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The Long, Angry Summer of ’43
Labour Relations in Quebec’s Shipbuilding Industry

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Article abstract

The complex story of labour unrest in Quebec’s shipbuilding industry considerably broadens understanding of Canada’s wartime industrial relations. For while trade union leaders were significant in organizing thousands of shipyard workers, and government and business opposition were givens, workers sometimes struggled in the absence of leadership to achieve their goals and inter-union conflict frequently obstructed their efforts. The spontaneity of worker struggle in Quebec shipyards was less due to union weakness, however, than to conflict between craft versus industrial-based trade unionism. Strikes in Quebec’s shipbuilding plants during 1943 also shed light on the growing failure of the Canadian government’s labour policy known as compulsory conciliation. The contextualization of labour relations in Quebec’s shipyards during that long, angry summer lends support to those historians who argue that workers’ struggle rather than politicians’ acuity had a greater impact on the eventual appearance of pc 1003 than others would allow.

ARTICLE

The Long, Angry Summer of '43: Labour Relations in Quebec's Shipbuilding Industry

James Pritchard

The complex story of labour unrest in Quebec's shipbuilding industry considerably broadens understanding of Canada's wartime industrial relations. For while trade union leaders were significant in organizing thousands of shipyard workers, and government and business opposition were givens, workers sometimes struggled in the absence of leadership to achieve their goals and inter-union conflict frequently obstructed their efforts. Labour conflict in Quebec's shipyards resembled unrest across the rest of the country in several respects, experiencing strikes and loss of production, especially during 1942 and 1943, and the causes (wages, working conditions, and the application of wage controls) were often similar.

Like the rest of the country, labour strife in Quebec's shipyards largely ceased after order-in-council PC 1003 appeared in February 1944. But local conditions there were significantly different than national trends. Though strikes were proportionally more numerous than elsewhere, those for union recognition were rare: indeed, less than one-fifth of the total of 37 shipyard strikes were even union led.[1] The largest strike of shipbuilding workers was certainly union led and was, among other things, for union recognition, but most strikes were spontaneous and arose over wages and working conditions. Unions were sometimes quick to assure Department of Labour (DOL) officials they had nothing to do with unrest and often urged strikers back to work. Consequently, despite the important role of labour unions, unorganized workers were significant agents of disruption and change in Quebec shipbuilding plants. The British Columbia story of big labour confronting big

1. Based on 37 strikes in Quebec shipbuilding plants during the war as compiled from the strikes and lockout files of the Department of Labour.

James Pritchard, "The Long, Angry Summer of '43: Labour Relations in Quebec's Shipbuilding Industry," *Labour/Le Travail,* 65 (Spring 2010), 47–73.

business and big government in the shipyards was not replicated in Quebec.[2] The spontaneity of worker struggle in Quebec shipyards was less due to union weakness, however, than to conflict between craft-based versus industrial-based trade unionism.

Quebec's French-language historiography, which focuses almost exclusively on the growing secularization of the Catholic trade unions in the *Confédération des Travailleurs Catholique du Canada* (CTCC) and their role as agents of social change during World War II, has ignored the shipbuilding industry. In 1940, Catholic syndicates in the CTCC represented one-third of all unionized workers in Quebec. Yet, they were virtually absent from, and played no significant role in, the evolution of labour relations in Quebec's wartime shipyards.[3]

Labour historians have so stressed the struggle of steelworkers against wage controls, the reconstitution of the National War Labour Board during the winter of 1943, and the latter's hearings into labour relations and wage conditions through the spring, that few have any idea that the same struggle and others for union recognition and the closed shop continued.[4] Nowhere was the battle more vigorous than in Quebec shipyards during the long, angry summer of 1943. The country-wide model of mid-war union militancy presented so effectively by Laurel Sefton Macdowell is somewhat misleading when applied to Quebec's shipbuilding industry. While the shipyard workers' strike in June 1943 at Quebec City, following a legally administered strike vote, was partly for union recognition, the consequences were unprecedented and unintended, and though the number and severity of strikes rose sharply in 1942 and 1943, most were spontaneous and unorganized, undertaken without union leadership. Unorganized workers were significant agents of work disruption.

The fierce rivalry among craft unions that dominated organized labour in the province and the new trade unions that sought to organize workers on an industry-wide basis may have allowed worker militancy in Quebec shipyards to grow. Craft-based unions belonging to the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) and affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) initially displayed no interest in organizing semi-skilled and unskilled workers in

2. Chris Madsen, "Continuous Production in British Columbia Shipyards During the Second World War," *The Northern Mariner*, 14 (July 2004), 11–26.

3. Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme Québécois des origins à nos jours* (Montréal 1989), 216, tableau 4.5; Education Committees of the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux and Centrale de l'Ensignement de Québec, Arnold Bennett trans., *The History of the Labour Movement in Quebec* (Montreal 1987).

4. Harold A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada: Their Development and Functioning* (Toronto 1948), 260–3; and Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "*Remember Kirkland Lake:*" *the History and Effects of the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners' Strike, 1941–1942* (Toronto 1983), and "The Steel Strike Against Wartime Wage Controls." *Labour/ Le Travail*, 10 (Autumn 1982), 65–85 reprinted in *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings*, David J. Bercuson and David Bright, eds., 2nd ed. (Toronto 1994), 295–315.

the shipbuilding industry. Indeed, strikes in Montreal's two shipyards during 1943 show how the so-called internationals in the TLC proved to be bitter enemies of the new Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which was anxious to organize workers on an industrial basis.[5]

Strife in Quebec's shipbuilding plants during the summer of 1943 also sheds light on the growing failure of the Canadian government's labour policy known as compulsory conciliation.[6] Canada's shipbuilding achievement was one of the wonders of the war. Between 1940 and 1945 Quebec shipbuilders constructed more than 300 naval and cargo ships, including 53 frigates, 56 corvettes, 24 minesweepers, 28 motor torpedo boats, and more than one million deadweight tons of merchant shipping.[7] Nonetheless, after reviewing the record of government labour boards and conciliators, one might well ask how any ships came to be built at all.

