Gazette*, 29 July 1977.

[61] *La Presse*, 26 July 1977.

[62] *Gazette*, 14 September 1977.

and political authorities of the country by using the flour mill dispute to challenge the AIB over wage controls. For having the audacity to do this, it was labelled as a radical, unacceptable protagonist who was threatening the established order. As a result, the authorities took a strong anti-CSN position, refusing to discuss any infringement of the wage control policy. Its demands were rejected. It was unable to negotiate a change in the wage control policy. At the same time, encouraged by their tactical alliance with the public authorities, flour mill operators like Robin Hood might have felt less restrained in adopting particularly brutal strikebreaking tactics. For their part, the strikers resorted to sabotage, mass demonstrations, and boycotts, all non-routine forms of action that a relatively weak protagonist uses in desperation against a powerful coalition of employers and government with the law and court injunctions behind them.

The conflict was bound to be long and bitter. The CSN aim to challenge the government's power to impose economic policy on the country was *ipso facto* illegal. Any action to pursue such an aim was therefore unacceptable and would be subject to stern countermeasures. In effect, the CSN and its allies were the victims of harsh repressive actions that ultimately left eight strikers *shot on the pavement in front of the Robin Hood mill.*

III
The Fleck Strike

"HERE IS A SHABBY LITTLE STRIKE that should never have amounted to a pile of beans," wrote Julian Hayashi who covered the Fleck strike for the *Free Press* in nearby London, Ontario. How it turned out to be "one of the bitterest strikes in recent memory" can be explored through the dynamics of the collective action process.[63]

Fleck made electrical harnesses for automobile plants. The firm was located at the Huron Industrial Park, a former air base in Centralia, four miles north of Exeter and about 25 miles north of London, Ontario. The Ontario Development Corporation had acquired the industrial park and in turn leased it out to several companies including Fleck. The company was half-owned by Mrs. Margaret Fleck and her children, the other half belonging to Sonor Investments of Toronto.[64] Mrs. Fleck and Sonor got a good deal on their lease under a special provincial development program.[65] It so happened that Mrs. Fleck's husband, James, was Deputy Minister of Industry and Tourism in the Conservative provincial government.

At first, the strike seemed fairly typical. Like 100s of other strikes it involved a first contract and union security. Working conditions at the Fleck

[63] *Peterborough Examiner*, 2 June 1978.
[64] *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, 28 April 1978, 2039.
[65] Al Seymour Regional Representative, interview, London, Ont., 17 June 1980.

plant were not much different from those of other small non-union operations of about 100 workers. The shop was rat-infested, it lacked sanitary and safety facilities, it was dirty and dusty, the machinery was antiquated, and the pay was minimum wage. Local 1620 wanted a first contract that provided for better working conditions and benefits, a wage increase from $2.85 to $3.20 per hour, and union security with automatic dues check-off. The company refused and the budding union movement at Fleck ran into a stone wall. It was weak and vulnerable to repression by a coalition composed of the plant management, provincial police, and political authorities.

Company actions prior to and during the initial period of the strike indicate that it was determined to break the union and that it intended to follow a hard line policy to achieve that result. "Fleck management tried to take the union on through negotiations and break the union at that point."[66] When that failed, they determined to make a last ditch effort along the picket line to break the union.[67]

The first morning of the strike busloads of strikebreakers began to arrive at the plant. Management perhaps hoped an initial display of overwhelming power would demoralize the strikers. The nature of the opposition the strikers were facing was further highlighted when Deputy Minister James Fleck visited the plant that had so far not been given a second thought. The strikers began to feel that their little union was taking on the whole "establishment;" and Fleck, the politicians, and the police were all part of it.

Given the hard line policy of the authorities and the power of their coalition, the Fleck strikers needed support from other groups in order to increase the power that they could bring to bear in pursuit of their aims. A wide variety of groups came eventually to their aid. The UAW was one. It launched a boycott of Fleck products at UAW-controlled assembly plants. Its local at the St. Thomas plant offered to send reinforcements. Support also came from the Belleville, Ontario locals. It came from 1,300 Ford workers at Talbotville. It came from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The Women's Movement sent help. Even the Toronto Workshop Productions Theatre came out to support the "cause célèbre." The Fleck strike coincided with the creation of an International Women's Day Committee in Toronto. Many of these women organized support for the Fleck strikers by sending delegations and relating the issues at

[66] Julian Hayashi who reported on the strike for the *Free Press* wrote that "Fleck executive . . . exhibit the kind of out-dated patronizing attitudes that business administration schools hope their graduates won't copy to become executives" (29 March 1978). UAW leader, Denis McDermott accused Fleck management of " 'outdated attitudes' " and acting " 'like mad dogs' that need to be taught a lesson" (*Free Press*, 4 April 1978).

