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Labour/Le Travail and Canadian Working-Class History: A View from Afar

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Article abstract

This article attempts to explain the similarities and parallels between Labour/Le Travail and its Australian equivalent, Labour History; as well as analysing Labour/Le Travail';s distinctive interests and concerns, which reflect the peculiarities of the Canadian. It suggests, in particular, that the timing of Labour/Le Travail's appearance was propitious and that it was well positioned for various reasons to take advantage of the Thompsonian moment in labour historiography. Further, by responding to the rise of the new social movements, it was able to enrich further the study of labour history through attention to forms of oppression other than class. With class nonetheless remaining its central focus, a degree of political pessimism is understandably evident from the mid-1980s onwards, with the downturn in labour movement activity and allegations about the death of class. By the same token, signs of working-class remobilization in the late 1990s have encouraged a renewed sense of political purpose in the journal. It is argued that this situation also offers opportunities for new forms of dialogue between academics and activists challenging corporate globalization, enabling the journal and those associated with it to continue to reach out to audiences beyond the academy, to place their knowledge of labour's past at the service of movements contesting the current circumstances of the working class.

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COMMENTARIES

LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL AT 50: VIEWS FROM AFAR

Labour/Le Travail and Canadian Working-Class History: A View from Afar

Verity Burgmann

THE PECULIARITIES OF ANY WORKING CLASS and labour movement not only mould the interests, strengths and weaknesses of that class and movement, but also of those who study them. Labour historians write labour history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing. It is unsurprising, then, that an Australian reader should immediately notice remarkable parallels between *Labour/Le Travail* (*L/LT*), and *Labour History* (*LH*), our Australian journal, which speak to the similarities and congruences between our two societies and the situations of those who have created the wealth of those societies; nor is it surprising that an antipodean should also detect distinctive interests and concerns, which reflect the peculiarities of the Canadian.

There are other factors at stake, too. In an academic journal, it is not just the class and the movement that inform the nature of the labour history produced, but developments within intellectual, political, and academic life. The class and the movement affect the content and general direction of labour history research and

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writing, but intellectual and political forces shape the approaches taken to this material and academic conditions greatly determine the opportunities available and the manner in which these opportunities can be seized.

Birth

It is in regard to these latter factors — the intellectual, the political, and the academic — that it is obvious to an Australian commentator that the moment of *L/LT*'s birth was most propitious. When I commented to a Canadian colleague of mine that *L/LT* was a good journal, she replied: "It always was." It always was, because timing is all important.

Conceived around 1973 and delivered in 1976, *L/LT* was born Thompsonian, in rhythm with the new historiography, aware that labour history had to become the social history of labour and that "theory is meant to inform historical inquiry and, in turn, to be informed by historical research."[1] Not just Thompson, but Eric Hobsbawm, Herbert Gutman and others effected the transformation of labour history in the period before and coinciding with the founding of *L/LT*.[2] Under such intellectual influences it was understood that the new labour history could never be another specialism like economic history because its subject matter could not be isolated; that it was an all-embracing kind of history writing informed by a model of how the different aspects of society were connected, which refused to separate the social and cultural from the material aspects of being, or the political ideas and consciousness of the working class from its living and material environment.

So *L/LT* was self-consciously "new labour history" from the outset. It expressed the newfound historiographical sensitivity towards the culture of the exploited, while standing upon a foundation of acute awareness of the importance of *material* culture, as Bryan Palmer noted in the first issue.[3] It started life with a theoretical bang, thanks to the interesting intellectual conjuncture at which it appeared. In its own strange way, "To the Dartmouth Station," which also appeared in the first volume of *L/LT*, attests to this significance of this conjuncture. This off-the-cuff satirical essay, constructed as a transcript of a tavern conversation in Halifax, where the journal was launched, opted for a mocking voice, in which one fictional commentator notes:

[1]Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montréal 1979), xii-iv, quoted in David J. Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 96.
[2]Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York 1976).
[3]Bryan D. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 7.

That old English commie, Thompson, has got more followers down here and up in Canada than he's got amongst the Limeys. Your basic Canadian labour history has got all foreign. Used to be real Canadian, just like the rest of Canadian history, it was all about leaders and institutions and politics, about trade union centres and all the backstabbing that went on in them. Now they keep talkin' about social history and somethin' they call 'working class culture'.[4]

In the words of Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian: "Workers must be studied 'in a totality:' almost every aspect of the life and work of workers must be included."[5] This totality did not exclude and never intended to exclude the study of unions and labour politics. Nor did it ever call for a history simply "written from the bottom up," since it always placed the relationship between classes at the centre of the story. The continuing interest in the more formal expressions of mobilization, such as industrial organizations and political parties, was supplemented now by an emphasis on working-class experience, conditions, culture, class consciousness, class conflict, class relationships in both their tangible and intangible forms, and the more traditional expressions of mobilization were subjected to new forms of scrutiny. This kind of focus is evident from the very first issue.[6] In its inclusivity, depth, and breadth the new labour history constituted a maximum programme for labour history; and in the Canadian case, Gregory S. Kealey deserves mentioning in

[4]John H.O'Rourke and Michael S.Cross, eds., "To the Dartmouth Station: A Worker's Eye View of Labour History," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 194.

