

## 1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt

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## ARTICLES

### 1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt

Gregory S. Kealey

IN LATE MARCH 1919 A WORRIED Union government appointed a Royal Commission to "enquire into Industrial Relations in Canada." From 26 April to 13 June, the Commissioners toured industrial Canada visiting 28 cities from Victoria to Sydney and examining a total of 486 witnesses. Their travels coincided with the greatest period of industrial unrest in Canadian history. Their report, published in July 1919, and the subsequent September National Industrial Conference held to discuss their recommendations, appear now only as minor footnotes to the turbulence of the year. Like many Royal Commissions, the Mathers investigation proved far more important than the lack of tangible results.

The Royal Commission on Industrial Relations had two recent and prominent predecessors in its field of inquiry: the 1914 United States Commission on Industrial Relations and the 1917 British Whitley Committee on Industrial Conciliation. It also had one earlier Canadian predecessor, although one suspects it was but dimly remembered in 1919. The Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor had been appointed by a previous Conservative prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, at a similar moment of crisis in class relations in 1886. That inquiry had also included trade unionists as commissioners, had toured the industrial sections of the nation, and had interviewed hundreds of Canadian workers. Its report also received little attention and resulted only in the establishment of Labour Day as a national holiday — a considerable accomplishment compared to the complete legislative failure of the Mathers Commission.

The Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labor, a testament to the turmoil of the "Great Upheaval," has been extensively studied by historians interested in the social history of Canadian workers in the late nineteenth century. The Industrial Relations Commission, however, has received far less attention. Yet the evidence it heard is an equally rich source for the post-war upsurge of working-class militancy. The very titles of the two Royal Commis-

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sions convey much about the transformation which had taken place in Canadian industrial capitalist society in the approximately thirty intervening years. The rather quaint, Victorian "Relations between Labor and Capital" with its echo of classical political economy gives way to the modern sounding "Industrial Relations," hinting now not at conflicting classes but at a system of mutual interests. If the titles suggest something of transformed bourgeois and state attitudes, then the contents of the two collections of testimony tell us much about the development of the Canadian working class. The specific material complaints enumerated by Canadian workers vary little from 1886 to 1919 — unemployment, low wages, high prices, long hours, unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, abysmal housing, the super-exploitation of women workers, employer blacklists, non-recognition of unions, refusal of collective bargaining — all remain a constant in the working-class bill of grievances. What differs, however, is the workers' attitude. The cautious note of respectability and, in some cases, of near deference present in 1886 was transformed into a clarion cry for change. From Victoria to Sydney, Canadian workers appeared before the 1919 Commission and defiantly challenged it. From Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) soap-boxer Charles Lestor in Vancouver to the Nova Scotia leaders of newly-organized District 26, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the message the Commission received was the same across the country. The capitalist system could not be reformed, it must be transformed. Production for profit must cease; production for use must begin.

British Columbia MLA J.H. Hawthornthwaite, a former SPC stalwart and then Federated Labour Party leader, asserted in his appearance before the Commission:

Working men today understand these matters . . . and if you go into any socialistic bodies and listen to the discussion you would understand the grasp that these men have. I do not know any college man or university man who can for ten minutes hold their own in an argument among these people.<sup>1</sup>

Workers across the country more than lived up to Hawthornthwaite's boast. In city after city, the Commissioners were regaled with Marxist-influenced histories of the development of industrial capitalism. A few of these lectures came from middle-class proponents of the workers' movement such as Edmonton Mayor Joseph Clarke or social gospel ministers William Irvine, A.E. Smith, William Ivens, Ernest Thomas, and Salem Bland. But more impressive were the many workers — some well-known leaders, but many not — who appeared to explain patiently to the Commissioners, in the words of Edmonton Grand Trunk Railway machinist E.J. Thompson, "We are the producers and we are not getting what we produce." Like most other workers who appeared,

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, Evidence, Victoria, B.C., 26 April 1919, 242-3. (Henceforth cited as Mathers Commission.) One SPC view of the Commission is *Causes of Industrial Unrest* (Winnipeg 1919), a pamphlet published by SPC Local No. 3.

Thompson was uninterested in the Commission's extensive plans for Industrial Councils; only "complete ownership of the machines of production by the working class" would suffice, he asserted. When pushed by hostile Commissioners who claimed that the new Canadian National Railway represented the nationalization he sought, Thompson responded in kind, reminding the Commissioners that workers saw their investigation as nothing but "a talkfest" and as "camouflage" for the anti-labour Union government.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson's evidence is of interest for two reasons: first, he was not a front-line leader of western labour; second, he came directly out of the railway machine shops. In city after city, metal trades workers from the shipyards, from the railway shops, and from the more diversified contract shops came forward and talked socialism. Even James Somerville, the International Association of Machinists' (IAM) Western representative, who predictably chose to distinguish himself from the radicals in his testimony, and who worried about the workers having "gone so far that they do not recognize the authority even in their own organization," explained:

One of the things they want first is nothing short of a transfer of the means of production, wealth production, from that of private control to that of collective ownership, for they know that is the only solution.<sup>3</sup>

Lest there be any notion that this was a regional manifestation of class unrest, let us travel east to Sudbury, Ontario. There Frederick Eldridge, a machinist and secretary of the local Trades and Labour Council, received "considerable handclapping, stamping of feet, and vocal enthusiasm" from the Commission's working-class audience, when he asserted:

The workers do not get enough of that which they produce. . . . I advocate government ownership of everything: mills, mines, factories, smelters, railroads, etc. That is the only solution of the problem and I am only one of hundreds of workmen in Sudbury that think the same thing.<sup>4</sup>

In Toronto, machinist James Ballantyne called for the nationalization of all industry.<sup>5</sup> In Hamilton, IAM District 24 representative Richard Riley more cautiously noted that "although a great many workers have not given the matter much thought, they are beginning to think that there must be a change of the system, that is to say the present competitive system."<sup>6</sup> When the Commission reached Montreal, John D. Houston of IAM District 82 presented a prepared brief on the economic system, arguing in part:

*I believe that in the system of ownership lies all our social problems. . . . For 300 years or over, while the businessman was consolidating his position as captain of industry, the institutions of autocracy provided, through the law, the machinery of force and fraud*

<sup>2</sup> Mathers Commission, Evidence, Edmonton, Alta., 6 May 1919, 987-90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Moose Jaw, Sask., 9 May 1919, 1330-42.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Sudbury, Ont., 17 May 1919, 1968-72.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Toronto, Ont., 28 May 1919, 2940-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Hamilton, Ont., 21 May 1919, 2261-81.

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which was rigorously applied, to make the worker a proletarian with no means of livelihood except to work for wages or a salary. . . .

He closed with the familiar call for production for use, not for profit.<sup>7</sup>

By the time the Commission arrived in the Maritimes, the Commissioners' impatience was showing, no doubt increased by the mounting industrial crisis which was sweeping the nation. While the evidence of their sessions in Amherst, Nova Scotia, at the height of the General Strike there, has unfortunately been lost, evidence from New Glasgow and Sydney demonstrates the eastern manifestation of the workers' revolt.<sup>8</sup> While UMWA District 26 leaders such as Dan Livingstone, Robert Baxter, and Silby Barrett provided much of the fire, Alex T. Mackay, representing carmen and steelworkers, infuriated the Commissioners by warning of an intensification of the struggle:

The way the fight in Winnipeg will be terminated, will very largely influence the attitude throughout Canada. I think if matters are allowed to run their course there will be no interference in this part of Canada, but if there is any attempt at coercion, the first shot fired in Winnipeg, will hit every labouring man in eastern and western Canada, and the result will be confusion from the Atlantic to the Pacific.<sup>9</sup>

A day earlier, in Halifax, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour organizer C.C. Dane had threatened a province-wide General Strike for the eight-hour day and had added almost gratuitously: "Industrial unrest? Why, gentlemen, we have none to what we are going to have. I am a Bolshevik and I will warn these two governments that trouble is coming and the men will have what belongs to them."<sup>10</sup> Dane, a boilermaker from Australia, had played a major role in the March 1919 establishment of the Federation.

Machinists were not the only group of workers who testified in these terms. Indeed most workers who appeared made similar points, although not always couched in a socialist framework. An additional important group of witnesses who echoed much of the above but who also added a new dimension to the workers' revolt were women witnesses. Unlike the young women workers paraded before the 1886 Commission, who testified only to oppressive conditions and often answering in monosyllables, the women appearing in 1919 included representatives of retail clerks' unions, women's labour leagues, local councils of women, and consumer groups. Among them were then-prominent figures such as Montreal's Rose Henderson or later leading Communist militant Bella Hall, but also many women who enjoy no such historical fame. These women universally complained of bad housing, runaway inflation, high

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Montreal, Que., 29 May 1919, 3255-60.

<sup>8</sup> For a partial reconstruction of this evidence from newspaper sources, see Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," *Acadiensis*, 9 (1980), 56-77; see also *Eastern Federationist*, 14 June 1919.

<sup>9</sup> Mathers Commission, Evidence, New Glasgow, N.S., 5 June 1919, 3533-55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Halifax, 4 June 1919, 4355-9. On Dane, see Clifford Rose, *Four Years with the Demon Rum* (Fredericton 1980), 5-9, 83.

food prices, and the low wages paid to working women. Calgary's Mrs. Jean MacWilliams, who had organized laundry workers, asked rhetorically, "Are we in favour of a bloody revolution?" and answered, "Why any kind of revolution would be better than conditions as they are now."<sup>11</sup> In Saskatoon, Miss Francis, representing the local TLC, demanded that "plundering must cease, profiteering must go, commercialized industries and institutions must give way to the larger hopes of the people" and "production for use" must replace "production for profit."<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Resina Asals of the Regina Women's Labour League told the Commission:

There is only one thing that the workers have to thank the capitalists for, and that is that they have tightened the screw up so much that they are awakening the worker up to the fact that he is the most important factor and that until we produce for use instead of profit this unrest will still prevail. Let the workingman, the one who produced, have control and then we shall see the light of a new dawn.<sup>13</sup>

Rose Henderson simply advanced the proposition that "the real revolutionist is the mother — not the man. She says openly that there is nothing but Revolution."<sup>14</sup> Working-class women, both wage workers and unpaid domestic workers, also had started to view the world in new ways in 1919.

These examples are intended simply to demonstrate that the revolt was national in character and that its seeds were not rooted in any unique regional fermentation. The "radical" west and the conservative east have become sorry shibboleths of Canadian historiography. The foundations of our understanding of 1919 must be built on national and international conjunctures. While the local and regional pictures are not identical, as we come to know the history of eastern and central Canadian workers as well as we know that of western workers, the similarities of struggle begin to outweigh the initial impression of regional particularism. World War I, a profoundly national experience for Canadians, helped provide part of the cement for this nascent national working-class response.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, we should also remind ourselves at the outset that, as David Montgomery has argued, "Strikes can only be understood in the context of the changing totality of class conflicts, of which they are a part."<sup>16</sup> In 1919 Canada, that totality was increasingly national in scope.