[67] Mary Lou Richards of Local 1620 claimed that "Turner told the women that if they went out on strike, . . . he could not guarantee their jobs in six months." (Affidavit to the DLRB, 16 March 1978). Fifty to sixty employees eventually refused to cooperate with the union once the strike began.

Fleck to the broader questions raised by the Women's Movement. At the same time the women's caucus of the UAW pushed for support for the women of Local 1620. So did the women's caucus of the New Democratic Party.

Soon the picket line ballooned into a mass demonstration. But with large numbers of outsiders involved, it was harder to keep the collective action on the picket line disciplined and routine. There was a greater risk of precipitating police reprisals especially since the police forces also rapidly increased their numbers. The more people there were, the greater was the risk of violent confrontations. Furthermore, it was hard to get enough people to march on the picket line. There was a single access road serving several businesses in the industrial park. Therefore, the pickets could not stop all traffic indiscriminately.

The number and variety of groups that mobilized in support of the Fleck strikers not only changed the form of collective action from a routine picketing operation to a series of mass-picketings and demonstrations, it also changed the types of issues in the strike. The Fleck strikers broadened their aims in order to encompass the interests of all of the supporting groups. Thus, as the conflict escalated, and as outside supporters came into the fray, the issues evolved from the immediate problems that Local 1620 had with management to broad politicized questions.

Also, labour began to see the strike as a trial of strength that it could not afford to lose if it wanted to continue organizing women who were a new pool of potential recruits to the labour movement. For labour, women workers were the "last great frontier" for organizing. In 1975, there were 3,697,000 women in a labour force of 10,060,000 workers, a 78 per cent jump from 1965.

As the issues and allies of the Fleck coalition broadened, and as the conflict became increasingly politicized, the authorities fought back by mobilizing large numbers of police forces. More and more was at stake for both sides, and the result was a bitter conflict. Death threats against strikebreakers, vandalism, and police brutality all accompanied the strike.[68] For their part, the police reacted to the strike as if it were a veritable insurrection. An Assistant Commissioner personally oversaw the deployment of OPP officers at Fleck. It was not exceptional "to see 80-85 police cars on the picket line."[69] And at times, police actually out-numbered demonstrators by two to one.[70]

It appeared that massive police mobilization was a form of intimidation against strikers. Certainly it had a sobering effect on the striking women, who were involved in their first labour dispute.

I never seen so many police, and I never seen besides TV — so many riot cops. So we're all out there and all of a sudden you see about a hundred fifty cops coming at you and all you can see is black shiny helmets, visors — you can't see their face and those long

[68] *Citizen*, 27 May 1978.
[69] Seymour, interview, 17 June 1980.
[70] *Free Press*, 4 April 1978.

sticks and the black gloves.... It's like something out of a science fiction movie. Scared? Aw, you better believe it. That morning I was never so scared in all my life.[71]

For six months, the protagonists squared off along the picket line. On one side the union coalition, and on the other Fleck and the OPP, abetted by the benevolent neutrality of the Conservative provincial government. Most of the conflict involved mass picketing and exceptionally massive police repression as both sides fought for control over access to the plant. As far as the authorities were concerned, any effort to impede access to the plant was a legally unacceptable form of collective action, which provided police authorities with a legal pretext to repress the strikers.

Meanwhile, the Conservative government and its supporters defended the massive police measures. Justice Minister Kerr affirmed that the police had "handled the situation well." When a clash occurred, he brushed it off as a mere "scuffle," and affirmed that energetic police action was necessary in order to keep access to the plant open. Such measures were justified because mass-picketing was "in itself . . . an illegal action."[72] Riddell, the Liberal who represented the riding, also supported the massive police mobilization. There was a "riotous situation," he said, with the "safety of school children at stake." For her part, the Minister of Labour Bette Stephenson also maintained a non-interventionist posture as the picket line was being ground down by police repression. She stood aside during the first months and even defended Fleck management by insisting that the "plant's accident rate was 'not high'."[73] In making this statement, she was contradicting her own inspectors' reports.