[5]Introduction to Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto 1976), 7-8, quoted in Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass of Culture," 95.

[6]For example, articles such as: Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men," 5-31; Gregory S. Kealey, "'The Honest Workingman' and Workers' Control: The Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 32-68; Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Trade Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 92-121 (looking at the profound upheaval in the Toronto building trade industry 1896-1914 and its effects in terms of labour-mangement relations and working-class consciousness in a range of locations within that class in that industry, for "the building trades were not a homogeneous conglomeration of skills and conditions" [93]); and Paul Larocque, "Aperçu de la condition ouvriere a Quebec (1896-1914)," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 122-38 (on the conditions of working-class life in Québec and the social geography and living conditions of workers in Montréal in particular in the 1896-1914 period). David Bercuson argued in issue 7 that the new labour history was new more for the "how" rather than the "what": "restricted but intensive studies of workers in different places and at different times which will eventually form a new synthesis of Canadian social history." He cites Palmer's *A Culture in Conflict*, xii-iv, which describes the method as involving the use of "sharp detail of limited chronology or restricted region to illustrate the human dimensions of the past." Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass of Culture," 96.

dispatches for leading the charge, then guiding *L/LT* successfully through the next couple of decades.

L/LT also arrived bearing the birthmarks of the new social movements. This is apparent from the second issue onwards, in the journal's interest in the problems surrounding racial, ethnic and gendered divisions within the working class and its organizations. For instance, the second and third issues feature articles on: immigrant labour;[7] racial and ethnic tensions amongst silver miners;[8] working-class women in Montréal;[9] a Jewish revolutionary;[10] the French-Canadian community of Lowell;[11] 19th-century ritualized mechanisms of community control over the sexual activities and domestic relations of working people;[12] women workers and the 1907 Bell Telephone Strike;[13] and ethnicity and class in the Alberta beet sugar industry during the 1930s.[14] Subsequent issues also brought a gendered analysis to the study of the far left, such as Linda Kealey's article "Canadian socialism and the woman question 1900-1914"[15] and Joan Sangster's "The Communist Party and the woman question, 1922-1929."[16]

Interest in gender, ethnicity, and race had deepened even further by the time of *L/LT*'s tenth anniversary assessments of the state of labour and working-class history. The Editor's Note to issue 19 in Spring 1987 commented that the "general tenor" of these discussions "suggests that gender and ethnicity will receive ever-increasing attention in *L/LT* and that our theoretical and political discussion will sharpen."[17] Both predictions were realized, as the journal continued its publi-

[7]Stanley Scott, "A Profusion of Issues: Immigrant Labour, the World War, and the Cominco Strike of 1917," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 54-78.

[8]Doug Baldwin, "The Life of the Silver Miner in Northern Ontario," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 79-107.

[9]Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart, "Les travailleuses montréalaises entre les deux guerres," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 170-83.

[10]Irving Abella, "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 185-213.

[11]Frances H. Early, "Mobility Potential and the Quality of Life in Working-Class Lowell, Massachusetts: The French Canadians ca.1870," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 214-28.

[12]Bryan Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 5-62.

[13]Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 109-30.

[14]John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, "Workers, Growers and Monopolists: The 'Labour Problem' in the Alberta Beet Sugar Industry During the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 153-96.

[15]Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1983), 77-100

[16]Joan Sangster, "The Communist Party and the Woman Question, 1922-1929," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), 25-56.

[17]Editor's Note, *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (Spring 1987), 6.

cation of high-quality articles, invariably sensitive to such issues, if not explicitly aimed at examining them. The special issue on women and work in Fall 1989 was not planned but, as the Editor's Note explained, "grew organically from work submitted ... indicative of the quantity and quality of work being done in our area in the field of women's studies."[18] As Joan Sangster noted more than another decade later, in issue 46, "gender, ethnicity and race revitalized the study of class, stretching out its boundaries, in terms of sources, themes and interpretative possibility."[19]

It was not only the new social movements that made the 1970s a good moment politically; it was also a time of upturn in working-class activity, which invigorated and sustained labour studies. This was the period when Serge Mallett wrote in *The New Working Class* about a working class characterised not only by the best traditions of militancy but by the best innovations in values.[20] It was a time when there was a general expectation that the struggles of the new social movements would combine with working-class organizations and lead to significant social transformation. In the 1960s and 1970s, according to Kevin McDonald, "the importance of the labour movement to the new social movements was regarded as self-evident: they were engaged in similar social struggles that would converge in the practice of building socialism."[21]

As it turned out, these hopes were not realized. Instead, during the 1980s and 1990s new social movement theorists and activists became increasingly hostile towards the labour movement. However, after nearly two decades of neo-liberal reaction, working-class retreat, and the ebbing of new social movement radicalism, promises and hopes are present again, as we view evident signs of both remobilization and reunification of old and new social movements in the campaign against corporate globalization. The impact of these developments can be seen in the last few issues of the journal.