Sources for this study are chiefly the official strike and lockout files maintained by the federal DOL and files maintained by the Canadian Congress of Labour. During the war the government kept a detailed record of every strike in the shipbuilding industry. Included are government memoranda and correspondence, official reports from companies, unions, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and newspaper clippings. The record provides detailed insight into the nature of industrial unrest in the shipyards.[8] The second CCL source contains detailed records of union recruitment and membership, local union charters, and correspondence between local executive committee members, field organizers, and national executive officers. Some limited use was also made of the records of the Quebec *ministère du travail* located in the provincial central archives at Ste. Foy.

At the beginning of World War II, the Canadian shipbuilding industry was moribund. Quebec's five shipyards had only 1,227 employees. Numbers

5. Terry Copp, "The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montreal, 1935–1945," *Rélations Industrielles*, 37 (1982), 847; also Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System during World War Two," *Labour/ Le Travail*, 3 (1978), 175–96 reprinted in *Canadian Working Class History: Selected Readings*, L.S. MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds., 2nd ed. (Toronto 2000), 526–49.

6. Jeremy Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada during World War II," *Labour/ Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), 57–88.

7. Compiled from G. N. Tucker, *The Naval Service of Canada*, 2 vols. (Ottawa 1950), 2: 505–7, 513–14; W.H. Mitchell and L.A. Sawyer, *The Oceans, the Forts and the Parks: Merchant Shipbuilding for British Account in North America during World War II* (Liverpool 1966), 12–3, 27, and 38; Eileen R. Marcil, *Tall Ships and Tankers: The History of the Davie Shipbuilders* (Toronto 1997), 515–17, 523–4, 532–4; and F.H. Smith, *et al.*, "History of the British Admiralty Technical Mission in Canada," typescript, (Ottawa, 1946), 77, 87.

8. Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Times of Troubles: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900–1966* (Ottawa 1968), provides a broad overview based on these records; see especially pages 276–95 for his treatment of World War II.

grew quickly during the next twenty months, increasing more than ten times to 12,762 by 1 June 1942. During the next thirteen months, the number of shipyard workers more than doubled. At Montreal, they nearly tripled owing to the establishment of a new government-owned yard, United Shipyards Limited, on the Bickerdike Pier at the foot of the Lachine Canal. In the Quebec City area and at Sorel, the shipyards workforce grew by 94 and 66 per cent, respectively.[9] On 1 July 1943, when the number of shipbuilding employees in Canada peaked, 28,502 men (and a few women) employed in Quebec shipyards comprised more than one-third (34.7 per cent) of the industry's national work force.

Shipbuilding proved to be a challenging environment for labour organizers. Such labour organization as existed in Quebec's pre-war shipyards took the form of small international craft locals, notably AFL-affiliated boilermakers, machinists, blacksmiths, shipwrights, caulkers, and pipefitters. These proved insufficient to accommodate the thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled chiefly young men who poured into the shipyards.[10] Many new workers were not only unskilled, they were often in their first jobs, bewildered, and as suspicious of trade union organizers as of the bosses; in their vernacular, both were "les big shots." Relations between shipbuilding companies and their workers were often confused and sometimes tense. Although the federal government continually denied it, little evidence can be adduced that it was anything but hostile to labour.[11] In contrast to Great Britain and the United States where labour played important roles in central administrative planning of war production, the Canadian government excluded worker representatives from wartime decision-making.[12] At the same time, the government's conduct in industrial relations was characterized by weakness, indecision, and absence of planning and foresight. All of this hampered the state's capacity to prevent strikes.[13] According to Jeremy Webber, the malaise of compulsory conciliation lay in the government's preoccupation with strike prevention and reluctance

9. Canada, Dept. of Reconstruction and Supply, "Location and Effects of Wartime Industrial Expansion in Canada, 1939–1944," (Ottawa 1945). Data presented by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in "The Shipbuilding Industry, 1943" are annual averages whereas the data presented here are actual numbers on dates given.

10. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada*, 133. This otherwise important study of Canada's trade unions fails to mention even the existence of shipbuilding workers in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence region during World War II.

11. See MacDowell, "*Remember Kirkland Lake,*" 3–35 for an excellent summary of the dominion government's approach to industrial relations.

12. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada*, 521–3; Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History,* 2nd ed. (Toronto 1996), 70; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The* CIO *in World War* II (Cambridge and New York 1982), 47–51; Andrew E. Kersten, *Labor's Home Front: The American Federation of Labor during World War II* (New York and London 2006), 8, 28, 40, 46.

13. Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 292.

to grapple with the substance of labour relations. Its refusal to give direction to boards or to establish standards and a policy of appointing judges led to adjudication of disputes rather than attempts to find workable settlements.[14]

Canada experienced 120 strikes at a cost of 224,588 lost worker-days in 1939. In 1941, the numbers had soared to 231 strikes and 433,914 lost worker-days, and the following year, 354 strikes resulted in 450,202 lost worker-days. Still, the government pursued the same labour policies as before, and in 1943 401 strikes led to 1,041,198 worker-days lost, many in war industries.[15] Seventy-one strikes, 11.3 per cent of all major strikes in the country, wracked the shipbuilding industry during 1942 and 1943.[16] Thirty-seven, about forty per cent of them between October 1940 and June 1945, occurred in Quebec.[17] Their pattern is significant. After one strike in 1940 and two in 1941, the shipbuilding industry experienced the same wave as other industries in 1942 and 1943. Eighteen strikes occurred in 1942 and twelve in 1943. After the passage of PC 1003 and the corresponding Quebec Labour Relations Act in early 1944, the shipbuilding industry suffered only four strikes in the final year and half of the war.[18] Of 21 strikes reported in provincial shipyards by the end of 1942, at least ten occurred at Quebec City, chiefly over wages and job classifications.[19] At the beginning of the summer of 1943, shipbuilding was in full force in the province and labour relations in the shipbuilding industry were at an all-time low. To contextualize the consequent conflict, it is necessary to look at the state, inter-union rivalry and militant spontaneity.

