

## Canada's Workers Movement: Uneven Developments

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# Canada's Workers Movement: Uneven Developments

Michael Goldfield and Bryan D. Palmer

WITHIN THE CONTEXT of North America, Canada's economy, politics, and labour movement, as well as the country's diverse cultures, have a dual, almost divided, character. On the one hand, they exhibit highly independent and distinctive features; on the other, they are deeply entwined with — indeed operating in the shadow of and influenced greatly by — the imperialist colossus to the south. An advanced capitalist nation in its own right, and one with an imperialist arm reaching into the Caribbean and elsewhere, Canada nevertheless remains very much within an 'American' sphere of influence.<sup>1</sup>

## *Historicizing National Difference*

As Seymour Martin Lipset long ago noted, and as political scientists, historians, philosophers, and others as different in their views as Louis Hartz, Kenneth McRae, George Grant, and Gad Horowitz have grappled with, Canada's origins were touched with 18th-century toryism, the demographics of which registered in settle-

<sup>1</sup>For relevant discussions of this Canadian political economy, in which debate still dominates as to whether dependency or the capitalist logic of accumulation and the terms of class struggle best defines the nature of a political program of resistance, see, among many useful studies: Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender: The Multinational Corporation in Canada* (Toronto 1970); Steve Moore and Debi Wells, *Imperialism and the National Question in Canada* (Toronto 1975); Wallace Clement, *Continental Corporate Power: Economic Linkages between Canada and the United States* (Toronto 1977); Glen Williams, *Not for Export: Toward a Political Economy of Canada's Arrested Industrialization* (Toronto 1983); Murray E.G. Smith, "Political Economy and the Canadian Working Class: Marxism or National Reformism?," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 343-368; Paul Kellogg, "Kari Levitt and the Long Detour of Canadian Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, 76 (Autumn 2005), 31-60.

ment by refugees from the Age of Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Compared to Mexico and the United States, Canada can look, superficially, like the land of counter-revolution, one that has ironically come to harbour a moderating and influential social democratic politics of balance. Until the 1960s Canada was arguably a white settler Dominion, well integrated, for all the popular and politically useful allusion to ‘two founding nations’, into the British Empire.<sup>3</sup> Its identity, which began to unravel under specific pressures after World War II, was long recognized as a unique experiment in imperial expansion, one that produced a specific northern vision that unfolded as a colony matured into a nation.<sup>4</sup>

That nation, however, was destined, as the founding father of Canadian political economy, Harold Adams Innis, understood, to be subjected to new pressures of colonization, however subtle.<sup>5</sup> With the waning of Britain’s Empire and its global reach, the United States, by the 1920s, stepped into the breach. Over the course of the 20th century, Canada-US relations solidified as more and more of Canadian economic and cultural life came to be dominated by the dynamic expansion of United States capitalism which, on a world scale, was unprecedented, especially in the post-World War II years.<sup>6</sup> Today the Canadian and US economies, and the politico-cultural trajectories that arise out of them, are integrated to the point that it is difficult to discern where they are differentiated, where one stops and another begins.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See, as a sample only, the perspectives in: Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation* (New York 1963); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York 1955); Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* (New York 1964), which contains the essay by Kenneth McRae, “The Structure of Canadian History”; George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto 1965); Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968).

<sup>3</sup>See José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971* (Vancouver and Toronto 2006).

<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto 1970).

<sup>5</sup>Alexander John Watson, *Marginal Man: The Dark Vision of Harold Innis* (Toronto 2006), 22.

<sup>6</sup>For a brief summary of US world economic dominance after World War II see Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of US Politics* (New York 1997). Note as well the discussions in Philip Armstrong and Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism since 1945* (Oxford 1991); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (London 2006), 43-51.

<sup>7</sup>This deep continentalist integration is a feature of much of the literature addressing free-trade agreements and Canada in the age of globalization. See, for instance, Christina Gabriel and Laura Macdonald, “‘Of Borders and Business’: Canadian Corporate Proposals for ‘Deep Integration’,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 74 (Autumn 2004), 79-100. See, also,

That said, the Canadian bourgeoisie has generally been an independent wing of world capitalism, in contrast to its Mexican counterparts, who have usually functioned as US subsidiaries.<sup>8</sup> The protection of Canadian home industries was often compromised in the face of US capital's capacity to extend its influence. Yet, the Canadian state produced extensive networks of tariffs and other trade restrictions which, up until the 1980s, at least, allowed Canada's ruling class to preserve significant levels of autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

With the development of so-called free-trade agreements with the United States and Mexico (the Free Trade Agreement, or FTA, in 1989, and the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, in 1994), the Canadian bourgeoisie has succumbed more to the economic dominance of US capital. Bourgeois independence has subsequently suffered a series of blows, some of which are material, others ideological. The picture is complicated by the unevenness of the developments, but on balance it can be said that the neo-liberal restructuring of the free-trade era has not in fact strengthened Canadian capital in relation to its United States counterparts. Foreign ownership rose marginally in the period 1988-1996, increasing from 27 per cent to 31.5 per cent, but more surprisingly the much-predicted expansion of the manufacturing sector did not materialize, and Canadian dependency on staples exports has remained a key feature of economic life. This is due in part to low levels of productivity in particular sectors, specific lags in technological development, and, perhaps critically, the bellicose nature of the Bush Administration, which is more willing than any previous US governing political elite to simply insist that its arbitrary economic provisions be adhered to, however much they fly in the face of established trade agreements (softwood lumber, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

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of course, an older work: Wallace Clement, *Continental Corporate Power: Economic Linkages Between Canada and the United States* (Toronto 1977).

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, James D. Cockcroft, *Mexico's Hope: An Encounter with Politics and History* (New York 1998).

<sup>9</sup>For a raucously extreme statement that questions the independence of the Canadian ruling class see R.T. Naylor, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence," in Gary Teeple, ed., *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada* (Toronto 1972), 1-42. More judicious is the argument and theoretical elaboration in Leo Panitch, "The Role and Nature of the Canadian State," in Panitch, ed., *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power* (Toronto 1977), 3-27.

<sup>10</sup>Andrew Jackson, "The Free Trade Agreement — A Decade Later," *Studies in Political Economy*, 57 (Spring 1999), 141-160; Jackson, "A Tale of Two Economies," *Canadian Dimension*, 40 (May-June 2006), 33-36; Jeffrey Ayres, "Power Relations Under NAFTA: Reassessing the Efficacy of Contentious Transnationalism," *Studies in Political Economy*, 74 (Autumn 2004), 101-123; William K. Carroll and William Little, "Neoliberal Transformation and Antiglobalization Politics in Canada: Transition, Consolidation, and Resistance," *International Journal of Political Economy*, 31 (Fall 2001), 42; Jim Stanford, "Economic Models and Economic Reality: Free Trade and Predictions," *International Journal of Political Economy*, 33 (Fall 2003), 28-49; Stanford, "Back to the Hinterland,"

Despite far-reaching regional differences that demarcate Canada's west and east coasts, its prairie and northern landscapes, and its concentration of modern industry in southern portions of Quebec and Ontario, with traditional extractive and resource-dominated mining, lumber, and fishing endeavours located elsewhere, there remains much that is similar in the Canadian and United States economies. Both, for instance, gained immensely from the post-1945 prosperity, being among the few developed western economies in the northern hemisphere that survived World War II with their productive capacities intact. The occupational and industrial structures of both Canada and the US have experienced similar changes in the last half-century, with strong expansion of the service sector and the resulting explosion of white- and pink-collar jobs. Post-war immigration has played a critical role in sustaining labour market growth. Institutions of social provisioning — hospitals, clinics, universities, research complexes, media of all sorts — are important components of a recognizable 'North American' way of life in which the consumption side of a Fordist regime of accumulation seemingly predominates.<sup>11</sup>

*The Labour Regime and National Welfare: Standards, Entitlements, and Race*

Yet for all of the similarities, Canada and the United States are also quite different, especially in terms of the 'climate' of expectation and entitlement as it is lived out in the broad population and articulated within the workers movement. The labour relations environment has, since the consolidation of a modern post-World War II system of industrial pluralism, been different in Canada than in the United States.<sup>12</sup> Far more social democratic than their United States counterparts, Canadians, with a somewhat lower standard of living (which has experienced a long, slow slide since the end of World War II, one accelerating markedly in the 1990s),<sup>13</sup> nonetheless

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www.caw.ca/news/ facts from the fringe (17 December 2003); Stanford, "The Northern Tiger's a Kitten — But Do Voters Care?" *Globe and Mail*, 10 May 2003; Mel Watkins, "The Clash of Ideas: Neoclassical Trade Theory Versus Canadian Political Economy," *International Journal of Political Economy*, 33 (Fall 2003), 90-101.

<sup>11</sup>For a still useful discussion of Fordism see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford 1989).

<sup>12</sup>For an overview accenting this "labour regime" difference see David Kettler, James Struthers, and Christopher Huxley, "Unionization and Labour Regimes in Canada and the United States: Considerations for Comparative Research," *Labour/Le Travail*, 25 (Spring 1990), 161-188. Note as well Peter McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943-1950* (Toronto 2002). On union culture in modern Canada see D'Arcy Martin, *Thinking Union: Activism and Education in Canada's Labour Movement* (Toronto 1995).

