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Labour/Le Travailleur

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Volume 38, 1996

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt38art01

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)
1911-4842 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Kealey, G. S. & Patmore, G. (1996). Comparative Labour History: Austrailia and Canada. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *38*, 1–15.

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Comparative Labour History: Australia and Canada

Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore

THIS INTRODUCTION has several objectives. It defines comparative labour history and examines the various benefits and problems of research. It then looks at the comparative methods and examines how extensively labour historians have used a comparative perspective, especially in Australia and Canada. Finally, the paper concludes with discussion of the Australian-Canadian Labour History Project and a general structural overview of Canada and Australia.

Comparative Labour History: Definition, Benefits, and Problems

The meaning of comparative research is problematic. All research can be regarded as comparative. Researchers do not examine a question in isolation, since they implicitly or explicitly relate their findings to some form of theoretical construct or other social phenomena. More specifically comparative research has been defined as research dealing with the same question in two or more countries. Nations are the focus of research and provide the context for dealing with particular questions. While some proponents of comparative analysis have preferred the terms "macro-social units" or "social milieus," comparative labour history in this paper refers to comparison between two or more nation-states.[1]

There are problems with focusing on nation-states. Nation-states may assume homogeneity and mask regional, cultural, and ethnic differences. For example, there are tensions in Belgium between the Flemings and the Walloons that influence

[1]M. Bloch, "Toward a Comparative Theory of European Societies," in F.C. Lane and J.C. Riemersma, eds., *Enterprise and Secular Change: Readings in Economic History* (London 1953), 496; E. Oyen, "The Imperfection of Comparisons," in E. Oyen, ed., *Comparative Methodology: Theory and Practice in International Social Research* (London 1990), 3-4; C.R. Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley 1987), 3-8.

Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore, "Comparative Labour History: Australia and Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 38 (Fall 1996)/*Labour History*, 71 (November 1996), 1-15.

the shape of the labour movement and national politics. Nations are not static. Italy has only existed as a unified state since 1861. The recent experiences of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have indicated that nation-states can also disintegrate. The structure of capital, the labour force, and conflict may span national borders. For example, railway workers were mobile across the United States/Canadian border in the 19th century and the US railway brotherhoods became entrenched in the Canadian railways. There are also questions whether nation-states are still relevant given the growing globalization of the economy. Indeed Wallerstein and others have argued that you cannot isolate nation-states, since they form part of a broader single global economy, which is a source of social change.[2]

Despite these problems, there are some convenient reasons for using nation-states as the focus of comparative study. The world is divided into these administrative units, which provide statistical data and the focus of political activity. Oyen has argued that politicians and research councils give funding to comparative research that focuses on their nation-state.[3] For whatever reason there is still rather little comparative history written.

Comparative labour history has several benefits. As Burke argues comparisons are also "useful primarily because they enable us to see what is not there."[4] To understand why particular ideas or methods of action were not adopted by workers and trade unions, it is necessary to look at countries where they were. By isolating the factors that encouraged or inhibited certain actions by workers in different countries in each historical setting, it is possible to develop a more sophisticated conceptual framework. Comparative labour history stimulates hypotheses and also allows us to test ideas developed in the peculiar circumstances of one country.[5]

There are also important problems to be addressed in pursuing comparative analysis. It is not possible to make comparisons without reference to the cultural and political context of the countries studied. Concepts such as trade unionism and arbitration may have a very different significance across societies. Strike statistics may vary between countries because of different legal and bureaucratic definitions.

[2]P. McMichael, "Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective," *American Sociological Review*, 55 (1990), 385-90; G. Patmore, "Labour Relations in the NSW Railways before 1914: Some Canadian Comparisons," in G.S. Kealey and G. Patmore, eds., *Canadian and Australian Labour History. Towards a Comparative Perspective* (Brisbane 1990); C. Tilly, "Theories and Realities," in L.H. Haimson and C. Tilly, eds., *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions in an International Perspective* (Cambridge 1989), 7.

[3]Oyen, "The Imperfection of Comparisons," 2-3.

[4]P. Burke, *Sociology and History* (London 1980), 33.

[5]R. Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations. An Introduction to Cross-National Perspectives* (London 1985), 7; M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn, "Introduction," in M. van der Linden and J. Rojahn, eds., *The Formation of Labour Movements, 1870-1914. An International Perspective*, vol. 1 (Leiden 1990), xiv.

