

Class Conflict in a Prairie City

The Saskatoon Working-Class Response to Prairie Capitalism, 1906-19

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Glen Makahonuk

... I wish to distinctly state that as long as the present system of production for profit instead of for use lasts, so long will we have an accute labor problem. We realize that the transformation to that ultimate aim will take time and therefore must be brought about by a gradual process.

WALTER MILLS, PRESIDENT of the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council, was trying to convince the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, which held a hearing in Saskatoon on 7 May 1919 as part of its nationwide investigation of industrial unrest, that as long as capitalism continued there would be "friction between the union men and bosses" not only in the city, "but throughout the Dominion of Canada."¹ It is interesting to note that such an argument would come from a craft unionist in a small prairie city whose provincial economy was predominantly agricultural. Other workers, whether they were coal miners labouring in a Cape Breton mine or factory workers toiling under appalling conditions in a Toronto sweat shop, had made similar statements to the commission in its tour of 28 cities across Canada. In articulating their grievances about unemployment, low wages, high prices, long hours, appalling conditions, non-recognition of unions, and the refusal of collective bargaining, the Saskatoon labour representatives to the commission were demonstrating that they shared similar class experiences with other workers.

Although W.J.C. Cherwinski has completed a major study of the organized labour movement in Saskatchewan in which he has emphasized its weakness,

¹ Public Archives of Canada (PAC) Canada, Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, 1919 (hereafter referred to as Mathers Commission), Minutes of Evidence, V. 2, 1050, and *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 8 May 1919.

Glen Makahonuk, "Class Conflict in a Prairie City: The Saskatoon Working-Class Response to Prairie Capitalism, 1906-19," *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), 89-124.

smallness, and conservatism,² there is still a need to examine the nature of the labour-capital relations in a city like Saskatoon. The Saskatoon working class was far from being weak and conservative in its relationship with the ruling class, especially in the period from 1912 to 1919. In fact, the Saskatoon working class issued both an economic and political response to prairie capitalism which culminated in a sympathy strike for the Winnipeg workers in 1919. Thus the purpose of this paper is to address the class experience in terms of the workers' material conditions³ and their means of carrying out class struggle, using methodologies developed in studies of the larger urban centres of eastern and western Canada.⁴

1

LABOUR-CAPITAL RELATIONS in Saskatoon operated within the general framework of prairie capitalism. Most business activity in the West, except for the primary industries like coal mining, was focused on railway transportation, the production and sale of wheat, and the various industries or businesses which serviced the agricultural community.⁵ The Saskatoon (as well as the Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) working class developed within the context of a prairie economy characterized by independent wheat farming, low urbanization, and an absence of significant large-scale secondary industry, which gave it a distinctive structure both in terms of organization and cultural life. Nevertheless, when Saskatoon incorporated as a city on 29 May 1906 it had a population of 3,011, three railway lines (CPR, CNR, and GTP) and twelve commercial or small industrial enterprises including eight general stores, three sash and door factories, a cement firm, brickyard, lumbe yard, flour mill, machine shop, and a miscellaneous collection of butcher shops, grocery, hardware, and furniture stores, barbers, laundries, and hotels.⁶ Within the next few

² This point is clearly stated in W.J.C. Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan: The TLC Years, 1904-1945," (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1972), 354-75.

³ It should be noted that this paper does not involve a full discussion of proletarian lifestyles, especially in the areas of religion, recreational activities, sports, social functions, education, temperance, and other non-work activities. To do so would involve another major study. The reference to material conditions here means a brief examination of the economy, the labour market, unemployment, the high cost of living and the effects of both World War I and government policies on the workers. It is these conditions which set the stage for the response.

⁴ The most noteworthy of these works are G. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980); B. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979); T. Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal 1897-1929* (Toronto 1974); M. Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto 1900-1921* (Ottawa 1979); and D. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal 1974).

⁵ See G. Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto 1984), 274-300.

⁶ *Henderson's City Directory 1908*, 45, and *Saskatoon: The Hub of the Hard Wheat*

years Saskatoon experienced more significant growth which made it the second largest city in the province. A new provincial university was under construction in 1910 and the number of manufacturers employing five or more workers jumped from 3 in 1904 to 28 in 1915; capital investment increased from \$54,900 to over \$2,000,000 (see table 1).

TABLE I
Manufacturers Employing Five Workers or More in Saskatoon, 1905-15

Year	Establish- ments	Capital	Employees	Salaries and Wages	Cost of Materials	Value of Products
1905	3	\$ 54,900	36	\$ 12,640	—	\$ 130,800
1910	10	1,078,865	246	162,261	\$ 269,962	683,277
1915	28	2,188,736	641	476,383	1,221,909	2,734,057

Source: *Postal Census of Manufacturers, 1916, 1921*.

Most of this growth was attributed to the city's location in the hub of the wheat belt and the CPR's decision to set up a divisional point, terminal, round house, and repair shops at Saskatoon. The railway industry was important to the city for it supplied the vast majority of the residents of Sutherland (over 500), a satellite of Saskatoon, with jobs. In comparison to other prairie cities, particularly Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, and Edmonton, local industrial activity remained relatively small. At the height of the boom period in 1912, the local daily *Phoenix* summarized the extent of industry in the city:

the planing mills and roofing company employed 230 men, the ironworks and foundries 120, the brick company, brewery, and flour mill 50 each, the largest bakery 20, the bottling works 10 and the cigar company 8. The Saskatoon Tent and Mattress Co. was about to open large new premises and employ 100 men, which would make it and the Cushing Brothers Planing mill, with 120 employees, the largest industrial employers in the city.⁷

Nevertheless, the leading Saskatoon capitalists, notably James Leslie, James Clinkskill, and J.F. Cairns, promoted a boomtime ideology which hoped to see Saskatoon become a major industrial centre with a population of 100,000 by 1917.⁸

These hopes, of course, did not materialize. The population fell far short of the predicted 100,000, having reached 25,789 by 1921. By the 1920s Saskatoon had attracted only small- to medium-sized industries which served it and its immediate trading area. The industries containing the major occupations of the Saskatoon labour force are listed in table 2.

Belt: The City of Opportunity (n.p.: 1906).

⁷ *The Phoenix*, "Industrial Number," 24 September 1912, cited in D. Kerr and S. Hanson, *Saskatoon: the First Half-Century* (Edmonton 1982), 132.

⁸ See D. Kerr, "Saskatoon 1905-1913: Ideology of the Boomtime," *Saskatchewan History*, 32 (1979), 16-28.

TABLE 2
Industries Containing the Major Occupations
of the Saskatoon Labour Force, 1921

Industries	The Number of Workers	
	Males	Females
Workers of 10 years of age and over in all occupations	7,991	2,113
Agriculture	414	4
Manufacturers:		
Food	52	1
Leather and fur	17	1
Chemical	9	2
Iron and steel	290	32
Miscellaneous industries	71	2
Non-ferrous metal	27	1
Non-metallic mineral	77	12
Textiles	41	98
Vegetable products	179	24
Wood and paper	175	25
Construction	740	—
Transportation (railways)	1,362	121
Trade	1,732	393
Service (includes domestic)	1,967	1,158
Unspecific industries (e.g. office clerk)	425	109

Source: For a complete list of all the Saskatoon occupations, see *Census of Canada, 1921*, 54-71.

Approximately one-half of the labour force worked in construction, transportation, trade, and service industries. The table, however, fails to take into consideration the role of the government as an employer. The government not only employed clerical workers, maintenance and service workers, police, and fire-fighters in its day-to-day operations, but also carried out major capital expenditures in the construction of government buildings.⁹ In fact, the government contracts were considered to be a stabilizing factor in a wildly fluctuating capitalist market. Nevertheless, it was the conditions and experiences in the four main industries which were to help shape the workers' response.

⁹ See D. Taylor, *For Dignity, Equality and Justice. A History of the Saskatchewan Government Employees' Union* (Regina 1984), 1-3.

The major reasons for Saskatoon's failure to industrialize were a lack of suitable raw materials, a tight money market during World War I, high power costs, high land prices, and high transportation costs because of the distance from markets. Furthermore, the types of companies coming to Saskatoon, particularly those from the American northwest, were often financially unstable and had merely shifted some of their machinery to take advantage of new markets and the tariffs.¹⁰ Finally, Saskatoon was directly dependent upon the fortunes of wheat producers. The economic welfare of the farming community had a direct impact on the growth of Saskatoon. If the farmer suffered from low wheat prices, then practically everybody did. When prices were high, economic prosperity followed.¹¹

TABLE 3
Place of Birth of the Saskatoon Population, 1916

Place of Birth	Percentage	
	Male	Female
Canada	52.3	55.2
1. Ontario	23.4	24.1
2. Quebec	2.3	2.4
3. Other Provinces	26.5	28.7
Newfoundland	.1	.1
Great Britain	29.8	29.1
Ireland	2.2	1.9
United States	7.2	8.3
Northern Europe	1.7	1.8
Southern Europe	4.7	3.0
Asia	1.4	0
White Dominions*	0	.1
Other British Possessions	.1	.1
Other Foreign Countries	0	0

* Includes Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

All calculations are my own.

Source: *Census of Prairie Provinces, 1916*. Table XXIII. 219.

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of these factors see Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 130-2.

¹¹ The *Labour Gazette* issued monthly reports showing the relationship between the business conditions and the economic well-being of the farming community. The April 1916 issue, for example, stated that "The heavy yield of last year's crop in districts tributary to Saskatoon helped Saskatoon business, especially the wholesale trade."

TABLE 4
Ethnic Origins of Saskatoon's Population, 1911-21

Ethnic Groups	1911		1921	
	Number	%	Number	%
Asian	84	0.7	260	1.0
British	9,422	78.5	20,966	81.5
French	295	2.5	749	2.9
German	591	4.9	813	3.2
Italian	2	0.0	74	0.3
Jewish	77	0.6	599	2.3
Netherlands	68	0.6	282	1.1
Polish	21	0.2	106	0.4
Russian*	437	3.6	821	3.2
Scandinavian	198	1.7	522	2.0
Ukrainian	0	0.0	315	1.2
Others**	809	6.7	232	0.9
Total	12,004	100	25,739	100

*Russian includes the following: 1911: Austrian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Romanian; 1912: Austrian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Romanian.

** Native peoples are included in this category.

Source: *Census of Canada, 1911-21*, cited in Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half-Century*, 320.