Yet World War I, while providing specific sparks to light the flame of working-class struggle in 1919, should not be viewed as its cause. Underlying structural changes in capitalist organization, both on a national and international scale, must be viewed as providing the necessary fuel for this fire.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Calgary, Alta., 3 May 1919, 786.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Saskatoon, Sask., 7 May 1919, 1036.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Regina, Sask., 8 May 1919, 1191.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Montreal, Que., 29 May 1919, 3163.

<sup>15</sup> See Russell Hann's excellent introduction to Daphne Read, comp., *The Great War and Canadian Society* (Toronto 1978), 9-38.

<sup>16</sup> David Montgomery, "Strikes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 100.

TABLE I  
Strike Activity in Canada, 1912-1922

| Year | Number of<br>Strikes | Number of<br>Workers<br>Involved | Striker<br>Days Lost |
|------|----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1912 | 242                  | 43,104                           | 1,136,345            |
| 1913 | 234                  | 41,004                           | 1,037,254            |
| 1914 | 99                   | 9,911                            | 491,358              |
| 1915 | 86                   | 11,480                           | 95,242               |
| 1916 | 168                  | 26,971                           | 241,306              |
| 1917 | 222                  | 50,327                           | 1,123,916            |
| 1918 | 305                  | 82,573                           | 657,152              |
| 1919 | 428                  | 149,309                          | 3,401,843            |
| 1920 | 459                  | 76,624                           | 814,457              |
| 1921 | 208                  | 28,398                           | 1,049,719            |

Indeed, although the early war years 1914 to 1916 had seen little overt class conflict in Canada, the changes in the capitalist organization of production and the consequent "remaking" or reconstitution of the working class was well advanced before the outbreak of war. The years 1912 and 1913 should be seen as a prelude to the 1917 to 1920 conflagration. Table I demonstrates this continuity with pre-war class conflict.<sup>17</sup> This argument is not unique to this paper as various community studies, including Bercuson's on Winnipeg and Reilly's on Amherst, have perceived the continuity of class struggle between the pre- and post-war period.<sup>18</sup> This continuity extended, however, throughout the entire country. Craig Heron and Bryan Palmer's perceptive study of strikes in southern Ontario from 1901 to 1914 demonstrates a pattern that held for the other cities whose labour history has been chronicled, including Winnipeg.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> All strike data in this paper are drawn from recalculations for the Historical Atlas of Canada, volume III. These recalculations are based on the addition of Maritime provinces material compiled from local sources by Ian McKay of Dalhousie University and on a careful re-examination of all the "incomplete" files available in the PAC, Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts files. This work commenced by Peter DeLottinville has been carried through to completion by Douglas Cruikshank. These data currently being compiled for publication in the Atlas provides an entirely new data series for Canadian strike activity. For a report on McKay's work, see his "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1900-1914," *Acadiensis*, 13 (1983), 3-46.

<sup>18</sup> David Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal 1974) and Reilly, "The General Strike."

<sup>19</sup> Craig Heron and Bryan D. Palmer, "Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-14," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 423-58.

Lest there be any doubt about this, note the provincial distribution figures in Table II for the pre- and post-war peak strike years. The one striking anomaly on Table II, namely the especially high British Columbia figures, are largely accounted for by loggers' strikes as shown in Table III. When we turn from regional variation to the industrial pattern for these years, some other important common ingredients emerge, especially the ongoing importance of mining and the metal trades. Yet our attention is also drawn to new developments apparent

TABLE II  
Number of Disputes by Province

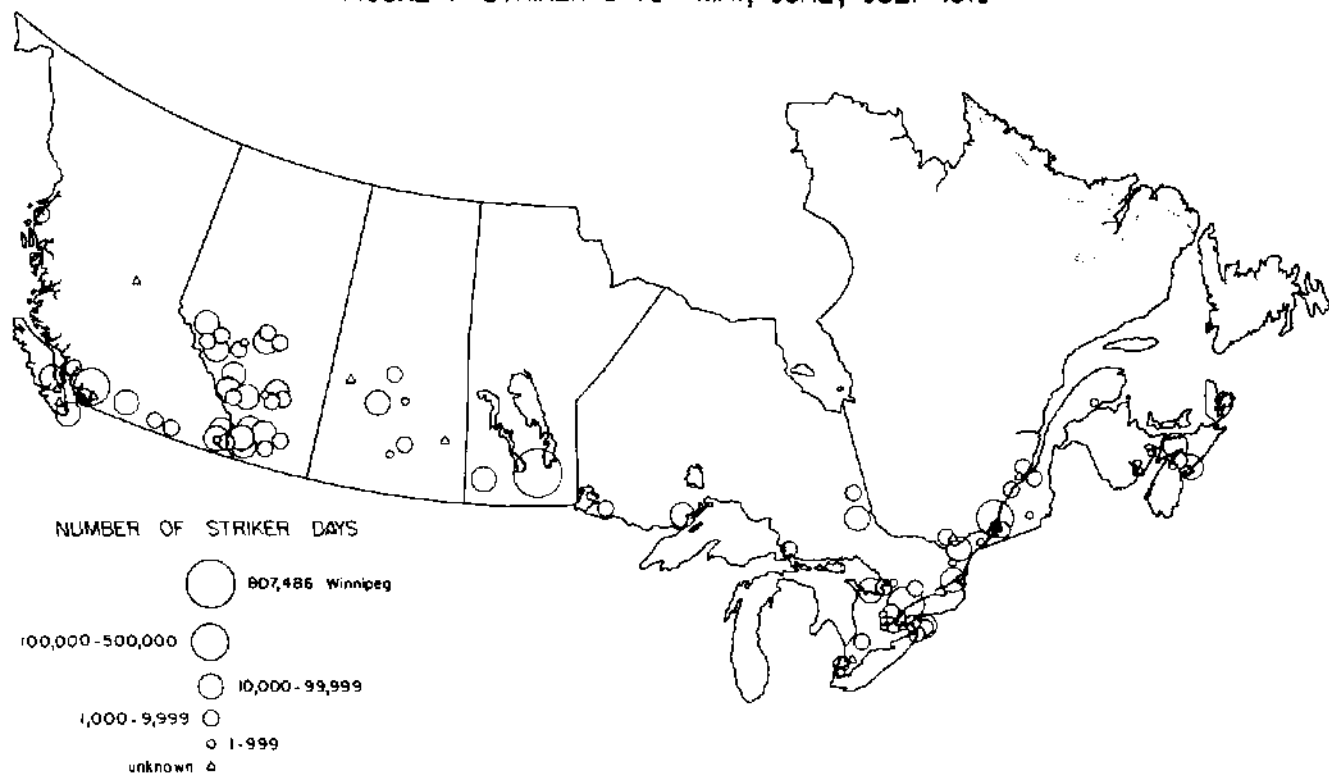
|            | 1912 | 1913 | 1917 | 1918 | 1919 | 1920 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| N.S.       | 9    | 12   | 8    | 18   | 19   | 39   |
| P.E.I.     | 1    | —    | 2    | —    | —    | 1    |
| N.B.       | 21   | 20   | 5    | 11   | 19   | 15   |
| Que.       | 32   | 31   | 31   | 28   | 100  | 79   |
| Ont.       | 100  | 114  | 68   | 112  | 158  | 122  |
| Man.       | 13   | 6    | 18   | 20   | 16   | 5    |
| Sask.      | 19   | 10   | 6    | 10   | 13   | 4    |
| Alta.      | 23   | 15   | 24   | 53   | 29   | 39   |
| B.C.       | 22   | 25   | 55   | 46   | 73   | 124  |
| Interprov. | 2    | 1    | 5    | 7    | 2    | 1    |
| Total      | 242  | 234  | 222  | 305  | 428  | 459  |

TABLE III  
Number of Disputes by Selected Industry

|                  | 1912 | 1913 | 1917 | 1918 | 1919 | 1920 |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Logging          | 1    | —    | 1    | —    | 32   | 66   |
| Coal Mining      | 6    | 5    | 22   | 49   | 22   | 48   |
| Other Mining     | 6    | 6    | 6    | 3    | 10   | 14   |
| Metal Mfrg.      | 27   | 30   | 44   | 43   | 46   | 61   |
| Shipbuilding     | 2    | 3    | 13   | 16   | 25   | 12   |
| Steam Railway    | 16   | 8    | 12   | 16   | 6    | 2    |
| Electric Railway | 2    | 7    | 5    | 11   | 12   | 5    |
| Service          | 12   | 18   | 11   | 30   | 39   | 38   |
| General          | —    | —    | —    | 1    | 12   | —    |
| Total            | 72   | 77   | 114  | 169  | 204  | 246  |
| N                | 242  | 234  | 222  | 305  | 428  | 459  |
| % Total          | 29.8 | 32.9 | 51.4 | 55.4 | 47.7 | 53.4 |



FIGURE 1 STRIKER DAYS: MAY, JUNE, JULY 1919



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only in the later period such as the importance of wartime shipbuilding, and the rise of logging and "service strikes."

A more specific look at 1919 and especially at the months of May, June, and July helps to clarify some of these points. While these months generally figure high in the calendar of industrial conflict, clearly summer 1919 was not simply any year. Table IV shows both the geographic and industrial range of the strikes and Table V highlights the central role of coal, the metal trades, shipbuilding, and, of course, the general strikes themselves in the wave of unrest.

The summer strike wave consisted of three main types of strikes: first, local strikes contesting the normal range of issues; second, general strikes called in support of such local strikes as in Winnipeg, Amherst, and Toronto; and, third,

TABLE IV  
Strikes: May, June, and July 1919<sup>1</sup>

| A. By Month:     | Number of<br>Strikes<br>(total) | Number of<br>Strikes<br>(complete<br>data) | Number of<br>Workers<br>Involved <sup>2</sup> | Duration in<br>Worker<br>Days <sup>3</sup> |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| May              | 110                             | 96   | 68,606  | 742,506                                    |
| June             | 101                             | 89   | 84,054  | 1,274,998                                  |
| July             | 84                              | 75   | 71,121  | 555,802                                    |
| Total            | 210 <sup>4</sup>                | 178 <sup>4</sup>                           | 114,423 <sup>4</sup>                          | 2,573,306                                  |
| B. By Province:  |                                 |  |   |  |
| Nova Scotia      | 11                              | 9  | 3,461   | 85,135                                     |
| New Brunswick    | 6                               | 6  | 128   | 631  |
| Quebec           | 57                              | 50   | 25,988  | 395,285                                    |
| Ontario          | 90                              | 78   | 34,544  | 632,409                                    |
| Manitoba         | 6                               | 5  | 21,756  | 817,686                                    |
| Saskatchewan     | 9                               | 7  | 2,041   | 31,833                                     |
| Alberta          | 9                               | 8  | 9,271 <sup>5</sup>                            | 304,967 <sup>5</sup>                       |
| British Columbia | 23                              | 16   | 17,234 <sup>5</sup>                           | 305,360 <sup>5</sup>                       |
| Total            | 210 <sup>6</sup>                | 178 <sup>6</sup>                           | 114,423                                       | 2,573,306                                  |

<sup>1</sup> Strikes in progress.

<sup>2</sup> Figures for strikes beginning before May or extending beyond the end of a month are not adjusted to account for strikers returning to work.

<sup>3</sup> Figures are adjusted to account for strikers returning to work.