L/LT also appeared at a moment not only of radicalization of campuses, but of expansion in academic life and of increased access to higher eduation. The combination was powerful. As one of the characters in "To the Dartmouth Station" suggested of labour history at this point in time:

G.S. Five years since you coulda' read the whole lot over a couple of beers. Now those guys in the universities are pourin' it out so fast there'll soon be more books and articles than there are workers. I figure it's because some working class kids got into the university and they're interested in writing about their own history, their own families' history.... All that New Left

[18]Editor's Note, *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989), 6.
[19]Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present and Future," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 163.
[20]Serge Mallett, *The New Working Class* (Nottingham 1975).
[21]Kevin McDonald, "The unmaking of the labour movement," *Social Alternatives*, 6 (November 1987), 12.

trouble at the university helped start it too, when they found out the kids in Poli Sci 202 weren't all there was to the proletariat.[22]

From Autumn 1980, the journal's regular bibliographies on Canadian labour history reveal the extensive outpourings of books, theses, and articles. These compilations, ever-expanding, replaced and extended earlier bibliographic work of the Committee on Canadian Labour History that had appeared in the CCLH's *Newsletter* (1972-1975; 7 issues, edited by Andre Le Blanc) and in its *Bulletin* (1976-1979; 8 issues, edited by John Battye).[23]

By contrast, Australia's *Labour History* was launched in 1962. Not only were its early years spent in the shadow of the Cold War and its dire effects on political and academic life, for its first ten years it was barely affected by the Thompsonian historiographical revolution. Despite the 1963 publication of *The Making of the English Working Class*, it took a while for its impact to be felt for there was not a critical mass of labour historians informed by the new approaches and able to employ them; it was not until the 1970s that university expansion proceeded apace. Moreover, launched before the rise of the new social movements and the large-scale entry of women into academic life, *LH* before 1970 was both insufficiently critical of racism and decidedly "blokey." Admittedly, *L/LT* made that *faux pas* with "the implicit sexism"[24] of its original title, rescinded after Volume 12, but the contents of the first 12 volumes (at least after the first issue) contradicted the title. By contrast, *LH*'s first editorial referred to *LH's* interest in analyzing "the role of the labour movement and the men who made it" — and the contents fitted this statement.[25]

Labour History was therefore remade completely during the 1970s,[26] but a lingering image problem remained, due to the legacy of the old labour history re-

[22]G.S. continues by observing: "And, then, some of them are just tryin' to live with the fact they're fat and prosperous now. You get them university radicals to a meeting, they stand out like a sore thumb: they're the ones dressed like lumberjacks when the rest of us has got shirts and ties on. Looks to me like equal parts of lefty politics, nostalgia, and guilt." O'Rourke and Cross, "To the Dartmouth Station," 194.

[23]For full bibliographic detail on the contents of the *Newsletter* and *Bulletin* see Gregory S. Kealey, "An Index to the Publications of the Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1972-1981," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (1981-1982), 431-61.

[24]Editor's Notes, *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 5.

[25]R.A. Gollan, "Labour History," *Labour History*, 1 (January 1962), 3. Not until issue 8 was there an article that focussed on female participants in the labour movement and it was written by a man. It was issue 21, in November 1971, before there was an article written by a woman about working women. But then the deluge began.

[26]Its articles and editorials expressed the new mood very obviously and it even produced a special issue on Women at Work in 1975 and a special issue on Racism and the Working Class in 1978. The journal had strong links with the women's liberation movement in particular.

flected in the 1960s and early 1970s issues of the journal. It was an unfair and unwarranted image problem, given the dramatic changes undergone in *LH* by the mid-1970s, which rendered labour history considerably more sensitive to issues of gender, race, and ethnicity than other historians were to matters of class. Nonetheless this pre-history of labour history did exacerbate the problem encountered by labour history from the 1980s onwards: being outcompeted within academia by sub-disciplines such as women's history, Aboriginal history, the history of ethnic minorities and gay and lesbian history. The trendiness of these sub-disciplines and the relative decline in popularity of working-class history reflected the rise of the new social movements and these movements' increasingly critical stance towards the labour movement.[27] *LH's* situation was again rendered more problematic between 1983 and 1996 with the Labor Party in government federally. These periods of Labor in power seemed to confirm all the worst prejudices of new social movement theory, which had been articulated from the late 1970s onwards, about the working class's lack of transformative potential.[28]