II

ALTHOUGH THE LABOURER, according to both H. Clare Pentland and Gerald Friesen, was "present at the creation of the capitalistic labour market in western Canada," it was the immigration of large numbers of people, especially from the British Isles, Europe, eastern Canada, and the United States, which actually stocked it.¹² Most of the immigrants stocking the Saskatoon labour market were from English-speaking countries (see tables 3 and 4). They were wooed by government and board of trade advertisements touting the availability of a large number of jobs and the wealth to be made. It soon became apparent to many of them that they were nothing more than a cheap source of labour power in an oversupplied labour market.

During the period 1906 to 1919, the labour market developed a dual structure, that is, a primary and a secondary market emerged. The primary market comprised skilled jobs that had higher wages, better working conditions, and

¹² See H.C. Pentland, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, (November 1959), and Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 93.

more status than those in the secondary market.¹³ Examples of workers in the primary market were the cabinetmakers, blacksmiths, millwrights, stonecutters, typographical workers, machinists, engineers, jewellers, mechanics, and the craft workers in the building trades.¹⁴ Most of these jobs were held by male journeymen who had completed formal apprenticeship programmes. Examples of workers in the secondary market were the unskilled textile workers, labourers, domestic servants, seamstresses, dressmakers, office messengers, laundry workers, waitresses, janitors, coal heavers, freight handlers, as well as agricultural labourers who lived in Saskatoon and its vicinity.¹⁵ In most cases adult males and females held these positions, but it was not uncommon to find children under the age of fifteen working at such occupations.¹⁶

Of the approximately 2,000 women in the secondary market, most held domestic, service, or clerical jobs. There was a great demand for domestic labour, especially during the period from 1913 to 1919.¹⁷ Because of this demand, the Salvation Army assumed the responsibility of selecting qualified domestic labourers in Britain and placing them in Saskatoon and other middle-class Saskatchewan homes.¹⁸ Employment opportunities for women improved during the war years. As more and more men left for Europe, their jobs in banks, department stores, offices, factories, and shops became available. One of Saskatoon's largest department stores, for example, had 31 men leave to enlist and 29 women were hired immediately to replace them.¹⁹ Most male craft workers did not object to women taking jobs formerly held by unskilled males. They only became exclusionist when women attempted to enter the trades. The Trades and Labour Congress held such an attitude during World War I when it argued that "women should not be employed in industry until full investigation had proved that all available man power had been absorbed."²⁰ There were exceptions, however, such as in February 1911 when the Saskatoon Typographical Union (STU) Local 663 endorsed the suggestion of the Women's International Auxiliary of the International Typographical Union (ITU) that

¹³ The concept of a dual labour market is discussed in P. Phillips, "The Dual Labour Market in Manitoba: A Theoretical Investigation," *Munpower Issues in Manitoba. Report of the Manitoba Economic Development Advisory Board* (Winnipeg 1975), 68.

¹⁴ These few examples have been taken from the *Census of Canada 1921*, Table 3, 54-69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Sask. Dept. of Labour, I. General, 47. Child Labour, General Correspondence, M.J. McGarth, President STLC to A.G. McNabb, Minister of Education, 13 October 1911.

¹⁷ "Women and Domestic Work," *Turner's Weekly*, 2, 19 April 1919, 9.

¹⁸ Sask. Dept. of Labour, I. General 23. Orders-in-Council Minister of Agriculture to His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, 18 July 1913.

¹⁹ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 20 January 1917.

²⁰ PAC, Borden Papers, 54070, Minutes of Conference on Labour's Position on War Problems, 16-18 January 1918, cited in Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 323.

women be admitted to the union. The only proviso was that it had to be deemed constitutional and proper application procedures followed.²¹

III

PRACTICALLY ALL JOBS in Saskatoon were subject to seasonal unemployment and this affected workers in both the primary and secondary labour markets. The monthly reports of the *Labour Gazette* indicate that during the "wintry weather" little activity occurred in the building trades and, if there was any, only about 40 per cent of the skilled workers would be regularly employed. Similar conditions existed in factories and other types of companies which often laid off 25 per cent of their employees during the winter. The manager of a Saskatoon sash and door factory gave the following response to questions about this practice before the Mathers Commission:

Q. Is there any place where the men who find employment in the summer time only, can get employment in the winter time?

A. It is pretty hard, that is a big problem out here, there are so many industries in the West here busy in the summer time and nothing doing in the winter time.

Q. ... you have an acute unemployment problem in the winter time and no method of relieving it?

A. That is our trouble.²²

The perennial problem of unemployment became more severe in late 1913 and throughout 1914, when a cut in wheat prices combined with the national downturn in the business cycle and the international financial repercussions of World War I. Even large-scale farmers were unable to finance the construction of farm buildings, pay hired labourers their wages, or purchase new farm equipment or supplies from Saskatoon merchants. The war curtailed capital expenditure on a number of scheduled construction projects and factory expansions. Stores, railroad shops, and other businesses laid off employees.²³ First to go were the so-called enemy aliens, workers from Germany and Austria, who were virtually unemployable during the early war years. Adding to the problem were large numbers of unemployed agricultural labourers who drifted into Saskatoon. A Bureau of Labour report on unemployment pointed out that "Whilst unemployment generally is due to well defined economic causes such as abnormal credit or overproduction of certain commodities, [the real] problem now confronting the cities of the Province [is] the present system of

²¹ SAB, Saskatoon Typographical Union Local No. 663, Minutes, 4 February 1911.

²² Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V, 2, 1042-3.

²³ *Labour Gazette*, 15 (1914), 362.

immigration in time of business inactivity."²⁴ By the beginning of 1914, over 964 workers were registered as unemployed in Saskatoon.²⁵

Urban unemployment had become so great that the mayors from across Canada met with Prime Minister Borden in Ottawa in May 1915 to deal with the problem. Borden was more concerned with the war effort. He believed that his programme of volunteerism and enlistment would alleviate the problem and show Canada's commitment "to fight beyond the seas."²⁶ As a consequence Borden issued a call for the unemployed either to join the army or to go to England and assist in the manufacture of war munitions.²⁷ Some 328 skilled workers from Saskatoon heeded Borden's second suggestion and signed up for overseas employment. Only 29 passed the examining board's test, however; they left for Britain on 23 August 1915.²⁸ Other unemployed Saskatoon workers joined the "thousands of men" who, according to Gerald Friesen, "were pleased to accept a uniform and a rifle in exchange for a trip home and a brief exercise in educating the Germans in their proper place."²⁹

The unemployment problem improved slightly in 1916 when an additional 172 trade unionists enlisted, thus opening up a number of jobs in building repairs and in civic improvements.³⁰ The fear of unemployment and poverty, nevertheless, remained. Most realized that when the soldiers returned there would be an oversupply of workers and a poor selection of jobs. Thus the crisis of unemployment reappeared in late 1918 and 1919 and added to the growing labour unrest.³¹

IV

"POSSIBLY THE GREATEST source of discontent" between capital and labour, as J.D. Wallace of the typographical union pointed out to the Mathers Commis-

²⁴ SAB, MI Scott Papers IV, 105. Labour Laws and Legislation, 1907-16. T.M. Molloy Report on Unemployment, 13 May 1915, 46050-1.

²⁵ This figure is not very accurate, for it represents only those who registered and does not take into account "foreigners," women, children, and the large number of clerks, bookkeepers, and other white-collar workers who refused to register because of pride or fear of charity. See *Labour Gazette*, 15, 790, and Sask. Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1914*, 23.

²⁶ PAC, Borden Papers 40, no. 17702, cited in R.C. Brown and R. Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto 1974), 212.

²⁷ MI, Scott Papers IV, 105. Labour Laws and Legislation. T.M. Molloy, Report on *Proceedings of the Convention of Mayors Held in Ottawa in May 1915 in Connection with the Unemployment Problem*, 46074-6.

²⁸ Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1915*, 22.

²⁹ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 348.

³⁰ Canada, Dept. of Labour, *Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1916* (Ottawa 1917), 24.

³¹ SAB, M4 Martin Papers I, 100. Labour, 1916-1922 A.M. Eddy, Rec. Sec. of STLC to W. Martin, 1 April 1919, 29873.

sion, was "the high cost of living."³² Regardless of whether the worker was skilled or unskilled, organized or unorganized, all had a problem with the cost of living. Albert H. Provost, a member of the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council, tried to explain to the Mathers Commission the connection between the high cost of living and labour unrest:

I feel that one of the incentives to the unrest of labor is the high cost of living. . . . I believe in every working man being in a position to own his own building to live in and let us have inducement whereby he can do so. Every man should earn enough to keep his family and have something over to put away for a rainy day. We have to give him plenty of healthy outdoor exercise also, a man cannot afford to take his wife and family under the present method of transportation out to get fresh air and himself, it costs him a week's wages to take a little journey of eight or ten miles in the country and most men cannot do it and they have to sit around the house and all these things you see result in unrest. Of course it is commonly called profiteering, exploiting the working man. . . .³³

World War I, the profiteers, and the government were particularly responsible for the drastic increase in the cost of living. A worker who had spent \$6.59 per week for food in June 1914 was spending (for the same amount of groceries) \$6.79 in December 1914, \$7.29 in June 1915, \$8.29 in December 1915, \$9.42 in June 1916, and \$11.11 in December 1916.³⁴ This upward trend in prices also applied to clothing, fuel, rent, and other expenses (see table 5). Between 1908 and 1918, the amount spent on food increased by 84 per cent while clothing increased by 38 per cent, fuel by 73 per cent, rent by 61 per cent and other miscellaneous items by 60 per cent. Most workers attributed these high prices to the greed of war profiteers who were taking advantage of the economic situation. An article in *Turner's Weekly* summarized the impact of price increases on the worker's stationary wages:

Consider the position of the workingman. He goes to work on Monday morning and finds that since he quit work and drew his pay on Saturday night, the price of tobacco, flour, bread, clothes and a few other luxuries he was thinking of investing in, have advanced considerably in price. When he gets to the job on which he is engaged, it is rarely that he finds that his employer, owing to the advance in price of a great many of the necessities of life, has increased his workers' wage correspondingly. Something like this may happen at odd times, but in the main the worker finds that his wages remain stationary and they continue to remain so, until some emphatic demand in the form of a strike or a threatened strike is made.³⁵

The lack of adequate housing was another common source of discontent among the workers. Between 1906 and 1913 the building boom was unable to keep up with demand, nevertheless, some workers were able to either purchase or rent houses in the city centre, near their place of work. On any given street one could thus find members of the working class living beside members of the

³² Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V, 2, 1083.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1105 and 1112.