<sup>13</sup>On Canada's slipping standard of living see Daniel Shaw, "Canada's Productivity and Standard of Living: Past, Present, and Future," Government of Canada, Depository Services Program, <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca> (20 January 2007). Heather Schofield, "Equality Myth Seen Holding Canada Back," *Globe and Mail*, 18 January 2007, notes that a Conference Board of Canada Report points out that Canada's standard of living, as measured by per ca-

have deeply ingrained appreciations of programs of social universality. Especially evident in terms of health care, this Canada-US difference also appears in education and inner-city infrastructure. Canadians experience, moreover, nowhere near the level of contact with debilitating poverty that characterizes the contemporary United States. The racialization of this destitution, while evident, is simply not comparable in the two countries. Canadian cities tend to be cleaner, safer, and less desperate places than those in the US, recognized by Americans as well as Canadians as more liveable.

Evidence suggests that this difference is indeed fading, and if the free-trade era has produced change in Canada it is in the structural narrowing of specific historical gaps between the Canadian and United States ways of grappling with economic inequality. The share of Canadian government expenditure in the Gross Domestic Product, for instance, has fallen considerably between 1992 and 2001, bringing Canadian experience more in line with that of the United States.<sup>14</sup> The historic association of Canadian identity with universality and a relatively strong welfare state nonetheless remains an important component of contemporary political culture. And this is buttressed, in terms of comparison with the United States, by the significantly different levels at which racialization of poverty, welfare, and labour market segmentation have operated in the two countries.<sup>15</sup>

The extremes of racial polarization that exist in the United States, for instance, are historically rooted in the slave economy of the South, and continued in share-cropper form until as late as the 1960s. They involve significant regional enclaves of acute destitution (much of the American South) as well as urban ghettos throughout the US (New Orleans, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, New York, among others). Increasingly important, at the level of a discourse of exclusion, are Latinos, now scapegoated as crashing the Mexican-US border in what is increasingly presented in a language of Lou Dobbs-racism as a threatening influx.<sup>16</sup> One

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pita income, has slipped from ranking fifth among the developed countries of the world in 1990 to tenth place in the same rankings in 2005.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Johnson and Rianne Mahon, "NAFTA, the Redesign and Rescaling of Canada's Welfare State," *Studies in Political Economy*, 76 (Autumn 2005), 7-30; David A. Green and Jonathan R. Kesselman, eds., *Dimensions of Inequality in Canada* (Vancouver 2006).

<sup>15</sup>For evidence that the political culture of Canada remains different than that of the United States, and has not been vanquished and 'Americanized' from above by neo-liberal restructuring see Watkins, "The Clash of Ideas," and Sam Gindin, "Beyond NAFTA," *Canadian Dimension*, 38 (March-April 2004), 29-31.

<sup>16</sup>Canada's contemporary scene is rife with the racialized oppression of newly arrived immigrant workers, many of them having arrived from Latin America, the Caribbean, or the Philippines, to take up jobs as domestic servants and live-in caregivers, or toil as migrant labourers in agriculture or stock the labour pool in the worst paid and least attractive spheres of the service sector. Indeed, this kind of racialized labour recruitment is longstanding, evidence reaching across the entirety of the 20th century. But there remain differences between the Canadian and US situations. See, for the Canadian case, Victor Satzewich, *Racism and*

measure of Canadian-United States difference in this regard is the current US orchestrated politico-economic moral panic over border surveillance. A few hundred security personnel staff the still relatively 'undefended' Canada-US border, while the much more geographically compact Mexico-US southern boundary has become an armed divide, patrolled and occupied by almost 10,000 'guards'. Even this is not enough, and vigilante forces have been called upon to monitor the border's porous nature, which, in the view of far too many, opens the floodgates to the Latino peril.<sup>17</sup> Another indicator of this race difference is what we might call the Katrina-phenomenon: the extent to which a major US metropolitan centre, New Orleans, was exposed by the devastation of a hurricane as a site of racially ordered poverty, written off to the extent that virtually half of its population has been 'ethnically cleansed' in the aftermath of the 2005 disaster, the remaining residents of colour reduced to a refugee-camp-like status within a United States where market mechanisms turn a blind eye to the colour of calamity.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, the deep structure of racist treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is appalling, and among Inuit, Metis, and First Nations communities, microcosms of New Orleans have existed in barren northern outposts and on isolated reserves for decades. That said, the quantitative concentration of African American and Creole populations in the devastation that rocked Louisiana outstrips anything imaginable in Canada, as does the

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*the Incorporation of Foreign Labour: Farm Labour Migration to Canada since 1945* (New York 1991); Grace-Edward Galabuzi, *Canada's Economic Apartheid: The Social Exclusion of Racialized Groups in the New Century* (Toronto 2006); A. Bakan and D. Stasiulus, "Foreign Domestic Policy in Canada and the Social Boundaries of Modern Citizenship," *Science and Society*, 58 (1994), 7-33; Nandita Sharma, "On Being Not Canadian: The Social Organization of 'Migrant Workers' in Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 38 (2001), 415-439.

<sup>17</sup>It remains worth noting, however, that despite the rising racist rhetoric in certain quarters that is directed at the large number of Latinos in the United States, estimated at 12 per cent of the total population and growing, in only two of the five states with extremely large Hispanic populations (Florida and California) have the anti-immigrant tirades and assault on 'undocumented' Latinos had any political traction. Republican programs directed at Latino immigrants in California during the 1980s were not without their political costs, and these have not lessened since 1997, from which point the west coast state has been majority non-white. In states dependent on the large reserve army of Latino labour, such as New York, Texas, and Illinois there is little stomach for legislative assault on the 'undocumented', and the importance of immigrant workers keeps the racist rhetoric somewhat in check. On the significance of urban Latino immigrants see Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US Big City* (New York and London 2000).

<sup>18</sup>Mike Davis, "The Predators of New Orleans," *Le Monde diplomatique*, October 2005, <http://mondediplo.com> (12 January 2007); "Hurricane Bush," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 September 2005.



callous indifference and gross incompetence of the state, which has worsened the situation.<sup>19</sup>

To address racism in Canada, and to focus on its contemporary face, is to see an ugly countenance, to be sure, but it is one that differs significantly from that of the United States. The racialization of the Québécois was a standard feature of Canadian life until it was decisively challenged in the first class war salvo of the Quiet Revolution, the Asbestos Strike of 1949, and then later further exposed and vilified in Pierre Vallières's 1960s-published *White Niggers of America*.<sup>20</sup> A virulent strain of anti-Asian racism runs through the late 19th-century experience of both the US and Canada, continuing well into the 20th century, where it is most visible in pre-World War I pogrom-like riots, exclusionary 'head tax' legislation, and the internment of the Japanese during World War II.<sup>21</sup> It is quite obvious that there is considerable, and historically longstanding, nativist animosity against newly arrived immigrants to Canada.<sup>22</sup> The contemporary period is marked by an increasing socially constructed media-driven racialization of criminality in major Canadian urban centres, especially Toronto and Vancouver, jarring in its crudeness.<sup>23</sup> There is,

<sup>19</sup>As in, for instance, the history of residential schools: J.R. Millar, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto 1996); John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986* (Winnipeg 1999). Among other studies that reveal much consider Heather Robertson, *Reservations are for Indians* (Toronto 1970); Anastasia M. Shkilnyk, *A Poison Stronger than Love: The Destruction of an Ojibwa Community* (New Haven and London 1985); Mel Watkins, ed., *Dene Nation: The Colony Within* (Toronto 1977); Frank James Testor and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarnitt (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-1963* (Vancouver 1994); Harold Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (Penticton, BC 1995); Ila Bussidor and Ustun Bilgen-Reinart, *Night Spirits: The Story of the Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* (Winnipeg 1997). Revelations of the social malaise in northern Inuit and Aboriginal communities surface regularly, some of the most recent being Katherine Harding, "In Nunavut, An Epidemic of Violence and Despair," *Globe and Mail*, 13 January 2007; Margaret Philp, "A Slap in the Face of Every Canadian," *Globe and Mail*, 3 February 2007.

<sup>20</sup>Andre Siegfried, *The Race Question in Canada* (London 1907); Pierre Elliott Trudeau, ed., *La Grève de l'Amiante* (Montreal 1956); Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America* (Toronto 1971).

<sup>21</sup>W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston 1978); Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston 1995).

<sup>22</sup>Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979); Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper, and Robert Ventresca, eds., *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto 1998).