Circumstances: Australian and Canadian

In its running statement of intent, *L/LT* describes its intellectual project as rectifying "an all too general Canadian ignorance" of the legacies of labour and redressing the fact that "Canadian history lacks a sufficient understanding of the lives of workers." By contrast, Australian labour history has had to operate in a society all too familiar with the Australian Labor Party as a dominant political force and aware of the trade union movement as an entrenched institution, protected until recently by the compulsory conciliation and arbitration system, and with record density by international standards for much of the 20th century. In Australia, too, popular cultural forms have repeatedly mythologized the rural worker but mythologized this worker beyond recognition. Australians think they know much about the legacies of labour, so labour historians "down under" have had to wrestle with the partial and distorted nature of widespread understandings of labour. A more iconoclastic approach to the familiar labourist mainstream was politically indicated for us.

[27]Verity Burgmann, "The Strange Death of Labour History," in *Bede Nairn and Labor History*, Labor History Essays, Volume Three (Sydney 1991), 69-81.

[28]For some of the classic statements of new social movement theorists in regard to the outmoded nature of the labour movement, see Alain Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society* (London 1974), 75-6, 9, 17, 61, 73, 11; Alain Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (Cambridge 1981), 13; Jürgen Habermas, "New Social Movements," *Telos*, 49 (Fall 1981), 33-5; Clause Offe, "Work: the Key Sociological Category?" in Claus Offe, *Disorganised Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, (Cambridge 1985) esp. 133-6, 141, 148; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism Without Apologies," *New Left Review*, 166 (November/December 1987), 103, 106; and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemoney and Social Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London 1985), esp. 183.

This contrasts with the Canadian situation, where there are many labour parties to rescue from "ill-deserved historical obscurity."[29] Accordingly, in *L/LT* there are many intriguing examinations of labourist mobilization, often all the more fascinating because the potential exceeded the reality. Craig Heron has noted that labourism is often the neglected child of the Canadian left, and "has languished in a dimly lit corner of Canadian intellectual inquiry." But then, "the flood of new research into individual working-class communities in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has brought to light the particular histories of several local Labour parties."[30] He details the contributions of articles published in *L/LT* in this respect.

This diversity of labourist and social democratic expression is absent in Australia, due to the early emergence and continuing dominance of the Australian Labor Party. With Labor forming government in the various states of Australia from 1899 onwards and federally from 1903 onwards, there are no intellectual imaginings, as in *L/LT*, of what might have been in terms of political representation of the more moderate aspirations of the working class. Instead, we Australian labour historians have seen the labourist future and often write about the ways in which it has not worked.

For example, in *LH* there is a welter of articles on instances of Labor government betrayal of the working class or of individual Labor politicians who joined the negative pantheon of "rats." Ratting takes two forms: outright desertion of the Labor Party for more conservative pastures; and betrayal of fundamental principles while remaining, formally, within the Labor political fold.[31] That an Australian word exists for the practice is pertinent; and our continuing historiographical interest in rats is testimony to the extent to which the political party formed by trade unionists to do their bidding has successfully inverted that relationship. By contrast, Michael Welton berates Canadian labour historians for reluctance to examine the specific failings of the social democratic imagination and political will — "social democracy's lack of courage and vision."[32]

The dominance of Labor in Australia also affected working-class organisations to its left. So, while both *L/LT* and *LH* are enamoured of the Industrial Workers of the World and the One Big Union (*OBU*) movement, there is a difference. Larry

[29]Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 75. In issue 5, Allen Mills' study of the Manitoba ILP refers to "the welter of competing post-war labour ... parties and organizations in Manitoba." Allen Mills, "Single Tax, Socialism and the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba: The Political Ideas of F.J. Dixon and S.J. Farmer', *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (1980), 56.

[30]Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," 45.

[31]Marilyn Lake, "John Earle and the Concept of the 'Labor Rat'," *Labour History*, 33 (November 1977), 29.

[32]Micheal R. Welton, "Conflicting Visions, Divergent Strategies: Watson Thomson and the Cold War Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-6," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 137.

Peterson argues that, "common to the political stance of all revolutionary industrial unionists was not hostility toward political parties as such. Rather, it was a position critical of the dominant wing of labour and social democratic parties before 1914...."[33] Australian labour historians could not write this, because the Australian IWW *was* hostile toward political parties as such. The Australian IWW stance was informed by the experience peculiar to Australasia of the duplicity of Labor governments, the role of the Labor Party in discouraging industrial militancy and of the way in which parliamentary politics generally drained energy and resources away from more effective forms of working-class action.[34]

Other similarities and differences between Canada and Australia have been summarised effectively by Gregory Kealey and Greg Patmore in the joint issue in Fall 1996.[35] Naturally, these similarities and differences are expressed in the articles in *L/LT*.