³⁴ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 20 January 1917, 2.

³⁵ "Prices of Food and Everything," *Turner's Weekly*, 3, 5 October 1918, 4.

TABLE 5
Yearly Expenditures Showing the Cost of Living of an Average Family
of Five in Saskatchewan, 1908-18

Items	1908-10	1913	1918
Food:			
Meat and fish	\$ 85.52(*)	\$ 109.10(*)	\$ 100.30(*)
Dairy Produce, etc.	170.47	178.19	278.26
Cereals, bread, etc.	50.70	49.33	96.18
Vegetables	23.72	22.26	48.11
Fruit	21.65	22.26	43.49
Sugar, etc.	18.95	20.00	33.85
Tea, etc.	16.56	15.84	22.01
Condiments, etc.	2.00	2.61	7.08
All	<u>389.56</u>	<u>420.32</u>	<u>719.28</u>
Clothing:			
Man	\$ 52.85	\$ 55.83	\$ 99.34
Woman	54.18	58.52	104.28
Boy	28.07	30.97	56.03
Girl	29.18	31.95	57.70
Child	20.89	23.78	39.77
All	<u>185.17</u>	<u>201.10</u>	<u>357.12</u>
Fuel and light	\$ 93.08	\$ 97.76	\$ 161.72
Rent	\$144.00	\$ 198.84	\$ 231.84
Misc. Expenditure:			
Furnishings	\$ 31.33	\$ 35.29	\$ 67.39
Household sundries	11.59	13.10	24.27
Carfare, etc.	25.00	25.00	30.00
Doctor, dentist, etc.	35.00	40.00	65.00
Insurance, etc.	40.00	40.00	40.00
Charity, church, etc.	20.00	20.00	30.00
Newspapers, etc.	10.00	10.00	20.00
Sundry	15.26	17.09	25.47
All	<u>188.18</u>	<u>200.48</u>	<u>302.13</u>
Total	999.99*	1,118.50*	1,772.09*

The table indicates the prices based on an estimated consumption pattern.

* The mathematical errors in the totals have been corrected.

Source: Sask. Dept. of Labour. I. General. 132. Cost-of-Living General. Yearly Expenditures showing the cost of living of an average family in Saskatchewan.

TABLE 6
Number of Disputes in Saskatchewan, 1906-19

Year	No. of disputes	No of workers affected	Time losses in working days
1906	1 (?)	40 (?)	400 (?)
1907	1	60	360
1908	1	200	800
1909	1	162	486
1910	4	297	10,662
1911	—	—	—
1912	16	1,930	11,116
1913	5	243	3,569
1914	2	78	78 (?)
1915	2	88	1,728 (?)
1916	6	441	1,875
1917	5	200	1,130
1918	9	1,015	8,381
1919	9	2,041	46,524

(?) Because of the inconsistent and unreliable reporting of disputes in Saskatchewan, I have had to make a number of estimated calculations.

Source: Sessional Paper No. 36 A. 1917. Canada. Dept. of Labour *Report 1916* (Ottawa: King's Printer 1916), 88; Bureau of Labour, *Annual Reports 1911-20: Labour Gazette*, 17, 121; 18, 101; 19, 280; 20, 271.

middle class.³⁶ But as land prices skyrocketed and builders started demanding profit margins of at least 15 to 25 per cent on each house in the city centre, rent and mortgage payments which had ranged from \$30 to \$50 jumped to \$75 to \$100. The increased costs forced workers and their families to move to Mayfair in the northwest corner, Riversdale in the southwest corner, and Sutherland, a railway town a few miles southeast of the city, where monthly payments ranged between \$10.00 and \$40.00. One commentator in the *Star Phoenix* reported that

the average man who comes out here to try his luck cannot afford to buy a house, or rent one for \$30 to \$50 a month, which he would have to pay if he wanted a modern house, so consequently he has to go further out, where there are no sidewalks and sewer and water, and take a shack or a small house, which he can rent at anywhere from \$10 to \$25 a month.³⁷

³⁶ For example, on "Fourth Ave." between 22nd Street and 23rd Street, *Henderson's Saskatoon City Directory 1908* lists butchers, teamsters, labourers, and carpenters living beside accountants, clerks, engineers, and the chief of police.

³⁷ *Star-Phoenix*, 1 October 1913.

These working-class districts were often overcrowded and had substandard housing accommodations. The medical health officer found the unskilled immigrant labourers and their families herded into ill-ventilated shacks living on inadequate diets of dry bread, water, and raw turnip because they had insufficient funds to get better food and lodgings. It was not uncommon to find five families sharing an eight-room house with one stove.³⁸

Even if a worker was able to find a suitable house with good sanitary conditions, there was still the problem of meeting mortgage payments. In some cases houses (which measured 560 sq. ft. and contained a parlour, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and a basement) valued at \$2,000 sold for \$250 down and \$20 a month for eight years at 6 per cent interest. Most craft workers could afford such housing in good times, but unemployed workers had great difficulty meeting mortgage payments.³⁹ In a word, then, the complaints about high food prices, of blatant profiteering, of inadequate housing, as well as of inflationary rents and mortgages created genuine working-class discontent. It was complaints such as these that "united all workers in ways that the more limited workplace battles sometimes failed to" and thus gave a class response.⁴⁰

V

THE CLASS RESPONSE was both economic and political. In terms of the economic response the workers understood the "rules of the game" as it pertained to the buying and selling of labour power within the political economy of capitalism.⁴¹ This political economy or labour relations system was based on two major pieces of labour legislation: the Trade Union Act (1872), which rescued trade unionists from the common law doctrine of criminal conspiracy and the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (1907), which curbed strikes and lockouts in so-called public utilities.⁴² This legislation gave no protection to workers to organize into unions of their own choosing and employers were not forced to recognize unions or engage in collective bargaining. Workers like J.D. Wallace of the typographical union complained to the Mathers Commission about the lack of legislation which would "make it legal for a man to have

³⁸ Sask. Bureau of Public Health, *Annual Reports 1910-1916*.

³⁹ MI. Scott Papers IV. 105. Labour Laws and Legislation. G. Ford to W. Scott, 20 October 1914, 46012.

⁴⁰ See G.S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 16-7.

⁴¹ For an excellent discussion about workers learning the rules of the game, see E.J. Hobsbawm, "Custom, Wages and Work-load in Nineteenth-Century Industry," in *Labouring Men* (London 1974), 344-70.

⁴² A detailed discussion of the development of the industrial relations system under Mackenzie King's guidance and influence and the role of the state in the mediation of class relationships is contained in P. Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980).

protection to form a union."⁴³ The Saskatchewan Masters and Servants Act (1909), however, was one piece of legislation which was concerned with the employment contract obligation between the worker and the employer. The act allowed an employer to have an employee convicted if that employee failed "to perform his just duties or to obey the lawful commands of his master. . . ." And the worker could have the employer fined for "nonpayment of wages (not exceeding the sum of \$100), ill usage or improper dismissal. . . ."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, until the passage of the Trade Union Act in 1944, there was little in the way of industrial relations legislation in Saskatchewan.⁴⁵

Saskatoon workers, especially the skilled in railways, printing, and construction, naturally turned to trade unionism as a means to combat the political economy of capitalism. The actual initiative for organizing the Saskatchewan workers, however, came from the Manitoba executive of the Trades and Labour Congress in 1906. The congress provided the funds while the Winnipeg council selected an organizing committee consisting of W.R. Trotter of the ITU, W.H. Reeve of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, A. Smith of the Bricklayers' and Masons' International Union, and W.N. Goodwin of the Brotherhood of Painters, Paperhangers and Decorators of America. However, the organizing committee, according to W.J.C. Cherwinski, did not bother itself with Saskatoon because "it had only half as many people as Regina and Moose Jaw" in 1906.⁴⁶ For this reason the organization of unions in Saskatoon during the early years was carried out on a piecemeal basis by individual AFL representatives. Owing to the high concentration of railway workers, the first union organized in Saskatoon was the International Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees in April 1903 with a membership of one hundred. The printers followed next, with the formation of Local 663 of the Saskatoon Typographical Union on 22 June 1906. The union organized the printers at the *Phoenix* and the *Capital* and negotiated the eight-hour day and an equitable wage scale.⁴⁷ In 1907 *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm* pointed out that there appeared to be "no reason why strong unions of carpenters, plumbers, and tinsmiths, painters, retail clerks, and numerous other trades should not be formed here."⁴⁸ Most of the organizing occurred during the boom period of 1908-11 with seventeen unions established then.⁴⁹ It seems that E.J.

⁴³ Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V. 2, 1084.

⁴⁴ Chap. 149, *Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan 1909* (Regina 1909), 2040-1.

⁴⁵ The only legislation that had any connection to industrial relations was the Factory Act (1909), the Fair Wage Act (1909), and the Mechanics' Lien Act (1907). These acts were mainly concerned with the protection of workers from accident or from the deprivation of just wages.

⁴⁶ See Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 16.

⁴⁷ SAB, Saskatoon Typographical Union Local No. 663, Minutes 2 February, 9 March 1907.

⁴⁸ *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 2, 31 May 1907, 14.

⁴⁹ The seventeen unions organized were as follows: in 1907, Amalgamated Society of

Hobsbawm's observation about "the correlation of labour movements with the trade cycle" applied to Saskatoon.⁵⁰ In January 1909 seven unions met to discuss the formation of a central labour body. At its first meeting on 15 February, the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council was established with W. Youhill of the STU becoming its first president. An organizing drive was immediately launched and by 1914 the STLC had expanded to 29 local unions with a membership of over 1,200.