In some countries workers may pursue other forms of organized conflict such as demonstrations and "riots" to achieve the same objectives as a strike.[6]

Comparative method

There are a variety of comparative methods. Bonnell draws the distinction between the "analytical use of comparison" and the "illustrative use of comparison." In the former, the researcher compares equivalent units such as nation-states and searches for variables that explain similar or different patterns of variables. Any regularities noted may provide explanatory generalizations. The illustrative approach is where one evaluates a varying number of nation-states not in relation one to another but in relation to a basic theory that is applicable to all of them.[7]

One dimension is the "most similar" system approach versus the "most different" system approach. In the former, researchers look for countries with similar economic systems, political institutions, terminology, and heritage. It is argued that under these circumstances the researcher can control certain variables and have a greater chance of identifying differences.[8]

What is similar? Researchers have attempted to create typologies to establish similar features. Some typologies are based on the political system and the level of economic development. For instance, market-industrialized countries, communist countries, and developing third world countries. Of particular relevance to Australia and Canada are typologies based on the patterns of settlement. Countries as diverse as Argentina, Australia, Canada, and South Africa are classified either as "settler capitalism" or "regions of recent settlement." Some "similar" countries share a geographical position. The "bureaucratic-authoritarian" states of Latin America are lumped together despite differences.[9]

The "most different" approach involves tracing similar processes of change in cases that are as diverse as possible. The supporters of this approach argue that the "most similar" method does not eliminate a large number of rival interpretations and provides the researcher with no criteria for choosing the most suitable.

[6]Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations*, 15-6; Tilly, "Theories and Realities," 7.

[7]V.E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory, Concepts and Comparison in Historical Sociology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 164-5.

[8]D. Collier, "The Comparative Method: Two Decades of Change," in D.A. Rustow and K.P. Erickson, eds., *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives* (New York 1991), 16; R.J. Jackson, "Australian and Canadian Comparative Political Research," in M. Alexander and B. Galligan, eds., *Comparative Political Studies. Australia and Canada* (Melbourne 1992), 14.

[9]Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations*, 12-3; Collier, "The Comparative Method," 17; D. Denoon, *Settler Capitalism. The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (Oxford 1983); J.P. Fogarty, "The Comparative method and the nineteenth century regions of recent settlement," *Historical Studies*, 19 (1981), 412-29.

Researchers are forced to extract from the diversity a common set of explanatory variables.[10]

Another issue arising within the comparative method is how many countries do you compare. There are numerous arguments that favour selecting a small number of countries, which is known as the "small-N method." You can examine each country in detail and find subtle factors that explain similarities or differences. It also allows comparative historical analysis in which countries can be both compared and scrutinized over long periods. Further, the range of variation that a sample of countries can provide is more important than the number of countries.[11]

The "large-N" method involves the examination of a large number of countries. The emphasis is on finding generalities and the method involves statistical analysis. In attempting to demonstrate generality, however, diversity may become obscure. A preoccupation with distilling explanatory variables can eliminate the distinct identity of each nation-state.[12]

The final major issue in comparative method is the level of analysis. Do you focus on the national level — macro comparative labour history? Or do you focus on the industry, workplace, region, or community — micro comparative labour history? The problem with the macro approach is that results can be misleading because one or more industries dominate the economy. The industry effect is misinterpreted as the national effect; but, as Bean suggests, the problem may be overcome by examining both industry and national factors. Comparative studies of the same industry across several countries are helpful because they allow the researcher to assume that the technical and market factors are relatively constant and focus on broader political and social influences.[13]

Labour Historians and Comparative Labour History

Have labour historians made extensive use of the comparative method? This section will examine Australian and Canadian labour history through a review of *Labour History* and *Labour/Le Travail* respectively. It will also look at an international journal —*International Labor and Working Class History*. There will also be an examination of books and monographs.

In Australia, *Labour History* has published 453 articles between January 1962 and May 1995. Of these only three are comparative. Ian Bedford attempted in November 1967 to explain the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Australia through comparison with the US. In November 1989 Jennifer Crew tried to explain why the ratio between men and women's wages did not change significantly in

[10]Collier, "The Comparative Method," 16-7.

[11]Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations*, 13; Collier, "The Comparative Method," 7-8; C. Ragin, "New Directions in Comparative Research," in M.L. Kohn, ed., *Cross-National Research in Sociology* (Newbury Park 1989), 57-62.