As settler societies, there was much back-breaking work to be done in both countries in the process of dispossessing the indigenous inhabitants and subduing the earth. Many *L/LT* articles attest to this process, though the industries are somewhat different: hence Canadian articles focus on class conflict and working conditions in canal building,[36] in the fur trade,[37] or in the fishing industry,[38] in temperatures and terrain Australian labour historians are unable to comprehend, as we churn out articles on shearers, stockmen and cane-cutters.

[33]Larry Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 52.

[34]Verity Burgmann, "Antipodean Peculiarities: Comparing the Australian IWW with the American," *Labor History*, 40, 3 (August 1999), 371-92.

[35]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.

[36]Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (Spring 1981), 9-39; and William N.T. Wylie, "Poverty, Distress, and Disease: Labour and the Construction of the Rideau Canal, 1826-1832," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (Spring 1983), 7-29.

[37]Robert C.H. Sweeney, "Understanding Work Historically: A reflection prompted by two recent studies of the fur trade," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1997), 243-52; and Carolyn Podruchny, "Unfair Masters and Rascally Servants? Labour Relations Among Bourgeois, Clerks and Voyageurs in the Montréal Fur Trade, 1780-1821," *Labour/Le Travail*, 43 (Spring 1999), 43-70.

[38]Sean Cadigan, "Battle Harbour in Transition: Merchants, Fishermen, and the State in the Struggle for Relief in a Labrador Community during the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (Fall 1990), 125-50; Miriam Wright, "Young Men and Technology: Government Attempts to Create a 'Modern' Fisheries Workforce in Newfoundland, 1949-1970," *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998), 143-60; Sean Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons: Ecology and Equity in the Newfoundland Cod Fishery, 1815-1855," *Labour/Le Travail*, 43 (Spring 1999), 9-42; and Charles R. Menzies, "Us and Them: The Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op and Organized Labour, 1931-1989," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 89-108.

Issues of immigration and ethnicity are as prominent in Australia's new labour historiography as in Canada's, but we have no equivalent to the French presence in Canada. Obviously, this affects not just the content of *L/LT* but also its form, an impressive endeavour that deserves commendation. However, there is relatively little in *L/LT*, compared with *LH*, on indigenous peoples and the labour movement. This might reflect a greater degree of disarticulation between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians' productive activities, compared with the situation in Australia. Labour was in much shorter supply in Australia given the relative remoteness from sources of European immigration, so Aboriginal labour was crucial in the development of Australian pastoral capitalism, which underpinned White Australian prosperity.[39] From the early 1970s onwards, encouraged by a significant upsurge in indigenous political activism, *LH* played an important role in revealing the importance of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry and exposing the complicity of labour movement organisations in the racial segmentation of this workforce until the mid-1960s, when the trade union movement finally embraced equal pay for Aboriginal workers. In 1978 a special issue of the journal canvassed such issues.[40]

Both *L/LT* and *LH* regularly examine and re-examine particular strikes. However, some strikes are more equal than others. Canadian labour historians, understandably, are fixated on Winnipeg 1919; Australian labour historians are almost as obsessed with the 1917 general strike in New South Wales. Likewise, both journals have regular articles on surveillance, police, and spies. Labour historians from both countries clearly consider it part of their responsibility to keep a retrospective watch on those who watch the working class and its organizations and activities.

The relationship with British imperialism is complicated in the Canadian case by the looming proximity of a far greater power and many *L/LT* articles speak to the influence of the American international unions and debate the consequences of their presence in Canada. Distance protected Australia from the same degree of interference, so the much more limited influence of British unions has never become quite such an historiographical issue.

There is a similar timing in the emergence of recent themes. For example, in *L/LT* Steven Maynard writes on the social construction of masculinity in working-class history in Spring 1989, three years after a similar investigation in *LH*.[41]

[39]Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner, "Strikes, Worker Protest and Union Growth in Canada and Australia, 1815-1900: A Comparative Analysis," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 190.

[40]Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus, eds., *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class* (Sydney 1978). Scholars closely associated with *Labour History* — notably Ann Curthoys, Andrew Markus, and Ann McGrath — have been at the forefront of research into the role of indigenous Australians in the workforce.