Contextualizing Conflict: The State

THE LARGEST, LONGEST STRIKE in Quebec's wartime shipbuilding industry occurred in June 1943. It was fought primarily to enforce new wage rates and

14. Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation," 62.

15. Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 276–95; Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Year Book, 1945* (Ottawa 1945), 789.

16. Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 282.

17. The Department of Labour (DOL) called them strikes and I continue the practice. Some might want to distinguish between work stoppages and strikes, but that might privilege the latter by suggesting strikes were union organized and led while work stoppages were commonly unorganized and sometimes spontaneous. But some serious work stoppages involved thousands of workers, were unorganized and lasted several days, while union-led strikes affected only a few and lasted for less than an hour.

18. Virtually every labour historian has written about PC 1003, but see Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation in Canada; Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto 2001), 41–2 and more importantly Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst, eds., *Labour Pains, Labour Pains: 50 Years of PC 1003*, (Winnipeg and Halifax 1995).

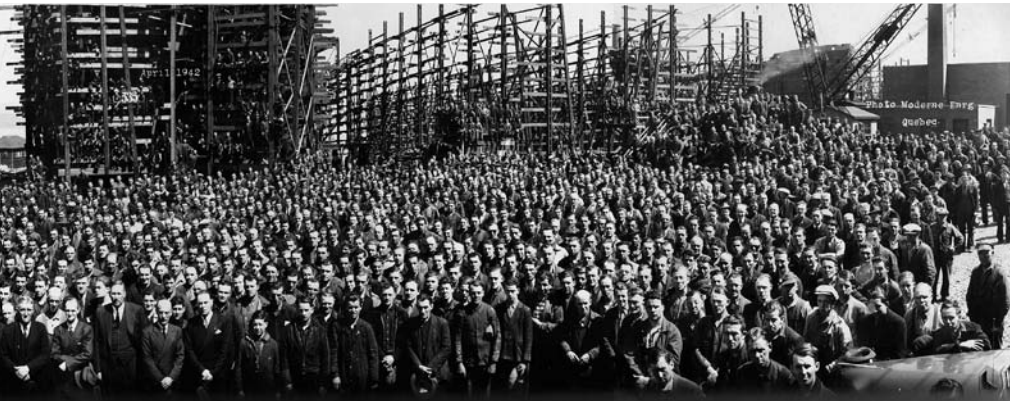
19. Compiled from Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC) RG 27 Department of Labour fonds (hereafter RG 27), Volumes 407–424, strikes and lockout files.

working conditions agreed to and to achieve the terms of a closed shop that a conciliation board majority report had rejected. This strike contributed over 77,000 worker-days to the more than one million worker-days lost in Canada that year. But the strike's consequences were unique to Quebec, leading directly to government seizure of two of the three shipyards at Quebec City and to their incorporation into a crown corporation. Yet the strike concluded with unintended consequences as the industrial-based shipbuilding union signed not one but two major labour agreements. These unusual outcomes were all the more surprising because unlike most conflicts the work stoppage had been legal.

Relations between employers and workers in Quebec City's three shipyards had been deteriorating long before the angry summer of 1943. During 1940 and 1941, two boards of conciliation and investigation had looked into disputes between employees at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Company Limited at Lauzon and Morton Engineering and Dry Dock Company Limited at Quebec City. Also, in 1941, a royal commission investigated several eastern Canadian shipyards including two in Quebec City. But none of these investigations led the two largest shipyards there to sign agreements or even to negotiate with union representatives. The exception was the third, smaller yard, George T. Davie & Sons at Lévis whose sole owner, Charles G. Davie, signed an agreement with the local industrial union in November 1940.

In March 1940, employees at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing had applied to the All Canadian Congress of Labour (the ACCL would later merge with the CCL), and received a union charter as Local 3 of the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders Union of Canada/ Union Canadienne des Chaudronniers et Constructeurs des Navires en Fer (BISUC/UCCCNF). Initial membership was small; at the end of the month it reported 224 paid up members from all three shipyards.[20] According to union organizer Ernest Bolduc, the

20. LAC, MG 28 Trades and Labour Congress fonds I103, Box 52, file 9, Application for a local



The hundreds of Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Company workers are standing before hull no. 535, a 10,000-ton dry cargo ship later christened SS Gatineau Park. Of three additional berths at the right, one holds SS Fort La Maulne (hull no. 532) within days of her launch; in between may be seen some ship frames sticking up through the staging on two other berths.

Credit: Photo taken April 1942 by Photo Moderne, Quebec, and reproduced by the kind permission of the Service des arts et de la culture , secteur des archives privées historiques, Ville de Lévis, PQ

word "Canadienne" in the union name attracted French-Canadian workers, enabling him to beat out both international craft-based unions and Catholic syndicates whose agents were trying to organize the shipyards.[21] But Bolduc, who was deputy president for Quebec of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees and Other Transportation Workers, was deeply embedded in organized labour in the province, which may have had more to do with his success.[22] With the exception of some craft locals in the government-owned outfitting yard operated by Anglo-Canadian Pulp and Paper Mills (Shipbuilding Division), AFL unions were insignificant in the Quebec City shipyards.