The majority of these unions had not been involved in recognition or closed shop struggles. Rather, the method of organizing involved an education campaign whereby unorganized workers were told about the benefits of joining. For example, at a meeting of carpenters, J.A. Kinney, an organizer from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, explained that the union's objects were "to encourage an apprentice system and a higher standard of skill; to cultivate feelings of friendship among the men of the craft; to improve the trade generally and to furnish aid in cases of sickness, permanent disability or death."⁵¹ The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters (the only British-based union in Saskatoon) argued that the entire trade union movement operated on the basis of trying to achieve "better terms on the part of its members for the purchase of their particular kind of labour power." It claimed that "the reduction of working hours, the increase of wages, and the adoption of codes of working rules as instituted in many of our western cities has been the direct result of the trade union."⁵²

During the war years (1915-7), however, the number of unions dropped to 23 with a total average membership of 760. The major reason for the decline was the large number of trade unionists who enlisted; "some unions [gave] as many as 75 per cent of their membership in defence of the Empire."⁵³ As trade

Carpenters and Joiners, and Brotherhood of Locomotion Firemen and Enginemen No. 723; in 1908, Bricklayers and Masons, International Union No. 3, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America No. 1390, United Association of Plumbers and Steam Fitters of United States and Canada No. 264; in 1909, Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paper Hangers of America No. 227; in 1910, Journeymen Barbers' International Union No. 663, Cigar Makers' International Union of America No. 459, International Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees No. 114, Federation of Musicians No. 553, Operative Plasterers' International of United States and Canada No. 442, Brotherhood of Railroad Carmen of America No. 253; in 1911, Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers of America No. 589, International Association of Machinists No. 534, Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers International Alliance No. 308, Order of Railroad Conductors No. 595. See Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1913*, 41-2, and *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 3, 14 June 1907.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of this correlation, see E.J. Hobsbawm, "Economic Fluctuations and Some Social Movements since 1800," in *Labouring Men*, 126-57.

⁵¹ *The Daily Phoenix*, 17 August 1908, 6.

⁵² *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 3, 14 June 1907, 10.

⁵³ Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1915*, 29.

unionists returned from the war, the number of union members continued to increase until approximately 1,500 in 34 local unions was reached in 1919. In comparison to Regina, Saskatoon had 350 more organized workers at the time of the Winnipeg General Strike.

Despite employer opposition to union recognition and collective bargaining, unions had an astute understanding of the buying and selling of labour power during fluctuations in the business cycle. If the business cycle was in an upswing and if there was a great demand for labour, unions were in a relatively advantageous position for negotiating wage increases. In 1908 the STU, for instance, negotiated a new piece scale which increased the average weekly wage by \$1.00 to \$2.00, thus "securing \$18 per week for the floor men."⁵¹ In 1911 the building trades, including labourers, were able to negotiate an increase of 5¢ per hour. And, as a final example, the IBEW negotiated an increase of \$3.00 per week and a reduction of three hours per week for linemen.⁵² If, however, there was a downswing in the business cycle or if there was an oversupply of labour, workers often faced wage cuts or no wage increases. Labourers who had received a paltry 20¢ per hour in July 1913 experienced a cut of 5¢ per hour the following October.⁵³ In 1915, when general wage cuts were introduced, plumbers had their hourly wage reduced from 65¢ to 50¢, a 23 per cent cut.⁵⁴

There were, nevertheless, a few employers, according to J.D. Wallace of the typographical union, who gave official recognition to the union on a continual basis because "it [was] to their advantage to recognize the Union and deal only with union men."⁵⁵ Section 15 of the 1913 agreement between the Saskatoon Municipal Railway and the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electrical Railway Employees of America, Division Number 615, stated "That the Department recognises the Employees' Association and will not discriminate against any employee because of connection with the same and the Department prefers that all employees affected by this agreement should be Members of this Association in order that all grievances and questions be dealt with under one head."⁵⁶ Furthermore, the city commissioner, C.J. Yorath, explained that in negotiations with six public sector unions (street railway workers, electrical workers, firefighters, police, teachers, and civic employees) he usually met their bargaining committees each year to negotiate. Yorath also pointed out that each union had a grievance committee which he was

⁵¹ Saskatoon Typographical Union No. 663 Minutes, 7 May 1908.

⁵² *Labour Gazette*, 13 (1913), 1159.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 14 (1913), 34, and 14 (1913), 416.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15 (1915), 871.

⁵⁵ Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V, 2, 1083.

⁵⁶ City of Saskatoon, Carton 10, 1910-1914 City Clerk Correspondence File. Agreement Between the Saskatoon Municipal Railway . . . and the Amalgamated Association of Street & Electrical Railway Employees of America, Division No. 615.

TABLE 7
Strikes and Disputes in Saskatoon, 1906-19

Year	Trade	No. of firms involved	No. of employees involved	Dates of duration	Cause
1906	sewer workers	1	40	July 18-Aug. 1	wage increase and safety measures
1907	CNR round house labourers	1	60	June 25-26	paycheques withheld
1908		—	—	—	—
1909	civic labourers	1	150	July 3-Sept. 9	wage increase and safety conditions
1910	carpenters	1	20	Nov. 22-Dec. 10	wage cut
1911		—	—	—	—
1912	carpenters	34	325	May 1-4	wage increase
	painters	30	100	May 1-4	wage increase and union recognition
	plumbers and steamfitters	1	11	June 4-?	wage increase
	lathers	?	30	June 15-July 1	wage increase and working conditions
	plasterers	20	70	July 15-22	wage increase and hours of work
	labourers	1	250	Aug. 1-3	wage increase
	sheet metal workers	7	60	Sept. 3-13	wage increase
	electrical workers and linemen	?	120	Nov. 1-3	wage increase, hours of work and improved working conditions
1913	plumbers	23	105	June 2-July 5	wage increase and hours of work
1914	barbers	4	12	Feb. 16-24	wage cut
1915		—	—	—	—
1916	teamsters	2	40	Nov. 28-Dec. 4	wage cut
1917		—	—	—	—
1918	letter carriers	1	30	July 22-31	wage increase and grievances
	postal clerks	1	71	July 22-31	wage increase and grievances
	railway mail clerks	1	65	July 22-31	wage increase and grievances
	electrical workers	1	53	July 29-31	sympathy with government employees
	CNR employees	1	100	July 29-31	sympathy with government employees
1919	machinists, teamsters, labourers, civic workers, and the majority of trades, etc.	?	1,200-1,400	May 28-June 25	in sympathy with general strike at Winnipeg

Sources: Bureau of Labour, *Annual Reports, 1911-1919*; *Labour Gazette, 1906-19*; *Phoenix* and *Daily Star*; Sessional Paper No. 36, A, 1917. Canada. Dept. of Labour, *Report 1916* (Ottawa 1916), 88.

willing to meet whenever a grievance arose. If the committee was unsatisfied with his decision, it had the right to appeal to the city council.⁶⁰

If negotiations proved unsuccessful, unions were prepared to strike. Of the 61 strikes fought in Saskatchewan between 1906 and 1919, at least 21 were in Saskatoon (see tables 6 and 7). "The literature on industrial conflict," as Terry Copp has stated, "suggests that strikes are caused by a variety of factors which are an inherent part of the process of industrialization in a capitalist economy."⁶¹ Except for the 1918-9 sympathy displays, most strikes in Saskatoon, as in other cities, were concerned with wage increases or the prevention of wage cuts. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of each strike but it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of them in their historical context so that they can be seen as part of "the elementary class struggle of the proletariat."⁶²

Surprisingly, two of the first three disputes fought in Saskatoon involved unskilled workers rather than craft workers. The 40 labourers working for the sewer contractors, Whiteman and Peck, were well aware of the "rules of the game" when they struck on 18 July 1906 for a pay increase from \$2.00 to \$2.50 per day. They realized that if they did not get their pay increase they would be able to find employment elsewhere because of the high demand for labour. The contractors, of course, refused to comply with the wage demand because they believed that they could get unemployed labourers from Winnipeg for \$2.00 a day. When the contractors failed to get their labourers, the city decided to take over the work on 1 August and rehired the men at the new rates.⁶³

The second dispute of unskilled workers was more significant, for it involved the STLC in its first confrontation, and it marked the first time that the IDI Act was used in Saskatoon. The sewer workers had been interested in forming a union for some time before they finally contacted the STLC in early 1909 to see if they could be organized. The STLC immediately assisted them in organizing as the Saskatoon Federal Labour Union Local 12801. In June 1909 the union presented city council with their demands: a wage increase of 5¢ per hour, adequate cribbing on all excavations, proper sanitary arrangements for all employees, the payment of wages in cash on a weekly basis, and recognition of the union. Because the city refused to comply with the demands, the union applied for a board of conciliation under the IDI Act. The board first met on 13

⁶⁰ Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V. 2, 1093-4.

⁶¹ Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty*, 128.

⁶² According to Ernest Mandel, "The first stirrings of the class struggle of the wage-earners always centre on three demands: (1) The raising of wages, an immediate means of redistributing the social product between employers and workers in favour of the wage-earners. (2) The reduction of working hours without loss of pay, another direct means of altering the balance in favour of the workers. (3) Freedom to organise." *Introduction to Marxism* (London 1982), 77.

⁶³ *The Phoenix*, 18, 25 July, 1 August 1906.

August and held fifteen further meetings until it was finally realized that the differences over wages and union recognition were impossible to resolve.⁶⁴ An agreement, however, was finalized about the safety and sanitary regulations, the Workmen's Compensation Act and the payment of wages. In a word, then, unskilled workers and the fledgling STLC had a partial success in establishing the principles of unionism.

Except for the 22 November 1910 strike on the issue of a 5¢ per hour wage cut, which the carpenters' union won, the next major period in union militancy was the 1912 strike wave, prelude to the general unrest of 1918-9.⁶⁵ Between May and November, eight strikes were carried out in the building trades involving carpenters, painters, plumbers and steamfitters, lathers, plasterers, labourers, sheet metal workers, electrical workers, and telephone linemen. It is not certain if there was any political significance for having 325 building trades workers striking on 1 May, but in terms of the economic conditions (a boom period when the demand for labour was high) it was the ideal time to strike. During 1911 they had been able to negotiate improvements in wages and working conditions and expected the same in 1912. Consequently the major issues in all the strikes included wage increases of either 5¢ or 10¢ per hour, a reduction in the hours of work, an improvement in working conditions and, in the case of the painters, union recognition.⁶⁶ In all cases, save the plumbers and steamfitters strike, the workers were able to achieve their demands after very short strikes. The eleven plumbers and steamfitters in the employ of James Ballantyne and Company, however, resolved their dispute of 4 June 1912 by seeking employment in the other Saskatoon plumbing and heating shops which were paying higher union wage rates.