<sup>4</sup> Totals are for strikes in progress over the three month period.

<sup>5</sup> Includes provincial estimates for the District 18 coal mining strike.

<sup>6</sup> District 18, UMWA strike counted once.

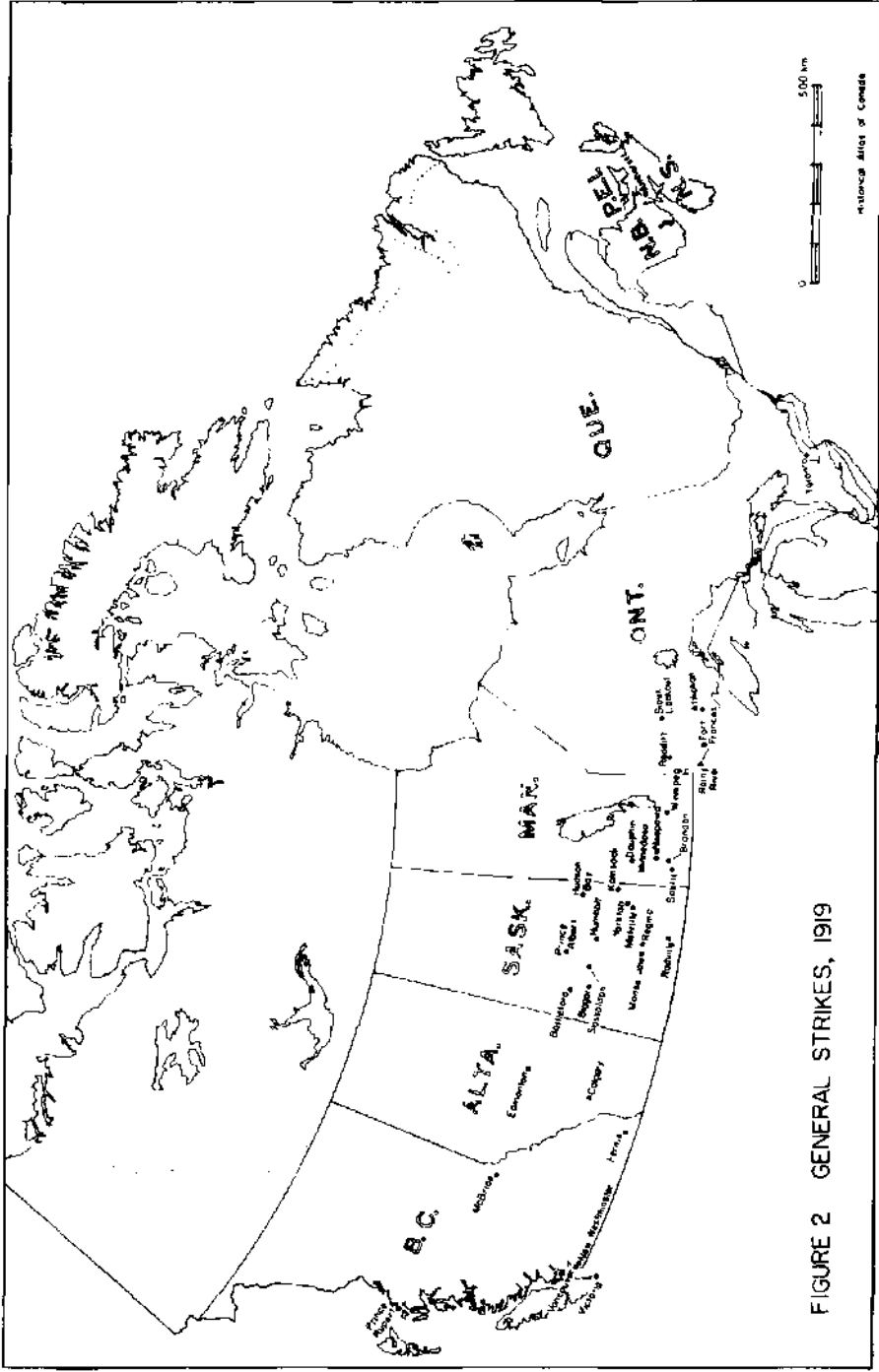


FIGURE 2 GENERAL STRIKES, 1919

general sympathy strikes called either in support of the Winnipeg General Strike or to protest its repression. Variants two and three have received some attention, although even here the focus on Winnipeg has tended to obscure these less well-known struggles. Local strikes, however, have received little study.

Table V, while describing all industrial action in these three months of 1919, suggests how important the local or category one conflicts were to the strike wave. Clearly these strikes cannot be described in this paper in any detail but I will highlight a few to suggest the range of activity. Let us reverse the historiographic trend and travel across the country from east to west.<sup>20</sup> In Moncton, N.B., and Amherst, N.S., moulders won victories over iron founders. A lockout of 350 quarry workers in Sweet's Corner, N.S., lasted 55 working days and resulted in higher wages. Brief walkouts on the street railway systems in Halifax and Moncton also occurred. The most significant story in the Maritimes, however, focused on Amherst and we will return to it in our discussion of general strikes.

TABLE V  
Strikes: May-July 1919, By Industry

|                                      | Number | %      | Number<br>Workers<br>Involved | %      | Duration<br>in Strikes<br>Days | %      |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|
| Mining                               | 11     | 5.2    | 10,216                        | 8.9    | 340,216                        | 13.2   |
| Manufacturing                        |        |        |                               |        |                                |        |
| Total                                | 101    | 48.1   | 43,495                        | 38.0   | 922,117                        | 35.8   |
| Mfrg. Leather<br>& Textile           | (20)   | (9.5)  | (9,505)                       | (8.3)  | (204,897)                      | (8.0)  |
| Mfrg. Metal<br>& Shipbldg.           | (43)   | (20.5) | (24,590)                      | (21.5) | (623,577)                      | (24.2) |
| Construction                         | 32     | 15.2   | 9,829                         | 8.6    | 185,488                        | 7.2    |
| Transportation &<br>Public Utilities | 21     | 10.0   | 4,772                         | 4.2    | 68,964                         | 2.7    |
| Service & Public<br>Administration   | 19     | 9.1    | 1,137                         | 1.0    | 4,799                          | .2     |
| Other Industries                     | 14     | 6.7    | 607                           | .5     | 18,036                         | .7     |
| General                              | 12     | 5.7    | 44,367                        | 38.8   | 1,033,686                      | 40.2   |
| Total                                | 210    | 100.0  | 114,423                       | 100.0  | 2,573,306                      | 100.0  |

<sup>20</sup> Unless other sources are cited this account draws on PAC, Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts files as well as on the original published version, *Labour Gazette*, 20 (1920), 267-94.

Quebec's 57 strikes were highly concentrated in Montreal which accounted for 47 of them (82 per cent). Outside Montreal, the major strikes occurred in the shipbuilding industry at Lauzon and Trois Rivières, and in the metal trades at Lachine and Sherbrooke. The brief metal strikes were both successful for the workers, and the Trois Rivières shipyard strike won union recognition for the strikers. Montreal, however, was the centre of activity in Quebec. Indeed, the Borden government was sufficiently alarmed about the conflicts in Montreal that the city was included on their emergency daily briefing list. Over 22,000 workers in Montreal struck during the three-month period, logging nearly 380,000 striker days lost. Again the metal trades and shipbuilding figured prominently. A metal trades strike at Canadian Car and Foundry in early May involving 4,000 workers ended in victory after only three days. In the shipyards, however, it took a one-day strike to force negotiations and then a five-week strike before the employers conceded to some of the demands of their 3,500 workers. This strike was led by a General Strike Committee, not by the union officials of the Marine Trades Federation. A major strike of 2,000 wire workers failed after three weeks. A series of skirmishes in the garment trades led to a number of worker victories, and a major battle involving over 3,500 workers at Dominion Textiles gained some employer concessions after nearly three months of struggle. This strike was marked by a successful sympathetic strike at Montmorency Falls where 1,100 workers stayed out for ten days in support of their Montreal comrades and returned to work with a wage increase. Other industrial workers showed a new ability to organize as well. Over 1,400 rubber workers, for example, won a compromise settlement after a strike of three weeks, as did 350 sugar refinery employees, while 700 meat packers won a quick victory to match a settlement won earlier by Toronto workers. This militant activity on the part of industrial workers represented a new departure for Montreal's working class, as did the willingness of Montmorency textile workers to resort to a sympathy strike.<sup>21</sup> While the majority of the Montreal Trades and Labour Council (MTLC) opposed a general sympathetic strike, the tactic had proponents in Montreal. The machinists (IAM) and the engineers (ASE), true to national form, held a massive support rally in late May which was addressed by Winnipeg strike leader R.J. Johns, who was in Montreal representing Division #4, railroad shop craft workers, at Railroad Board arbitration meetings. Those attending, identified as workers from the Canadian Vickers Shipyard, heard speeches from A.H. McNamee, president of the ASE, and radical machinists Richard Kerrigan and William Turnbull, as well as from Montreal "reds" such as Beckie Buhay and Albert St. Martin.<sup>22</sup> In early June the MTLC endorsed the 44-hour week and called for the reinstatement of the postal workers who had been dismissed in Winnipeg.<sup>23</sup> At their subsequent

<sup>21</sup> For a brief account, see Terry Copp, *Anatomy of Poverty* (Toronto 1974), 134-5.

<sup>22</sup> *Gazette* (Montreal), 28 May 1919.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1919.

meeting in mid-June the arrests of the Winnipeg strike leaders were roundly condemned and Richard Kerrigan led a debate in which the Canadian Vickers General Strike Committee sought to gain the endorsement of the Council for a general sympathetic strike. In this, they failed.<sup>24</sup>

Ontario's 90 strikes involving 34,122 workers were not as concentrated as Quebec's, although Toronto did account for 22 (24 per cent) in addition to its General Sympathetic Strike, which I will deal with later. Ottawa had eleven strikes, London seven, Hamilton six, St. Catharines and Windsor, five each. Major mining strikes took place in Cobalt and Kirkland Lake where 2,200 and 525 miners respectively struck for eight and 21 weeks. In both cases the miners were defeated by intransigent mining companies, although not before there had been discussions of a Northern Ontario-wide general strike.<sup>25</sup>

In Toronto, newly-organized workers in the meat packing industry, organized on an industrial basis, took on the giants of the industry, including Swift Canada, as over 3,000 workers struck in the stockyards area after the companies refused to negotiate with the union. In addition to union recognition, they sought the eight-hour day and 44-hour week, and guaranteed minimum levels of employment. After just over a week on the picket line in early May, an IDIA board was agreed to by both sides and reported unanimously on 29 May mainly in favour of the workers, granting a 48-hour week, a weekly guarantee of 40 hours, overtime pay, a formal grievance procedure, and seniority provisions. This settlement became the model for the industry and workers in Montreal, Ottawa, Hamilton, and Peterborough fought for it in summer 1919 and spring 1920.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in July almost 2,000 Toronto garment workers led by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) struck over 40 shops for twelve weeks before winning wage and hour concessions. Both of these industries involved high proportions of ethnic workers and their successful strikes suggest the expansion of both trade union organization and class struggle to new and difficult terrain.