Finally, the Minister of Industry and Tourism, Mr. Rhodes, James Fleck's superior, defended his subordinate, who he said had had "no involvement in the day-to-day general administration of this company."[74] He backed Deputy Minister Fleck in his claim that there was no conflict of interest. Despite the government's vigorous support of the police and its defence of its own Deputy Minister, so universally deplored was the overwhelming deployment of police that criticism started to pour in from all sides. Some were concerned about the incredible costs of the police repression, others about their tactics. Whether as a result of the wave of criticism or apparent internal dissent, a new police strategy emerged in June. It was characterized by an absence of the convoys of police cruisers that had become part of the morning ritual at the Huron Park plant. Police from then on were no longer brought in *until* the law was actually broken. The police clubbing finally ceased.[75]

[71] Women's Workshop, "The Fleck Women" (Film).

[72] *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, 25 May 1978, 2778; Justice Committee, 31 May 1978, 5-158.

[73] *Free Press*, 29 March 1978.

[74] *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, 9 March 1978, 4941.

[75] Douglas Glynn, UAW Public Relations Director (interview, Toronto, 23 May 1980) complained about the repression. "The OPP contributed greatly to it. They put far too

Events having forced reduced support from police and politicians, Fleck finally negotiated an agreement with Local 1620 in mid-August. After a six-month struggle the Fleck women had finally won their first collective agreement. They were proud of their effort. They had developed a sense of solidarity and collective pride and they were now more aggressive in demanding their rights. "We found out that we were a lot stronger than we ever were before," said one participant. Another added, "I don't think we've got a lot to show to a lot of people."[76] However, not everyone was so optimistic about the content of the first contract. "The contract didn't really make gains for them, not in that contract . . . [though] Bette Stephenson, the Labour Minister, sent in inspectors and they did clean up the health and safety conditions at the plant."[77] The strike did, however, give an impetus to provincial legislation that provided protection for union security. Fleck, along with the Radio Shack and Blue Cross strikes, pushed Mrs. Stephenson's successor, Robert Elgie, to favour the Rand formula and its automatic dues check-off system. On the other hand, despite NDP support voiced by members like Tony Lupusella, Ontario has not enacted legislation against the use of strikebreakers.[78]

This strike has been analyzed in terms of the five attributes of participating protagonists that were put forward in the first part of the paper. A new labour group, Local 1620, was trying to improve its status by making a series of demands on the economic authorities. It was decidedly on the disadvantageous side of its power relationship with the authorities. It was opposed by a hard line employer who was aided by a cooperative police force and provincial government who early on tried to crush the women's mobilization. Faced with this repressive coalition, the women sought help from other groups. They broadened their coalition, and in order to incorporate their new-found allies in the collective action, they were obliged to adopt a non-routine form of collective action — mass-picketing. Because the union coalition was composed of a variety of groups like women, labour, and fringe political groups, the issues had to be broadened and "politicized" to accommodate their allies, for example, invoking questions like union busting and women's rights. Imbued with such aims, the union and its allies engaged in mass-picketing to shut down the plant and did it in such a way that all allied groups could participate in the collective action. For their part, having accused the picketers of having political aims rather than merely wanting a collective agreement, the authorities used

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many officers on the scene. Commissioner Graham admits that they over-reacted in at least one incident, when they waded into a picket line and on that occasion in traditional police fashion billys were not raised. You didn't raise a billy if you are a cop because that makes a bad picture for the media. You learn to use the billy so you get them bang right where it's going to make the bladder . . . release. Nothing's more humiliating than to make a person evacuate themselves. . . ."

[76] "The Fleck Women."

[77] Glynn, interview, 23 May 1980.

[78] *Legislature of Ontario Debates*, 9 March 1978, 508.

this pretext to justify massive repressive efforts. They also claimed massive repression was essential because the unionists used a non-routine form of action — mass-picketing instead of symbolic informational picketing. This combination of relationships led to the violence at Fleck.

IV

The Artistic Woodwork Strike, 1973

THE 1973 ARTISTIC WOODWORK STRIKE was one of the most brutal labour confrontations in Toronto in recent years.[79] The 120 strikers of Local 570 worked in a picture framing shop. They had organized the previous year and were in the process of bargaining for their first collective agreement. They had invited the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union (CTCU) to take up their drive and to adopt them.[80] Upon the specific request of the workers, Madeleine Parent of the CTCU had agreed to take up the organization of the shop, but she did so with a sense of considerable foreboding.