The refusal in April 1940 of Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing to recognize the BISUC as the employees' bargaining agent or to negotiate an agreement led the employees to apply for and obtain the first board of conciliation under the extended Industrial Disputes Investigation Act.[23] Worker morale may have improved somewhat after Charlie Davie signed an agreement with Local 3 BISUC on 7 November 1940, but the event so surprised DOL representatives that

union charter, ACCL, 13 March 1940; A.R. Mosher, president ACCL, to Ernest Bolduc, ACCL organizer, 20 March 1940.

21. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 52, file 9, Bolduc to Mosher, 23 March; Mosher to Bolduc, 4 March 1940.

22. *Ibid.* Box 52, file 10, Bolduc to Mosher, president CCL, 2 May 1941.

23. *Ibid.* Box 52, file 11, Submission of Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Co. to royal commission; copy of Mr. Justice Gillanders' report submitted to the Minister of Labour on 7 June 1940; and see memorandum, 4 October 1941.

they queried it.[24] Four months later, DOL and CCL officials made another fruitless attempt to clarify wage rates and job classifications at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Company.

Under such discouraging circumstances, union membership declined. Bolduc described the situation as "precarious and confused" because "everything is being done to discourage the men."[25] R. Brock Thomson, long time director and secretary of Canada Steamship Lines and vice-president and general manager of Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing, refused to allow the union's business agent to enter the shipyard. Months later, the intervention of Aaron Mosher, president of the CCL, who had arranged a meeting in Ottawa on 31 July between representatives of the company, union, DOL, and Department of Munitions and Supply (DMS), led to little.[26]

A second board of conciliation set up under Judge Alfred Savard in August on an application from coppersmiths and members of Local 601 of the International Brotherhood of Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers of America (AFL) at Morton Engineering and Dry Dock, reported that "the wage rate level existing at Morton Engineering and even at Lauzon across the river is unduly low and subnormal" with respect to shipbuilding wage rates across the country. Mechanics at Morton were still being paid 58 cents an hour and helpers 35 cents with very few exceptions. On the Great Lakes similar men were receiving 78, 80, and 85 cents per hour, at Canadian Vickers 75 to 85 cents, and Pacific coast workers 90 to 95 cents. While slightly higher in Montreal, the cost of living in Quebec was not lower than in Halifax.[27]

This board's work was superceded by a royal commission established on 2 September to inquire into wages and working conditions at Quebec, Lauzon, and Sorel and whether they should be the same as at several Montreal and Ontario yards. Unlike boards of conciliation and investigation set up under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, the royal commission was established under the Inquiries Act that permitted the government to exclude both company and union representatives. Government policy to preserve wage differentials between workers employed at different shipyards lay at the heart of much of the bitterness in the industry's labour relations.

24. *Ibid.* Box 52, file 11, copy of agreement between Geo. T. Davie & Sons Ltd. and Local 3 BISUC, 7 November 1940.

25. *Ibid.* Box 52, file 10, Bolduc to Mosher, 8 April 1941.

26. *Ibid.* Mosher to R.B. Thompson, 8 July; *ibid.* (telegram) Norman S. Dowd, secretary treasurer CCL, to Achille Leblond, president Local 3 BISUC, 29 July 1941.

27. Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales de Quebec-Central Archives Quebec (hereafter BANQ-CAQ), Ministère du travail E24, Transfer number 1960-01-040 (hereafter E24), Box 197, file G10-41-42, Report of the conciliation board between Morton Engineering and Dry Dock Co. Ltd. and employees members of Local 601 International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers of America, 26 October 1941.

Senator Leon Mercier Gouin, KC, was appointed chairman, and the other two commissioners were Vincent C. Macdonald, KC, dean of the law faculty at Dalhousie University, and F. H. Marlow, KC, master of the Ontario Supreme Court. During eleven weeks between 16 September and 22 November, the commissioners met in seven cities, heard over 100 persons, and received more than 80 exhibits before retiring to write their report, which they completed in a week. They found that since the outbreak of war employment in the seven yards under investigation had grown from approximately 1,000 to more than 7,500, four-fifths of whom worked in Quebec. Acknowledging that wages in the industry were based on minimum rates of pay for men in specific classes, the commissioners turned to the different situations in which the shipyards found themselves. The proximity of the two largest firms, Canadian Vickers Limited in Montreal and Marine Industries Limited in Sorel, adjacent to a large aircraft plant and an armaments factory, respectively, and employing many men of similar classes, affected positively their ability to secure and retain men. Canadian Vickers enjoyed a major advantage in having a large pool of trained shipyard workers and skilled labour in other industries available. The problem of training men in other yards, especially Quebec and Sorel, was much greater than in the big city, containing relatively large pools of skilled workers who needed to be adapted to new work rather than trained.

Shipbuilders were not well paid. Basic wage rates everywhere were low "as compared with rates generally prevailing for the same, or substantially similar occupations in the locality, or in a locality which … is comparable".[28] Despite the vagueness of the notion, the commissioners attempted to establish "fair and reasonable" wage rates. But they concluded that the period 1926 to 1939 as laid down in order-in-council PC 7440 of December 1940 could not be used to established scales of remuneration. The order-in-council had been the federal government's first comprehensive policy to control wages in all industries. Reports of earlier boards of conciliation could not be taken as conclusions of what were "fair and reasonable" rates and actual cost-of-living data for specific localities provided very uncertain (and sometimes illusory) guides to precise conclusions. The commissioners believed that uniformity of wage rates should be applied "as far as possible" in spite of differentiation between yards and localities, but they conformed to government policy in opting to preserve regional wage differentials recommending uniformity of regions. Ontario companies located in small communities outside Toronto and relying on local sources of labour should have uniform wages and job classifications while Quebec companies were treated as being in two regions, Montreal and Quebec-Sorel. Those in the latter region drew labour from local, largely unskilled sources and required different job classifications (helper, learner-improver, and specialist) than in Montreal. The commissioners recommended

28. "Report of the Royal Commission on Shipbuilding in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario," *Labour Gazette* (January 1942), 17–27.

establishing three schedules of basic minimum wage rates, and rejected recommending union recognition as beyond their terms of reference.