Ontario's shipyard workers, who in 1918 had organized a Marine Trades and Labour Federation of Canada, engaged in a series of seven strikes covering almost all the province's shipbuilding centres. Bridgeburg, Collingwood, Fort

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1919. For a brief reminiscence of the emerging Montreal red world, see Catherine Vance, *Not by Gods, But by People: The Story of Bella Hall Gauld* (Toronto 1968), 19-44. On the Vickers strike see, *Ontario Labor News*, (Toronto), 1 July 1919.

<sup>25</sup> On Cobalt, see Brian F. Hogan, *Cobalt: Year of the Strike, 1919* (Cobalt 1978); on Kirkland Lake, see Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *'Remember Kirkland Lake': The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42* (Toronto 1983), 58-60, and Wayne Roberts, ed., *Miner's Life: Bob Miner and Union Organizing in Timmins, Kirkland Lake and Sudbury* (Hamilton 1979), 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> J.T. Montague, "Trade Unionism in the Canadian Meat Packing Industry," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1950, 31-8 and George Sayers Bain, "The United Packinghouse, Food and Allied Workers," M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1964, 35-67.

William-Port Arthur, Midland, Welland, and Toronto each witnessed strikes involving workforces ranging from 100 to 1,300. Most of these strikes were fought for wage increases and the 44-hour week, and resulted in significant worker gains. In Collingwood, however, 900 workers failed in a three-week strike in July demanding the rehiring of Orange fellow-workers who had been fired for refusing to work on the glorious twelfth.

In the metal trades, which included many of the same trades as shipbuilding, 1919 saw the machinists attempt to gain Ontario-wide uniformity of wages and conditions. The first provincial convention of Ontario machinists held in Toronto in July 1918 had decided to force this issue. Their major aim was to gain the eight-hour day and 44-hour week and in spring 1919 metal trades meetings were organized province-wide to prepare for that struggle. IAM Vice-President John McClelland reported that "the largest halls in many of the towns" were "too small to accommodate the crowds." Moving beyond IAM exclusivism, McClelland worked for "complete affiliation of the metal trades," and "in the meantime" organized metal trades councils as the basis for a strike which would "completely close down the industry until a settlement is reached."

The Toronto campaign became the central battle for the war for recognition of the metal trades councils as bargaining agents and for the eight-hour day. The demands were sent to the employers on 1 April and tools were dropped on 1 May by some 5,000 metal trades workers. Meanwhile in Peterborough, approximately 100 moulders struck on 1 May and were followed by their fellow workers in Brampton (thirty) and Hamilton (250) on 5 May. Four days later the Kingston Metal Trades Council struck the Canadian Locomotive Company, pulling out 650 workers. On 12 May the Ottawa Metal Trades Council called some 200 machinists and patternmakers out of fifteen small shops. The following day Brantford moulders struck. St. Catharines moulders and machinists left work on 23 May.<sup>27</sup>

The results of these strikes varied but by and large they were defeated. In Toronto the metal trades council ended its strike on 28 July, although 750 moulders refused to end their strike which was still continuing at year's end. In Peterborough the moulders won a victory after a 22-week strike. Their fellow craftworkers in Brampton returned after eight weeks but 250 striking moulders in Hamilton remained out for the rest of the year. In Kingston a compromise ended the metal trades strike after almost 26 weeks, while Ottawa machinists and patternmakers admitted defeat after almost thirteen weeks on the lines. Brantford moulders remained out the entire year. Clearly the metal trades

<sup>27</sup> *Machinists Monthly Journal*, 31 (April 1919), 330, cited in Donald Wright, "Belshazzar, the Medes, and the Persians: The Rise and Fall of the Metal Trades Strike in Toronto, 1919," unpublished paper, Dalhousie University, 1979. Planning for 1919 took place at the second Provincial Convention of the IAM in late November 1918. See *Labour Gazette*, 19 (1919), 51-2. See also *Ontario Labor News*, 1 May-1 July 1919.

workers' optimism as they approached May Day 1919 had turned out to be illusory.

In the west, Manitoba's strikes revolved totally around the epic struggle in Winnipeg and the General Sympathy Strike in Brandon which we will turn to later. In Saskatchewan, the pattern was similar involving primarily sympathetic strikes. In Alberta, however, a successful Calgary metal trades strike in April and May won shorter hours and higher wages for machinists, moulders, and other metal workers. In addition, UMWA District 18's over 6,200 coal miners left the pits at the end of May and stayed out until 1 September when they returned on the advice of OBU leaders.<sup>28</sup> This General Strike was exceptional in that as a "100 per cent" strike involving the maintenance people, it transgressed UMWA custom and in the fact that some of the firebosses, the foremen in the mines, also took part. By July what had started partially as a sympathy strike with Winnipeg had been transformed into a major struggle for recognition of the OBU which would play itself out over the next few years.

In British Columbia the District 18 strike spread into the southeastern coal field and a series of small logging strikes under the leadership of the new, later OBU, B.C. Loggers Union took place. The major activity in B.C., however, also revolved around the June sympathy strikes.

The three General Sympathetic Strikes generated by local industrial struggles were in Amherst, N.S., Toronto, and Winnipeg. The sensitive work of Nolan Reilly has provided us with a model study of the community background to the Amherst General Strike, an event which had gone almost unnoticed. In Amherst, the local Federation of Labour, under the rubric of One Big Union, led a general strike which spread out from the Canadian Car and Foundry workers' demands that they receive pay equal to that which their 4,000 Montreal co-workers had won in a three-day strike in early May. The company's intransigence led to a city-wide walkout involving all of Amherst's major employers. While proceeding from local causes and representing the culmination of a decade of industrial conflict in Amherst, the strikers identified themselves with the national struggle, as their enthusiastic correspondence with the OBU suggests.<sup>29</sup>

Events in Toronto in 1919, while less dramatic than those in Amherst, nevertheless caused Prime Minister Borden and his government considerable

<sup>28</sup> For details see David Jay Bercuson, ed., *Alberta's Coal Industry 1919* (Calgary 1978); Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978), 196-214; Allen Seager, "Socialists and Workingmen: The Western Canadian Coal Miners' Movement, 1900-1920," paper presented at American Historical Association Meetings, December 1982.

<sup>29</sup> Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike," his "Notes on the Amherst General Strike and the One Big Union," *Bulletin of the Committee on Canadian Labour History*, 3 (Spring 1977), 5-8, and his "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: A Study of Amherst, 1891-1925," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1982. See also *Eastern Federationist*, 24 May-21 June 1919.



consternation.<sup>30</sup> As elsewhere, the metal trades were central in the crisis. Toronto's extensive foundries, machine shops, and metal factories had been at the core of war production. The city's metal trades workers, who had organized a joint council in 1901 and who had endorsed a call for industrial unionism in 1913, led the battle to enforce collective bargaining and a "fair-wage schedule" on the Imperial Munitions Board (IMB).<sup>31</sup> This struggle first came to a head in spring 1916 when Toronto machinists tried to extend gains they had made in some shops in December 1915 to the entire city. In addition, Hamilton machinists also demanded parity with their Toronto comrades. The joint threat of a general metal trades strike in Toronto issued by IAM District 46 in March, and a machinists' strike in Hamilton, combined with McClelland's public worry that he could no longer retain control of his people, led to the appointment of a three-member government commission to investigate the munitions plants in Toronto and Hamilton and the general extension of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA) to all war industry. This commission, however, which the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) regarded as a victory, eventually proved meaningless when Hamilton employers refused to abide by its recommendation of the nine-hour day and wage increases. The subsequent Hamilton-wide strike of some 2,000 workers which included a coalition of machinists (IAM), engineers (ASE), and unorganized, unskilled workers ended in a major defeat for Hamilton workers at the hands of Canadian Westinghouse, National Steel Car, the Steel Company of Canada, Otis Elevators, and Dominion Steel Foundry. Although Toronto IAM members, for the second time in only a few months, threatened a general strike in sympathy with the Hamilton workers, the IAM international leadership managed to prevent it. The Metal Trades Council did manage, however, to help move the Toronto Trades and Labour Council (TTL) significantly to the left during these developments. In March and April TTL condemnation of the Borden government and of the IMB for

<sup>30</sup> Borden Papers, PAC, MG 26 H vol. 113 pt. 1 and pt. 2, file OC 564 (henceforth Borden Papers.) See, for example, N.W. Rowell to White, Toronto, 26 May 1919; White to Rowell, Ottawa, 26 May 1919; T.L. Church to Borden, Toronto, 27 May 1919; Church to Borden, 31 May 1919; Church to Borden, 2 June 1919.

<sup>31</sup> The literature on the munitions industry, the IMB, and labour unrest is growing, but for contrasting views, see: D.J. Bercuson, "Organized Labour and the Imperial Munitions Board," *Relations Industrielles*, 28 (1974), 602-16; Peter Rider, "The Imperial Munitions Board and its Relationship to Government, Business, and Labour, 1914-1920," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974, esp. ch. 9; Michael Bliss, *A Canadian Millionaire: The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle, Bart., 1858-1939* (Toronto 1978), esp. 270-2, 280-4, 320-5, 378-81; Myer Siemiatycki, "Munitions and Labour Militancy: The 1916 Hamilton Machinists' Strike," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 131-51; Craig Heron, "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton's Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (1980), 7-48; and, for Toronto metal trades background, Wayne Roberts, "Toronto Metal Workers and the Second Industrial Revolution, 1889-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (1980), 49-72.

failure to implement a fair-wage schedule had been shelved by a worried TLC executive in Ottawa. Both Secretary Draper and President Watters apparently hoped their cap-in-hand lobbying would result in a breakthrough. In this they were to be sadly disappointed. The late March extension of the IDIA to cover shipbuilding and munitions led to a furious response from the TTLC which "emphatically denounced this uncalled for and unwarranted action" and accused the TLC executive "of not fulfilling their obligation to the workers of Canada."<sup>32</sup> Thus Toronto and Hamilton metal trades workers as early as summer 1916 found themselves moving in opposition to state labour policy and already identifying their differences with both the TLC leadership and to some degree with their own international officers such as McClelland and James Somerville, all of whom were continually promoting patience and industrial peace. These latter strategies looked increasingly problematic. Thus, as Myer Siemiatycki has noted with considerable irony, "the war-induced epidemic of general strikes, which one prominent unionist subsequently dubbed 'Winnipegitis,' found its earliest germination in Toronto."<sup>33</sup>

By the time of the next major metal trades struggle which came in May 1919, the metal workers exercised considerable control over the TTLC. In a May Day meeting, the TTLC voted to contact all Canadian Trades and Labour Councils to get support for the metal trades fight for the eight-hour day. Moreover, they "requested sympathetic action to bring about the result desired." A 13 May meeting demanded that metal trades employers negotiate and then issued a call for a general strike convention for one week hence. While this motion noted western strikes in Winnipeg and Calgary and other Ontario strikes, its major interest was in the Toronto Strike.<sup>34</sup>

The vote in favour of a general strike by 44 unions representing 12,000 workers led to hurried correspondence between Toronto politicians and Ottawa. Newton Rowell, president of the Privy Council, sought permission from his cabinet colleagues to pressure the employers to concede to the demand for collective bargaining. If they refused, he proposed to embarrass them publicly. Not surprisingly, a hurried negative response came from Minister of Finance Thomas White who had consulted Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson.<sup>35</sup> The following day Toronto Mayor Tommy Church wrote directly to Prime Minister Borden seeking government legislation on shorter hours, explaining that his offer of mediation had won a brief delay in the planned walkout, and seeking Borden's personal intervention in the talks if necessary. Borden's agreement provided Church with an important talking point in a 27 May conference at City Hall which brought together the strike leaders and

<sup>32</sup> TTLC, *Minutes*, 2, 16 March, 6, 20 April 1916, including correspondence from Draper and Watters of the TLC.