Artistic Woodwork, a four to five million dollar business, employed about 150 employees producing picture frames in four Toronto plants. Smaller operations existed in Montreal, Vancouver, and Cleveland. Despite its modest size, it had reportedly become the largest producer of fancy picture mountings in Canada. Six Estonian immigrants had established the business 20 years previously. The anti-communist, anti-union, conservative, and authoritarian attitude which the proprietors brought to their successful enterprising exploits continued to be manifest in the management of the company. Sarel Van Zyl, the company assistant general manager who handled the strike, embodied the mentality of what one observer has described as "a mix of manipulative paternalism and an army style barracks discipline."[81]

The company relied on immigrant labour paid at rates close to the minimum wage — 20 per cent to 40 per cent less than the rates at union shops. A first generation of employees, still constituting about a third of the work force, reflected the same Eastern European origin and spirit as that of the owners. This group would later "scab" and bitterly divide the workers. More recently, and with less seniority, Greeks, Italians, West Indians, Portuguese, and Latin Americans were added to the mix. Selected thus for maximum dependency, it was difficult if not impossible for workers to communicate among themselves, let alone assert themselves against their employers.

In spite of the communications problems, the negotiations seemed to be going smoothly. Management finally conceded a 65 cent raise over two years to

[79] This section is a revised version of a paper presented with Professor Fred Caloren at the 1981 Blue Collar Conference in Hamilton, Ontario.

[80] Rick Salutin, *Kent Rowley, The Organizer* (Toronto 1980), 105-6; *Toronto Citizen*, 14-27 September 1973.

[81] Daniel Drache and John Lang, "Lessons from the Artistic Strike," *This Magazine*, 8, 1 (March 1974), 3.

Local 570. But the real issues were not wages, they were management's traditional prerogatives. The company was vehement in opposing a seniority rule on promotions; they insisted on maintenance of power to establish shop rules and to fire those who contravened them; they also rejected automatic dues check-off (Rand formula); and finally, they opposed a shorter work week.

By 20 August, the negotiations had broken down. On the eve of the strike, having assembled the workers, the management decried the need for a union, and stated its intention to continue production and use police protection for those who would continue to work. About one-third in fact continued. Artistic management was immediately able to pull some of the multi-ethnic work force from the Local, mainly the older East European workers. To replace those who supported the strike, the company began hiring newly arrived, unemployed East Indian and West Indian labour. The 13-week strike that ensued was brutal. 108 persons were arrested, virtually all of whom were brought to trial, resulting in about 50 convictions entailing heavy fines and jail sentences.[82] Attrition also took its toll of strikers due to economic privation and picket line casualties.

The issues in the strike had great material and symbolic significance in the Toronto industrial context. Effects of the deindustrializing of the city were already, by 1973, becoming evident to the business and political leadership of Toronto. Artistic Woodwork was carrying the flag for the kind of small-scale manufacturing enterprises that were becoming predominant and essential to the city's economy. At the time there were an estimated 5,500 such small manufacturing plants. They operated in declining and labour intensive industries, what James O'Connor has called the competitive sector. The success of these operations depended on a labour force considered marginal, which could be remunerated at minimum scale: immigrants, women, youth, the unskilled of all sorts, and of course, non-unionized workers of no interest to the large, established unions. The maintenance of industry's control over these favourable factors of production was of more importance than ever — a fact to which provincial and later, municipal governments were becoming sensitive and responsive.

And, in fact, the municipal and provincial governments, the latter in the person of the Minister of Labour refused to intervene until the third month of the strike. The Minister defended this attitude on the ground that non-worker interference on the picket line had blown the labour dispute into a political issue. His "professionals," the Minister stated, would play their role only if the outsiders left off and restored it to being a supposedly technical problem of industrial relations. The effect of this hands-off attitude, of course, was to allow management to assert its rights to keep production going with the help of strikebreakers, and the police to wade into the picket lines, to harass and to intimidate. The strike finally broke in favour of the workers, only when in the third month the united front of political jurisdictions gave way. The police rough-house finally reached up to city councillors and others identified with

[82] *Canadian Union News* (November 1978) put the number of arrests at 118 of which about half were tried.