[12]Ragin, "New Directions," 60-1.

[13]Bean, *Comparative Industrial Relations*, 13-5.

Australia during World War I by reference to the United Kingdom, where it did. Bruce Scates used both Australian and New Zealand evidence in November 1991 to highlight the importance of women's militancy in the 1890 Maritime Strike.[14]

Beyond *Labour History* there are examples of Australian labour historians undertaking comparative research. Since Lloyd Churchward's pioneering work in 1952 there has been an interest in explaining the IWW in Australia through comparison with the US. In 1979 Andrew Markus published a comparative study of Australia and California examining the treatment of the Chinese during the second half of the 19th century. He reinforced the argument that labour movement opposition to Chinese labour arose from economic competition rather than racism. In 1984 Brian Kennedy engaged in micro comparative labour history through a study of the mining towns of Johannesburg and Broken Hill between 1885 and 1925. Australian labour historians have also participated in a number of international conferences and projects of a comparative nature. Jill Roe compiled and edited a collection of case studies on unemployment during the Great Depression in Australia, the United Kingdom, the US, France, Germany, Sweden, and the USSR. There have also been two edited collections of essays which brought together Australian and New Zealand labour historians in one case and Australian and Japanese labour historians in another. In all these books, however, the comparative analysis was undertaken by the editors of the volume rather than the contributors. A conference of Australia and Canadian labour historians in 1988 faced similar problems. While over 30 papers were presented at the conference, only 2 drew direct comparisons. They examined railway labour and state intervention in industrial disputes.[15]

In Canada comparative labour history has also not been very popular. Of the 168 articles published in the first 35 issues of *Labour/Le Travail*, only 2 could be classified as comparative. Both relate to the research by Larry Peterson, who examined revolutionary industrial unionism in the origins of communist labour

[14]I. Bedford, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia," *Labour History*, 13 (1967), 40-6; J. Crew, "Women's Wages in Britain and Australia during the First World War," *Labour History*, 57 (1989), 27-43; B. Scates, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: the 1890 Maritime Strike in Australia and New Zealand," *Labour History*, 61 (1991), 70-87.
[15]L.G. Churchward, "The American Influence on the Australian Labour Movement," *Historical Studies*, 5 (1952), 258-77. See also Bedford, "The Industrial Workers of the World"; V. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Unionism in Australia. The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (Melbourne 1995), 27-31; F.Cain, *The Wobblies at War: A History of the IWW and the Great War in Australia* (Melbourne 1993), chs. 1, 11; E. Fry, ed., *Common Cause. Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History* (Wellington 1986); J. Hagan and A. Wells, eds., *Industrial Relations in Australia and Japan* (Sydney 1994); Kealey and Patmore, *Canadian and Australian Labour History*; Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities. Johannesburg and Broken Hill 1885-1925* (Melbourne 1984); A. Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California 1850-1901* (Sydney 1979); J. Roe, *Unemployment. Are there lessons from History?* (Sydney 1985).

unionism in several countries between 1910 and 1925. *Labour/Le Travail* has also published a small number of research reports/critiques relating to comparative research. Outside *Labour/Le Travail* there has been an interest in micro comparative labour history based on communities or regions. Carlos Schwantes explored labour and socialism in Washington and British Columbia. Robert Babcock has examined Portland, Maine and Saint John, New Brunswick, while Jeremy Mouat has studied mining communities in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Bruno Ramirez undertook an study of several regions of rural Québec and Italy and identified factors that encouraged or discouraged villagers to leave and search for work in North American industry. In addition to the Australian-Canadian conference in 1988, Canadian labour historians have also participated in a number of comparative projects. Examples include Dirk Hoeder's project on labour migration, D.C.M. Platt's on social policy in new white settler nations, and a joint conference of the Canadian and Welsh labour history societies.[16] More recently Paul Craven and Douglas Hay of York University in Toronto have begun an ambitious project on Master and Servant in Comparative Perspective throughout the British Empire.[17]

Outside Australia and Canada labour historians have also had difficulties developing a comparative perspective. Despite its international focus, *International Labor and Working Class History* has tended to focus on single nation rather than comparative research. Only 32 of the 235 articles, scholarly controversies, and