Senior DOL officials were distinctly unhappy with the commission's recommendations. In their eyes, the commission had solved nothing. In the first place, the commissioners' conclusions ignored the replacement on 24 October of PC 7440 by a new order-in-council PC 8253 that froze all wages, extended cost-of-living bonuses, and established the National War Labour Board (NWLB) as permanent enforcement machinery.[29] Commenting on the meaning of the failed wages policy in PC 7440, Floyd Chalmers, editor of the *Financial Post*, accused the government of misleading workers that the war would not affect them while falsely assuring employers that a ceiling had been placed on wage costs.[30]

Current minimum rates for journeymen were 65 cents per hour at Lauzon, 73 cents at Montreal, and 70 cents at Kingston, Midland, and Collingwood. The royal commission recommended increases in the three Ontario yards to 80 cents per hour, the same as for Vickers, and 70 cents at Lauzon, leaving Quebec City workers further behind than before despite the recommended 5 cent increase. Acknowledging that Lauzon and Ontario yards were in rural zones, the commission recommended a differential of ten cents per hour between them. Moreover, the recommended increase for Montreal with the highest cost of living in Canada was unfair. DOL officials thought Lauzon should receive the same minimum wage as rural Ontario yards and that Vickers journeymen should receive five cents per hour more. This would still be ten and five cents per hour respectively lower than west coast rates. The commissioners' recommendation to investigate the cost-of-living bonus further failed to resolve the issue. DOL officials wanted an immediate increase at Montreal and Lauzon of at least six cents per hour.[31] Even if they were prepared to accept the royal commission's proposed wage scales for Canadian Vickers and the two Davie yards, the Montreal firm persuaded the government to evade signing an agreement with shipyard workers, refused to meet industrial union representatives, and endeavoured to consult AFL craft unions.[32]

The government's solution to this confusion was to scrap the royal commission's recommendations and issue yet another order-in-council, PC 629, dated 26 January 1942, that fixed wages for mechanics in designated Quebec and

29. MacDowell, "*Remember Kirkland Lake,*" 240; also see Webber, "Malaise of compulsory Conciliation," 65–9 and McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*, 36–42 for further discussion of some of these government orders-in-council.

30. Archives of Ontario, Floyd Chalmer's Papers F-4153, file 3-0-10, memo of conversation with Gilbert Jackson, 8 October 1941.

31. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 52, file 10, memorandum M. M. M[aclean], director of industrial relations DOL, to A. R. M[osher], 20 December 1941.

32. *Ibid.*, Box 53, file 5, Bryce M. Stewart, deputy minister DOL, to Mosher, 24 December 1941; *ibid.* (telegram) Pat Conroy, secretary treasurer CCL, to Alex McAuslane, CCL, 17 January 1942.

Ontario shipyards and authorized the minister of labour to adjust wage rates for other job classifications "that having regard to all the circumstances, are fair and reasonable." The new wage rates for Quebec yards outside Montreal were the lowest, Canadian Vickers the highest, and rural Ontario in-between.[33] Aside from being arbitrary, the action of settling wages by orders-in-council had eliminated any right of employees to bargain collectively, indeed, undercutting any form of negotiating. To justify reducing the basic wage rate paid to labourers at Morton Engineering and Canadian Vickers as against the recently applied increases for mechanics, DOL increased the cost-of-living bonus, which further muddied the waters.[34] PC 629 was in keeping with the government's chief concern throughout the war: the enforcement of its wage stabilization programme. Maintenance of the industry's existing wage structure appeared to be an explicit government goal.[35]

On Saturday morning, 4 April, after receiving their pay, workers at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing spontaneously walked off the job to express their dissatisfaction with PC 629. The union had nothing to do with the walkout, although members of the CCL executive committee and a DOL representative were instrumental in getting the men to return to work on Tuesday.[36]

Low productivity reflected festering dissatisfaction among workers. Following strikes at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing and George T. Davie & Sons in November, which were called off after the intervention of CCL organizer and member of the Quebec Regional War Labour Board, Paul Marquette, the deputy-minister of Quebec's Department of Labour, Gérard Tremblay, appealed to federal labour minister, Humphrey Mitchell, apparently without avail, to modify PC 629 by removing the 10 cent per hour differential between Quebec City and Montreal and Sorel. "It is a fact," he wrote, "[that] the cost of living in Quebec and Lévis is higher than in Montreal."[37] Declining productivity could be directly attributed to the companies' refusal to recognize and negotiate with the union. By December, with the union claiming 85 per cent of employees at all three Quebec City yards as members, demands for equal rates of pay with Canadian Vickers, establishment of a joint management-labour production committee, and for a closed shop, revealed increased anger and frustration.[38]

33. *Ibid.*, Box 54, file 9, for copy of PC 629, dated 26 January 1942.

34. *Ibid.*, for copy of PC 629, dated 26 January 1942.

35. Webber, "Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation," 62.

36. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 53, file 5, Conroy to Humphrey Mitchell, Minister of Labour, 21 April 1942.