upper echelons of the state apparatus. Some of them and their children supported the strikers on the picket line. When the "black eyes and busted shins" were theirs, they quickly recognized "a dangerous and inflammatory situation."[83] In an unprecedented move, the executive bodies of the city and the metropolitan municipality voted resolutions calling strongly upon the Premier and the Minister of Labour to intervene — that is, to get the employer to the bargaining table — on pain of threat of withdrawing the police, thus effectively ending the employer's strikebreaking.[84] This move had just been preceded by a decision of the Ontario Labour Relations Board which gave the CTCU permission to prosecute the Artistic Woodwork Co. for failing to bargain in good faith. In that same week of 12 November, police activity at the picket line reached its peak; 35 arrests were made; agencies of the media broke ranks and clearly exposed the police abuse of power; large numbers of delegates to the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention joined the picket line. Isolated and exposed, the provincial government let the heat fall on the employer; negotiations resumed immediately!

To the police, the law provided the occasion, in the context of a mass picket designed to stop work in the plant, to throw brute force, intimidation, and the weight of the legal system against the union. The police assert it was a legitimate duty to assure access into the workplace of company employees. In the melee of the scrum, as the police wedges and speeding cars rushed the plant gates, police rough-house and arbitrary action prevailed without check. The effect of these actions was clearly understood by union people. It served the employer's design of destroying the union. "The cops make a holy war over letting them [the company] strikebreak."[85] In effect becoming an agent of the company, the police were accomplices to the company's aims. "The Company's objective was to demoralize and destroy the picket line as quickly as possible; if there was no picket line, there would be no strike and no union."[86]

As was the case in the other strikes we have examined, the police played a major role in this strike. We are persuaded that in circumstances such as those at the Artistic strike the police become, to a degree, an authority unto themselves, or at least directed by their mandate to protect the employer's property and interests. Starting fights, provoking, assaulting "... they were rarely if ever amenable to the sanctions of the court."[87] This freedom of action is typified by a young policeman challenged for pushing "scabs" through the line and shoving picketers aside: "I'm a police officer; I come and go as I please."[88]

The *Metro Toronto Police Handbook* issued in June 1963 decrees how an acceptable strike shall be conducted — with few, symbolic pickets playing a

[83] Alderman Karl Jaffary, *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 1973.
[84] Drache and Lang, "Lessons from the Artistic Strike," 4.
[85] Rick Salutin, Former CTCU organizer, interview, Toronto, 21 May 1980.
[86] Drach and Lang, "Lessons from the Artistic Strike," 3-7.
[87] Salutin, interview, 21 May 1980; CTCU Press Release, 11 March 1974.
[88] Salutin, interview, 21 May 1980.

passive role in the event of strikebreakers entering the plant. Its instruction on "NO MASS PICKETING" justifies the exclusion of large numbers of "outsiders," which include union organizers. Furthermore, at the Artistic picket line, the police in a sense exercised a political function by very selectively focusing their repressive activity almost entirely on the "outside" strike supporters. So concerned were they about outsiders that only nine company workers were arrested. This is not, of course, to suggest that company workers were not taunted and intimidated. But the thrust of police efforts was obviously to destroy support for the striking workers, and at the same time prevent the strike from becoming an occasion for politicizing other groups and mobilizing a broader constituency of the public to radical action.

One of the most striking features of the Artistic strike as well as of the other protests we have studied, is the police treatment of women, immigrants, and youth.[89] This pattern has significance. That impression is bolstered by a perusal of *News and Views*, the publication of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Association. Police prejudice against marginal and minority social groups undoubtedly informs their action against these groups and serves a social order which has a clear material interest in keeping such groups dependent and "available" for duty in units like the one at Artistic.

Having reviewed the behaviour of the public authorities and the employer, let us now describe the attributes of the protesting groups and see how they made them candidates for repression by the authorities. The first is associated with the nature and relative strength of the group involved in the collective action. This variable was the organization and power of the group. For reasons we have already outlined, Local 570 of the CTCU had a notably weak organizational base in the plant where it was negotiating its first collective agreement.

The second characteristic attributed to protest groups was their political status. As we have seen, the CTCU was affiliated with the CCU. This was a maverick, nationalist, independent labour federation that had been engaged in numerous organizing conflicts in small plants (such as the Texpack strike in Brantford and the Puretex Knitting Mill strike in Toronto) where low wages and deplorable working conditions were imposed on marginal workers — women and immigrants. The large, established business unions affiliated with the CLC did not often deem it worthwhile to commit effort and resources to the organization of these workers. In fact, they, along with the authorities, viewed the activities of the nationalist and left-leaning CCU and its affiliates with some measure of distrust as well as displeasure. Similarly, business and many political leaders tended to see the CCU and CTCU Local 570 as a radically-led unacceptable group which was bent on upsetting the status quo.