<sup>23</sup>See Todd Gordon, "The Political Economy of Law and Order Policies: Policing, Class Struggle, and Neoliberal Restructuring," *Studies in Political Economy*, 50 (Summer 1996), 65-94. In Toronto, 49 per cent of the current population was born outside of Canada, and visible minorities are poised to become the majority of urban dwellers in the next decade. This



therefore, certainly no basis for complacency about racism in Canada.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there is little Canadian equivalent to the extreme and ongoing United States fear-mongering around race, drugs, and violence that fuels a culture of xenophobic labour market exclusionism. One reflection of this is penal retribution, culminating in the expanding US prison population, its medieval Death Row component, and the rising body count, overdetermined by race. It is surely no accident that while the death penalty in the US exists in a majority of states, it has no political salience in significant regions of the country. The majority of executions take place in only two states, Texas and Florida, and hardly any happen outside of the South, the historic site of African American slave cotton plantation labour.<sup>25</sup>

The history of racial oppression in the United States, compared to that of Canada, is also inseparable from key political-economic differences. Canada has a much smaller low-wage manufacturing sector, where workers are permanently trapped in poverty. There is, of course, an obvious Canadian gap between rich and poor, but not the ostentatious street visibility of this separation, evident in acute form in the United States. Canada's social safety net, however ragged in its capability of catching the most egregious instances of individuals falling from economic grace, is, while under attack and constantly threatened by growing state cutbacks and erosions, far more generous in its provisioning than what has historically existed in the US. Health care, unemployment insurance, housing provisions, and welfare entitlements remain, whatever their precariousness, better in Canada than in its neighbour to the south. And public discussion of this, even in an age of market-driven priorities, reflects recognition that this matters to Canadians. In generalizing, we leave aside the growing significance of region. Provinces such as Alberta may nurture views similar to those associated with a seemingly 'American' per-

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marks a departure from the historic dominance of native-born Canadians and immigrants from the British Isles, a process that began in the post-World War II period and has continued with added force in recent years. The result has been increased tensions around race, exacerbated by the racialization of criminal activity and its representation and reporting in the media. See Jennifer Lewington, "Immigrants and Integration — Is the City Ready to Listen?," *Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2007.

<sup>24</sup>Consider Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto 1999); Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender* (Toronto 2000); Sherene H. Razack, *Dark Threats and White Nights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto 2004).

<sup>25</sup>See, among a wide range of possible readings, Peter Linebaugh, "Gruesome Gertie at the Buckle of the Bible Belt," *New Left Review*, 209 (January-February 1995), 15-33; Allen J. Beck and Christopher J. Mumola, *Prisoners in 1998* (Washington 1999); Fox Butterfield, "Many Black Men Barred from Voting," *New York Times*, 30 January 1997; Tamar Lewin, "Racial Discrepancy Found in Trying of Youths," *New York Times*, 3 February 2000; Death Penalty Information Center, "Number of Executions by State since 1976," and "Executions by Region to Date," <http://www.essential.org/dpic/dpicreg.html> (January 2000).

spective. In contrast, in the US the levels and nature of unionization and attitudes toward social provisioning may be more similar to Canada in certain states than in many others, with the upper mid-West of Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, parts of the north-east, including New York, California and sectors of the Northwest, and Hawaii embracing more progressive positions.

*Public Sector Workers and the Social Wage*

Not surprisingly, and what is undoubtedly related to the preservation of minimal levels of institutionalized, state-orchestrated welfare, Canada's public sector is proportionately far larger than that of the United States, employing roughly one-third of the labour force, approximately 72 per cent of which is unionized. Yet it needs to be recognized that these organized public sector workers occupy rungs on a welfare state economic ladder that are being chopped at viciously by state policies of retrenchment and outright attack, many of them ideologically fuelled by the political culture of the US and the world-wide dominance of the neo-liberal agenda. Even if unionized, such workers routinely toil at tasks that are ill-paid, poorly regarded, and without status; they are more likely to be women, persons of colour, or recently arrived immigrants and, as a result, are often marginalized and undermined. A Calgary wildcat strike of laundry workers in 1995, illegal nurses' walk-outs in Quebec and Saskatchewan in 1999, and British Columbia's hospital employees' struggles over the period 2002-2004, which came close to precipitating a province-wide general strike, all indicate that such public sector workers, for all of their strength, are currently under considerable pressures. They often face demoralizing defeats that are a consequence of recalcitrant state forces and union officialdoms less than resolute in commitment to safeguard the material well-being of their memberships.<sup>26</sup>

Roughly one in three Canadian workers nevertheless belongs to a union, and this figure is understandably compared favourably to the dramatic decline in union density in the United States.<sup>27</sup> (Historically, it is worth noting that this is almost exactly the same level of union organization as existed in Canada in 1948, after the post-war surge of industrial unionism and a wave of mass strikes in important sectors of the economy.) Moreover, precisely because unionism's relative well-being in Canada has been in part premised on a climate of moderate social democratic sensibility and sustained somewhat by the presence of a public sector in which women workers figure centrally, the Canadian labour movement's modern ad-

<sup>26</sup>See David Camfield, "Neoliberalism and Working-Class Resistance in British Columbia: The Hospital Employees' Union Struggle, 2002-2004," *Labour/Le Travail*, 57 (Spring 2006), 9-42.

<sup>27</sup>On this demise see Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago 1987), and Goldfield, "The Impact of Globalization and Neo-liberalism on the Decline of US Unions," forthcoming in Debdas Banerjee and Michael Goldfield, eds., *Labour, Globalization, and the State* (London 2007).

dressings of gender issues has historically been more direct and forceful than what has unfolded in the United States. This is of course again no cause for self-congratulation given what remains to be confronted and changed, and the uneven development of feminist consciousness and practice across different unions and regions in both Canada and the US.<sup>28</sup>

The Canada-US comparison, then, raises warning as well as highlighting clear differences. Union density in the US reached levels of over 35 per cent in 1945 and 1953, at that time higher than such figures in Canada. Since this historical peak, the steady, continuous erosion of the percentage of the workforce organized in the United States has dipped to the point where, in 2005, less than 12 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce carries a union card. The picture of union membership in Canada is, to be sure, not pretty, there being an ongoing decline in the percentage of the workforce organized from the mid-1990s to the present, dropping from 36 per cent in 1994 to 30 per cent in 2005; this falling rate of unionization, however, seems relatively benign when compared to the collapse of United States labour organization. There only 8 per cent of the private sector workforce is organized, and the 40 per cent of the public sector that is unionized is often handcuffed by antediluvian labour laws and intransigent employers in the state sector. Regional imbalances in the United States also skew these figures dramatically, in even more extreme ways than in Canada. Still, as Andrew Jackson has pointed out, private sector workers employed in Canadian manufacturing have taken a serious hit in their unionization rates over the last two decades: almost 30 per cent of this largely male, well-paid workforce was organized in trade unions in the mid-1980s, but the figure has dropped to under 19 per cent in the opening decade of the 21st century. Even if such figures compare well with those of the United States, giving credence to the existence of differentiated “labour regimes,” there is no denying that unions in Canada are on the defensive, and whatever modest gains they register annually are coming nowhere near keeping pace with the growth in the workforce.<sup>29</sup>

Historically, the Canadian labour movement has been closely tied to that of workers’ organization to the south, at least until quite recently. In the late 19th century, the upsurge of unionization and trade union struggles was linked to the US-based Knights of Labor and the craft-ordered American Federation of Labor

<sup>28</sup>See, for instance, the accounts in Julie White, *Sisters and Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1993); Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott, eds., *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy and Militancy* (Toronto 1993); 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. For the US see Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton 2005).

<sup>29</sup>For discussions of Canadian union density see Barry Brennan, “Canadian Labor Today: Partial Successes, Real Challenges,” *Monthly Review*, 57 (June 2005), 46-61; Andrew Jackson, “Solidarity Forever? Trends in Canadian Union Density,” *Studies in Political Economy*, 74 (Autumn 2004), 125-146.

[AFL]. In some industries in the early 20th century, more firmly left-wing strongholds existed in Canada, as compared to the United States, among them the Red coal miners in Nova Scotia in the 1920s or the communist-led woodworkers of British Columbia in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>30</sup> But one could also point to bastions of the left in United States unions<sup>31</sup> or in specific ethnic enclaves, such as the Finns of various Michigan and Minnesota mining belts. Given the widespread impact of communist organizers and militants in the development of industrial unionism in the United States during the 1930s, and the leading role of US workers in fomenting union drives in sectors such as auto and steel, which spilled over into Canada, few would claim that up to 1950 the Canadian labour movement was more militant or radical than its counterpart south of the 49th parallel.<sup>32</sup> If we reach back to the 1880s and compare Canada's Knights of Labor experience to that of the Noble and Holy Order in the US, there is no denying that the latter contained a far more radical, indeed revolutionary, element, associated with the anarcho-communist strongholds of German immigrants in cities such as Detroit and, most notably, Chicago.<sup>33</sup>

### *The 1960s: A Watershed Decade*

The main divergence between Canada's and the United States' labour movements undoubtedly began during the late 1940s, with the more thorough purge of communists and other leftists and militants in the United States. But this separation took on added salience during the 1960s and 1970s, a product of three different developments. First, highly militant public sector unions emerged in Canada — a trend that

<sup>30</sup>David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto 1999); Jerry Lembcke and William Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (New York 1984).

<sup>31</sup>John Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York 1970); Steve Rossworn, ed., *The CIO's Left-Led Unions* (New Brunswick 1992); Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 45 (Fall 1993), 1-32; Goldfield, "Race and the CIO Revisited: Reply to Critics," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 46 (Fall 1994), 142-160; Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (New York 2004). Among the working-class constituencies of these left union strongholds would be workers in the farm equipment, electrical, tobacco, maritime, packinghouse, longshore, and mining sectors.

<sup>32</sup>Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto 1973).