[41]Steven Maynard, "Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989), 159-69; and Marilyn

Nine years later in Fall 1998 the special issue on masculinities appears, with articles by Todd McCallum on the OBU and radical manhood; Deborah Stiles on masculinity and the north American sole leather tanning industry; Mike O'Brien on manhood and the militia myth; Miriam Wright on young men and technology in Newfoundland fisheries; Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta on work, women and protest in the Italian diaspora; Anne Forrest on the industrial relations significance of unpaid work; and Tatiana van Riemskijk on gender in antebellum politics and culture.[42] Issues of sexuality and homosexual liberation appear at similar moments in both journals. In *L/LT* in 1995 Franca Iacovetta noted that the history of sexuality had begun the important work of problematising heterosexuality but that Canadian gay/lesbian history was under-developed; in 1997 Carolyn Strange reviewed recent works on sexuality in United States history; and in 1998 Steven Maynard considered queer musings on masculinity and history. In 1999 *LH* published its first serious study of gay and lesbian issues in the labour movement.[43] Explicit attention to environmental politics comes late to both journals, in 1999; though six years earlier Richard A. Rajala's *L/LT* article on the North American West Coast logging industry argued persuasively that timber capital sought domination over nature not as an end in itself, but to secure control over the activities of those they employed.[44]

Turning the Tide

Both *L/LT* and *LH* have had to contend with the alleged death of class from the late 1980s, a coronial verdict that strikes at the heart of our shared intellectual orientation. As Joan Sangster has observed, "the denigration of class and the derision of emancipatory projects ... hang, like a dense fog of indifference and scepticism, over our present efforts."[45] The cover to issue 46, the millennium issue, depicts the prob-

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Lake, "Socialism and Manhood: The case of William Lane," *Labour History*, 50 (May 1986), 54-62.

[42]*Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998).

[43]Franca Iacovetta, "Manly Militants, Cohesive Communities, and Defiant Domestics: Writing about Immigrants in Canadian Historical Scholarship," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 217-8; Carolyn Strange, "Bad Girls and Masked Men: Recent Works on Sexuality in US History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), 261-75; Steven Maynard, "Queer Musings on Masculinity and History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998), 183-98; and Graham Willett, "'Proud and Employed': The Gay and Lesbian Movement and the Victorian Teachers' Unions in the 1970s," *Labour History*, 76 (May 1999), 78-94.

[44]Cadigan, "The Moral Economy of the Commons," 9-42; Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann, "'A rare shift in public thinking': Jack Mundey and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation," *Labour History*, 77 (November 1999), 44-63; and Richard A. Rajala, "The Forest as Factory: Technological Change and Worker Control in the West Coast Logging Industry, 1880-1930," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993), 73-104.

[45]Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present and Future," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 165.

lem graphically: "Swimming against the Academic Tide. Unsafe." I would contend, however, that it is only a matter of treading water for a while, because those who were fond of making academic fashion statements got it wrong.

A most remarkable aspect of the enthusiasm for pronouncing the death of class was that it occurred at a moment in history when class divisions were hardening and socioeconomic inequalities widening dramatically. As transnational corporations embarked upon an especially aggressive campaign to increase profits and decrease workers' wages and working conditions across the globe, academics were busily debating the death of class. Such pronouncements are reminiscent of those equally inept prophecies of Raymond Aron and Daniel Bell, who announced the end of ideology just before the rise of the anti-Vietnam War movement, Black Power, the student movement, and women's liberation. As Oscar Wilde might have observed, to be wrong once is unfortunate, whereas to be wrong twice is sheer carelessness.[46]

Certainly, intellectual trends in the 1990s became more and more out of step with developments in the real world, where the injuries of class and the consolidation of class divisions were becoming increasingly apparent. Although those pronouncing upon the death of class liked to point to declining levels of class *consciousness* to justify their denial of class, the ascendancy of their position in intellectual circles exacerbated rather than diminished the growing gap between the objective importance of class and its subjective importance. The chasm between reality and perception has only recently started to close, as revealed in the rise of anti-corporate politics.

Canada staged one of the important preludes to this new movement — the Ontario Days of Action. In Australia we heard that in 1996-97, "sustained collaboration between labour and community groups" resulted in the mobilization of two to three million people in five months of strikes, rallies, and demonstrations as part of a wide revolt against the aggressive neo-liberal policies of the provincial government.[47]

Since this time I detect a heightened mood of political engagement, occasionally pessimistic but often optimistic, in *L/LT*. It was hinted at as early as Volume 35 in Spring 1995 when William Carroll and R.S.Ratner responded to the misplaced confidence of new social movements that they have supplanted the labour movement as the midwife of history.[48] In Volume 39 Don Wells inquired in a review essay what the decline of Fordism and the rise of "disorganized" forms of capitalism meant for the future of class politics. He noted that the books reviewed, including

[46]Terry Eagleton makes this polemical point in relation to Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis. Terry Eagleton, "Defending Utopia," *New Left Review*, 4 (July/August 2000), 174.

[47]Nancy Jackson, "A Taste of our Power," *Australian Options*, 13 (May 1998), 5-8.

[48]William K.Carroll and R.S. Ratner, "Old Unions and New Social Movements," *Labour/Le Travail*, 35 (Spring 1995), 195-221.