<sup>33</sup> Siemiatycki, "Munitions and Labour Militancy," 141.

<sup>34</sup> TTLC, *Minutes*, 1, 13, 15 May 1919; *Ontario Labor News*, 15 May 1919.

<sup>35</sup> Borden Papers, Rowell to White, 26 May 1919 and White to Rowell, 26 May 1919. Statistics from *Ontario Labor News*, 1 June 1919.

some of the major metal employers such as Findlay of Massey-Harris and White of Canadian Allis-Chalmers. Although the employers made no major concessions, the workers were placed in an embarrassing situation and finally agreed to Church's proposal that a joint delegation visit Ottawa and talk to Borden. Subsequently the union "convention" authorized this trip, while reaffirming that the General Strike would commence on Friday, 30 May, unless the right of collective bargaining and the 44-hour week were granted to the Metal Trades Council.<sup>36</sup>

Borden's intervention led only to an offer of arbitration, which the workers scornfully declined, but again the employers scored a minor publicity coup by offering a compromise 48-hour week, although not agreeing to Metal Trades Council recognition.<sup>37</sup>

The sympathetic strike commenced on 30 May and from 5-15,000 workers left their jobs. The strike's strength predictably lay in the metal trades, in shipbuilding, among some groups of building trades workers, especially carpenters, and among garment workers. Its major failing was the decision by civic employees and especially the street railway workers to stay on the job until their contract expired on 16 June. The strike lasted until 4 June when it was called off by the Central Strike Committee at the request of the Metal Trades Council. The Committee of fifteen which ran the strike included nine metal trades workers, four building trades workers, and two garment trades workers.<sup>38</sup>

Although the left in Toronto had suffered a defeat in this struggle, they were not repudiated. Instead they took control of the TTLC in its subsequent July election. Left-wing revelations that prominent right-wingers on the Council's executive had received \$5,000 from the Toronto Employers' Association to support a new labour paper in Toronto which had worked to divide metal trades workers during the strike, helped them gain control. These charges were sustained by a Council investigation.<sup>39</sup>

The Winnipeg General Strike we will simply pass over in order to discuss the rather less well-known wave of general sympathy strikes. Compilation of these is somewhat risky since the Department of Labour's official version and even their manuscript materials do not necessarily conform to all strikes mentioned in the labour press or even in the various security reports which crop up in the Borden Papers and elsewhere. Table VI lists those identified in Depart-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Church to Borden, 27 May 1919 and "Minutes of Toronto Meeting."

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Borden to R.O. Hawtrej, 2 June 1919.

<sup>38</sup> Low estimate is Department of Labour; high estimate is given by Mayor Church in letter to Borden, 2 June 1919. The *Globe* decided on 8000. See *Globe*, 30 May-7 June 1919.

<sup>39</sup> TTLC, *Minutes*, 7, 21 August, 3 October, 6 November, 4, 18 December 1919, 22 January, 19 February 1920; Michael J. Piva, "The Toronto District Labour Council and Independent Political Action, 1900-21," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 126-8. See also *The New Democracy* (Hamilton), 31 July, 7 August 1919.

**TABLE VI**  
**General Strikes in Sympathy with Winnipeg, May - July 1919**

| Location            | Dates                  | Number Workers Involved | Duration in Strike Days |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| A. Brandon          | 20 May - 2 July        | 450                     | 10,200                  |
| Calgary             | 26 May - 25 June       | 1,500                   | 31,700                  |
| Edmonton            | 26 May - 25 June       | 2,000                   | 24,000                  |
| Saskatoon           | 27 May - 26 June       | 1,200                   | 24,000                  |
| Prince Albert       | 28 May - 23 June       | 300                     | 5,000                   |
| Regina              | 29 May - 26 June       | 350                     | 1,500                   |
| Vancouver           | 3 June - 4 July        | 8,000                   | 160,000                 |
| New Westminster     | 13 - 23 June           | 537                     | 3,400                   |
| Victoria            | 23 June - 7 July       | 5,000                   | 28,000                  |
| B. Atikokan, Ont.   | Neepawa, Man.          | Melville, Sask.         |                         |
| Fort Frances, Ont.  | Souris, Man.           | Moose Jaw, Sask.        |                         |
| Rainy River, Ont.   | Battleford, Sask.      | Radville, Sask.         |                         |
| Redditt, Ont.       | Biggar, Sask.          | Yorkton, Sask.          |                         |
| Sioux Lookout, Ont. | Hudson Bay Jct., Sask. | Prince Rupert, B.C.     |                         |
| Dauphin, Man.       | Humboldt, Sask.        | McBride, B.C.           |                         |
| Minnedosa, Man.     | Kamsack, Sask.         | Fernie, B.C.            |                         |

ment of Labour data (A) and then adds a list compiled from other sources (B).<sup>40</sup>

In Manitoba many small railroad junction towns such as Dauphin supported Winnipeg as did workers in Brandon. The strike in Brandon, the longest of all the sympathy strikes, was extremely solid and orderly. It eventually involved

<sup>40</sup> Data on additional Saskatchewan locations from W.J.C. Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan: The TLC Years, 1905-45," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Alberta, 1972, chapter 2, and his "Saskatchewan Organized Labour and the Winnipeg General Strike, 1919," unpublished paper, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1976; for Prince Rupert, see *B.C. Federationist*, 30 May 1919; for Radville through Souris, see Walter Scott Ryder, "Canada's Industrial Crisis of 1919," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1920, 36. How reliable this last list of whistle stops (literally) is, isn't clear. Ryder, however, was writing in the immediate aftermath of the event and most of these are railway junction towns where there were probably significant groups of shopcraft workers.

civic workers who had fought and won their own strike in April but who still came out in solidarity as repression mounted in Winnipeg. Controlled throughout by the Brandon Trades and Labor Council, the strike extended to unorganized workers who were guaranteed "full protection" from the labour council.<sup>41</sup>

The list of small Saskatchewan railway junction towns makes clear the support of railroad shop workers and of some running trades workers, although the Brotherhoods exerted all the pressure they were capable of to prevent this. Prince Albert's sympathy strike involved mainly Canadian Northern workers.<sup>42</sup> In Saskatchewan's larger urban centres a similar pattern prevailed. Regina workers initially supported a general strike but only a minority eventually struck, mainly from the railroad shops. In Moose Jaw, shopcraft workers, street railway workers, civic employees, and some building trades workers provided the strike's backbone. Saskatoon's sympathy strike was the most successful in the province and included the Sutherland CPR shop workers, street railway workers, freight handlers, postal workers, teamsters, and at least eleven other local unions.

In Alberta, as elsewhere in the west, both Edmonton and Calgary workers had flirted with general strikes earlier. In Edmonton, the Trades and Labour Council had endorsed a general sympathy strike in October 1918 to aid the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. Events in 1919 led to a vigorous left-right struggle for control of the Edmonton TLC which culminated in late April in the expulsion of the Carpenters, led by SPC militant Joe Knight, Federated Labour Union, No. 49, which included Carl Berg and Sarah Johnson Knight, and the UMWA, Local 4070. As a result of the expulsions, the machinists and street railway workers also left the council. Despite this serious split, a successful sympathy strike was organized. The Federated Railway Trades (shop workers) introduced a motion in the ETLC calling for a meeting of all Edmonton trade unionists to plan for a strike. At that meeting the machinists successfully moved for a strike vote of all unions to report to a Central Strike Committee composed of representatives from both sides of the previous split. This vote resulted in a 1,676-506 vote for a strike with 34 of the 38 unions voting casting pro-strike ballots; eleven locals, however, failed to vote. Major strike support came from railway carmen, machinists, railroad shop workers, street railway workers, coal miners, building trades workers, and civic employees. The strike held until the Committee called it off and was marked by a

<sup>41</sup> On Brandon, see A.E. Smith, *All My Life* (Toronto 1949), ch. 3-6; Kathleen O'Gorman Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba, 1919-1927," M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1977, esp. ch. 2; Brandon Trades and Labor Council, *Strike Bulletin*, 21-31 May 1919; *Western Labor News* (Winnipeg), 7, 9 June 1919. On the earlier Brandon strike, see *Confederate* (Brandon), 4 April 1919 and *Western Labor News*, 25 April, 7 May 1919.

<sup>42</sup> On Saskatchewan see Cherwinski, "Organized Labour," ch. 2 and his "Organized Labour and the Winnipeg General Strike."

minimum of disorder of any kind. This partially resulted from the tacit support the strike received from pro-labour Edmonton Mayor Joe Clarke, who RCMP security regarded as less than trustworthy.<sup>43</sup>

In Calgary the huge CPR shops were central both to the city's economy and to its trade union movement. Carmen, machinists, and all the other Railroad Shops Federated Trades exercised a considerable thrust for and experience of amalgamation. During the war years, the machinists came to dominate the CTLC and, as Taraska has argued, forged "a new working-class solidarity which led to class conscious action."<sup>44</sup> Militance and political lobbying on the part of munitions workers led to a Provincial Munitions Commission ruling that war contracts should go only to union shops. Thus by the end of 1915 the war shops were fully unionized. Skilled machinists' leaders such as Socialist and Labour Alderman A. Broach, R.J. Tallon, and H.H. Sharples came to dominate the local council and to push it successfully into local politics. Tallon became president of Division 4 of the Railway Employees Department of the American Federation of Labor in 1917 which represented over 50,000 shopcraft workers on the Canadian railways. The Division, created to negotiate directly with the Railway War Board, entered negotiations with the CPR in April 1918. After heated negotiations the Board offered parity with the United States McAdoo Award which was rejected by an overwhelming Division 4 vote. Armed with this rejection, Division 4 leaders threatened a nation-wide rail strike. A series of walkouts led to dire threats from the government and the active intervention of the AFL which ordered Division 4 to accept the Board's offer. In September reluctant railway shop workers did so but in Calgary trouble flared up quickly when the CPR victimized some freight handlers who had not been formally allowed to enter Division 4. The freight handlers struck demanding the McAdoo Award. Calgary Labour Council unions voted in favour of a general strike in support of the freight handlers and a shopcraft workers' strike began on 11 October 1918. Street railway workers and civic employees also struck in sympathy. The threat to prosecute under Privy Council Order 2525 banning all strikes proved futile when Alberta courts refused to uphold it. A compromise, arranged by Senator Gideon Robertson, ended the affair in late October but general strike tactics had definitely been sustained.