<sup>33</sup>Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge 1983); Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton 1986); Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick 1988); Richard Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900* (Urbana and Chicago 1990); James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York 2006).

was paralleled in both the US and Mexico — that had no ostensible ties, through common employers or organizations, to unions in the United States. These unions coloured the climate of class struggle in Canada, their attention inevitably directed at provincial and federal state policies, thereby providing a national focus to workers' demands rather than limiting them to a narrow and less political set of contractual negotiations with the common multinational corporations faced by the private sector unions. Moreover, such public sector battles tended to be able to extract more from the Canadian state of the 1960s. The liberal hegemony of the Trudeau era, something of a last gasp of post-war affluence, was more able to bankroll worker-demanded reform and related social justice, anti-poverty, and welfare initiatives than was possible in the Vietnam War-entangled US.<sup>34</sup>

Second, the flowering of Quebec nationalism and the development of a far more radical labour movement in a province seething with discontent, created a broad workers movement with a distinct culture and identity, one that often veered in the direction of a revolutionary program. The October Crisis of 1970, in which the Front de Libération du Québec signed its own death warrant with the kidnapping of James Cross and Pierre Laporte, and the execution of the latter, actually gave way to an October 1971 'Blue Collar' Crisis. Striking workers at *La Presse* mobilized thousands and clashed with police, leaving one young supporter dead. By March-April-May of 1972, 210,000 public sector workers had walked off their jobs; a Common Front brought together the historically divided Québécois working class; strikes and protests took on an insurgent quality as worksites were occupied, radio stations seized, and union leaders jailed. "Not since the days of the Industrial Workers of the World ... has a North American union movement been so dedicated to the tradition of revolutionary syndicalism," proclaimed Marcel Pepin of the Confederation of National Trade Unions [CNTU].<sup>35</sup>

Third, one wing of the generalized North American youth radicalization of the 1960s opted in Canada for an increasingly left-inflected nationalism. This dissident

<sup>34</sup>There were of course limits to this era of free collective bargaining, but compared to the post-1970 climate of repression, it offered cautious and conservative union leaderships some room for manoeuvre. See Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From Wage Controls to the Social Contract* (Toronto 1993), 7-20. For a discussion of state initiatives and popular mobilizations surrounding the period's 'war on poverty' see James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto 1994), 211-230; Honourable David A. Croll, Chairman, *Poverty in Canada: A Report of the Special Senate Committee* (Ottawa 1971); Ian Adams et al., *The Real Poverty Report* (Edmonton 1971).

<sup>35</sup>The writing on Quebec unions and radicalization in this period is extensive. See as an introduction only Daniel Drache, ed., *Quebec — Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front* (Toronto 1972); Black Rose Books Editorial Collective, ed., *Quebec Labour: The Confederation of National Trade Unions Yesterday and Today* (Montreal 1975); Dimitri Roussopoulos, ed., *Quebec and Radical Social Change* (Montreal 1974); Louis Fournier, F.L.Q.: *The Anatomy of an Underground Movement* (Toronto 1984).

contingent intersected with elements of organized labour that were then chafing under the bureaucratic yoke of a US-dominated 'international' unionism that was strongly economistic in its day-to-day dealings with employers and conventionally conservative in its relations with the political culture of the time. The result was a small, but growing, contingent of left-nationalist trade union forces that precipitated a politically influential breakaway movement of unions that separated themselves out from the US-headquartered, AFL-CIO unions. Often this coming together of radical youth and independence-minded trade unionists broke through barriers of complacency to try to organize the unorganized or bring union protections to the most vulnerable, immigrant workers.<sup>36</sup> Over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s, this fusion of youth radicalism and labour nationalism exercised a considerable impact among west coast smelter and metal-working tradesmen, pulp and paper workers, energy and chemical labour, retail clerks, building tradesmen, and within the Ontario and Quebec garment trades, where Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent were standard-bearers of an alternative unionism.<sup>37</sup> This contrasted sharply with the US experience. There, an entrenched anti-communist but often reform-sympathetic labour leadership had countenanced a tenuous alliance with the elements of a revived early 1960s left. But as the mid-1960s saw growing militance around opposition to the war in Vietnam, a shift from civil rights activism to black power, and the countercultural challenges of youthful rebellion, US trade union leaders moved decisively to marginalize student rebels and radical African American activists. New Leftists and organizations like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers found themselves excluded from any possible positions of common work or influence in the trade union movement.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>R.B. Morris, "The Reverter Clause and Break-Aways in Canada," and Charles Lipton, "Canadian Unionism," in Teeple, ed., *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, 89-119; Philip Resnick, *The Land of Cain: Class and Nationalism in English Canada, 1945-1975* (Vancouver 1977); Ed Finn, "Prospects for an Autonomous Labour Movement," *Canadian Dimension*, 1 (September-October 1968), 4; Finn, "The Struggle for Canadian Labour Autonomy," *Labour Gazette*, 70 (November 1970), 766-774.

<sup>37</sup>Rick Salutin, *Kent Rowley: The Organizer — A Canadian Union Life* (Toronto 1980); Andrée Lévesque, ed., *Madeleine Parent: Activist* (Toronto 2005); Philip Resnick, "The Breakaway Movement in Trail," and Paul Knox, "Breakaway Unionism in Kitimat," in Paul Knox and Philip Resnick, eds., *Essays in BC Political Economy* (Vancouver 1974), 42-59; Wayne Roberts, *Cracking the Canadian Formula: The Making of the Energy and Chemical Workers Union* (Toronto 1990), 149-164; Joan Sangster, "Remembering Texpack: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Militancy in Canadian Unions in the 1970s," *Studies in Political Economy*, 78 (Autumn 2006), 41-66.

<sup>38</sup>Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana 1994); Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Boston 1998); James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race and Worker Insurgency: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge 1977).



With the late 1970s, a rise of 'independence' among Canada's organized workers meant that at that time only 50 per cent of the country's labour movement was affiliated with trade unions whose leaderships were rooted in the US. Three decades later this nationalist trend has continued, with roughly 7 in 10 Canadian trade unionists belonging to purely Canadian unions. The Canadian Automobile Workers [CAW], splitting from the US-based UAW in 1984, parlayed some of this now routinized attachment to independence, and the view that it could sustain a more radical trade union project, into its successful breakaway and its growing alliance with unions in the public sector. The result was that the CAW helped to create a pole of militant attraction, in which postal workers, government employees, health care workers, and select industrial unionists sustained a distinctive and separate Canadian unionism associated with broadly social democratic commitments.<sup>39</sup>

Significant gains were thus registered by trade unions in Canada over the course of the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s. Younger workers paced a wildcat wave in 1965-1966 that saw the percentage of work time lost to strikes reach its highest point in the entire period reaching from 1950. With the numbers of workers involved in strikes more than doubling any previous year's count, and the worker days lost to strikes in 1965-1966 soaring to almost 7.5 million, this set the stage for important breakthroughs by militant public sector workers at the end of the decade, in which postal workers were perhaps the leading sector. While the US likewise had increased numbers of wildcats and strike activity in these same years, with public sector workers playing a pivotal role, the ongoing and accelerating demise of trade unionism in the United States meant that these trends registered less forcefully than they did in Canada.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>For the official statement, glossing over much of a problematic nature, see Sam Gindin, *The Canadian Automobile Workers: The Birth and Transformation of a Union* (Toronto 1995). Leaders of the CAW breakaway, Bob White and Buzz Hargrove, have often painted a picture of their union's heroic struggle against United States domination, but reading between the lines of White's autobiography, or watching the film, *Final Offer*, it is apparent that the Canadian autoworker move to autonomy was premised on a particular view of class relations identifiable with labour officialdom's generalized distrust of the left. Consider, for instance, the number of times White refers sarcastically to how the decision to move towards Canadian union autonomy did not mean he had joined or set up "the Workers Revolutionary Party in Canada." Bob White, *Hard Bargains: My Life on the Line* (Toronto 1987), 291-293. For a left critique note Lee Parsons, "Canada: What Lies Behind the Split in Union Officialdom?" 5 March 2001, World Socialist Web Site, [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org) (5 January 2007). For the standard scholarly account of the Canadian automobile workers see Charlotte Yates, *From Plant to Politics: The Autoworkers Union in Postwar Canada* (Philadelphia 1993).

<sup>40</sup>On the wildcat wave see an early statement in Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966* (Ottawa 1972), 422-446. Postal workers and their significance are discussed in Jean-Claude Parrot, *My Union, My Life: Jean-Claude Parrot and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers* (Halifax 2005). For the United States see Goldfield, *Decline of Organized Labor*, and for a case study of signifi-



These class struggles at the point of production paved the way for social democratic success in the political arena as the New Democrats [NDP] were elected to govern provincially, first in Manitoba, and then later in Saskatchewan and British Columbia in 1971-1972. On the federal stage, David Lewis and the NDP, campaigning against the "Corporate Welfare Bums" in 1972, rode the trough of Trudeau's faltering Liberals, managing to win enough seats to give them the balance of power over the deadlocked Liberals and Conservatives, who found themselves separated in the final House of Commons tally by a mere two seats. In this context, workers benefited from legislation that raised minimum wages, protected jobs, and restructured labour-capital relations. Plant shutdowns and strikebreaking were subjected to labour-movement orchestrated research reports and studies, pressuring provincial governments to draft acts and policies in line with workers' interests. The numbers of workers organized almost doubled between 1960 and 1975, rising from just under 1.5 million to roughly 2.9 million, with the percentage of the non-agricultural workforce unionized fluctuating from a low of 29.4 per cent in 1964 to a high of 36.8 per cent in 1975. This rising union density would peak in the mid-1980s, with 40 per cent of Canadian workers organized in trade unions.<sup>41</sup>

*The 1970s: Class Struggle and the Beginnings of the Downturn*

This highwater mark of seeming union strength was, however, about to recede. The relations of class forces turned against the Canadian working class as the global crisis of capital accelerated with the recession of the 1970s. The oil crisis of 1973, the end of the international gold standard, the collapse of the ideological edifice of Keynesianism, along with a decade or more of economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, and seemingly unstoppable inflation were all signals, rather than causes, of a crisis of western capitalism. Overproduction and a generalized falling rate of profit were taking place in the historically unprecedented context of a post-World War II Fordist compromise, in which high wages and union organization in the pivotal economic sectors and welfare state provisioning to sustain more marginal milieu were traded for the stability of peaceful class co-existence. Given Canada's dependency on international trade and exports, the global slump precipi-

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cance Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers Union, Local 1199* (Urbana 1989).