[16]R. Babcock, "Economic Development in Portland and Saint John, 1850-1914," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 9 (1979), 3-37; C. Bergquist, "Latin American Labour History in Comparative Perspective: Notes on the Insidiousness of Cultural Imperialism," *Labour/Le Travail*, 25 (1990), 189-98; C. Harzig and D. Hoeder, eds., *The Press of Labour. Migrants in Europe and North America, 1880's to 1930's* (Bremen 1985); D. Hopkin and G. Kealey, eds., *Class, Community and the Labour Movement in Wales and Canada, 1850-1930* (Aberystwyth 1989); D. Kettler, J. Struthers, and C. Huxley, "Unionization and Labour Regimes in Canada and the United States: Considerations for Comparative Research," *Labour/Le Travail*, 25 (1990), 161-87; J. Mouat, "The Miners of Broken Hill, Waihi and Rossland: A Comparative Investigation," *Australian-Canadian Studies*, 8 (1990), 47-74; L. Peterson, "Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike: The Origins of Communist Labour Unionism in Europe and North America," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 115-31; L. Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 41-66; D.C.M. Platt, ed., *Social Welfare, 1850-1950: Australia, Argentina, and Canada Compared* (London 1989); B. Ramirez, *On the Move. French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914* (Toronto 1991); C. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labour, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia* (Seattle 1979).

[17]See Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, "Master and Servant in England and the Empire: A Comparative Study," *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (1993), 175-84 and Paul Craven and Douglas Hay, "The Criminalization of 'Free' Labour: Master and Servant in Comparative Perspective," *Slavery and Abolition*, 15 (1994), 71-101.

review essays published in the first 46 issues of this journal have a comparative focus. A notable early example is the micro comparative labour history research of Yves Lequin and his colleagues in Lyons. Lequin focused on four working-class communities — three in France and one in Italy — from the first years of the 20th century until World War II. The research combined social geography, oral history, and quantitative analysis to answer the question why certain communities embraced communism. Subsequent authors have applied a comparative perspective to deal with issues such as worktime, protoindustrialization, and working-class education.[18]

There are other interesting examples of comparative labour history. James Cronin uses a comparative focus in his study of labour insurgency and class formation in Europe during the period from 1917 to 1920. He found that the preconditions of shifts in industrial structure and urban spatial arrangements, combined with the deprivations of the war, explain the labour unrest. Charles Bergquist in his comparative analysis of Chile, Argentina, Venezuela, and Colombia draws important links between workers in key export sectors, the potential for economic development, and the potential for labour organization and leftist politics. A interesting example of micro comparative labour history is McGuffie's study of management and labour in the British, French, German, and US metal industries between 1890 and 1914.[19]

While there have been several major international comparative labour history projects involving conferences undertaken in the last decade, the results have been disappointing. These projects have examined the development of trade unionism in Great Britain and Germany; strikes, wars, and revolutions; and strikes, social conflict, and World War I. However, as Cronin has noted, "the individual papers are typically of high quality but seldom venture beyond national boundaries."[20] This problem continued with the project organized by the International Institute of

[18]M. Cohen and M. Hanagan, "Work, School and Reform: A Comparison of Birmingham, England, and Pittsburgh, USA: 1900-1950," *International Labor and Working Class History (ILWCH)*, 40 (1991), 67-80; G. Cross, "Worktime between Haymarket and the Popular Front: An International Perspective," *ILWCH*, 30 (1986), 79-93; Y. Lequin, "Social Structures and Shared Beliefs: Four Worker Communities in the 'Second Industrialization'," *ILWCH*, 22 (1982), 1-17; J.H. Quataert, "A New View of Industrialization: 'Protoindustry' or the Role of Small-Scale, Labor-Intensive Manufacture in the Capitalist Environment," *ILWCH*, 33 (1988), 3-22.

[19]C. Bergquist, *Labor in Latin America: Comparative Essays on Chile, Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia* (Stanford 1986); J.E. Cronin, "Labour Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917-1920 in Europe," in J.E. Cronin and C. Sirianni, eds., *Work, Community and Power. The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900-1925* (Philadelphia 1983), 20-48; C. McGuffie, *Working in Metal. Management and Labour in the Metal Industries of Europe and the USA, 1890-1914* (London 1985).

[20]J.E. Cronin, "Neither Exceptional nor Peculiar. Towards the Comparative Study of Labour in Advanced Society," *International Review of Social History*, 38 (1993), 74.