The third characteristic, along with its vulnerable organization and its "unacceptable" political status, was the aims of the union. The CTCU was viewed as a labour organization that pursued maximalist objectives. It was an

[89] Madeline Parent, Secretary-Treasurer, CTCU, interview, Toronto, 21 May 1980.

adversary of the large international unions and had frequently been a competitor of the United Textile Workers of America, for example at the Silknit Ltd. plant in Cambridge, Ontario.[90] The union was also well-known for defining issues in the broadest way possible in order to elicit support from other community groups. It went on strike not only for specific aims such as better wages, but also in the name of workers in general, and exploited women and immigrant workers in particular.

The fourth factor associated with severe repressive measures involved the *form* of collective action. The CTCU-CCU had a reputation of engaging in all-out forms of collective action. Once a strike was voted, everyone was on the picket line; there was no such thing as symbolic picketing. By invoking broad issues of community interest and attracting support from liberal and left groups as well as the media, the union could mobilize large numbers of non-union demonstrators for massive picketing.[91] This was especially effective for blocking access to a plant where management was determined to keep operating with strikebreakers and police escorts.

The Artistic Woodwork strike typified numerous small plant conflicts across Canada. Its volatile combination of a vulnerable union organization negotiating its first contract, along with the unacceptable political status of the union, its reputed penchant for pursuing maximalist goals, and finally its practice of engaging in forms of collective action involving potentially intense confrontations make the affair a representative case study of numerous labour conflicts in Canada where repressive violence has most frequently tended to occur.

V
Conclusion

OUR STUDY OF THE FOUR STRIKES has brought us to a number of conclusions about the nature of violent labour conflict and those involved in it. These conclusions are organized around the relationships between the five features of labour conflicts that were presented in our introduction, that is the workers' organization, the way they are viewed by the authorities and employers (their status), the aims they pursue, and the policies and power of their opponents. The article suggests that the interplay of these five features forms the pattern of violent confrontations and affects their outcomes. We will explore these in our conclusions.

Generally, where the workers were well-organized, with good discipline, leadership, resources, and allies, they were better able to withstand the onslaught of the police. They were also capable of holding their supporters behind them. The Fleck women were a case in point. On the other hand,

[90] Salutin, *Kent Rowley*, 86.
[91] John Lang, CTCU Organizer, interview, Toronto, 20 May 1980.

Montreal's independent taxi drivers proved unable to hold together, nor for that matter were the Artistic workers. The flour mill workers of the CSN survived the confrontation but they emerged weakened at Robin Hood and ultimately succumbed to "disciplinary" measures by the employer.

Strikers in locals who used disciplined forms of collective action were better able to control their reactions to police and employer harassment. They were able to discourage random individual actions by their members which often served as pretexts for police intervention. They were also able to show restraint in the face of police measures which encouraged a favourable coverage by the media, support from other groups, and some political leaders. The Fleck local, though engaged for the first time in such a collective action and though faced with an overwhelming police presence, used skillful tactical discipline in a dangerous situation. The MLT on the contrary rapidly gained the reputation of trouble-making vandals in the press and among other drivers. Their tactics, though perhaps imposed by circumstances in their industry, nevertheless proved ineffective and even counterproductive.[92]

As labour groups proved disciplined and effective as spokespersons for the interests of their members, their political status with the authorities would improve. It would appear that groups with political status would accept the "rules of the game" and assume that they could benefit from them. They would pursue limited Gompersian aims in exchange for their "legitimization" by the authorities. On the other hand, unacceptable, marginal, weak labour groups reject the parameters that those in power impose when they attempt to improve their status by gaining certification and a first contract. They are demanding a change in the power relationship. Therefore, they have aims that directly contradict the policies of the authorities. It could be assumed, in other words, that when locals like the ones at Fleck or Artistic made limited acceptable demands that were provided for in the labour code such as a first agreement with wage concessions and union security, in exchange, they would gain acceptance and would enter into routine labour relations with employers. Fleck and Artistic do not substantiate this assumption. In fact in those two strikes, employers and police reactions imposed a confrontation on the locals even though their aims were not a direct challenge to the political authorities as was the case with the CSN's confrontation with the AIB.[93] Hence "reasonableness" does not guaran-

[92] Less powerful labour groups tend to use less routinized forms of action where the rules of behaviour for all participants are not as clearly spelled out and where violent repression is possible at every step. Strikes with only informational picketing are typical structured actions. These are more often used by powerful established unions. See Amitai Etzioni, *Demonstration Democracy* (New York 1970), 19.