Bryan Palmer's *Capitalism Comes to the Back Country*, "understand the future as contested."[49]

From Volume 40 onwards, articles are noticeably more present and future oriented than in all the earlier issues, and with a greater sense of immediacy and urgency.[50] Some examples: Greg McElligott argues progressive political action is still possible on the front lines of the state, based on the experience of the CEIU;[51] Belinda Leach examines the pressing problems of industrial homework, economic restructuring, and the meaning of work;[52] Paul Bowles' note on APEC reminds readers that, while the APEC leaders announced they had taken more steps to usher in a brave new world of free trade and investment in the Asia Pacific region, it is a world in which workers' rights have not been considered;[53] and Kim Moody, whose wonderful *Workers in a Lean World* outlined the rise of "social-movement unionism," inquires whether recent developments in American unionism are adequate to meet current challenges in the workplace.[54] Similarly, Paul LeBlanc reviews recent books touching on labour in capitalist America, including the recent Parker and Gruelle manual on rebuilding unions from the bottom up, "a tool for those who will actually make labour history in the early decades of the new century," the outcome of which will "help clarify the future of Marxism, democracy, the working class, and the human condition."[55]

These preoccupations are very evident in the millennium issue. Bryan Palmer's "Introduction" explains that the cover

> offers an artistic representation of the possibilities present as the working-class and its movements enter a new historical period. It also illustrates some of the constraints that will loom, threatening and large, as labour struggles to have its varied voices heard and its complexly diverse agendas recognized into the 21st century.[56]

[49]*Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), 243 and 260.

[50]A more assertive and pugnacious tone is also evident in comments and asides, such as Lawin Armstrong's review of *Land and Freedom*, which noted that: "The message is particularly welcome at a time when the left is rushing to shed its socialist principles in favour of neo-liberalism...." Lawin Armstrong, "Film Review. *Land and Freedom*. Directed by Ken Loach, 1995," in *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 327.

[51]Greg McElligott, "Clients and Consciousness: Drawing Militancy from Confusion on the Front Lines of the State," *Labour/Le Travail*, 40 (Fall 1997), 171-98.

[52]Belinda Leach, "Industrial Homework, Economic Restructuring and the Meaning of Work," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 97-115.

[53]Paul Bowles, "APEC: No Place for Labour," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 330-1.

[54]Kim Moody, "Is U.S. Labor Changing as Fast as the Workplace?" *Labour/Le Travail*, 43 (Spring 1999), 217-28.

[55]Paul LeBlanc, "Labour in Capitalist America: Ideology, Bureaucracy, Insurgency," *Labour/Le Travail*, 45 (Spring 2000), 279-92, esp. 292.

[56]Bryan D. Palmer, "Introduction. Labour Confronts the Millennium," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 7.

Desmond Morton notes the harsh economic climate and its recent effects on the labour movement and labour history.[57] Anthony Giles deplores the state of industrial relations as it fails to come to grips with the sweeping changes that have occurred in labour markets, the workplace, and the wider political economy. In his survey of 100 years of Canadian socialism, Ian McKay refers to the regrouping of socialist movements in the 21st century.[58] Joan Sangster notes that working people have reason to be pessimistic about their fate in the new millennium and points to the disjuncture between such realities and academic emphases:

> Surely, as globalized capitalism and the deconstruction of the welfare state become more menacing forces ... some of the traditional topics of labour history, including wage work, the sexual division of labour, consumer organizing, and socialist politics, should seem more, not less prescient.[59]

Murray Smith argues Canada's contemporary economic troubles are attributable to the "normal" crisis tendencies of an advanced capitalist economy, as analyzed by Marx, and should not be seen as the product of "foreign domination" of the Canadian economy.[60]

In Volume 47 Dennis Soron surveys the contemporary left and the politics of utopia and comes down on the side of Daniel Singer's contention that radical politics in the dawning millennium must be both "realistic" and "utopian."[61] In Volume 48 Meg Luxton analyzes the 1996 Women's March as an example of working-class women's issues and left-wing politics being kept alive in an era of "neo-liberal attacks and misogynist backlash."[62] And Jacques Hamel ponders notions of work and citizenship at a time when they are threatened.[63] Not just the peculiarities of the Canadian working class and labour movement, but now too the impact of globalisation on workers everywhere, is informing the nature and flavour of articles in *L/LT*.

Commitment to the cause of workers has always been present in *L/LT* but it is rather more explicit in recent issues. For example, Bryan Palmer's introduction to the three obituaries in Fall 2001 reiterates: "The study of the working class and

[57]Desmond Morton, "Some Millennial Reflections on the State of Canadian Labour History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 11-36.

[58]Ian McKay, "For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 69-126.

[59]Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History," 127, 164.

[60]Murray E.G.Smith, "Political Economy and the Canadian Working Class: Marxism or Nationalist Reformism?" *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 343-68.

[61]Dennis Soron, "Back to the Future: The Contemporary Left and the Politics of Utopia," *Labour/Le Travail*, 47 (Spring 2001), 203-16, esp. 215.