Social History in Amsterdam on the formation of labour movements. The resulting 2-volume publication involved 27 scholars and covered 26 countries, the Czech workers' movement in the Hapsburg Empire, and the Jewish workers' movement in the Russian Empire. While the editors hoped that comparisons would stimulate hypotheses and proclaim the benefits of the "large-N" method, very few authors attempted systematic comparisons and remained firmly within their national boundaries. As a result, the reader was left to compare an unwieldy number of case studies.[21]

Why is comparative labour history not widespread? Beyond the logistical difficulties and cost of undertaking research in two or more countries, labour historians have tended to be preoccupied with the particular, unrepeatable, unique, and the local. For example, the writers of trade union or labour parties histories have been reluctant to draw upon overseas experience to increase the explanatory power of their research. The concern with the uniqueness of each labour movement has been reinforced by the implicitly comparative notions of "American exceptionalism" in the US, the "peculiarities of the English" in the United Kingdom, and "negative integration" in Germany.[22]

There has also been a concern that comparative analysis distorts historical research. Robin Gollan, a leading Australian labour historian, wrote in 1965 that "comparative studies can be very dangerous. Unwittingly one may distort what is being compared or contrasted in an effort to show what is similar or dissimilar."[23] In Canada the historically reductionist and sociologically simplistic work by US scholars such as Louis Hartz and Seymour Martin Lipset, popular in the 1960s, reinforced a disdain for comparative research.[24]

Comparing Australia and Canada

This volume of essays is the product of a collaborative project involving Australian and Canadian labour historians. We are the co-ordinators of the project and were motivated by the failure of the 1988 Australian-Canadian Comparative Labour History Conference to produce many comparative papers. With the exception of two papers, the papers in this volume are jointly written by teams consisting of Australian and Canadian labour historians. We selected the themes for the comparative projects on the basis of our combined, but admittedly limited, knowledge of each country's history and of the state of labour history in Canada and Australia. We also bear the responsibility for the choice of the participants.

[21]van der Linden and Rojahn, *The Formation of Labour Movements.*

[22]P. Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge 1992), 22-3; Cronin, "Neither Exceptional nor Peculiar," 58-63; G.S. Kealey and G. Patmore, "Introduction," in *Canadian and Australian Labour History*, 1-2.

[23]R. Gollan, "American Populism and Australian Utopianism," *Labour History*, 9 (1965), 15.

[24]Kealey and Patmore, "Introduction," 2.

Many of the topics we chose are obvious subjects for intense comparative study. The necessity to include the history of native peoples in both countries, for example, both pre- and post-conquest, was self-evident. Similarly, given the immense importance of immigration in the formation of the two societies, the topic could not be ignored. Other topics, however, arose from the desire to explore less immediately apparent areas of comparison such as popular culture. The inclusion of gender, the labour process, and the state developed to some extent from the strength and depth of the work in these areas that we knew was being done in both countries. The labour movement and labour in politics, the institutional bulwarks of labour history, demanded attention as two crucial components of our comparative construction. Finally, it struck us as highly likely that most of the papers on the other themes would have a heavily 20th-century focus and hence we felt that we should partially compensate for that by assigning the unenviable task of providing a paper on the 19th-century labour experience in the two countries.

The evident utility of the Australian-Canadian comparison is, of course, not the unique discovery of labour historians. At the turn of the century an array of social reform intellectuals travelled to Australasia to study what they perceived to be an important social experiment with an alternative labour relations system to that of North America.[25] In a similar fashion they would turn to Canada's modified version thereof in the following decades.[26] More recently, a broad range of social scientists, especially geographers and political scientists, have traversed some of this territory. Malcolm Alexander, Warwick Armstrong, Anthony Birch, Francis Castles, Richard Cullen, Phillip Ehrensaft, Roger Hayter, and Peter Wilde, to name only a few, have all made significant contributions to the comparative project.[27] Moreover there have been some historical attempts to come to grips with the comparative experience of the two countries, although these were generally framed in the discourse of comparing "white settler societies" or later through the lens of

[25]Among others see Russel Ward, trans. *Metin: Socialism without Doctrine* (Chippendale 1977); Nicholas Paine Gilman, *Methods of Industrial Peace* (Boston 1904); Victor S. Clark, *The Labor Movement in Australasia* (New York 1906); Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Newest England: Notes of a Democratic Traveller in New Zealand, with some Australian Comparisons* (New York 1900); and Henry Bourne Higgins, *A New Province for Law and Order* (London 1922).

[26]The literature on this subject is immense but one can profitably start with Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980).