[93] These case studies do not clearly substantiate Tilly's and Korpi's work about the nature of specific power relationships and the likelihood of repressive measures. See Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 111, who affirms that "The group's current power is the most promising single factor. That for two reasons: because might often makes right, and because current power sums up many other kinds of acceptability. The

tee tolerance or restraint by employers or police. Ultimately, much depends on the policies and attitudes of the employers, police and politicians. Possessing overwhelming power, they control the parameters of the contests.

Despite union efforts to carry out disciplined collective actions that are well organized, the police may nevertheless provoke protesters because it may be strategically useful for a government to have a little violence on the picket line on the assumption that it reinforces anti-union feelings amongst the population. An Ontario legislator explained the idea before the Assembly.

> The reputation of working people is under assault. People react to pictures of police moving in and tugging strikers away. They react to violence. They think that this becomes typical of the trade union movement. And the government digs its heels in because it thinks that . . . the labour movement is losing public approval as long as this [violence] goes on.[94]

Such provocative action by the authorities, however, can backfire. There comes a point where politicians no longer are prepared to support the police's "energetic" activity. This was especially the case in the Fleck strike. This is usually the point when the media and the community start believing that the police are going too far, namely when blood shows on colour television screens on the nightly news. At this point the ruling coalition starts to have internal tensions and to put pressure on police to let up.

Quite apart from these general considerations regarding the likelihood and intensity of repressive measures, we have also discovered that the actual outbreak of violence is prompted by the interaction between protesters and police. But the interaction does not occur in the context of an equilibrium between the two adversaries. Employers, police, and politicians are by far more powerful than their labour opponents. Contrary to labour, their coalition is able to

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more powerful the group, on the average, the less repression it receives." On the other hand, "When the difference in power resources between the actors is very large, the probability that the stronger party makes a punishing move against the weaker is high, as is the probability that the stronger party will defend himself against an attack from the weaker party. Since, however, the probability that the weaker party himself will attack, the probability for manifest conflict remains low." However, manifest conflict can still occur when the challenger is very weak because defender aggression may automatically elicit a response for self protection by weak challengers. See Korpi, "Conflict Power and Relative Deprivation," 1574.

Korpi describes this curvilinear relationship in this way. "The power-balance model of conflict . . . gives a rationale for the often-made assumption that manifest conflict is more rare between parties with greatly different power resources. Empirical support for this part of the model can be found e.g. in the observations that industrial disputes tend to be more frequent in boom periods than in recessions. . . . In boom periods with an increasing and relatively high demand for labor, the power position of the workers tends to be better relative to that of management although labor still is a long stretch from [actual] equality in power." See "Conflict and the Balance of Power," *Acta Sociologica*, 17 (1974), 110.

[94] Stephen Lewis, *Legislature of Ontario Debates* (Hansard), 1 November 1973, 5020.

coordinate its countermeasures through the repressive legal and physical machinery of the state. Thus labour could only gain enough power to challenge the state if it could build a coalition that would be strong enough to launch a general strike. This has rarely occurred because of the enormous organizational problems involved in such a massive undertaking. Only such power would force the ruling coalition to think twice about lauching violent retaliatory measures, because only this potential superiority would render violent repression too costly and too risky for the defenders of the status quo.

In comparison to the powerful coalition that was arrayed against them, the labour groups were the weak partners in our four collective actions. The defenders of the status quo had more control over the process of these labour conflicts and ultimately were better able to affect the level of personal violence that would occur. They controlled the dynamics of the collective action process in several ways. Employers had the power to keep running their operation by using strikebreakers. They could also demand police protection for their property. The police could interpret acceptable picketing activities in the strictest sense thus favouring employers, and thus providing a pretext to attack picket lines. They also gave free rein to strikebreakers. For their part, politicians were free to close their eyes to labour conflicts leaving unions at the mercy of prolonged repression that was meant to break their strike. They could also enact measures that would limit the bargaining power of the union. That leads to the argument that labour unions are far from being equal partners in the politics of liberal democracies. They are a distinct underdog when conflicts occur, and they have far less impact on the dynamics of violent conflict than do those they challenge.

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