<sup>41</sup>The above paragraphs draw on Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992), 298-339. On other matters raised in this paragraph see Marc Zwelling, *The Strike Breakers: The Report of the Strikebreaking Committee of the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto* (Toronto 1972); John W. Eleen and Ashley G. Bernadine, *Shutdown: The Impact of Plant Shutdown, Extensive Employment Terminations and Layoffs on the Workers and the Community* (Toronto 1971); David Lewis, *Louder Voices: The Corporate Welfare Bums* (Toronto 1972); Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984* (Toronto 2003).

tated in the 1973-1975 years quickly translated into a fiscal crisis of the state.<sup>42</sup> With Canada's capacity to compete in the manufacturing sector slipping as the national measure of a unit cost of labour rose, peaking in 1976, and international demand for Canadian natural resources spiralling downward, a 1970 Canadian trade balance surplus of \$3 billion turned into a \$450 million deficit five years later. Coincident with the rise of the New Right in the United States and the United Kingdom, Canada's largely liberal and social democratic federal and provincial states followed suit, waging war on the working class, especially targeting government employees in the public sector.<sup>43</sup>

As Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz have demonstrated convincingly, the 1975-1984 years saw an unprecedented wave of state assault on trade union freedoms, commencing with anti-inflation measures that, for all the rhetoric of curbing wages *and* prices, placed meaningful restriction only on the former. Canadian labour fought back, threatening general strikes and mounting political protests; intense years of class struggle such as 1972, 1974, and 1976 saw anywhere from 20 to 50 per cent of all organized workers involved in strike action. But this militancy was not without its counter-reaction. Labour found itself on the receiving end of state discipline. Back-to-work legislation in the public sector proliferated, with the rising record of coercion unmistakable: between 1950 and 1970, Canadian federal and provincial governments legislated striking workers back to their jobs only sixteen times; in the 1970-1984 years this figure soared to 63. With the federal election of Brian Mulroney and the Conservative Party to power in 1984, the trend continued. Complaints of violations of trade union rights by Canadian labour bodies to the United Nations-affiliated International Labour Organization climbed from three in the entire 1950-1973 years to 27 in the 1973-1991 period; four provinces were censured by the ILO for their clampdowns on government clerks in 1985-1986 alone.<sup>44</sup>

This repressive message was read loudly and clearly, including in the private sector. The number of strikes waged over the period 1982-1985 declined precipitously, and was, on annual average, down more than 30 per cent from comparable figures for the 1970s. More and more class battles were initiated by employers, who often opted to lock their workers out. By the late 1980s wage settlements below the rate of inflation had climbed to 87 per cent, up almost 40 per cent from the first half of the decade, and whole sectors of the economy, including the building trades of the prairie West, had been reduced from strongholds of unionism to open shop enclaves. As early as 1984 almost 300,000 Canadian workers were bound by 136 collective agreements that called for either a wage freeze or a pay cut; salary hikes for

<sup>42</sup>On the wider, global context see Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence*.

<sup>43</sup>For an important contextual and conceptual discussion see Murray E.G. Smith and K.W. Taylor, "Profitability Crisis and the Erosion of Popular Prosperity: The Canadian Economy, 1947-1991," *Studies in Political Economy*, 49 (Spring 1996), 101-130.

<sup>44</sup>Ernest Mandel, *The Second Slump: A Marxist Analysis of Recession in the Seventies* (London 1978); Panitch and Swartz, *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*.

corporate executives, in contrast, were poised to climb 22.5 per cent.<sup>45</sup> Strikers as a percentage of the workforce organized, which had rarely dipped below 10 per cent over the course of the entire 1970s, tapered to a paltry 4.4 per cent in 1985. Not since the early 1960s had the number of days lost to class conflict been so low. In 1990, time lost to strikes dropped by 66 per cent in one short year.<sup>46</sup>

All of this had a decisive impact in the widening gap separating the well-to-do from the working and non-working poor. In 1973 the richest 10 per cent of Canadian families with dependent children received 21 times the income of the poorest decile of families. Twenty-three years later, the two deciles were distanced by income multiples of 314. Over the course of the 1990s, those Canadians making more than \$150,000 annually (roughly the top 1 per cent of wage and salary earners) saw their share of the nation's paycheques climb from 9 to 14 per cent, and for the truly super rich the proportional jump was even greater. As Canadian workers were in retreat, the material gulf separating class from class grew more and more apparent.<sup>47</sup>

*Compromising Class Struggle:  
The Fruit — Bitter and Sweet — of Unevenness in the 1980s*

In broad outline, for both Canadian and United States workers the periods of militance (1960s and 1970s) as well as the years of relative quiescence (1980s and 1990s) have closely paralleled one another. Yet Canadian workers have engaged in a number of impressive displays of solidarity and struggle in the 1980s and 1990s that are often presented as the envy of United States leftists and labour militants. If these battles do indeed need to be recognized, they must also be seen for what they were: defeats that led to demoralization, undermined by union leaders who failed, almost to a person, to mount anything approximating an adequate opposition to the concerted intransigence of employers and the state. The unending record of missed opportunities, in which rank-and-file commitment to class struggle was squandered by a layer of trade union officialdom that persistently snatched defeat from the jaws of potential victory, reaches from the debacle of British Columbia's Solidarity movement of 1983 into the steady erosion of Quebec's painfully constructed

<sup>45</sup> CEO salaries and benefits have soared in the recent past, and are a measure of the widening gap of inequality that suggests the worsening lot of labour and the poor in our times. The current gap between CEO remuneration and the working-class wage is not as wide in Canada as it is in the United States, but as the *Globe and Mail* noted in an 8 January 2007 editorial, "What's a CEO Worth," "the disparities in Canadian income levels have similarly grown to unhealthy levels." The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives noted that in 2005 Canada's top 100 CEOs averaged annual earnings of \$9 million. The average earnings of a Canadian worker, by comparison, was \$38,000. Thus, even the lowest paid Canadian CEOs earned in three and a half days what it took most Canadians a year to take home in pay.

<sup>46</sup> For a general discussion see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 340-416.

<sup>47</sup> Carroll and Little, "Neoliberal Transformation," 35; Jackson, "Tale of Two Economies," 33.

Common Front union solidarities of the 1970s and early 1980s. By 1987, the much-heralded proletarian Québécois militancy that was, in 1972, widely regarded as a potentially revolutionary cutting edge of North American syndicalism was but a pale reflection of its former self.<sup>48</sup>

A late 1980s battle at Peter Pocklington's Edmonton, Alberta, meat-packing Gainers' plant pitted 1,000 unionists against an implacable foe and a conservative provincial government. The workers' militancy, shored up by labour support that ran the breadth of the country, seemed to be on the verge of securing victory. Hundreds of strikers and supporters had been jailed, but the unionists held firm, the rightness of their cause confirmed by Pocklington's outrageous and insulting demands, which included a five-year wage freeze, a two-tiered payment system in which new hires would be paid a paltry \$6.99 an hour, and a plethora of give-backs, all of which bankrolled a new, non-union operation the jet-setting millionaire was setting up in California. After six months of bitter conflict, the workers appeared to have the upper hand, but in the end the trade union tops folded. The announcement of the settlement, which included a wage freeze for two years and Pocklington's 'right' to loot the union pension fund, was met with angry jeers, and a mere 60 per cent of the strikers voted to go back to work. "We had [Pocklington] where we wanted him," said one disgruntled unionist. "Just squeeze — that's all [the union leadership] had to do. And they stroked."<sup>49</sup>

### *Days of Action / A Decade of Defeat*

This art of trade union leaders stroking labour's foes rather than struggling resolutely against them, was perhaps nowhere more evident than in Ontario's Days of Action campaign against the Mike Harris Tory 'Common Sense Revolution' of the mid-to-late 1990s. Background to this momentous uprising was the sorry social democratic capitulation of the Bob Rae-led New Democratic Party. It swept to a surprising Ontario electoral victory in 1990 only to abandon much of its campaign promise of reform, retreating in the face of a fiscal crisis passed on to it by the predecessor Liberal government. Attacks on the unions followed, gutting collective bargaining in the public sector, leaving trade unions prey to the successor ideologues of reaction in the far-right Conservative Party, once Rae and the NDP went down to inevitable defeat.<sup>50</sup> As Harris unloaded on the working class, chang-

<sup>48</sup>For a thorough critique of the Solidarity experience see Bryan D. Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1987); and for a comparison of Quebec and British Columbia, Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 361-370. For a particularly irksome reading of the BC Solidarity movement by arguably one of the most antediluvian of trade union leaders see Jack Munro and Jane O'Hara, *Union Jack: Labour Leader Jack Munro* (Vancouver 1988), 1-17.