When the downturn in the business cycle came in 1913 and continued into the war years, workers seemed reluctant to engage in a strike if they could not negotiate a wage increase. Most of them seemed to be concerned with maintaining existing conditions. They only fought strikes when employers tried to take advantage of the situation by introducing wage cuts. As a consequence the plumbers' strike of 2 June 1913, the barbers' strike of 16 February 1914, and the teamsters' strike of 28 November 1916 were fought to prevent employers from implementing wage cuts. As part of their strategy, the 105 striking plumbers had countered the threat of a wage cut by demanding a wage increase of 16¢ per hour. Soon after the commencement of the dispute, some employers agreed to pay an increase of 5¢ per hour; it was not, however, until 5 July that a settlement was reached on the maintenance of existing wage rates. Twelve journeymen barbers in four shops went on strike when the employers tried to

⁶⁴ For a copy of the findings of the board of conciliation, see the *Labour Gazette*, 9 (1909), 455-9.

⁶⁵ A number of labour historians have argued that "The years 1912 and 1913 should be seen as a prelude to the 1917 to 1920 conflagration." See Kcaley, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," 16-7.

⁶⁶ See Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1912*, 32-4.

cut their wage agreement of \$18.00 a week plus 60 per cent of all earnings over \$30.00 a week to 60 per cent on all earnings. The strike lasted a week before the employers agreed to adhere to the previous agreement. Finally, the 40 teamsters employed by Western Distributors Ltd. and G.W.A. Potter struck when their employers tried to cut their wages from \$2.50 to \$2.25 per day. After a short strike the teamsters were able to return to work on 4 December 1916 at their old rate. All three cases were considered to be successful demonstrations of workers' power to stop capital's attempts to cut wages.⁶⁷

VI

THE SASKATOON GENERAL strikes of 1918-9 seem to mark a partial transition from the sectional economic strikes of the earlier period to what Gregory Kealey has described as the "international surge in class militancy which knew no national limits and few, if any, historical precedents."⁶⁸ These strikes emerged out of labour's political response to capitalism. The political response involved both lobbying tactics and the politics of dissent as expressed by labourism and socialism. "The turn to politics," as Craig Heron has argued, "was seldom a swing away from the industrial battleground, but rather an attempt to broaden and intensify the same conflict into a unified class initiative."⁶⁹

Lobbying tactics were used in four major issues: factory legislation, fair wage, minimum wage, and unemployment. Prior to 1909 there was no legislation to protect workers from the hazards of industry. Employers were quite prepared to operate their businesses even with dangerous or unsafe working conditions. In 1908-9, Saskatoon workers joined the province-wide protest to force the provincial government to take action to "safeguard the lives and limbs of the workers employed in the various industrial pursuits of the Province."⁷⁰ The Saskatchewan Factory Act, which came as a result of the protest, attempted to regulate the number of hours worked by women and children; to make provision for temperature-controlled rooms of not less than 60°F, a proper ventilation system, a clean supply of drinking water, and clean privies for both males and females; and to protect employees from the hazards of industry.⁷¹ The regulations were to be enforced by factory inspectors empow-

⁶⁷ *Labour Gazette*, 14 (1913), 90-1; 14 (1914), 1079; 16 (1916), 1842, and 17 (1917), 44.

⁶⁸ Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," 34.

⁶⁹ For an interesting analysis of this issue see C. Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (1984), 49.

⁷⁰ M.L. Scott Papers IV, 105. Labour Laws and Legislation, 1907-1916. T.M. Molloy, Sec. of Sask. TLC to W. Scott, 22 December 1908, 45826.

⁷¹ Factory was defined as any premise, building, workshop, structure, room, or place wherein both manual labour and steam, water, or mechanical power was used in the preparing, manufacturing, or finishing of any article, substance, material, fabric, or compound for the purpose of sale. Chap. 17, "An Act for the Protection of Persons Employed in Factories," *Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan 1909* (Regina 1909), 281-4.

ered under section 30 of the act to enter, inspect, inquire about, and examine factories which were not complying with the provisions of the act and to order the owner to make the necessary changes. If there was a violation, inspectors had to rely on the courts to inflict a fine, penalty, or other punishment on the employer. Unfortunately, most employers escaped inspection and those who did not could find enough loopholes in the act to avoid inspectors' orders. As a result the Regina and Saskatoon trades councils in 1910 pressured the government to institute "regular and periodical inspections of all places which may be classed as factories;" however, little changed in the operation of the act.⁷²

Labour also had problems with employers failing to comply with the Fair Wage Act which had been passed in 1909. Essentially the act established a minimum rate of wages to be paid to craft workers who were employed on government contracts. However, during a downturn in the business cycle or when there was an oversupply of workers, contractors often tried to pay less than the fair wage. As a consequence the Saskatoon TLC was involved in a number of these disputes, particularly incidents relating to construction of buildings at the fairgrounds during the summer of 1913. The STLC sent a letter of protest to the mayor when the city refused to include a fair wage clause in their contracts:

No mechanic Union or non-union, who has any respect for himself or his trade, will use tools for the beggarly wages offered, unless driven by starvation.

If there is such a thing as honor while dealing with working men, it is such times as these that it would be appreciated.

We who are left now are mostly married men and ratepayers; we have the Ghost of a lean winter looming up on the near horizon; we are not asking "charity" we desire just that small portion which rightfully belongs to us; That which we have fought for and may be forced to fight again — a pittance of what we produce.⁷³

Similar complaints and protests were carried out after 1914, even though the government accepted and endorsed the fair wage resolution of the Legislative Assembly of 7 January 1913. The resolution clearly stated that the government should take the necessary steps to apply and enforce its fair wage policy to all provincial works and undertakings. This meant that contractors had to post, in a conspicuous place, the schedule of wages of the workers employed, keep a record of payments made to workers, and apply for a schedule to the fair wage officer.⁷⁴ To ensure that these wages were paid in Canadian currency every seven days, the government passed, on 19 December 1913, an Act Respecting the Payment of Wages to Certain Employees.⁷⁵

⁷² MI, Scott Papers IV, Labour Laws and Legislation, 1907-1916. W. Scott to T. Molloy, 5 November 1910, 45945.

⁷³ City of Saskatoon, Carton 6. Special File, 1910-1913 STLC, 1913. C.E. Hulett, Sec. of STLC to Mayor and Council, 4 August 1913.

⁷⁴ Sask. Dept. of Labour, 1. General 23. Orders-in-Council Minister of Agriculture to His. Hon. the Lieutenant Governor, 10 February 1913.

⁷⁵ Chap. 40, *Statutes of the Province of Saskatchewan, 1913* (Regina 1914), 181-2.

Women workers were in a worse position than the men. In most cases women workers, except possibly public school teachers who received \$21.00 per week and nurses who earned \$25.00 per week, received wages which did not "enable them to live decently."⁷⁶ The clerks at Woolworth's store, for instance, started at \$5.00 per week, \$7.00 per week less than common labourers earned.⁷⁷ Garment factory workers had to produce at least two dozen overalls in order to earn \$2.00 a day. It is interesting to note that even the fastest woman, who was brought in from Winnipeg to provide instruction in the sewing of the garments, could make a top wage of only \$3.00 a day.⁷⁸ In 1914 the Saskatchewan trades councils pressured the Bureau of Labour to carry out an investigation of wages paid to women workers. It was discovered that store clerks, dressmakers and milliners, laundry workers, and waitresses had a hierarchical wage scale based on age: those younger than 16 received an average weekly wage of \$7.19, those 16 to 21 \$8.54, and those over 21 \$10.56.⁷⁹ These low wages remained in effect throughout the war years.⁸⁰

Organized labour and women workers had been pressuring the government for a number of years to establish minimum wage legislation. The government had refused to do so because of employers' lobbying efforts and because Saskatchewan, according to Premier Martin, had 72 per cent of its population connected to agriculture, not industry.⁸¹ Nevertheless, by January 1919 the government finally submitted to labour's pressure tactics and passed a minimum wage act. It created a minimum wage board consisting of five people, two of whom were women. This board had the authority "to ascertain and declare what wages are adequate to furnish the necessary cost of living to employees [and] to establish standards of minimum wages and of hours of employment for such employees. . . ."⁸² Surprisingly, a single wage was not selected, but rather a hierarchical wage scale based on classification and experience:

	Laundries and Factories	Stores or Shops	Mail Order Houses
1st 6 months	\$ 9.50 per week	\$ 9.50 per week	\$ 8.00 per week
2nd 6 months	11.00	11.00	10.00
3rd 6 months	12.50	13.00	12.00
After 18 months	14.00	15.00	14.00

The reason for the increments, according to the board, was to provide a period of apprenticeship for the women. The problem with this is that it artificially

⁷⁶ Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1914*, 19.

⁷⁷ *Star Phoenix*, 28 May 1914.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 18, 27 September 1913.

⁷⁹ Bureau of Labour, *Annual Report 1914*, 20.

⁸⁰ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 22 January 1919, 11.

⁸² "The Saskatchewan Minimum Wage Act, 1919," *Labour Gazette*, 19 (1919), 497.

extended the period until the maximum of the minimum wage schedule was reached.

Labour had an ongoing lobbying tactic against its worst problem — unemployment. In fact, the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council set up a permanent committee on unemployment, responsible for providing whatever moral and financial assistance it could to union members and for political lobbying. The committee flooded City Hall with letters demanding that local government proceed with improvements such as the building of a sewage disposal plant, sewer lines, and cement sidewalks. Members of the Painter, Paperhangers and Decorators Union pointed out that "property belonging to the City is in a disreputable condition, especially the City Hall, where . . . the wood inside and out is falling to pieces for want of paint and varnish."⁸³ In September 1914 the STLC also received the support of the Saskatchewan executive of the trades and labour council to petition the Scott government for financial assistance. Premier Scott replied that he hoped financial relief would not be needed because other work or the war crisis would reduce the number of unemployed.⁸⁴ Within a few months, however, it became apparent that the provincial government would have to provide aid to those cities which were experiencing the greatest difficulty in providing relief. The government finally agreed to make the following grants to the cities on the condition that they would be used to make loans (averaging \$11.00 per family/individual) to those unemployed workers who had collateral in the form of tools or a house: Regina, \$21,000; Moose Jaw, \$15,000; Swift Current, \$1,000; Saskatoon, \$18,000; Prince Albert, \$1,000; and North Battleford, \$1,000.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the money did nothing to solve the ongoing problem of unemployment.