[27]Malcolm Alexander, "Australia in the Capitalist World Economy," in Brian W. Head, ed., *State and Economy in Australia* (Melbourne 1983), 55-76 and M. Alexander and B. Galligan, eds., *Comparative Political Studies: Australia and Canada* (Melbourne 1992); Anthony H. Birch, *Nationalism and National Integration* (London 1989); Richard Cullen, *Federalism in Action: The Australian and Canadian Offshore Disputes* (Sydney 1990); Roger Hayter and Peter D. Wilde, *Industrial Transformation and Challenge in Australia and Canada* (Ottawa 1990).

"Dominion capitalism."[28] Similarly, our colleagues in literature have for a relatively long time taken such comparisons for granted. (Ironically, the early legitimization of the study of "colonial" literatures like Canadian and Australian lay in the curious formulation "commonwealth literature.")

In recent years the benefice, or perhaps self-interest — the choice is yours — of the Canadian government in promoting Canadian Studies internationally has significantly aided the process. The Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, its various exchange programmes, and its journal *Australian-Canadian Studies* have all helped to develop further study of each society in both countries and increasingly in overtly comparative ways. Indeed, we acknowledge with gratitude the support that this project has received from the Programme for International Research Linkages, administered by the International Council for Canadian Studies with funds provided by Canada's Department of External Affairs, and at an earlier stage of planning from the Australian Association for Canadian Studies through its speakers programme funded by the Canadian High Commission.

In comparing Australia and Canada one is immediately struck by the fact that the two countries are huge by world standards in area (almost 3 million and 3.8 million square miles respectively) but relatively tiny in terms of population (17.8 [1994] and 28.8 million [1993, est.] respectively). Not surprisingly, then, vast areas of each country remain either unsettled or quite sparsely settled. (Currently Australia has about 5.9 people per square mile and Canada 7.6.) Canada's population is spread thinly along the United States' border, while Australia's is almost totally on the east and south coasts in the semi-circle running from Brisbane to Adelaide. Both countries are highly urbanized (Australia at 86 per cent and Canada at 76 per cent respectively in 1981) with the three largest cities in Australia containing 47 per cent of the population and 28 per cent in Canada. The climates may be extraordinarily different yet in many other ways the analogies between the Canadian north and the Australian interior and north are striking as are those between the islands of Newfoundland and Tasmania.[29]

In political structure the countries also share numerous characteristics. As befits white settler colonies of the former British Empire, both countries' legal systems derive from common law, with the notable exception of Québec civil law. Similarly, both are parliamentary democracies with bicameral legislatures at the

[28]Examples include Denoon, *Settler Capitalism*; D.C.M. Platt and Guido di Tella, eds., *Argentina, Australia, and Canada: Studies in Comparative Development, 1870-1965* (London 1985); Platt, *Social Welfare*; Warwick Armstrong, "Thinking about 'Prime Movers': The Nature of Early Industrialization in Australia, Canada and Argentina, 1870-1930," *Australian-Canadian Studies*, 1 (1983), 57-69.

[29]Data in this section are derived from Wray Vamplew, ed., *Australian Historical Statistics* (Broadway 1987); F.H. Leacy, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2d ed. (Ottawa 1983); Rand McNally, *World Atlas Census Edition* (Chicago 1981).

national level, although unlike Australian states except Queensland, all Canadian provinces have unicameral legislatures.[30] Needless to say the Canadian senate, however, provides a useful comparative dimension in which to judge Australian Labor Party (ALP) complaints about the undemocratic nature of the Australian upper house. Canada has a simple, first-past-the-post electoral system unlike the rather more complex Australian system with its mixture of preferential and proportional representation. Both countries possess federal systems, but the Canadian provinces retain rather more power than the Australian states, more for historical reasons than because of constitutional design. Indeed one of the interesting findings of Alexander and Galligan's collection of essays comparing the politics of the two countries is that such differences in the evolution of the federal division of powers are owing to "some sense of nationalism and a commitment to distinctively national policy orientations which appear to be both stronger and more widely accepted in Australia than in Canada."[31] Of course, two of their other major observations have been amply demonstrated in the October 1993 Canadian federal election and the 1995 Québec referendum: namely that the Canadian party system is far more fluid than the Australian and that Québec nationalism "raises massive questions about the shape of future political developments in Canada."[32]

Indeed the historical presence of Québec in Canada undoubtedly provides the major difference in our "most similar system" comparative exercise. With its own language and culture, its national aspirations, its separatist Parti Québécois, restored to power in the September 1994 provincial election, and its Bloc Québécois, now the official opposition in Ottawa, Québec remains a crucial component of Canada which has no Australian analogue.