<sup>49</sup>Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 394-395.

<sup>50</sup>For this unfortunate chapter in a generalized contemporary crisis of social democracy see Stephen McBride, "The Continuing Crisis of Social Democracy: Ontario's Social Contract

ing the voluntary Rae Days (government enforced non-paid 'holidays') into Pink Slips, promising cutbacks to the public sector that would have eliminated tens of thousands of jobs, closed hospitals, dismantled the welfare state, eliminated important trade union rights, and targeted much-maligned teachers' unions, the labour bureaucracy was forced by a rank-and-file mood of revolt to rise to the threatening occasion.

The Ontario Days of Action were initiated by a Canadian Automobile Workers/public sector unions/social movements coalition, which prodded the Ontario Federation of Labour [OFL] to act. Workers and a broad array of groups representing women, welfare recipients, anti-poverty activists, minorities, students, and environmentalists were brought together. The goal was to protest the policies of the Harris government by holding one-day general strikes in conjunction with another day of mass political protests and demonstrations. Focusing on one city at a time, the ostensible purpose came to be to build towards a province-wide General Strike. Beginning in London, Ontario, in December 1995, and spreading to ten other cities, including Hamilton, St. Catharines, North Bay, Peterborough, Toronto, and Kingston, the Days of Action eventually encompassed hundreds of thousands of people. Unfolding over two and a half years, the last strike-protest gathering was organized in June 1998. The mobilization grew more and more spirited, sustaining radical critiques of the provincial government, creating an increasingly rebellious atmosphere. Toronto's massive work stoppage and anti-Harris demos saw the city's inner core of government-related institutions and businesses brought to a standstill on a Friday. A day later, as many as 250,000 protesters were in the streets. This much-publicized success was followed by an unprecedented educational strike at the end of October 1997. The province-wide teacher walkout, involving 125,000 members of five separate unions/federations, closed elementary and secondary schools, forcing the state to petition the courts unsuccessfully for an injunction to end the conflict.<sup>51</sup>

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in Perspective," *Studies in Political Economy*, 50 (Summer 1996), 65-94; George Ehring and Wayne Roberts, *Giving Away a Miracle: Lost Dreams, Broken Promises, and the Ontario NDP* (Oakville, ON 1993); Thomas Walkom, *Rae Days: The Rise and Fall of the NDP* (Toronto 1994); Panitch and Swartz, *Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, 159-188. For the Harris assault on the public sector see David Rapaport, *No Justice, No Peace: The 1996 OPSEU Strike Action Against the Harris Government in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston 1999).

<sup>51</sup>For a rather uncritical approach to the Days of Action see Marcella Munro, "Ontario's 'Days of Action' and Strategic Choices for the Left in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy*, 53 (Summer 1997), 125-140. There is also much of relevance, including considerable discussion of context, in Yonatan Reshef and Sandra Rastin, *Unions in the Time of Revolution: Government Restructuring in Alberta and Ontario* (Toronto 2003). We are obviously more inclined to endorse the views in Bryan D. Palmer, "Slowdown in Ontario: Build the General Strike," *Canadian Dimension*, 30 (May-June 1996), 21-26; Palmer, "Where Ya At, General Strike?!", *Canadian Dimension*, 32 (September-October 1998), 20-24.

The teacher job action, rare in its coordinated bringing together of historically divided federations of classroom educators organized by gender, religion, and level of schooling, was widely perceived as an illegal work stoppage. For a week it had the province open-mouthed in awe. Yet it signalled the beginning of the end. The embattled teachers went down to defeat, not because the rank-and-file strikers, the students, or even parents and their associations and local boards of education, faltered in the face of the Harris government attacks. Rather, three of the teacher federation leaders capitulated and broke the strike, declaring the struggle over without so much as meeting with their striking memberships and explaining what had been gained and what could be lost. It was a demoralizing denouement to an exhilarating battle.<sup>52</sup>

As went the teachers, so went the province's workers as a whole. The impressive accomplishment of trade unionists and their allies challenging the state by the hundreds of thousands, rallying to the standard of protest, defying laws in the insistence that their economic power be used to create and maintain a better society was, in the final instance, undermined by labour's leaders. There had always been problems inherent in the Days of Action strategy, the most pronounced of which was that there really was no agreement within the labour movement about how to best fight the onslaught of the 'Common Sense Revolution'. A fundamental divide split the labour hierarchy. Adherents of an early 'pink paper' manifesto authored by the Steelworker officialdom (closely aligned with the Lewis family lock on the provincial NDP) and other union heads reluctant to mobilize generalized strike and protest activity, opposed extra-parliamentary mobilizations and, most emphatically, turned their noses up at 'illegal' political strike action. Instead, they opted to place the political eggs of trade union discontent in the conventional New Democratic Party electoral basket. The 'pink paper' group was opposed by Buzz Hargrove's Canadian Automobile Workers and a number of public sector unions. These unions championed the more militant move that came to be known as the Days of Action, defiant in their resistance to the backtracking of their conservative counterparts in the mainstream of the Ontario Federation of Labour, seemingly willing to share the protest limelight with a diverse coalition of social movements. But they lacked any decisive organizational commitment that could translate, concretely, into a strategy to win, let alone lead to a province-wide General Strike. While they undoubtedly pursued a path determined to develop initial impressive protest showings, they also eventually abdicated, and at a critical juncture downloaded all responsibility for the ultimate organization of a General Strike on to the somewhat wobbly table of OFL officialdom. There it soon dispersed into inaction and worse. Amidst the militancy and success of the October 1997 Toronto strike-protest, OFL President Gord Wilson grew astonishingly mild mannered, going so far as sound apologetic about the 'disruptions' of job actions. Smaller and more isolated cities were targeted, in the hopes

<sup>52</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, "Halloween in Harrisland: Teachers, Bureaucrats, and Betrayal," *Canadian Dimension*, 32 (January-February 1998), 29-32.



that the mobilization would fizzle. When the possible election of an NDP candidate in a Windsor by-election seemed to caution against rocking the autoworking centre with widespread plant shutdowns and mass protest, the plug was quietly pulled on the scheduled walkouts and demonstrations. After the Kingston Day of Action was a resounding success, drawing not only a huge local contingent, but militants from across the province, and, indeed from the US and Quebec, newly elected OFL head Wayne Samuelson scotched the notion that a General Strike was in the offing. What had gone up with a bang, came down, ultimately, with a whimper. The Days of Action were unobtrusively terminated.

In this respect, Ontario's labour leadership proved itself remarkably similar to its US counterparts. Few critics on the left draw attention to this fundamental problem of the labour bureaucracy and its role in harnessing class confrontation.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, this lack of attention to trade union officialdom is itself an expression of the decline of the revolutionary left, which has always had as a fundamental plank in its program of social transformation a hard-hitting analytic understanding of the labour bureaucracy's accommodative role within the tension-ridden capitalist social relations of production.

This is not to deny that in advanced capitalist countries the consciousness of workers is underdeveloped and contradictory: in Canada as elsewhere large numbers of workers vote for the most conservative of capitalist parties, chauvinisms of various kinds abound, particularly among Anglo-Canadian workers, whose dominance of many trade union organizations is undeniable, and a politics of class struggle is too often sadly lacking. Still, whatever the failures of the Canadian working class in the last decades, few can realistically deny that the trade union tops, with their penchant for turning the tap of class struggle abruptly off in moments of inopportune capitulation, have weakened the taste for battle and victory that is so necessary if labour is to march forward. By no means do we suggest that a kind of revolutionary voluntarism can adroitly and acrobatically leap the structural barriers to working-class advance in our difficult times, but neither can the conscious timidity of labour's leaders be ignored as a factor in the current climate, which has so often seen the possibility of partial victory ripped away from the working class and its allies, quietly deposited in the cul-de-sac of another sad defeat.

*Lean Production and the Politics of Accommodation: The Case of the CAW*

Ontario's Days of Action were followed by the Canadian labour bureaucracy's abstentionist distancing of the trade union movement from the activities of radical youth-led protest that challenged the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit, held in Quebec City in late April 2001. As perhaps 100,000 demonstrators converged on Quebec City, the protest quietly bifurcated as tens of thousands of mili-

<sup>53</sup> A rare exception is David Camfield, "Neoliberalism and Working-Class Resistance in British Columbia."



tants battled police and assailed the symbolic fence that separated and 'protected' bourgeois power from its radical opponents. In contrast to the spirited anti-capitalist challenge mounted by the left, labour's leadership did its best to channel union forces away from the main battle, marching their ranks to an empty parking lot on the outskirts of a city where the agitational fires of resistance burned in the streets, and tear gas wafted over thoroughfares and alleyways congested with the antagonism of the rowdy ranks of potential revolt. There organized workers largely sat out the fight. Many, of course, had followed the non-labour protesters into battle, but others no doubt wondered why they had bothered to make the trek to Quebec City.<sup>54</sup>

Five months later the events of 9/11 drove many in the labour bureaucracy into postures even more cautious and conservative. Among those whose anti-terrorist rhetoric revved higher as 2001 closed was Buzz Hargrove, widely recognized as the most 'radical' of Canada's labour bosses, a 'social' unionist of progressive views and the leader of the most powerful private sector union in the country. As such, Hargrove garners significant media attention and has privileged access to television and newspaper outlets to promote not only the cause of the working class, but broader social agendas of reform, justice, and fairness as well. If there is a union, and a working-class leader, who might be expected to be in the forefront of the struggle for social change in Canada, the CAW and Hargrove would be on everyone's list.