VII

THE POLITICS OF THE Saskatoon working class was not confined to the Liberal and Tory parties, for it was influenced by the unique western Canadian radicalism of this period. This radicalism, as A.R. McCormack has argued, was made up of three strands: labourism, socialism, and syndicalism. Labourism was the dominant strand in Saskatoon, as well as the other prairie cities, because it was the political expression of the craft workers who were the best organized and most influential stratum of the working class. Labourism was a distinct ideology, the roots of which could be traced back to nineteenth-

⁸³ City of Saskatoon, Carton 17, M to Z, 1910-1916, Correspondence Files. 329. Petition of Painters, Paperhangers and Decorators Union 1915 to Mayor Harrison and Aldermen, 2 January 1915.

⁸⁴ MJ. Scott Papers IV, 105. Labour Laws and Legislation. W. Scott to Wm. McAllister, Vice Pres. Sask. Executive TLC, 16 September 1914, 46002.

⁸⁵ *Labour Gazette*, 15 (1915), 914-5, 1051.

century Radicalism.⁸⁶ The labourists were concerned with the immediate amelioration of social conditions under capitalism and believed this could be achieved by founding labour parties to challenge capitalist parties in elections. The call for an independent labour party had come as early as 1907. James D. Simson, a labour activist, had published an article in *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm* explaining the need for a labour party which would give direct representation to Saskatchewan workers who had no voice in municipal, provincial, or federal governments:

It is true that politicians of every party profess, especially when an election is imminent, a great regard for the workingman — and his vote. They give us pledges to the effect that they will do all they can to further our cause and protect our interest. But when the interests of Capital and Labor clash, as they are continually doing, the men who promised us their support in parliament in return for ours at the polls are apt to forget their promises in the heat of debate or the excitement of a division, and the workingman once more goes to the wall, to wait till the next election for more empty promises. . . .

What's the remedy? The only certain one to my mind is the formation of a Labor Party.⁸⁷

Simson also pointed out that Saskatchewan workers should follow the precedent set in Ontario where an Independent Labor Party had been formed as a branch of the Canadian Labor Party.

In late October 1908 a number of Saskatchewan TLC executive members and British workers met in Saskatoon to discuss the formation of a labour party modelled upon British lines. A few days later a labour party was organized with a 29-point platform which included a number of major reforms: an eight-hour day, government inspection of all industries, public ownership of all utilities, abolition of the senate, abolition of property qualifications for all public offices, proportional representation with grouped constituencies, direct legislation by the initiative and referendum, freedom of the press, nationalization of the banks, regularly scheduled general elections, and repeal of the Lemieux Act.⁸⁸ Upon the formation of the Saskatoon branch of the labour party and the other local independent labour parties, there was some discussion about which activities to pursue. It was decided that education through the labour press would be a viable means for politicizing workers about the evils of the capitalist system. In an editorial in *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm* it was argued that "In the battle of the trade union movement for a better standard of living and for the final emancipation of the working class — the labor press of every description is the best weapon of attack and the strongest wall of defence."⁸⁹

The Saskatoon branch of the Labor Party also made efforts to work with the

⁸⁶ A.R. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), see pp. 16-7, 77-97, 170-1.

⁸⁷ J.D. Simson, "An Independent Labor Party for Saskatchewan," *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 15, 20 September 1907, 3.

⁸⁸ A complete list of the platform is contained in *The Daily Phoenix*, 22 October 1908.

⁸⁹ *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 15, 20 September 1907, 3.

radical farmers movement and the People's Political Association because of their common interests. The association had been formed a few months earlier (in June 1908) at a convention held in Regina, which had brought together delegates from the Comrades of Equity, Producer's Union of Battleford District, Farmers' Political Association of Assiniboia, Canadian Society of Equity, and local independent labour parties. *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm* explained the need for the convention:

If ever [Marx's] cry of . . . "Workers of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains" was true, it is true now. The defeat of the labor movement in the past is but an incentive to renewed action now, and when farmers and workers of the cities have found common ground on which to unite for political welfare, the result is sure, and monopolists and exploiters may tremble, for their power is almost at an end.⁹⁰

The association formulated a sixteen-point platform which included the entire platform of the Comrades of Equity as well as a number of points from the Labor Party's platform. By combining the platforms, the principle of farmer-labour cooperation had been established in an organization, albeit a short-lived one.⁹¹

Municipal politics was another major arena of activity. Political action was more appropriate at the civic level because trade unionists and labourists could organize more effectively and maintain a sustained interest on issues which affected them both as residents and as workers. The degree of political involvement, however, varied from year to year depending upon the issues and the personalities in the STLC. An example of such an issue was the city's attempt in May 1914 to raise the street railway fare to 5¢. Workers were opposed to the fare increase because they relied on the streetcars for their only means of transportation to and from work. The STLC immediately launched a protest against the fare increase. The protest was quite effective: by the beginning of June the city had been forced not to increase the price of workers' streetcar tickets.⁹²

Saskatoon craft workers became particularly interested in civic politics when the pre-war depression struck. In the 1912 mayoralty election, they gave their support to Fred E. Harrison, who was not a trade unionist, because he had supported their demand for a fair wage clause in civic contracts. Labour's first candidate for city council ran in the Caswell Hill ward in 1913. Unfortunately, he was defeated as was the city's first reform candidate, newspaper reporter J.T. Hull, who had campaigned for a policy of open committee meetings, a minimum civic wage, and greater financial accountability. After an active campaign in 1914, labour was able to elect its first city councillor, H.J. Baillie, who was president of the International Association of Machinists local. The

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, 42, 22 May 1908, 1.

⁹¹ W.J.C. Cherwinski, "The Formative Years of the Trade Union Movement in Saskatchewan 1905-1920," (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1966), 155-6.

⁹² City of Saskatoon, Carton 14, L to Z, 1913-1915 Correspondence File, City Clerk to J.F. Down, Rec. Sec. STLC, 3 June 1914.

following year, Baillie entered the mayoralty race and lost by a mere 50 votes. His attempt in 1917 was a worse failure: he lost every ward by a four to one margin. The only bright spot occurred in the 1918 city council elections when R.J. Moore, secretary of the STU, was elected as the second labour representative to council.⁹³

Political action at the provincial and federal levels became extremely important during World War I. The impact the war had on domestic production and social relations and the conscription crisis of 1916-7 pulled the Saskatoon working class into the political radical movement. In fact, World War I, as Gregory Kealey has pointed out, provided "part of the cement for the nascent national working-class response."⁹⁴ The response was focused on the conscription crisis, even though John Herd Thompson has argued that the "anti-conscriptionists did not succeed in creating a working class based opposition to conscription within the West."⁹⁵

Conscription was introduced in two stages, despite the protests of labour. The first stage came in October 1916 when the National Service Board was created by an order-in-council to obtain a national registration of males so that an effective deployment of Canada's employment resources could be made in the appropriate war industries. Winnipeg's working-class newspaper, *The Voice*, issued a warning that registration, as a prelude to conscription, "would bring the worker to heel, depriving him of the right of collective bargaining and forcing him to accept whatever terms might be offered."⁹⁶ Labour councils across the country immediately launched their opposition to registration because it was feared that employers would use it to create an open-shop drive. The Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council supported the resolution of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council, which had called for a special TLC convention to consider the matter.⁹⁷ A demand was also made for the registration and conscription of wealth before labour. An important call came from the Regina TLC for the replacement of the Borden government by a labour body.⁹⁸ And finally the labour councils sent copies of anti-registration resolutions to all members of Parliament, especially Borden, Bennett, and Laurier.

These labour activities did little to stop the second stage which followed in May 1917 when the Military Service Act, which actually became law three months later, provided for conscription. The labour movement, however, split on its tactics in fighting conscription. The West seemed to be more in favour of

⁹³ See Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 256-8, and Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 190-2.

⁹⁴ Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," 15.

⁹⁵ John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto 1978), 117.

⁹⁶ *The Voice*, 29 December 1916, cited in Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 126.

⁹⁷ *Labour Organization in Canada Annual Report 1916*, 43.

⁹⁸ *Regina Post*, 4 January 1917.

a national general strike to force the government to conscript wealth before labour. The East, particularly at the TLC convention in September, was in favour of political action by organizing a National Labour Party, upon British lines. The TLC leadership argued that it was time "the workers of Canada should follow British precedent and organize a labour party upon such a basis that trade unionists, socialists, fabians, co-operators and farmers can unite. . . ."⁹⁹

Some skilled Saskatoon workers joined the other Canadian labourists in their attempts to get the Independent Labor Party elected in the December 1917 federal election. The ILP's election manifesto called for the "repeal of the Military Service Act, extension of the franchise to all adult citizens irrespective of sex, state care and increased benefits for soldiers and their dependents, and the abolition of the 'root cause of all wars; the capitalist system.'"¹⁰⁰ Walter Rollo of Hamilton had been elected as leader of the national ILP and was supported by 36 candidates from across Canada, including James Somerville of Moose Jaw, and James W. Casey of Saskatoon, a railway worker. Casey ran against James Wilson, the Unionist Party candidate, and unfortunately was defeated by almost 7,000 votes. The failure either to elect the ILP or to defeat conscription was a clear indication, according to *The Voice*, that the workers "had voted according to race and ignored the interests of economic class."¹⁰¹

There was an effort made by some Saskatoon workers to support the Labor Party in provincial politics. With the resignation of Walter Scott, Liberal premier of Saskatchewan, the so-called "romance between labour and the Liberals" had come to an end. In fact, early in 1917 a number of STLC affiliates "strongly censured" their president for holding a seat on the executive of the local Liberal Club.¹⁰² Furthermore, in the provincial general election held in June 1917 the STLC put its support behind its labour candidate, Alex M. Eddy, a machinist from the Sutherland railway shops, who had a political platform which called for compulsory education in English, a minimum wage, an eight-hour day, equal pay for equal work, public ownership of utilities, and proportional representation. Eddy, however, had a disappointing experience when he ran against P.M. MacKenzie, the Liberal candidate, and Donald McLean, the Conservative candidate. He came in third with only 10 per cent of the vote — less than one-half the STLC membership.¹⁰³ Although the 1917 federal and provincial elections proved to be failures for the labourists, other Saskatoon radicals and socialists continued to pursue their alternative political activities, particularly in the 1918-9 period.

⁹⁹ *Labour Organization in Canada Annual Report 1917*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour*, 136.

¹⁰¹ For a more detailed account of the election results, see Thompson, *The Harvests of War*, 141.

¹⁰² Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 245.

¹⁰³ For a listing of the provincial election results in the riding of Saskatoon, see SAB, *Saskatchewan Executive and Legislative Director 1905-1970* (Regina 1971), 140-1.