Québec nationalism is one serious threat to the ongoing existence of the Canadian state as we have known it for the past 125 years, but there are other equally significant tensions in the federal system which are simultaneously structural and significantly complicated by the strength and pervasiveness of regional identifications and grievances. Regionalism has deep historical roots in Canada with cyclical peaks of discontent with what in the east is referred to as "Upper Canada" and what in the west is referred to as "the east." In both uses it was Montréal, Ottawa, and Toronto that the regions were attacking, although Montréal is rather less of a player now. Eastern regional anger has focussed on perceptions of economic exploitation by the centre, which historically was shared by western agriculture's hatred for high tariff protection, which drove farmers' costs up. In recent years some western discontent, and the western-based Reform Party's 1993

[30]For a detailed discussion of these issues see Alexander and Galligan, *Comparative Political Studies*, especially Keith Jackson, "Bicameralism and Unicameralism in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand," 27-44.

[31]M. Alexander and B. Galligan, "Australian and Canadian Comparative Political Studies," in Alexander and Galligan, *Comparative Political Studies*, 9.

[32]Alexander and Galligan, "Australian and Canadian Comparative Political Studies," 9-10.

federal electoral success dramatically demonstrated this, is based on a general dissatisfaction with the direction of the nation and what some observers have claimed is a distinctively western vision of Canada at odds with the multicultural, bilingual, pluralist policies of the three old, so-called mainstream parties (Liberal, Progressive Conservative, New Democratic Party). Such sentiments were strongly expressed in the referendum rejection of the Charlottetown Accord despite its endorsement by all three major parties. (We hasten to add that the rejection of the Accord was national in scope, not the expression of any one region.) While there have been separatist movements in Western Australia, the importance of regionalism in Canadian history is another factor that appears to be at some variance with Australia's past.

Another difference of key significance is the propinquity of the United States to Canada. While the US obviously is also of great importance in Australian economic and political life, its menacing bulk has been and continues to be one of the formative influences on Canadian life in almost every realm. Indeed even in the area of national definition, a major Canadian obsession, Canada is most often differentiated, even by Canadians, simply as that part of North America which is not the United States. Or as the joke goes: Question — "What's the difference between Canadians and Americans? Answer — Canadians know there is one." While significant in all realms of Canadian life the American influence was, of course, crucial in the trade union movement because of the historical strength of the so-called "international" unions in Canada, which were in reality binational. This influence has waned from the 1960s on. Nevertheless, for the first 100 years of Canadian trade unionism, American craft unions, the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor, the IWW, and later the Congress of Industrial Organisations played crucial roles in determining the direction of the Canadian labour movement.

Other structural comparisons that seem pertinent must be considered over time. For example, given Canada's earlier settlement and relative proximity to the British Isles and Western Europe, historically the major sources of Australian and Canadian migrants, it is not surprising that its post-conquest population has always exceeded that of Australia. More interesting is the uneven relationship the populations have had from the mid-19th century until the present. At mid-century Australia possessed about 18 per cent of the population of Canada; but by 1861 this gap had closed to 36 per cent and 20 years later to 52 per cent. By 1891 Australia had a population two-thirds of Canada's and by 1901 this figure had risen to 70 per cent. Thereafter it began to fall to about 62 per cent through until the late 1940s when it reached 60 per cent. It fell again in the 1950s and 1960s holding at about 58-59 per cent and then rose marginally in the 1970s to reach 61 per cent in 1981 and about 62 per cent today.[33]

[33]Statistical sources are those cited in note 29.

It is worth noting that despite the significance of immigration to both societies they remain surprisingly dominated by the native-born throughout the 20th century with Australia ranging from 79 per cent in 1901 to 86 per cent in 1954 back down to 77 per cent in 1981. Comparable data for Canada shows 87, 85, and 84 per cent. Of the remaining population the non-British dominated in Australia in 1901 at 13 per cent to 8 per cent British, while in Canada this was reversed at 5 and 8 per cent respectively. By mid-century Australia possessed an equal number of British-born and other foreign born at 7 per cent each, whereas Canada had a slightly greater number of non-British at 8 and 7 per cent British. By 1981 these trends had reversed and Australia's non-native born population had become predominantly British-born at 18 per cent with 5 per cent other foreign, while Canada's 16 per cent was distributed 2 to 1 in favour of the non-British. In Canada the trend to ever-increasing non-British immigrants has continued since then.