Yet in the last decade, in spite of rhetorical militance, Hargrove has come to be seen as highly mercurial, incapable of sustaining a radical orientation to class struggle. He demonstrates, precisely because of his seeming progressive, 'social' unionist stance, the extent to which labour officialdom, *as a whole*, is incapable of developing and sustaining an unwavering opposition to capital and the state. Moreover, because the CAW occupies a unique and pivotal place in Canada's industrial heartland, the autoworkers having a historic and ongoing centrality to class struggle in the most powerful province in the Dominion, Hargrove's stance is especially noteworthy. The CAW leadership under Hargrove also illuminates how the restructuring of capitalist workplaces with the pressures of free-trade globalization have inevitable and debilitating consequences on the politics of the labour bureaucracy. In the end, however 'social' the union pronouncements of certain trade union tops, they retreat into the 'business' unionism of their class politics. For without a program of socialist class struggle, union leaders invariably compromise and capitulate in the ongoing struggle that pits capital and labour against one another.

Autoworker unionism in Canada has, in the last 40 years, been buffered somewhat by the 1960s-developed protectionist legislation of the Canada-United States Auto Pact, which insured certain levels of production and state support to this critical economic sector. Between 1965 and 2002, Canada's automotive-producing sector employment soared from 75,000 to almost 500,000, while the vehicles that

<sup>54</sup>For one account see Kevin McKay, "Solidarity and Symbolic Protest: Lessons for Labour from the Quebec City Summit of the Americas," *Labour/Le Travail*, 50 (Fall 2002), 21-72.

came off the Canadian assembly lines climbed from 846,000 to 2.6 million. In 2002 the auto industry accounted for 12 per cent of Canadian GDP. The Auto Pact, however, was abolished as a consequence of World Trade Organization discussions over the course of 1999-2001, arguably one of the most important consequences of neo-liberal globalization to hit central Canadian workers. With the massive restructuring of the North American automobile industry over the course of recent decades, its Canadian component has been in an irreversible slide.<sup>55</sup>

During the period of the Auto Pact's existence Hargrove, who followed on the leadership heels of Dennis McDermott and Bob White, and was schooled in their classroom of labour officialdom, could mouth the rhetoric of class struggle without paying its full price. He knew full well that, unlike his US counterparts in Detroit's UAW Solidarity House, he could rely on a measure of Canadian state support for the country's protected auto plants. As militancy flared in the 1980s and 1990s, with the CAW one of the seemingly few bright spots on the horizon of union resistance, Hargrove utilized the muscle of organized labour's ranks to sustain plant occupations and flying squadrons of picket and protest-supporting auto workers.<sup>56</sup> He also lent material aid to radical movements such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty [OCAP], which was among the most forceful anti-capitalist agitators in Ontario's ongoing and escalating war against economic retrenchment. But as OCAP found itself locked into a no-holds barred battle with Mike Harris, presenting almost the only fighting front against the mean-spirited Tories in the aftermath of the Days of Action debacle, Hargrove, embarrassed by the refusal of the anti-poverty movement to play with the stacked deck of legalism, and opposed to its raucous office occupations of Conservative cabinet ministers and resulting charges of criminal trespass, pulled the plug on CAW donations to OCAP coffers.<sup>57</sup> It was a direct

<sup>55</sup>For a recent example of the CAW's political nostalgia for the days of the auto pact see Jim Stanford, "A New Auto Pact, for a New Auto Industry," *Globe and Mail*, 29 January 2007. On the history and importance of the Auto Pact see Dimitry Anastakis, "Between Nationalism and Continentalism: State Auto Industry Policy and the Canadian UAW, 1960-1970," *Labour/Le Travail*, 53 (Spring 2004), 89-125; Anastakis, "Requiem for a Trade Agreement: The Auto Pact at the WTO, 1999-2000," *Canadian Business Law Journal*, 31 (February 2001), 313; Anastakis, *Auto Pact: Creating a Borderless North American Auto Industry* (Toronto 2005).

<sup>56</sup>On background and development of this history see Bryan D. Palmer, "'Taking It': Ontario Workers' Struggles," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's, NL 1985), 183-198; Robert Simms and Joanne Wallador, "Auto Strikers Occupy GM Plant in Ontario," *The Militant*, 28 October 1996; Don Whelman, "No More Mandatory Overtime," Leaflet by Local 222 Shop Committee Chairperson on Behalf of the GM Unit Shop Committee, 1996; D.W. Livingstone and Reuben Roth, "Workplace Communities and Transformative Learning: Oshawa Autoworkers and the CAW," *Convergence*, 31 (1998), 12-23.

<sup>57</sup>On the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and Hargrove see Bryan D. Palmer, "What's Law Got to Do with It? Historical Considerations on Class Struggle, Boundaries of Con-

attempt to silence and starve into submission a critical voice on the margins of the labour movement.

The flying squadrons were also subdued. Once given something of a free reign, they had come to be recognized throughout labour and left circles as a corps of working-class self-activity. They are now nothing of the sort, reduced to a merely military arm of the CAW hierarchy, kept on a very tight leash by Hargrove and his immediate circle in the union's National Office.

Dissidents in the CAW, who in earlier years of Hargrove's reign had been given something of a hearing, have increasingly found themselves more and more muzzled and marginalized. When a Hargrove opponent, Willie Lambert, had the temerity to challenge the CAW head for the Presidency in 2006, running on a platform opposing concessionary bargaining, the autoworker bureaucracy came down quite heavily on the upstart leadership bid. It did not so much want to defeat Lambert, as crush him, providing a strong message to Hargrove rivals that they would be in for some very tough sledding if they dared to strike out against the entrenched CAW leadership. A union bureaucracy that routinely extols the virtues of democracy in its public pronouncements, barely countenanced it in its private practices of governance.<sup>58</sup>

Lambert's campaign highlighted a growing concern among many in the UAW ranks. The last years have seen the Canadian auto workers' historic refusal to engage in concessionary bargaining, always promoted by both Hargrove and his predecessor Bob White, as *the* key and strategic line of demarcation separating them (and, indeed, the Canadian union) from the officials of the UAW, compromised and, ultimately, jettisoned. Hargrove has exerted pressure on locals to abandon past collective bargaining gains, arguing that such give-backs are necessary if Canada's auto industry is to survive in the difficult and growingly competitive era of globalization.

Concessions at the point of production have been paralleled by a confusing politics of seemingly incomprehensible oscillation. Since the 1990s Hargrove has flipped and flopped on the question of support for the NDP, all the while avoiding any discussion that would lead towards the creation of a socialist party with a class struggle program. The CAW head first endorsed strategic voting for the Liberal Party in 1999 and, seven years later, during the 2006 federal election, posed for a photo-op that had him locked in the embrace of incumbent Prime Minister Paul Martin, arguably the country's most prominent corporate magnate-cum-politician since the infamous C.D. Howe. Not surprisingly, given this sidling up to the Lib-

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straint, and Capitalist Authority," and John Clarke, "Social Resistance and the Disturbing of the Peace," in *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 41 (Summer/Fall 2003), 465-504; Jonathan Greene, "Whatever It Takes: People's Organizing, OCAP, and Social Struggle," *Studies in Political Economy*, 75 (Spring 2005), 5-28.

<sup>58</sup>Alex Levant, "Reflections on the Canadian Labour Congress Convention," *Autonomy & Solidarity*, [http://auto\\_sol.tao.ca](http://auto_sol.tao.ca) (7 January 2007).

erals, Hargrove failed to adequately oppose the Canadian state's warmongering Afghanistan mission in the aftermath of 9/11, and followed this, in the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, with statements that could only be interpreted as support for the policies of the Israeli state.<sup>59</sup>

Even within the House of Labour, Hargrove's record has been anything but 'left'. He won his union eviction from the Canadian Labour Congress [CLC] for a refusal to abandon raids on other labour unions' memberships. Failing in a bid to create an alternative central labour organization, necessity being the mother of some inventiveness, Hargrove made his way back into the CLC where he aligned with the forces of established authority around Ken Georgetti (also known for expressing his gratitude to the Liberal Party, cooing his thanks in the ear of Magma mogul Belinda Stronach as she crossed the House of Commons floor to take up a Cabinet post, her abandonment of Stephen Harper's Conservatives propping up the rule of Paul Martin's minority government for a few months), who faced a challenge for the Presidency from left-reform candidate Carol Wall. A black feminist from the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Wall created some excitement in the dull circles of the Ottawa-based central labour umbrella organization in her 2005 run for the CLC roses. Lacking funds and an extensive campaign (she mobilized for the top labour job for only six weeks), Wall opposed Georgetti's lackluster leadership, calling for "a new voice, a new energy, a new vision," promising, if elected, to "reinvent the CLC" and implement an "action plan that responds to the priorities of our members." Wall managed, against all odds, to win 37 per cent of the delegate vote at the CLC convention, the highest ever recorded percentage polled against a sitting President. This owed nothing to the voice of labour progressivism in Canada, however, as Hargrove did all that he could to shut Wall out.