37. BANQ-CAQ, E 24, T no. 1960-01-040, Box 211, file G36-42-43, Gérard Tremblay to Mitchell, 26 November 1942.

38. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 53, file 4, Paul Emile Marquette, regional CCL director for Quebec, to David Craig, plant manager, Davie Shipbuilding, 22 December 1942.

Tension at Morton Engineering and Dry Dock in Quebec City may have been greater than at the big Davie yard. In January 1943, workers came together on a Sunday afternoon to apply to the CCL for their own union local the better to deal with the employer. The Congress immediately granted them a charter as Local 6 BISUC. Enclosing the application and fifteen-dollar fee for the charter, Julien Samson reported, "last Sunday afternoon a meeting of 50 men was anticipated and over 400 showed up."[39] By March, Local 6 counted 1,490 paid up members. Also in January, workers at George T. Davie & Sons obtained a union charter from the CCL as Local 7 BISUC.[40] These new arrangements left Local 3 BISUC representing the employees at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing. In early April, members of Local 7 voted overwhelmingly (98.4 per cent of votes cast) to go on strike.[41] This burst of organizing enthusiasm spread to Montreal where the CCL chartered locals 13 and 12 of the same union at Canadian Vickers and United Shipyards in April and May, respectively.[42] How much of this successful union organizing can be attributed to the growing frustration of local trade unionists in the yards and to the efforts of national CCL organizers remains moot, but their success is beyond question. Worker spontaneity and union organizing effort complemented each other.

Workers at Morton Engineering and Dry Dock and at Geo. T. Davie & Sons filed an application on 9 April with the DOL for another board of conciliation.[43] Wages and working conditions were at issue. Wages at Morton, Davie, and Anglo-Canadian were ten cents per hour less than rates paid at Montreal to workers at both Canadian Vickers and United Shipyards, and the weekly cost-of-living bonus was $2.10 compared to $2.70.[44] Aaron Mosher correctly anticipated the companies would agree to refer the dispute with their employees to the same board as was being established to deal with another dispute with Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing.[45] The three-man board, comprising Ernest Godbout, chairman, and lawyers Guy M. Desaulniers and Walter M. Merrill, KC, was quickly assembled, held hearings, visited all three yards

39. *Ibid.* Box 54, file 9, Julien Samson, secretary treasurer Local 6 BISUC, to Conroy, 12 January 1943.

40. *Ibid.* Box 53, file 8, demande pour une charte d'union locale, 18 janvier 1943.

41. *Ibid.* Box 53, file 8, strike committee Local 6 to Mosher, 6 April 1943.

42. *Ibid.* Box 54, file 4, Marquette to Conroy, 9 March 1943. Initially the CCL had issued a charter to Local 5 of the Industrial Union of Maritime and Shipbuilding Workers of Canada that transferred men from the United Steel Workers of America, but in April this was changed to Local 13 BISUC.

43. *Ibid.* rapport mensuel d'union locale – janvier à août 1943; and application for charter, dated 11 janvier 1943.

44. *Ibid.* Box 73, file 4, Basic hourly rates in steel shipyards in Quebec and Maritime Provinces – January 1943, compiled by National War Labour Board, Wages Branch, 4 January 1943.

45. *Ibid.* Box 53, file 8, Mosher to J. Georges Ouellet, secretary–treasurer Local 7, 9 April 1943; McAuslane to Maclean, 20 July 1943.

between 19 and 24 April, and submitted majority and minority reports on 4 May.[46]

The majority report, acknowledging that "unionism has rendered great services to the labouring class," recommended acceptance of three of the union's demands to establish union-management joint production committees, to remove the wage differentials paid for similar work at Montreal, and to recommend the union's demand for overtime.[47] It rejected company arguments for only a partial adjustment in the wage differential, accepting the union's claim that they no longer applied. Differentials created ill feeling, especially when the government paid companies the same amount for the ships they were building. The majority and minority reports both recommended against the union's demand for dues check off and a closed shop.

Nearly two weeks later, writing to C. D. Howe rather than to the Minister of Labour, Aaron Mosher stressed the contents of the board's majority report, repeating the union's demand for a closed shop, and claiming the latter would improve the workers' lot without harming employers.[48] During an appearance before the National War Labour Board in early June, however, T. R. Ker, KC, representing the Montreal War Industries Council and Quebec Shipbuilders Conference, claimed that the closed shop was the greatest stumbling block to improved labour relations.[49]

The Congress immediately applied to the National War Labour Board to remove the differentials and the companies continued to oppose the closed shop while favouring establishment of a grievance committee in each yard.[50] But the wheels of the NWLB ground very slowly, and on 3 June workers at all three Quebec City yards voted in an authorized strike vote supervised by the DOL to take job action to reinforce their demands. "Yes" votes accounted for 95.5 per cent of the votes cast, and 87.8 per cent of 7,032 eligible voters cast ballots.[51] On 14 June, more than three years after establishing their first union, after failing to sign any agreement with the two largest shipyards, and having

46. *Ibid.* Box 54, file 9, report of board of conciliation in disputes between Quebec's three shipbuilding companies and three union locals, 3 May 1943.

47. "Report of Board in Dispute Between the Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing Company Limited; Morton Engineering and Dry Dock Company Limited; and the George T. Davie & Sons Limited, Lauzon, Quebec, and their Representative Employees," *Labour Gazette*, (June 1943), 771. For full report, see copy in LAC, MG 28, I103 Box 53, file 8, Report of board of conciliation and investigation, 12 May 1943.

48. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 73, file 4, Mosher to C.D. Howe, 25 May 1943.