[62]Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 63-88, esp. 87-8.

[63]Jacques Hamel, "Sur les notions de travail et de citoyenneté à l'heure de la précarité," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 109-24.

commitment to its causes is central to what this journal is about."[64] In the millenium issue he stated:

> This journal was conceived more than twenty-five years ago in the spirit of recognizing and reversing the class inequalities and the blindspots of our age and of many previous historical epochs. Want and need always stalked the men, women, and children of the working class, while abundance and indulgence marked the privileged lives of those who owned and lived off a large piece of their varied productions. At some point in the next millennium, surely, this state of bedrock difference can be overcome.[65]

How? Appadurai has appealed recently for new forms of dialogue between academics and activists. This dialogue would be academia's gift to the new movements challenging corporate globalisation, contributing to new forms of pedagogy (in the sense of Paulo Freire) that could level the theoretical playing field for grassroots activists in international fora.[66] Theoretical reflection is impoverished without practical engagement with the issues at stake; equally, involvement is rendered more effective when informed and knowledgeable.[67]

Both *LH* and *L/LT* have sought to attract more union members and organisers and left-wing activists to readership of the journals. After conducting a survey of its readership, in 1986 *L/LT* acknowledged its failure to attract such readers and posed a difficult question:

> Why is it ... that a journal devoted to improving the "understanding of the lives of the workers" has so few readers from non-academic circles? The ordinary worker is not with us, and the worker's institutional representative is also not there or, perhaps, these readers are less likely than academics to respond to questionnaires. When *Labour/Le Travail* came to be, a declared objective was to work with organized labour to help further workers' historical consciousness. The nature and number of our respondents belie this aspiration.[68]

This problem of audience can not be resolved on the terrain of the journal because of the rules and regulations, stated and unstated, that govern the production of academic journals, and increasingly so these days.

[64]Bryan D. Palmer, "Introduction: The Year 2000 and the Deaths of Three Who Made Labour History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 48 (Fall 2001), 9.
[65]Bryan D. Palmer, "Introduction: Labour Confronts the Millennium," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 8.
[66]A. Appadurai, "Grassroots globalisation and the research imagination," *Public Culture*, 12, 1 (2000), 1-19, cited in Josee Johnston and James Goodman, "Academics, activism and the ivory tower: Freirean lessons for globalisation research," Paper presented to Globalisation Online Conference, Adelaide, 13 July-10 August 2001, <http://lorde.arts.adelaide.edu.au/ARCHSS/globalisation/goodman_johnston.asp.>, 3.
[67]Johnston and Goodman, "Academics, activism and the ivory tower," 3, 9.
[68]André LeBlanc, "*Labour/Le Travail* Reader Survey: A Report," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 317.

Yet, at the same time as labour historians meet these demands arising from our location in academic workplaces, it is imperative that we continue to reach out in other ways to audiences beyond the academy. It is ever more important in the difficult times in which we live to continue to place our knowledge of labour's past, heightened and sharpened by our academic journals, at the service of movements concerned to contest the circumstances of the working class in the present and future. In this way, the scholarly erudition and intensity of debate in *L/LT* throughout its first 49 volumes constitutes much more than mere ornament to academia, but serves a more fundamental — and higher — purpose in deepening the understanding of those who write for the journal. From this vantage point more meaningful exchanges and interactions have been developed with workers and their spokespeople, contributing further to the store of collective knowledge contained in the minds of those associated with *L/LT*. Moreover, the understanding gained through the processes of producing an academic journal has been — and will be — translated into more accessible and popular forms, such as on-line and hard-copy non-academic publications, public lectures, and talks at various forms of gathering, videos, physical showcases in museums, and many other ways.

Labour historians are well placed to remind working people that it is they who make history, that they have done so in the past, and that the circumstances under which they make history may be challenged in various ways. With the mantra surrounding corporate globalization depicting it as a remorseless, natural process that cannot be denied, it is all the more urgent that it be understood instead as a conscious policy by ruling classes to augment their power and wealth at the expense of the productive classes. There are alternatives. Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos sees:

> A world made of many worlds opens its space and conquers its right to be possible, it raises the banner of being necessary, it penetrates into the middle of the reality of the Earth to announce a better future. A world of all worlds that rebels and resists the Power, a world of all worlds that inhabit this world opposing cynicism, a world that fights for humanity and against neoliberalism.[69]

In its openness to the "many worlds" of the working class and the labour movement, *L/LT* and those who have produced it over the past quarter century and more have played their part in rebellion and resistance, and I am confident they will continue to do so in the future.

[69]Subcomandante Marcos, "First Intercontinental Encounter Against Neo-Liberalism and for Humanity in Chiapas" cited in Damien Grenfell, "The State and Protest in Contemporary Australia. From Vietnam to S11," PhD thesis, Monash University (2001), 253.