VIII

IT IS NOT CERTAIN how many Saskatoon workers followed the lead of other prairie radicals who were turning to socialism, militant direct action tactics, or those progressive political groups made up of farmers and returned soldiers. *Turner's Weekly*, for example, had a number of editorials and even a one-act play which argued for a party of farmers, labourers, and returned soldiers to rectify the injustices of the capitalist system.¹⁰¹ The various provincial United Farmers groups and the Nonpartisan League were part of the agrarian protest movement which supported labour's political demands. Socialists like J.H. Tripp, however, were more concerned with setting up branches of the Socialist Party of Canada in Saskatchewan. As early as 1907 he had argued in *Saskatchewan's Labor Realm* that there was

no subject of more vital importance . . . to the wage-earners than socialism as it is the only logical solution to the irrepressible struggle which is being constantly urged between Capital and Labor throughout the world. It strikes directly at the root of the evil, in as much as it stands for the abolition of wage-slavery. It does not waste time in fighting effects, but seeks to remove the cause.¹⁰²

Radicals such as Honoré J. Jaxon, "Riel's secretary," and Alberta's socialist leader C.M. O'Brien also gave addresses to Saskatoon workers on "the principles of scientific socialism." Despite the socialist addresses and the labour press, the SPC, as W.J.C. Cherwinski has pointed out, was all but extinct by the time it "rode trade union socialists out of the party for heresy in 1910-1911."¹⁰³

Socialist thought, nevertheless, survived and reappeared during the war. The terrible wartime conditions, low wages, high prices, conscription, the failure of union government, and the success of the Russian Revolution of 1917 started workers thinking about socialism. In fact, John McGrath, president of the plumbers' union, explained to the Mathers Commission that

There have been a few people for the last forty years who have been studying economic conditions and who are known as Socialists. Those men have been telling us things that the majority of trade unionists have regarded to a certain extent as bunk, but since this war has started and conscription was brought in . . . the workers were beginning to think that some of this bunk that the so-called Socialists were driving at them was not all bunk, the probabilities were that there was something of real truth in what they said, so they began to listen. . . .¹⁰⁴

Saskatoon workers were part of the western Canadian working class which was becoming educated about both the evils of capitalism, which the war enhanced, and the need for a new organization to carry on the class struggle.

The One Big Union movement seemed to become more acceptable to sup-

¹⁰¹ See *Turner's Weekly*, 2, 3, 18 January 1919, 7-9, and 3 May 1919, 6.

¹⁰² J.H. Tripp, "Socialism," *Saskatchewan Labor's Realm*, 1, 1, 31 May 1907, 10.

¹⁰³ Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 240.

¹⁰⁴ Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V, 2, 1059-60.

porters from both the labourist and socialist camps during the 1918-9 period because direct action was seen as an effective tactic not only in fights over "bread and butter" issues but also a viable form of political protest. Furthermore, at the international level, there was the success of the One Big Union movement in Australia, the shop steward and syndicalist movement in Britain, and the use of direct action in the Russian Revolution. Saskatoon workers realized the need to establish more powerful working-class organizations and tactics, because the sectional strike was no longer appropriate for dealing with their common problems. This certainly was the case in the strikes which broke out in Saskatoon in 1918 and 1919.

The Saskatoon postal strike, which began on 22 July 1918, was part of the nationwide dispute. The postal workers struck because the government refused to pay the previously approved wage increases and refused to allow a board of conciliation to investigate and resolve a number of grievances. According to Acting Prime Minister C.J. Doherty, the government was opposed to a board of conciliation because the IDI Act did not apply to its own employees and, since such a board was not responsible to Parliament, it could not set the wages of public sector workers. The 71 postal employees at the Saskatoon offices were joined by 30 letter carriers and 65 railway mail clerks who had also been denied wage increases.¹⁰⁸

Saskatoon labour immediately rallied in support of the strikers. The STLC held several meetings with representatives of the strikers to assure them they would have labour's total support. In a press release E. G. Jackson, president of the Electrical Workers' Union, stated that "We are heartily in sympathy with the postal employees and they can be assured that we will give our unqualified support."¹⁰⁹ In fact, the STLC was prepared to call for a general strike if it would help their fellow workers obtain their demands. The STLC reaffirmed its position on 29 July when it was learned that the local postmaster had been instructed by the deputy postmaster-general, to hire workers to move the mail. The press committee of the labour council told the *Saskatoon Daily Star* on 29 July that for everyone that scabs at the post office, "one union in Saskatoon will be called out on strike. It will only need twenty-two temporary men at the post office to completely tie up all industries in Saskatoon. . . ."¹¹⁰

The Saskatoon plan for a general strike was part of a nationwide plan. Unions across the country were preparing to walk out on schedule. The railway mail clerks in Calgary, Vancouver, Moose Jaw, and Winnipeg were scheduled to walk out at 4:00 PM on 29 July. The Saskatoon CNR, CPR, and GTP local unions were to follow the next day. They were to be followed by the electrical workers, teamsters, plumbers, painters, typographical workers, civic employees, carpenters, and others.

¹⁰⁸ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 26 July 1918, 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 July 1918.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1918.

A mass meeting was held on the night of 30 July 1918 to discuss the strike situation in Saskatoon. Representatives of the postal employees' union and the STLC outlined the grievances of the postal workers in addresses to a meeting attended by a number of civic officials and middle-class citizens. Despite some heated discussion, the meeting ended with the passage of the following resolution:

That this mass meeting of citizens reaffirm its sympathy with the post office employees demands for an independent conciliation Board to consider their grievances and urge upon the Government the necessity of withdrawing the temporary help at present employed in the Post Office as such help is not and will not be likely to relieve the chaotic conditions at present existing, and may if retained be the cause of further labor trouble.¹¹¹

It was to be a short-lived sympathy demonstration, for late that afternoon, the Winnipeg strike committee sent a message to the Saskatoon postal workers informing them that a satisfactory agreement had been reached and that everyone should return to work on the condition that there would be no discrimination against them. In addition, any scabs who had been employed were required to vacate the offices as the strikers returned.¹¹²

The postal strike had come to an end. Its significance for the Saskatoon workers was that it had contributed to the development of their class solidarity and class consciousness. This was the first time that they had stepped past the barriers of sectional interests. They knew what the working-class experience meant and what the response had to be.

Prior to the Winnipeg General Strike, there were three other issues which contributed to growing class consciousness and militancy among Saskatoon workers. The first issue involved J.H. Lewis, a railway mail clerk and a socialist. On 3 May 1918, under the War Measures Act, the federal government passed an order-in-council which had the effect of making a long list of radical literature illegal. On 24 February 1919, Lewis was arrested for having two of those publications in his possession — *The Melting Pot*, a monthly magazine, and a book entitled *War, What For?* Within 24 hours of his arrest by the RNWMP, he was convicted by two magistrates, fined \$2,000 and sentenced to three years in the Prince Albert penitentiary. According to one of the magistrates, it was a quick trial because they wanted "to capture other supposed offenders."¹¹³

Both organized and unorganized workers protested the state's actions by circulating a petition demanding a fair trial for Lewis by judge and jury. Within two days, 2,300 people had signed the petition. In addition, the STLC hired a lawyer, T.A. Lynd, to appeal the case before Justice H.Y. MacDonald in

¹¹¹ City of Saskatoon, Carton 26, P to Z, 1916-1919 Correspondence File 358. Strike-Postal Employees 1918. Minutes of mass meeting held at Old Daylight Theatre, 30 July 1918.

¹¹² *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 31 July 1918, 1.

¹¹³ See "The Lewis Case," *Turner's Weekly*, 2, 11, 15 March 1919, 7.

Regina. He succeeded in having the conviction quashed on the grounds that the single charge laid against Lewis was in error because it disclosed two separate offences. Lewis was subsequently released and labour had another victory to its credit.

The second issue was the government's attempt to dampen labour unrest in 1918 by passing four orders-in-council. PC 1743, issued on 11 July 1918, reestablished open-shop collective bargaining and the resolution of all disputes in accordance with the IDI Act. To ensure that prosecutions of violations of the IDI Act would be undertaken, PC 1832 was decreed on 19 July 1918. The government gave the Royal Northwest Mounted Police the responsibility of prosecuting these violations under PC 2299, which was implemented on 19 September 1918. A serious attack on labour came on 11 October 1918 with the passing of PC 2525, which took away the right to strike.¹¹⁴ Although these orders-in-council had been designed to remove the possibility of labour disputes, in fact they had the reverse effect and added to the growing industrial unrest and strikes across Canada, which increased from 222 in 1917 to 305 in 1918.

The third issue was the Western Canada Labour Convention held in Calgary on 16 March 1919. Its purpose was to have the western delegates draft a new programme which would change the ineffective conservative policy of the national TLC. This new programme was to be presented at the next TLC convention. The conference quickly took a much more radical stance, however, when the so-called "Reds" put forth resolutions in favour of polling all Canadian trade unionists on the question of secession from the AFL-TLC and the formation of a new organization based on industrial unionism. The proposed name of the new organization was the One Big Union (OBU).¹¹⁵

The Saskatoon delegates seemed interested in the idea. The president of the STLC, Walter Mills, claimed he was in favour of the OBU because a policy for united action in the political as well as the industrial field could now be achieved:

The greatest good that will come from the convention appears to me to be in the awakening that [it] is bound to bring to those men who are sliding along in a false security. The worker has been sleeping for some considerable time. He is only realising what is within his power. He is going to demand what he is entitled to.¹¹⁶

The conference was a clear indication that workers were moving towards mass labour organizations and general strikes in their confrontations with the ruling class.

In April 1919 the federal government appointed Chief Justice Mathers to head a royal commission to investigate the causes of industrial unrest in Can-

¹¹⁴ *Labour Gazette*, 18 (1918), 616-8, and 983-4.

¹¹⁵ The story of the One Big Union is contained in D.J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978).

¹¹⁶ "Opinions on the Labor Conference," *Turner's Weekly*, 2, 15, 12 April 1919, 13.

ada. The commission arrived in Saskatoon on 7 May. During its half-day hearings in the city it heard evidence from labour representatives who explained that a great deal of the labour unrest was a result of high unemployment rates, war profiteering, high prices, low wages, long hours of work, and employers' refusal to recognize unions and engage in collective bargaining. Miss Francis, a representative of the STLC, summarized the problem and the need to replace the political economy of capitalism, which was the common demand across the country:

... may it be said, that the comforts now enjoyed by the few, must be enjoyed by the many, and any government failing to grasp the present opportunity, unmistakably courts disaster, such as is spreading with remarkable rapidity ... evidence of which, no doubt, necessitated that appointment of this Commission.