<sup>43</sup> For the Edmonton strike, see William R. Askin, "Labour Unrest in Edmonton and District and its Coverage by the Edmonton Press, 1918-19," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1973 and Carl Betke, "Influence and Community: The Ambiguity of Labour Organization in Edmonton, 1906-1921," unpublished paper presented at the Canadian-American Urban Development Conference, University of Guelph, August 1982. See also *The One Big Union Bulletin* (Edmonton), 25 March 1919; *Edmonton Strike Bulletin*, 5, 11 June 1919; and *Edmonton Free Press*, 12 April-12 July 1919.

<sup>44</sup> For Calgary, see Elizabeth Ann Taraska, "The Calgary Craft Union Movement, 1900-20," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1975, quotation at 46 and *Calgary Strike Bulletin*, 30 May-24 June 1919.

This set the scene for the following year's city-wide metal trades strike in April and the subsequent sympathy strike in May and June. Predictably the major support during the general strike came from the CPR Ogden shops and the Metal Trades Council. One outstanding feature of this strike was the creation of an extremely active Women's Labor Council.<sup>45</sup>

In British Columbia, the SPC-controlled Vancouver Trades and Labour Council (VTLC) responded more slowly and deliberately to events in Winnipeg. In mid-May VTLC President Harold Winch of the longshoremen and Secretary Victor Midgley wired Winnipeg congratulating the workers for their "cohesion" which "augured well for the future."<sup>46</sup> The following week they warned the Borden government that any military interference in Winnipeg would force them to call a general strike and simultaneously requested that all Vancouver trade unions take a vote on the question.<sup>47</sup> One week later they issued the following demands:

Realizing that while there are many problems that face the workers that cannot be solved under capitalism, and that the end of the system is not yet; also realizing that the present situation is a political one, due to the action of the Dominion Government in the Winnipeg strike, and that as taking care of the soldiers . . . are working class problems, the majority of the soldiers being members of the working class, therefore be it resolved that the following be the policy of the workers in Canada now on strike, or about to come on strike in support of the Winnipeg workers:

1. The reinstatement of the postal workers. . . .
2. The immediate settlement of the postal workers' grievances.
3. The right of collective bargaining through any organization that the workers deem most suited to their needs.
4. Pensions for soldiers and their dependents.
5. A \$2,000 gratuity for all those who served overseas.
6. Nationalization of all cold storage plants, abattoirs, elevators. . . .
7. A six-hour day.

They closed by calling for the strike to continue until either the demands were granted or the government resigned and called new elections.<sup>48</sup>

The strike, which commenced on 3 June, initially saw 37 unions out but this actually increased in the first few days of the strike. As elsewhere, it found its major support among the metal trades, in the shipyards, and on the street railway. Unique to Vancouver as a major port, however, was the militant

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 5 and *Labour Gazette*, 18 (1918), 615, 759, 857, 1005 and 820, 974-5.

<sup>46</sup> *B.C. Federationist*, 16 May 1919 and Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, Executive Minutes, 15 May 1919. See also Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater* (Vancouver 1967), 80-1; *Strike Bulletin* (Vancouver), 9-26 June 1919; *The Camp Worker* (Vancouver), 2 June 1919; *The Vancouver Citizen*, 16 June-3 July 1919; and *The Critic*, 26 April-12 July 1919.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 May 1919; Borden Papers, G.H. Deane to Borden, Vancouver, 27 May 1919, J. Kavanagh, Secretary VTLC, to Borden, 27 May 1919; and VTLC, Executive Minutes, 22, 27, 28 May 1919.

<sup>48</sup> *B.C. Federationist*, 30 May 1919.

support of longshoremen, sailors, and other marine workers. As in Calgary, a series of women's meetings met with enthusiastic support.<sup>49</sup>

While the SPC provided leadership and intellectual sustenance, their reluctance and fears were manifest. Even at the final preparation meeting on 2 June, William Pritchard posed the question less than enthusiastically:

Their comrades were in the fight, and it was now a question of standing by them, and, if necessary, going down with them — or, later, going down by themselves. His advice was: "If you are going to drown — drown splashing!"<sup>50</sup>

Two weeks later at an SPC educational, W.W. Lefeaux explained that party policy did not include promoting strikes, only analyzing and explaining them.<sup>51</sup>

The strike ended in confusion a week after Winnipeg's return to work. A recommendation from the strike committee to go back earlier had been voted down by rank-and-file militants.<sup>52</sup> The strike committee's final report to the VTLC indicated that 45 unions had struck over the course of the strike, but admitted the initial vote had been a narrow 3,305-2,499 victory. Although 57 per cent of those voting favoured the strike, the under 6,000 votes represented only 40 per cent of VTLC members.<sup>53</sup>

In Prince Rupert a sympathy strike had commenced earlier on 29 May when railroad workers left their jobs, while in Victoria the sympathy strike developed very slowly with considerable reluctance being shown by Victoria TLC leaders. Nevertheless almost 5,000 workers left their jobs on 23 June, following the lead of the Metal Trades Council, and remained out until early July.<sup>54</sup> A smaller sympathy strike also took place in New Westminster.

These Canadian events captured the attention of European militants. On 14 June 1919, in Turin, Italy, Antonio Gramsci described "The Revolutionary Tide" which had brought "the struggle on a world scale." "The revolution can no longer be exorcized by democratic swindlers, nor crushed by mercenaries without a conscience," the Italian revolutionary argued. Gramsci's youthful optimism stemmed partially from his view of current world struggles and specifically of those in Canada where, he argued, "industrial strikes have taken

<sup>49</sup> For list of unions supporting the strike, see *Ibid.*, 6 June 1919. On women, see *Strike Bulletin*, 16 June 1919. It is worth noting the *Citizen*, the viciously anti-union publication of the Citizens' Committee, propagandized actively for women's support. See, for only two examples, "To the Women," 20 June 1919 and "Women! With Whom?" 21 June 1919.

<sup>50</sup> *B.C. Federationist*, 6 June 1919.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1919.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 June, 4 July 1919.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 July 1919. For another brief account of the Vancouver Strike, see Elaine Bernard, "Vancouver 1919," *Democrat*, 20 (June-July 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 80-1. See also the short memoir by machinist Arthur J. Turner, *Somewhere — A Perfect Place* (Vancouver 1981), 22-6, for a brief memory of the Victoria Sympathy Strike. See also *Semi-Weekly Tribune* (Victoria), 14 April-30 June 1919 and Victoria Trades and Labor Council, Minutes, esp. 9 June 1919.



on the overt character of a bid to install a soviet regime." Meanwhile, in Glasgow, John MacLean enthused about "the great Canadian strike," which, he argued, had stimulated American labour's "general rank-and-file strike which terrorized the union leaders."<sup>55</sup> While these claims appear exaggerated in retrospect, the important point here is that 1919 was an international event, or as MacLean termed it: "class war on an international scale." It was no more limited to Canada than it was to Winnipeg within Canada. In the years from 1917 to 1920, a working-class movement whose internationalism had been destroyed in 1914, ironically responded with an international surge of class militancy which knew no national limits and few, if any, historical precedents.

One little-known example of the international nature of the uprising can be drawn from Newfoundland, then a self-governing British colony in the North Atlantic. The story of Newfoundland's working class largely remains to be written but in the years 1917 to 1920 at least it resembled closely the Canadian and international pattern of revolt. In the immediate pre-war years Newfoundland fishermen and loggers had commenced to organize. The meteoric rise of the Fishermen's Protective Union, representing both groups of workers, led not only to industrial gains but to great political success and legislative reforms. In the later war years, an economic crisis which revolved around profiteering and rampant inflation led to an investigation which found that the St. John's merchants had indeed engaged in rapacious price gouging. In 1917, St. John's workers created the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association (NIWA), an avowedly industrial unionist organization which immediately proceeded to organize workers across the island. Thus, Newfoundland workers conformed to the international wave of industrial unionist unrest. Equally the NIWA found its leadership in the railway shops of the Reid Newfoundland Company and among local socialists and drew its membership from St. John's metal shops and the foundry. Its major industrial battle against Reid Newfoundland involved a three-week strike of 500 railway workers in spring 1918 which involved threats of an island-wide walkout and extensive sympathetic activities in St. John's.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings (1910-1920)* (New York 1977), 61; Nan Milton, ed., *John MacLean: In the Rapids of Revolution* (London 1978), 190, 137.

<sup>56</sup> On Newfoundland, see Melvin Baker, Robert Cuff, Bill Gillespie, *Workingmen's St. John's: Aspects of Social History in the Early 1900s* (St. John's 1982). Also Robert Cuff, "The Quill and the Hammer: Labour Activism in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, 1917-1925," Honours B.A. thesis, Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980; Bill Gillespie, "A History of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, 1936-63," unpublished M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980; John Joy, "The Growth and Development of Trades and Manufacturing in St. John's, 1870-1914," unpublished M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977; and Ian McDonald, "W.F. Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Newfoundland Politics, 1909-1925," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1971.

The international literature on the post-war upsurge has blossomed of late and important articles by Larry Peterson and James Cronin have chronicled these red years in rich international comparison.<sup>57</sup> As has often been the case, the comparative insights offered by international labour and working-class history open some interesting avenues for investigation. First, however, let us eliminate a few dead ends of previous Canadian investigation. In the aftermath of the strike, the *B.C. Federationist* concluded: "The first lesson that workers must learn is that only by organization and cohesion, not only in each centre, but throughout the country, can they resist the encroachments of capital."<sup>58</sup> Similar statements have often been used to buttress a "western revolt" notion of 1919, arguing that only workers west of the Lakehead behaved "radically." The lesson, however, surely lay not in a regional understanding of the revolt but rather in the reverse — namely, the necessity of perfecting nation-wide organization. The defection of the AFL, the TLC, and much of the international union leadership had left the working-class movement fragmented and, although the SPC leadership tried valiantly to fill the gap, the consequent breakdown in communications and lack of a national focus proved costly. While the established weekly labour press and the emergent daily strike bulletins were remarkably vibrant and blanketed the country with an extraordinary and rich range of labour opinion, they carried little national coverage. Thus workers in Vancouver knew little of Amherst, and District 18 miners lacked direct contact with their Nova Scotia District 26 comrades. The revolt was not western, however, it was national; but the size and regional fragmentation of the country proved a major impediment to systematic national organization and co-ordination.

Second, there is no doubt that the AFL and TLC leadership, not to speak of the railroad running trades leadership, played reprehensible roles. They undoubtedly exploited their image as respectable labour leaders who believed in the sanctity of contracts. We must add, however, that this ideological and political battleground existed within the North American labour movement everywhere, not only on both sides of the border but also at both ends of each country. The struggle within the TLC so often depicted as east/west was not so simple. At the 1917 TLC convention in Ottawa the debate on the executive's collapse on the issue of conscription and their decision not to resist the law once enacted revealed no simple regional vote. In a lengthy debate 28 delegates spoke with only nine fully supporting the executive of which only two actually supported conscription. The nineteen speakers who opposed the executive included eleven eastern delegates and eight westerners.<sup>59</sup> Eastern opponents

<sup>57</sup> Larry Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 41-66; James E. Cronin, "Labor Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917-1920 in Europe," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 125-152.

<sup>58</sup> *B.C. Federationist*, 4 July 1919.