49. Canada, National War Labour Board, *Proceedings [of an inquiry into] Labour Relations and Wage Conditions in Canada*, No. 10 (Ottawa), 934–45. The Quebec Shipbuilder's Conference had been set up to lobby the government the previous year with T. R. McLagan, general manager of Canadian Vickers, as chairman.

50. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 74, file 4, DOL news release, 30 May 1943.

51. *Ibid.* Box 73, file 4, Maclean to Mosher, 3 and 11 June 1943.

failed to remove the wage differentials, Canada's lowest paid shipbuilding workers had had enough and ceased all work.[52]

Because of its potential for disrupting war production, a strike by more than 7,000 shipbuilding workers in three Quebec City yards was one of the country's more significant wartime labour disputes. The government's response was immediate and unique, as were the consequences. The very next day, C. D. Howe, minister of munitions and supply, seized Morton Engineering and Dry Dock and George T. Davie & Sons from their owners and appointed Wilfrid Gagnon federal controller.[53] Gagnon, who had been Howe's right-hand man in Quebec for nearly a decade, resigned his position as director-general of the purchasing branch of DMS and travelled immediately to Quebec City to confer with the striking workers. The next day Howe incorporated the two shipyards along with Anglo-Canadian Pulp and Paper Mills (Shipbuilding Division), whose workers were not on strike, into a new crown company to be known as Quebec Shipyards Limited.[54]

Wilfrid Gagnon was born in Montreal in 1898 and after graduating from Collège Ste. Marie joined his family's shoe manufacturing firm, Aird and Son Limited, becoming president in 1926. Nine years later, Howe appointed Gagnon, a long-standing Liberal, a director of the Canadian National Railway Company and Trans Canada Airlines and, in 1940, he named him to the board of directors of the CNR's newly constituted Grand Trunk Pacific Development Company, which owned Prince Rupert Dry Dock and Shipyard. A member of the Montreal Board of Trade and the city's Chamber of Commerce, Gagnon had also served briefly as Minister of Commerce and Industry in Premier Adelard Gobout's Liberal government. Late in 1940, he had accepted Howe's appointment as director-general of the purchasing branch of the Department of Munitions and Supply.[55]

The government vigorously denied that creation of the new crown corporation had anything to do with the strike, claiming the move had been contemplated for some time as a means to increase efficiency at the two

52. LAC, RG 27, Box 429, Queen's University Archives (hereafter QUA), microfilm. no. 2472, no. 211 Assistant Commissioner F. L. Mead, RCMP, to Deputy Minister of Labour, 15 June 1943; Quebec *L'Action Catholique*, le 15 juin 1943.

53. LAC, Record Group 2, Privy Council register (hereafter RG 2) 1943, PC 4893, 15 June 1943.

54. LAC, Record Group 28, Department of Munitions and Supply Fonds (hereafter RG 28), Box 32, file 104, H. L. Clifford, general manager Quebec Shipyards Ltd., to C.D. Howe, 14 September 1943; PC 5526, 14 July 1943, 43 revoked PC 4893 and replaced it. The history of Quebec Shipyards Limited in J. de N. Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply: Canada during the Second World War*, 2 vols. (Ottawa 1950), 1: 405–6 is best described as a reticence in two pages.

55. For Gagnon's connection to Howe, see Robert Bothwell and W. Kilbourn, *C. D. Howe: a biography* (Toronto 1979), 109; *The Monetary Times*, 106, (28 December 1940), 430; and Charles G. D. Roberts and A. L. Tunnel, eds., *The Canadian Who's Who, 1938–1939* (Toronto 1939), 253.

small shipyards.[56] But the strike clearly triggered the move. On 14 June Howe acknowledged the existence of labour unrest in the area, adding that it was "perhaps not without cause," and expressing the hope that workers would take no action (i.e. would return to work) "until after the government plans have been announced."[57]

The new company contained little more than half the strikers; the others remained at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Canada Steamship Lines. The stated reason for the new company's creation was to coordinate the naval construction programme in the Quebec district, but no explanation was ever given for Davie Shipbuilding's exemption from expropriation even though all three yards were beginning to build frigates and workers at all three plants were on strike. The political influence of Canada Steamship Lines probably kept the big Davie yard out of the new crown corporation.

The fact that several thousand more men were on strike elsewhere in Quebec and Ontario probably influenced Howe's action. Struck companies included Dominion Engineering Works, Lachine, which was the largest manufacturer of marine engines for the cargo ship programme, and Babcock-Wilcox & Goldie-McCullough, Galt, manufacturers of marine boilers. The latter was in its 26th day of a strike when workers at the Quebec shipyards went out.[58] In view of an official reduction in the rate of ship production that occurred less than a month later, the sudden concern for efficiency and coordination in Quebec City shipyards after nearly four years of war seems precious.

Gagnon arrived in Quebec City on the same day as Alex McAuslane, the CCL's first vice-president, and immediately began conferring with him and Paul Marquette, the CCL's provincial director. Federal labour conciliators also converged on the city hoping to find a settlement. The chief obstacle was the absence of any representative from Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing, *le grand chantier* as it was locally known. According to Marquette, "il faut que l'on règle la grève simultanément dans les trois chantiers, sans quoi, il n'y aura pas de possibilité de règlement".[59] McAuslane repeated the same argument the next day: "There can be no separate agreement … and we are preparing

56. *Montreal Gazette*, 16 June 1943; Kennedy, *History of DMS*, 1: 404.

57. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates,* 14 June 1943, 3,599.

58. "Strikes Hit 3 Quebec Shipyards," *Montreal Star*, 15 June 1943. It is unfortunate that Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The 1943 Steel Strike Against Wartime Wage Controls," *Labour/ Le Travail*, 10 (Autumn 1982), 65–82 reprinted in *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings*, David J. Bercuson and David Bright, eds., 2nd ed. (Toronto 1994), 295–315, does not mention the latter strike or the fact that several hundred steelworkers were on strike at Hamilton Bridge Company, for she leaves the impression (p. 312) that their national director, C.H. Millard, was struggling to prevent "a seething membership" in basic steel from going on strike when he was leading the steelworkers in their shut down of Galt plants.