Moving away from structural concerns into the terrain of agency leads us to some perhaps too obvious comments on comparative history. While Canada's post-European arrival history reaches much further back than Australia's, the extent of pre-19th-century development outside of Québec was quite limited. Nevertheless, the pre-British conquest existence of a feudal society and its ability after 1759 to maintain an ambiguous social and economic system, combining elements of feudalism and capitalism, has had significant historical importance.[34] While Canada certainly possessed nothing equivalent to the convict system, there were at least two areas of the country in which British imperial aims did not envision white settlement. Both Newfoundland and the vast array of lands held in the west and the north by the Hudson's Bay Company were viewed by imperial interests as industries rather than colonies. The former was simply a base from which to prosecute a fishery and the latter was simply a territory in which to operate an extensive fur trade. In both cases, settlement, development, and the evolution of self-government were slowed, perhaps in a fashion analogous to the Australian case.[35]

Australia and Canada also provide interesting comparative possibilities in terms of their relatively late industrialization with shared roots in import substitution and their similar state economic policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Canada's National Policy of protection, railroads, and immigration bears both striking similarities to Australia's new Commonwealth strategy of high tariffs, "White Australia," and arbitration. The last part, arbitration, simultaneously sug-

[34]On Québec society see Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto 1985) and Joanne Burgess, "Work, Family and Community: Montreal Leather Craftsmen, 1790-1831," PhD thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1987.

[35]The best recent work on the Newfoundland fishery is Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855* (Toronto 1995).

gests some of the most interesting differences as well.[36] Clearly, the nature of the class forces underlying the state strategies in both countries needs careful analysis. Here is where our comparative assessment of the role of the working class in each country may prove most helpful.

The most obvious measures of working-class strength would seem to indicate a stronger Australian movement. Australia has had far higher rates of union density and a vastly more successful labour political movement over the course of this century, although there would appear to be some convergence in both these measures in the 1980s and 1990s as Canadian density rates hold around 40 per cent and as the New Democratic Party (NDP), provincially at least, has enjoyed increased electoral success. (We shall avoid any temptation to predict the future here, although we note the disastrous results of the October 1993 federal election and 1995 Ontario election for the NDP and the 1996 national defeat of the ALP.) The common failure of both Canadian and Australian labour/social democratic governments (if the ALP should even be considered social democratic and if the NDP should be considered labour) to cope with the current round of capitalist restructuring, however, demands some reconsideration of the entire formula by which such questions are answered.

Another similarity between Canada and Australian trade unionism is worth noting. Namely, roughly speaking in both countries the range of union density between states and between provinces is not significant unlike the American situation. To date, at least, there are no equivalents to "right-to-work" states in either Canada or Australia. Indeed the relatively less developed states and provinces, such as Tasmania and Newfoundland, actually have high union density rates because of the extent of organization in the resource sectors.[37]

Conclusion

Despite the problems of comparative analysis and the traditional reluctance to undertake this research, labour history has much to gain by continuing to develop a comparative focus. It requires experimenting with different research designs. Conferences and resulting publications that bring together many experts on individual labour movements without any explicit synthesis have so far been disappointing. Projects, such as the Australian-Canadian project, with its manageable "small-N approach" and ultimate aim of papers written jointly by experts from different countries, will hopefully have a greater effect in highlighting the benefits

[36]On Canada see Gordon Laxer, *Open for Business: The Roots of Foreign Ownership in Canada* (Toronto 1990) and his *Perspectives on Canadian Economic Development* (Toronto 1991); on Australia, see Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright, *No Paradise for Workers* (Melbourne 1988), esp. ch. 12, and R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 2d ed. (Melbourne 1992), esp. ch. 3.

[37]For comparative historical data see George Sayers Bain and Robert Price, *Profiles of Union Growth: A Comparative Statistical Portrait of Eight Countries* (Oxford 1980), 103-29.

of a comparative approach for labour historians. We also hope that this publication will increase our collective understanding of working-class development in both Australia and Canada and perhaps in general. The current climate of economic crisis and political confusion lends a certain urgency to the task before us as scholars of, and as participants in, the labour movements of our respective countries.