<sup>59</sup> Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Proceedings*, 1917, 141-55. For a good

included moderate Toronto socialists John Bruce and Jimmy Simpson and Montreal radical machinists Tom Cassidy and Dick Kerrigan. Cassidy engaged in the debate's major rhetorical flight, albeit prescient in light of events in 1919:

When the machine guns are placed on the streets of Winnipeg to shoot down strikers, also in Montreal, Vancouver Island, and other places, it shows that these organized soldiers are willing to shoot their fellow workingmen. I am not afraid to die. . . . The masters of the world must be whipped. . . . We have only one enemy and that is the international capitalist class.

When the vote finally came the major amendment, introduced by Alberta leaders Farnilo and Ross, failed narrowly 101 to 111. Since there were only 44 western delegates present, it should be clear that there was considerable eastern opposition to conscription as well. Indeed when a conciliatory division on conscription itself was taken only ten delegates voted in favour of the calling-up of manpower.

At the 1918 TLC convention in Quebec where seething western discontent eventually led to plans for the Calgary Conference of March 1919 similar non-regional divisions were evident. Westerners represented only 45 of 440 delegates. While radical motions were consistently lost and elections to executive positions saw moderates emerge victorious, nevertheless there were far more votes for radical positions than simply those of the west. For example, the one roll call vote on a Winnipeg motion to release all conscientious objectors from prison was narrowly defeated 99 to 90. The minority radical vote was composed of 58 eastern delegates and 32 western, while the conservative vote included two westerners and 97 easterners. The clear lesson to be learned was that the west should send more delegates.<sup>60</sup>

When the TLC met in Hamilton in fall 1919 the battle between craft unionism and the OBU for control of the labour movement was raging. In that context and with OBU members and sympathizers either departed or expelled, it should not surprise us that the Convention witnessed much red-bashing. Yet there was also an undercurrent of support for industrial unionism and disgust for the TLC's failure to support Winnipeg workers. There was vociferous eastern criticism of the TLC leadership. Toronto delegate Birks denounced "organized officialdom within the trade union movement as something opposed to the spirit and mind of the rank and file."<sup>61</sup> District 26 leader J.B. McLachlan introduced

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example of similar fights in the U.S., see Cecelia F. Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition: Bridgeport, Connecticut, Munition Workers, 1915-1919," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 105-124. Also see John Laslett, *Labor and the Left* (New York 1970), *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 1918, 138-9. Note that my count is slightly at variance with Gerald Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt': Regionalism, Socialism, and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 141. The point, of course, remains the same. His count, however, is 29 west and 51 east vs. 3 west and 81 east.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 1919, 165.

a motion for a general strike demanding the restoration of freedom of speech and of the press and the repeal of the Criminal Code amendments passed during the Winnipeg General Strike.<sup>62</sup> Toronto carpenter McCallum, speaking "as a member of the working-class movement," argued that craft unions were outmoded and asked "Why ban men who demand change?"<sup>63</sup> St. Catharines' delegate Grant "advocated the adoption of the shop steward as the most effective form of organization."<sup>64</sup> Later Ottawa stonecutters introduced a motion for broad joint strikes and denounced their international for ordering them back to work during a general building trades strike in May 1919. As one delegate argued, "the boss beat us because we were divided into small locals." Winnipeg's George Armstrong availed himself of this opportunity to condemn "the machinery of the AFL which made massed action impossible."<sup>65</sup>

Similar battles went on within the international unions as well. For example, the 1920 convention of the IAM saw bitter debate about the expulsion of OBU supporters. Montreal and Toronto machinists led a losing but fiery effort to defend their comrades.<sup>66</sup>

The fight in the Canadian labour movement thus rested on different views of labour's future organization. The western SPC leaders looked to the OBU as the way forward. Despite much historical debate about the intellectual orientation of the OBU, which I will not detail here, the OBU was certainly not syndicalist. An organization led by the SPC could never have been anti-political and thus the supposed "turn" to politics after Winnipeg is nonsense. The political aims of the SPC never varied.<sup>67</sup>

The strike wave, of course, gained SPC leadership only begrudgingly for

<sup>62</sup> TLC, *Proceedings*, 1919, 156-7. See David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917-1926," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979, 315-19.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

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

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-2.

<sup>66</sup> On the IAM, see *Proceedings*, 1920, especially 129-40, 559-62, 248-56, 187-98, 380. See also *Bulletin* (Winnipeg), April-August 1919.

<sup>67</sup> The syndicalist "accusation" has come ironically from both ends of the ideological spectrum over time. Gideon Robertson, for example, simply, and I believe sincerely, equated the OBU with the IWW. Later communist historians, refusing to forgive Bob Russell's refusal to join the CPC, have made the same charge. More recently some historians have repeated the error, while not necessarily sharing either Robertson's or the CPC's political position. See, for example, *Canada's Party of Socialism* (Toronto: Progress, 1982), 32-3; James Foy, "Gideon Robertson: Conservative Minister of Labour, 1917-1921," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1972; Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 89; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, *passim*; A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), 98, 112-3, 143 ff; Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 150-1, 171-7, 275. This argument is not unique to this paper, of course. See Peterson, "One Big Union," 53-8 and Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt,'" 139-40 for similar interpretations.

that very reason. The SPC doubted the wisdom of the industrial actions but had no choice but to lend its leadership skills to the working-class militancy which engulfed the nation. They never, however, viewed 1919 as a nascent revolution. They were politically too experienced for that. While Joe Knight and Carl Berg in Edmonton allowed their rhetoric to exceed the SPC line in the heady days of June 1919, the leading Vancouver comrades never lost sight of the limitations of the situation. Thus, *The Soviet* could argue, displaying the syndicalist tendencies of Knight and Berg:

In Winnipeg and Toronto today the same condition is observable. The General Strike by paralyzing industry, paralyzes government. The Strike Committees are forced to rule the cities, to "exempt" certain industries and services in order to provide for elementary human needs; they must police the cities themselves. Willy-nilly "this production for use and not for profit" is undertaken for the benefit of the workers. It displaces the capitalist government which operated for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. . . .<sup>68</sup>

Vancouver's *Red Flag*, on the other hand, was consistent and cautious. The OBU, it noted, simply represented:

. . . a decided urge towards industrial unionism which has lately become very insistent. We have referred to this movement several times and have criticized it and analyzed it. That is our function. We don't initiate movements, we seek to understand them. We realize that beyond a very transitory influence, great movements are not caused by individuals, they are the result of conditions.<sup>69</sup>

Later, after the Winnipeg General Strike had commenced, they warned:

It may be that some half-baked socialist is voicing Revolutionary phrases in Winnipeg. We doubt it. We know that a bunch of workers who are able to keep their heads in spite of the extreme provocation to which they are being subjected will not allow any muddle head from their own ranks to precipitate trouble.<sup>70</sup>

Simultaneously, the *B.C. Federationist* editorialized:

Neither the Seattle nor the Winnipeg strikes were revolutionary upheavals. They were strikes in the one instance for higher wages, and in the later case, for the recognition of the right to collective bargaining. Is that a revolutionary strike?

In that same editorial they cautioned against violence and promoted discipline "because the ruling class have the guns, and if blood is shed, it will be the blood of the working class." In a revolution, they continued, it was necessary to "control the means of coercion," and there was no such opportunity in Canada.<sup>71</sup> A week later they again emphasized, "The strike is not a revolutionary strike," and argued instead: "The issue is political. The workers must take the matter up on those lines, and wring political concessions from the master class, and beat them at their own game."<sup>72</sup> All of this fits well with William

<sup>68</sup> *The Soviet* (Edmonton), 1, 13 (20 June 1919).

<sup>69</sup> *Red Flag* (Vancouver), 1, 9 (22 March 1919).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 18 (24 May 1919).

<sup>71</sup> *B.C. Federationist*, 23 May 1919.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 May 1919.

Pritchard's now famous aphorism: "Only fools try to make revolutions, wise men conform to them."<sup>73</sup>

Ironically, Aaron Mosher, the president of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees, shared the SPC perspective to the degree that he recognized that radical leaders could not be held responsible for the labour revolt. In a letter volunteering his services to Prime Minister Borden, he noted:

Numerous telegrams we are receiving from our local branches throughout the entire west asking authority to strike and the fact that some of our members have gone on strike after authorization was denied them, leads me to believe that it is not just a few labour agitators at Winnipeg who are causing the unrest. In most cases, I am sure the rank and file in the labour movement are forcing the leaders to take the stand they have taken, and it would be well to look into this phase of the situation.<sup>74</sup>

Commissioner Perry of the Royal North West Mounted Police argued similarly in his "Memorandum on Revolutionary Tendencies in Western Canada:"

At the foundation of all this agitation is the general restlessness and dissatisfaction. The greater number of labour men, and probably of the community as a whole, are in an uncertain, apprehensive, nervous and irritable temper. Perhaps these agitators are but the foam on the wave.<sup>75</sup>

Let us take Mosher's advice and Perry's metaphor and close this paper with a consideration of the causes of the "wave" of unrest.

Eric Hobsbawm, some 20 years ago, suggested that:

The habit of industrial solidarity must be learned . . . so must the common sense of demanding concessions when conditions are favourable, not when hunger suggests it. There is thus a natural time lag, before workers become an "effective labour movement."<sup>76</sup>

Writing ten years later, Michelle Perrot argued: "The strike is a weapon of conquest, the major instrument of a working class more and more desirous and capable of improving its lot, more and more fascinated by the possibilities of the strike."<sup>77</sup> By 1919, Canadian workers had certainly become an "effective labour movement" and they also had developed in wartime conditions a considerable fascination with "the possibilities of the strike." Indeed, as this paper argued earlier, the 1919 revolt represents a return, albeit at a higher level of intensity, to the pre-war pattern of conflict. This intensification was fueled by the addition of new groups of workers to the struggle. These new groups

<sup>73</sup> Gloria Montero, *We Stood Together: First Hand Accounts of Dramatic Events in Canada's Labour Past* (Toronto 1979), 14. Also, of course, the source of Bercuson's title.

<sup>74</sup> Borden Papers, A.R. Mosher to Borden, 29 May 1919.

<sup>75</sup> Department of National Defence, RG 24, vol. 3985, N-S-C 1055-2-21, *Secret*, "Memorandum on Revolutionary Tendencies in Western Canada," prepared by Assistant Comptroller, RNWMP.

<sup>76</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London 1964), 144.