What explains this on/again, off/again labour bureaucratic politics? As Bruce Allen, a left dissident within the CAW and Vice-President of Local 199 in St. Catharines, Ontario, has suggested, the complex trajectory of autoworker politics is not unrelated to the material context of the last fifteen years, in which the lean production methods of the 'Toyota Way' have aligned with the globalizing thrust of free-trade agreements to produce a continuous downsizing of central Canada's critically important auto workforce. One measure of declining union density in Canada is of course the extent to which this quintessentially Fordist workforce has been whittled down, figuring forcefully in the falling rate of unionization among private sector workers. The pivotal CAW GM Local 222 in Oshawa lost approximately 4,000 members in the 1996-2001 years, and a further round of job cuts was announced in 2006. In February 2007 the Chrysler Group stated that it planned to eliminate 2,000 jobs, or 20 per cent of its entire Canadian workforce, in the working-class strongholds of Windsor and Brampton. Plant closures and massive layoffs have thus been particularly acute in the automobile-industry sensitive manufacturing of Ontario

<sup>59</sup>Buzz Hargrove, "CUPE Boycott of Israel Won't Help Cause of Peace," *Toronto Star*, 5 June 2006.

and Quebec, rivaling in their impact a previous set of consequences of the economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The devastation runs, ripple-effect like, through smaller factories in the auto supplying economy, and extends into clothing and textile manufacturers and a pulp and paper sector crippled by the negative effects of a high Canadian dollar. Over the course of the last half-decade, from 2001-2006, 200,000 Canadian manufacturing jobs, or just under ten percent of the country's total, have succumbed to economic restructuring, almost half of this staggering loss occurring in 2005 alone. The state-subsidized expansion of non-union auto manufacturing operations by Toyota and Honda in central Canada complicates the current scene even further, leading to an intensification of competition in the auto industry and ongoing weakening of industrial-unionist struggles that puts a leash on the entire labour movement.

At the bargaining table this has resulted in the Big Three automakers demanding concessions from the CAW and handouts from the Canadian state as the price for doing business. The neo-liberal, free-trade setting is one where the now dismantled Auto Pact no longer guarantees specific levels of production. Desperate to stop the bleeding away of jobs and dues, Hargrove and the CAW officialdom have done their part by conceding to the demands of the auto corporations for "flexible" contracts. This has been especially evident in the case of recent Oshawa negotiations, where a concessionary "shelf agreement" opened up the contract and bargained away important workplace rights long protected by collective agreements. Ratified in early March 2006, the CAW-GM agreement, which the union officialdom pushed on its ranks with all the 'hard sell' techniques at its disposal, spelled a decisive end to claims that the Canadian autoworkers are resisting concessions. The union agreed to work cooperatively with the company in 'restructuring' endeavours. It allowed outsourcing of janitorial work throughout the life of the agreement. Significant ground was given on issues related to early retirement. The daily relief time allowed shift workers was decreased, thereby exacerbating the problems associated with ongoing speed-up of production, and all of the attendant stresses and complications that undermine the health and occupational safety of line workers. Finally, the CAW caved in to management's insistence that it be allowed to use temporary workforces in "product launch situations." Ten short years ago these give-backs would certainly have precipitated strike action, mobilization of flying pickets, even, possibly, plant occupations and sit-down work stoppages. But now they are lauded by the CAW as grounds on which concessions must be made, opening up collective agreement language to employer demand and the voracious pressure of ever leaner production methods.

Such Hargrove-endorsed concessions are the union *quid pro quo* for state handouts to the companies. As was obvious in the recent 2006 Ontario government Oshawa General Motors bailout, the automakers are pressing harder and harder for dual concessions, in which unions *and* the state cough up enough to sweeten the likelihood of the assembly lines remaining operational. The relentless logic of this

fusion of production and politics is closer union ties to the *only* potentially governing political Party able to accommodate such concessions, the Liberals. Right-wing Tories are incapable of reaching past their reification of the market to consider financing corporate welfare bums (who are already on the receiving end of oodles of direct benefits and reams of masked government support), while the NDP is loathe to accept that such bailouts are an acceptable use of 'the people's money'. And so an unhappy marriage of the CAW and the Liberal party is not just announced, but has already been consummated.

Left on the sidelines, however, is the Ontario working class, which faces an ongoing restructuring of work environments that results in intensification of the labour process, concentration of workplace power in the hands of an aggressively demanding, union-hating managerial element, and reductions in the cost of production that are invariably extracted from the hide of the working class. With this happening to arguably the most powerful and militant union in Canada, led by the seemingly most progressive trade union leadership in the country, the writing on the wall of class struggle is telling an increasingly depressing tale. Its storyline, evident since the late 1980s, was presented starkly in the 1990s and has been ongoing ever since.<sup>60</sup>

*The Antidote: The Politics and Organization of Class Struggle*

As in the cases of Mexico and the United States, one critical variable lacking in the mix of creative and imaginative working-class responses to capitalism's ongoing war on labour is a mass party of workers and their allies capable of challenging the drift to demoralization. Until workers in Canada can break out of their dependence on the mainstream Liberal, Conservative and social democratic parties, they can expect to be on the receiving end of class struggle's capitalist-wielded stick, the odd

<sup>60</sup>The above paragraphs draw on the important analytic statement in Bruce Allen, "Inside the CAW Jacket," *New Socialist*, 57 (July-August 2006), <http://newsocialist.org> (accessed 7 January 2007); "Chrysler to Axe 2000 Jobs," *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 2007. See also Sam Gindin, "Concessions in Oshawa: The End of an Era?" *MRZine*, at <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org> (accessed 8 January 2007); and Gindin, "Auto Concessions: Yesterday's Defeat ... Tomorrow's Revival?" *Canadian Dimension*, at <http://canadiandimension.com> (accessed 8 January 2007), which accents the importance of health care differentials in Canada and the United States as a cause of Big Three demands for concessions in Canada; and Freda Coodin, "The CAW Turn: Bargaining Versus Building," *Canadian Dimension*, 39 (November-December 2005), 36-38. James Rinehart, Christopher Huxley, and David Robertson, *Just Another Car Factory: Lean Production and Its Discontents* (Ithaca 1997) and Jeffrey Liker, *The Toyota Way: 14 Management Principles from the World's Greatest Manufacturer* (New York 2003) present insights into lean production, while Alan Sears, *Re-tooling the Mind Factory: Education in a Lean State* (Peterborough 2003) indicates that the principles of lean production have permeated many sectors of social/economic life. See as well, Jackson, "Tale of Two Economies," 34-35.



carrot dangled before their noses to better accommodate them to the continuity, even deepening, of their exploitation and immiseration.

The workers movements of Mexico, the United States, and Canada now share too much to remain separate and isolated. Their fates have become entwined as never before, a consequence of a continentalist capitalist restructuring that enhances and intensifies processes of integration that have been operative for a century and a half, but that are now exercising an undeniable capacity to determine the outcome of class struggles in any given national context. There is little to be gained by labour anywhere in North America promoting an antiquated protectionism or standing pat on its supposed superiorities and illusory laurels. Like it or not, injuries to all, as they are inflicted by a capitalism whose lust for profit and quest for dominance now truly knows no bounds or boundaries, can only be offset by an internationalism genuinely animated by the need to secure victory of the proletariat as a whole.

Trade union consciousness must thus be transformed into class consciousness, and the vehicle of this development is a politicization of North American working people. If it is undeniable that much of the class struggles of our time and of the immediate future will invariably focus on the main enemy, the national bourgeoisie and its state structures, it is nevertheless the case that at no point in history has it been more imperative for the workers movement to grasp the extent to which capital, while operative locally, is increasingly dependent on thriving globally. What is most lacking, in all three countries, is the translation of the routine, everyday experience of class struggle into the formation of political parties of the working class that embrace and develop socialist programs capable of bringing workers and their many allies to power. Such parties and their practical activities will necessarily address the power of capital and the power of the working class as counterposed, international forces. They will play both a transitional, and, hopefully, a vanguard role. In their beginnings they will provide militants in the unions and other political formations with a beacon, holding them steadfast against the pressures to compromise, conciliate, and capitulate. These forces will both push those reluctant to pursue class struggle actions to the left, and eventually may well be in positions to supplant such misleaders. They will also serve an invaluable function in coordinating campaigns and actions across borders, promoting international class solidarity and integrating class resistance in the same way that capital has reconfigured its coordinated and widening extraction of surplus.

All of this will not develop spontaneously out of the trade unions. Nor is it at all evident that existing working-class politics, be they impaled on the dilemmas of revolutionary instability in Mexico, incarcerated in the prison-house of Democratic Party dead-ends in the United States, or placated by the attractions of Canadian social democracy, can transform themselves into the required tribunes of the people necessary to begin the march to workers' self-government. But without such class parties, the Herculean task of identifying the class interests of workers in all strug-



gles and situations, exposing the weaknesses and vacillating politics of all ensconced leaderships of labour, and promoting the working class as the vanguard of resistance to all forms of oppression, will remain handcuffed to the actually existing relations of capitalist exploitation. Only such parties can overcome the historic, but now related, 'national' shortcomings of Mexican, United States, and Canadian workers. Only such parties can develop the truly transnational working-class forms of struggle and internationalist class perspectives that can lead labour, not just to ultimate victory, but to attainable advances within the transformed and highly integrated North American capitalist social order of our times.

*This essay is part of a larger project, tentatively entitled Entwined Fates: The North American Working Classes, the co-authors of which are Dan La Botz, Michael Goldfield, and Bryan D. Palmer.*

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