Here the men and women join hands and I heartily concur with the views of the other representatives from the TLC who have or will express themselves here to-night in favour of an entire industrial reconstruction, substituting production for use versus profit.¹¹⁷

The president of the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council, W. Mills, was more forceful and critical of the commission by arguing that the only true remedy would come from the power of labour.

To my mind there is no use of approaching this Commission and pouring out distinctive criticism as to the condition of affairs between employer and employed, if there is not some remedy to be placed before the commission for their consideration.

I have read the report of the [1917 British] Whitley Commission [on industrial conciliation] and I must say I am grievously disappointed. ... What the Whitley Commission recommended is only what the workers have already got by their economic force, and I do not expect any real benefits here until we are strong enough to force our demands.¹¹⁸

Before the commission could issue its report, however, the growing unrest reached its peak with the Winnipeg General Strike.

The strike was a direct result of the metal trades' attempts to achieve union recognition, a shorter work week, and wage parity, and the building trades' efforts to increase wages. Over 22,000 Winnipeg workers answered the general strike call on 15 May. They closed down the city and were hopeful that this would be a quick and decisive fight. Within a week the Winnipeg strike committee had sent telegrams to trades and labour councils in other cities asking them to organize all workers into taking a sympathetic strike vote.

The STLC complied with the request and held a meeting on 22 May in the Trades Hall at which over 200 workers and representatives from 25 trade unions were in attendance. They voted unanimously in favour of a resolution which endorsed the Winnipeg General Strike and requested the various Saskatoon unions to take a strike vote. If the vote was successful, the strike was to commence at 12:00 noon on Tuesday, 27 May and continue "not only until the

¹¹⁷ Mathers Commission, Minutes of Evidence, V. 2, 1036-8.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1050.

Winnipeg dispute is settled, but also until all local labour demands have been acceded to."¹¹⁹ Seven workers from the floor were elected to form the central strike committee: H.J. Baillie, Charles Burnett, J.J. McGrath, W. Mills, Horace Nixon, A.M. Eddy, D. Campbell, and J.A. Pritchard.

The committee contacted all the labour organizations in the city informing them of the resolution. Another mass meeting was held on 26 May to discuss the resolution, hold and tabulate results of the votes, and determine the appropriate action to be taken. Of those casting a vote, 610 were in favour of a sympathetic strike while 127 were opposed.¹²⁰ Most of the opposition came from the ITU Local 663, a staunch advocate of Gomerism. The strike commenced on schedule the next day with the following unions going out: plumbers, railway carmen, CNR federated trades, carpenters, painters, postal employees, machinists, plasterers, Canadian express employees, Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, teamsters, and steam and operating engineers. Other organized and unorganized workers, including cooks, waiters, water delivery people, musicians, theatre operators, and stagehands were requested to stay at work in order not to have "too many people on the streets." The Saskatoon central strike committee operated in a manner similar to the Winnipeg committee when it came to the issuance of permit cards in order to allow certain businesses to stay open.¹²¹ Surprisingly, the first day of the strike was taken relatively calmly by most citizens.

It was not until postal and streetcar services ceased that the business owners "expressed their determination to wage the war to the finish."¹²² In fact they were prepared to back any government decision which would restore conditions to normal. The employers welcomed the federal government's announcement that it would open the post offices and railways with new employees if the strikers did not return to work. One of the government notices to the striking employees read: "You are hereby notified that you will be given until 10 AM Monday to report for duty, after which time you will be considered dismissed from the service and your places filled." In an act of defiance the strike committee replied: "We should worry" and called out more workers including warehouse workers, cooks, waiters, and labourers, thus increasing the number of strikers to somewhere between 1,200 and 1,400.¹²³

The committee also sent telegrams to Prime Minister Borden and Premier William Martin advocating the passage of legislation which would force employers to recognize unions and engage in collective bargaining. Borden wired back that the matter of collective bargaining was under the jurisdiction of

¹¹⁹ The entire resolution is printed in the *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 23 May 1919.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 May 1919.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 29 May 1919, 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 30 May 1919, 3.

¹²⁴ M4, Martin Papers I. 100. Labour, 1916-1922. Davis to Martin, 2 June 1919, 29884.

the provincial government.¹²⁵ Martin's reply was ambiguous; he stated that he was uncertain of the definition of collective bargaining, and even if he knew what it was, he was not sure how such legislation "would accomplish anything."¹²⁵ In other words, the government was not prepared to establish the principle of union recognition and collective bargaining as the unions had requested. It had already issued PC 1743 on 11 July 1918, which established the concept of open-shop collective bargaining.

Since the government was not willing to adhere to labour's demands, the Saskatoon strike continued into June. In fact, over 1,000 workers remained on strike until the Winnipeg General Strike itself was finally called off on 26 June, following the arrest and jailing of the Winnipeg strike leaders in an action which precipitated the bloody riot of 21 June. Most of the Saskatoon strikers were able to return to work without suffering too much discrimination.

The Winnipeg General Strike was a positive experience for the Saskatoon working class. It had helped them to develop solidarity and class consciousness with workers on a national and international basis. The strike was not seen to be merely an economic conflict. As H.J. Baillie, a member of the central strike committee, pointed out, the strike developed from a struggle "between employees and employers into a political contest. . . ."¹²⁶ Another member claimed that

the Winnipeg strike was . . . politics. The old line politicians have been trying for months, ever since it was proposed that the farmers, working men and returned soldiers get together, to break that alliance. They have been trying to split the farmers and labor, labor and the returned men, and even to split the ranks of labor itself. The OBU was their chance and they made it their slogan.¹²⁷

An average of 1,200 workers or approximately 12 per cent of the labour force had been on strike for a month. In proportion to Saskatoon's population, according to two historians of Saskatoon, this was "probably the strongest sympathy strike in the country."¹²⁸

This is not to imply that all Saskatoon workers had been turned into supporters, for the ITU Local 663 maintained the position "that it would have nothing whatever to do with the OBU movement . . . and would not countenance sympathetic strikes."¹²⁹ Others, nevertheless, had a different position. "I don't know what this One Big Union is," said one delegate to the Saskatoon Trades and Labour Council meeting of 9 July 1919.

I am not sure whether I would support it or not even if I did know what it is. I do know, however, that the internationals have never done a damned thing for labor in Canada, and I do know that the Dominion Trades Congress has never given us any assistance or encouragement. It has now appointed Brother Rigg for the express purpose of stamping

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, Martin to Central Strike Committee, Saskatoon, 2 June 1919, 29885.

¹²⁶ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 28 June 1919, 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 July 1919.

¹²⁸ Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 199.

¹²⁹ *Saskatoon Daily Star*, 10 July 1919.

out the OBU movement. . . . He is a man who is given power to use the funds which you and I subscribed, and he is using them to stamp out something that you and I might benefit by.

The One Big Union, as I say, may not be the best solution of the problem, but something has got to be done.¹³⁰

In the case of at least 200 workers, including Walter Mills, former president of the STLC, and H.J. Baillie and his local of the IAM, application for membership in the OBU had been made.¹³¹ By 1920, however, Bercuson argues that even though the OBU had considerable support among machinists and railway shop workers in places like Saskatoon, it still was not a threat to the AFL-TLC unions in any western city except Winnipeg.¹³²

IX

IN CONCLUSION, the nature of labour-capital relations in Saskatoon was based on class conflict, especially in the period 1912 to 1919. The Saskatoon working class, predominantly of British origin, struggled against prairie capitalists who attempted to control the labour market and the price of labour in their pursuit of profits in an agricultural economy. Class conflict was not restricted to the workplace, for it also involved the working-class community when it came to matters of unemployment, living conditions, high prices, and the tragedies of war which enhanced the evils of capitalism. The workers' common experiences helped shape their responses in both the economic and political arenas. The economic response involved an understanding of the rules of the game under the political economy of capitalism. Workers, especially the skilled, organized into trade unions and engaged in collective bargaining to improve their wages and conditions. If collective bargaining proved unsuccessful, workers had an astute understanding when to strike.

The Saskatoon working class played an important role in politics as well. Not only did they participate in lobbying tactics and parliamentary politics, but they were also part of the western Canadian radical movement, as expressed by labourism, socialism, and syndicalism. All three strands vied for the support of the working class during this period but it was in 1918-9 that all three tendencies merged into a common strategy of using mass organizations and the general strike to achieve workers' demands. These demands included a new vision of society which would not have production based on profit, but on use. In other words, certain parts of the Saskatoon working class seemed to be seeking the replacement of the political economy of capitalism with the political economy of labour. Unfortunately, the failure of the workers to join a socialist party meant that they had no organization to unite their political

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 31 October 1919, 10.

¹³² Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 159, 164.

struggle to achieve this objective. Even the One Big Union and a general strike could not do this. Consequently, the 1920s were to see the Saskatoon (and Saskatchewan) working class return to labourism to carry on a less radical struggle.

I would like to thank Stan Hanson, Don Kerr, Harley Dickinson, Bob Russell, Bryan Palmer, and Robin Wylie for providing many useful comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper.

dē reg'ye la'shen

(it works as badly as it looks!)

The federal government wants to deregulate our transportation system. They want to follow the United States' example and weaken rules that make Canada's transportation system one of the safest in the world.

All you have to do is look at the U.S. experience to see the dangers ahead.

Major U.S. airlines have reduced their maintenance spending at a time when their planes are aging and need more service. One major U.S. carrier alone is looking at \$9.5 million in fines for over 78,000 safety violations. In U.S. trucking the highway accident rate is rising. Equipment is kept on the road longer, is maintained less and carries heavier loads.

In Canada, we've already had problems with the transportation of dangerous goods by rail. Deregulation could make it worse.

Safe airways, **safe** roads, **safe** communities — they're worth preserving.

Let's not put them at risk.

GOOD RULES MAKE GOOD SENSE

☐ Yes, I would like a copy of your "good rules" alternative.

NAME

ADDRESS

. P.C.O.D.E

MAIL TO: POST TO: Good Rules Campaign
Canadian Labour Congress
2811 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 8A7

This ad placed by the Canadian Labour Congress in the interests of a fair and safe transportation system.

*In transportation...
good rules make good sense.*