<sup>77</sup> Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève, France 1871-90*, Tome 1 (Paris 1974), 64.

included public service workers, west coast loggers, and previously unorganized or at best partially organized groups of industrial workers such as those in Toronto's and Montreal's packing houses and garment shops. Among these last groups of workers, as also in Winnipeg and certainly as in the coal mines of District 18, another crucial new ingredient was present — ethnic solidarity. In 1919, momentarily at least, the divisiveness of ethnicity was surpassed in the struggle. A Canadian working-class movement which had been swamped with new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe in the pre-war years had matured, coalesced, and to some degree at least, commenced the process of incorporating the new workers into the movement. These "new" Canadian workers, as we are only now coming to realize, often were not "new" to the working class. Indeed Finns, Jews, and Ukrainians often arrived with a more extensive socialist background than their much celebrated English and Scot immigrant comrades. A brief Winnipeg example demonstrates this point poignantly. In the aftermath of the strike a number of "aliens" were transported to Kapuskasing, Ontario to await deportation. All had been arrested in the riot on Bloody Saturday. The *Strikers' Defense Bulletin* provided short biographies of thirteen ethnic workers. One German sheet metal worker joined twelve east Europeans hailing from Galicia (seven), Bukovina (two), "Austrian Poland," the Ukraine, and Russia. Occupationally, they included two boilermakers' helpers, a carpenter, a teamster, and eight labourers. Of the labourers, three were unemployed and the others worked for the city, on the railroad, in a restaurant, in the railway shops, and for Swift's. This state-selected group of foreign-born Winnipeg workers demonstrates graphically the ethnic presence in the Winnipeg strike. This presence was not unique to Winnipeg.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the new ethnic component of the labour movement there was also a more pronounced presence of women workers. The new involvement of public sector workers brought groups of telephone operators and civic employees, while organization also spread to department store clerks and waitresses, and, of course, into the heavily female garment trades. In Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, and elsewhere women workers played important roles in the 1919 strikes, both as strikers and as members of Women's Labour Leagues and Councils which, in some cases, emerged during the general strikes.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup> The new literature on ethnic workers is already too voluminous to list, but note especially Varpu Lindstrom-Best's work on the Finns and Orest T. Martynowych's essays on Ukrainian socialism. See, also, the special issue of *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 10 (1978) on ethnic radicalism. For the Winnipeg data, see *Strikers' Defense Bulletin*, 1, 4 (27 August 1919). For additional Winnipeg evidence see Donald Avery, "The Radical Alien and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation* (Toronto 1976), 209-31 and his "Ethnic Loyalties and the Proletarian Revolution," in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power, and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981), 68-93.

<sup>79</sup> On Vancouver telephone operators and the General Strike see Elaine Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union* (Vancouver 1982), 50-65.

Thus the structural transformation of the working class generated by the Second Industrial Revolution and by the ongoing process of the concentration and centralization of capital, which on some levels weakened the working-class movement, simultaneously stimulated an enhanced capacity for collective resistance at the workplace. Thus, scientific management and other managerial innovations, which attacked what Robert Morris has usefully termed the "moral economy of the skilled man," began the process of generating an industrial union response.<sup>80</sup>

The rapid urban expansion generated by monopoly capitalist growth also played its role in the revolt. The working-class neighbourhoods of Toronto's and Montreal's garment districts or those associated with the huge metal plants and railroad shops in those cities and in the west became centres of workers' lives and slowly began to generate working-class community institutions. North-end Winnipeg is perhaps the most celebrated example, but all Canadian cities developed equivalent districts. While sometimes ethnically segregated, these areas often took on instead occupational associations as in Toronto's stockyard area or even Toronto's Junction district. In this period before the automobile's dispersal of the working class, a relationship continued to exist between domicile and workplace. We need to know much more about these communities and their role in sustaining working-class opposition. Neighbourhood may have played another role as well. Witness after witness before the Mathers Commission complained of poor and expensive housing in Canadian towns and cities. This near-universal complaint also undoubtedly contributed to the working-class revolt of 1919 and helped to widen it beyond simple workplace issues. Thus the general and sympathetic strikes extended beyond organized workers to embrace many workers outside the unions.

Also helping to widen the conflict in a similar fashion were the inter-related issues of inflation, the cost of living, and war profiteering. Recent econometric work on real wages in the first three decades of the twentieth century confirms that "real wage rates declined significantly during the First World War."<sup>81</sup> The

<sup>80</sup> Robert Morris, "Skilled Workers and the Politics of the 'Red' Clyde," unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh, 1981. As Morris notes, his echo of Edward Thompson's "moral economy" is intentional.

<sup>81</sup> On the war economy in general see R.T. Naylor, "The Canadian State, the Accumulation of Capital, and the Great War," *Revue d'études canadiennes*, 16, 3 and 4 (1981), 26-55. On inflation specifically see: Terry Copp, *Anatomy of Poverty*, for Montreal; Michael J. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto*; Harry Sutcliffe and Paul Phillips, "Real Wages and the Winnipeg General Strike: An Empirical Investigation," unpublished paper, University of Manitoba, 1973; Gordon Bertram and Michael Percy, "Real Wage Trends in Canada 1900-26," *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 12 (1979), 299-312; and Eleanor Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," *B.C. Studies*, 51 (1981), 3-62. For a slightly later period, see Michael J. Piva, "Urban Working-Class Incomes and Real Incomes in 1921: A Comparative Analysis," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 31 (1983), 143-65. See also for a



new national index compiled by Bertram and Percy shows a low of 85.5 in 1917 (1913 equals 100), while Eleanor Bartlett's work on Vancouver shows the low point as either 1917 or 1918, depending on the choice of indices. What is clear in these studies and in earlier studies of Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg is that workers suffered a real decline on a national basis during the second half of the war. These econometric data provide the hard confirmation, for those who still need it, of the testimony of hundreds of workers before the Mathers Commission. They complained continuously of high food prices, of blatant profiteering, and of bureaucratic ineptitude, as well as of inflationary rents and inadequate housing. These complaints united all workers in ways that the more limited workplace battles sometimes failed to. Moreover the political dynamite in this situation was the clear dichotomy between a government which refused "fair wages" and conscripted manpower, and a government which allowed blatant profiteering and refused to conscript wealth. The transparency of the relationship between capital and the state in the war years allowed socialist propaganda to reach a growing and increasingly sympathetic audience. Demands for nationalization of abattoirs, cold storage plants, and elevators, which might at first seem surprising, must be viewed in this context. As Cronin has argued in the European context, the coincidence of these consumer demands with intense struggles at the point of production helped to deepen class conflict into something approaching conscious class struggle.<sup>82</sup>

The violent repression in Winnipeg, the strike trials and the martyrdom of the leaders, the creation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the conscious victimization of thousands of strikers, the TLC's retreat into craft exclusivism, all suggest a bleak aftermath and a story of defeat.<sup>83</sup> Yet as late as September 1919, Commissioner A.B. Perry of the new RCMP, an acute observer of labour radicalism, warned of the continuing "general state of unrest" which he found "far from satisfactory." Further, he cautioned:

The leaders of the recent movement are determined, resourceful men; that their aims and objects are revolutionary in character has been clearly established. They have

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U.S. comparison, Frank Stricker, "The Wages of Inflation: Workers' Earnings in the World War One Era," *Mid-America*, 63 (1981), 93-105. For the general U.S. economic context, see David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York 1982), 127-64.

<sup>82</sup> Cronin, "Labour Insurgency and Class Conflict," *passim*. See also his *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain* (London 1979), 109-20.

<sup>83</sup> Much of this has been chronicled elsewhere. For an apologetic but detailed description of the creation of the RCMP see S.W. Horrall, "The Royal North-West Mounted Police and Labour Unrest in Western Canada, 1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (1980), 169-90. On victimization, especially of postal workers, see Borden Papers, various letters June to September 1919, pp. 62179-257. On one particularly unseemly aspect of TLC behaviour, see Tom Traves, "'The Story that Couldn't be Told': Big Business Buys the TLC," *Ontario Report*, 1, 6 (September 1976), 27-9.

sustained a temporary setback, but to think we have heard the last of them is only resting in a false sense of security.<sup>84</sup>

The war on the labour left did continue and proved successful in the short term.

Yet the seeds of industrial unionism would survive to sprout later. Moreover, if the 1920s and early 1930s appear as a period of relative national labour quiescence, the phenomenon is far from unique. The working-class movement in other advanced industrial countries also slipped into what Yves Lequin has recently termed "the great silence," a period which stretched from the end of the great revolt until the resurgence of industrial unionism in the mid to late Depression years.<sup>85</sup> The fascination with industrial councils and various other welfare capitalist schemes which was so evident in the Mathers Commission and in the National Industrial Conference also had ambiguous results. The seemingly tame industrial councils often provided the basis for the new thrust to real industrial unions when the time was again propitious for working-class struggle.<sup>86</sup>

Defeats should not be confused with failure and perhaps the SPC leaders should be allowed to write their own epitaph. In Winnipeg, F.W. derived the following "Lessons of the Strike:"

*This is only a local momentary defeat on a world-wide battle front. Remember that permanently we cannot lose. Every struggle is a lesson in class solidarity. Every brutal act of suppression brings capitalism nearer to its inevitable doom. . . . Courage, fellow workers. Study your class position and you cannot lose.*<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile in Vancouver, Comrade C.K. addressed "The Burning Question of Trade Unionism," echoing a Daniel DeLeon pamphlet title. Developing a "dialectical" position against the old "philosophy of misery" school, he argued that trade unions must be viewed not simply as they are but rather as they might develop. The events of 1919, he wrote, led inexorably to the workers' recognition of the need for political action. He closed on an optimistic note which, although too reminiscent of Second International evolutionism, nevertheless might be a message for all of us in this period of renewed attacks on labour:

There is a benevolent appearing old gentleman wearing long white whiskers clad in a

<sup>84</sup> A.B. Perry, "Draft Memorandum," 1 September 1919, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Papers, volume 1003, PAC.

<sup>85</sup> Yves Lequin, "Social Structures and Shared Beliefs: Four Worker Communities in the Second Industrialization," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 22 (1982), 1-17.

<sup>86</sup> On Councils in Canada, see Bruce Scott, "'A Place in the Sun': The Industrial Council at Massey-Harris, 1919-1929," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 158-92; Tom Traves, *The State and Enterprise: Canadian Manufacturers and the Federal Government 1917-1931* (Toronto 1979), 86-94; and Foy, "Gideon Robertson." For U.S. comparisons see Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago 1976), *passim*, but esp. 119-48.

<sup>87</sup> *Socialist Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1, 7 (July 1919).

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nightshirt and carrying a scythe. He is known as "father time." The fact is not generally known but he is a socialist of the most pronounced revolutionary type. He is very busy among the trade unions these days. He is working for us.\*\*

*This paper draws on various ongoing research projects. In each of these, I owe a debt of gratitude for research assistance. The revised strike statistics are drawn from work for volume three of the Historical Atlas of Canada and Douglas Cruikshank has performed yeoman service in gathering the data. Ontario materials are drawn from work for the Ontario Historical Studies series. Data on the Maritimes owe much to the mutuality and exceptional researches and publications of my former Dalhousie colleagues and students. My friends at the PAC, archivists Danny Moore and Peter DeLottinville, have come up with emergency aid, as usual, far beyond the call of duty. Finally, Linda Kealey has discussed much of this paper with me and I'm grateful for her insights and support.*

\*\* *Red Flag*, 1, 22 (21 June 1919). For an academic echo of labour's educational gains from the strike, see D.G. Cook, "Western Radicalism and the Winnipeg Strike," M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1921, which argues, on the basis of interviews with Winnipeg strikers, that: "The gains of the strike were many for the labour group. The six-week's strike was like a college course in Economics. Papers were read, issues discussed, and many addresses were given by the leaders. Many of the labour men became enlightened as to the real struggle. There grew a strong spirit of solidarity in the rank and file of labour." (62).