59. *Montréal La Presse*, 17 June 1943: "The strike must be settled simultaneously in the three shipyards, otherwise, there will be no possibility of agreement."

to rally the support of the entire Canadian labour movement," adding that he was sending a call for "moral and financial assistance of all trade unions in Canada."[60] The strikers repeated their demand for a closed shop, and trade unionists from across the country answered the Quebec workers' call.[61]

Gagnon very quickly instituted a new collective agreement at the Anglo-Canadian plant where workers largely in AFL-affiliated craft unions had not gone out in order to demonstrate the new company's willingness to negotiate within the terms of the conciliation board's recommendations made more than a month earlier.[62] The greatest effect may have been on "the big yard," for at the beginning of the strike's second week representatives of Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing met with Quebec Shipyards and representatives of the CCL and BISUC locals. As a good will gesture, "for the sake of the war effort," union leaders agreed that naval authorities might move three nearly completed ships from the big Davie yard and Morton's into the Anglo-Canadian fitting out yard together with necessary naval material and equipment.[63] Negotiations continued at a swift pace and on Saturday, 26 June, representatives of both companies and BISUC officials signed a new collective agreement. The Davie strikers remained out, but six days later the company finally recognized its employees' union for the first time by signing a collective agreement with Local 3 BISUC to increase wages and the cost-of-living bonus.[64]

Although it did not gain a closed shop, the union won recognition as sole bargaining agent at all three shipyards, plus an undertaking from the companies that superintendents would cease to dissuade men from joining the union. The companies also agreed to bring before the NWLB the workers' demands for wage rate parity with Montreal shipyards retroactive to 16 April, a boost in the weekly cost-of-living bonus from $2.10 to $4.25, permission to institute a plan of paid holidays, formation of joint production committees, and time and a half for hours worked after completion of an eight-hour day.[65] Until then, overtime began only after 48 hours had been worked each week. The Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders and the CCL had won a major victory. But such was the level of government interference in labour relations that the remainder of the summer passed with the CCL pursuing the NWLB to rule in favour of the

60. *Montréal La Presse*, 17 June 1943; *Sydney Post-Record*, 21 June 1943.

61. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 64, file 12, H. A. "Pat" Shea to Conroy, 23 June 1943; and *ibid.* Box 54, file 7, Conroy to James Nicoll, secretary-treasurer local 4 BISUC, 30 June 1943.

62. *Quebec Chronicle Telegraph*, 22 June 1943.

63. *Montreal Star*, 25 June 1943. The newspaper got the ships' names wrong; they were SS *High Park*, HMS *Prudent*, and HMS *Pert* rather than "Hyde Park," "Prejudice," and "Perth."

64. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 73, file 4, (copy) agreement between Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing and Local 3 BISUC (CCL), dated 2 July 1943.

65. *Windsor Star*, 28 June 1943; *St. Thomas Times Journal*, 28 June 1943.

increased cost-of-living bonuses, wage adjustments, and vacations with pay in the agreements while unrest continued among workers.[66]

At Quebec Shipyards Limited, Howe gave Gagnon a small board of directors that included J. Edouard Simard, president of Marine Industries Limited, E. M. Little, and M. Samson. Besides Gagnon, who became president of the new company, officers were: H. L. Clifford, general manager, L. D. Hudon, secretary and comptroller, and H. Giroux, treasurer.[67] Gagnon had settled the strike within two weeks and signed a contract with BISUC Locals 6 and 7 agreeing to increased wages. On 26 July, Gagnon entered into an agreement with the government to supervise management of the two shipyards owned by the crown and the outfitting yard operated by Anglo-Canadian Pulp and Paper Mills. The following day, Colonel Morton, Charlie Davie, former owners of the two expropriated yards, L. Hart and J. B. H. Thivierge, president of Local 7 BISUC, were added to the board of directors.[68] Gagnon also established a school of production, which became very successful, to train men for more responsible positions.[69] During the company's active period, between June 1943 and 31 December 1945, Quebec Shipyards Limited employed an average of 8,000 men and delivered eighteen frigates, twelve corvettes, and eight medium-size cargo ships.[70]

Contextualizing Conflict: Inter-Union Rivalry

THE TWO-WEEK STRIKE at Quebec City in June 1943 was the most significant in the province's wartime shipyards, but it proved to be just the beginning of the long, angry summer. In mid-July, an important strike occurred at Canadian Vickers in Montreal. Initiated by craft unions affiliated with the AFL, it soon turned into a nasty inter-union contest lasting the rest of the month. It left a great deal of bitterness in the yard and delayed the company's recognition of representatives of the majority of employees by at least a year.

Animosity between craft locals that had long-held, signed agreements with the company and the new industrial unionism was quite pronounced at Canadian Vickers. AFL unions resisted every attempt to organize shipbuilding workers on an industrial basis until they attempted to do it themselves. In 1940, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers of America (AFL) local won wage increases of ten per cent for its 150 members after a two-day strike called to support a majority conciliation

66. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 73, file 6, Conroy to Mr. Justice C. P. McTague, 2 July 1943; *passim*; also telegrams Conroy to Marquette 30 July and 6 August 1943.

67. Kennedy, *History of DMS*, 1: 406.

68. LAC, RG 28, Box 32, file 104, Clifford to Howe, 14 September 1943.

69. Kennedy, *History of DMS*, 1: 404.

70. *Ibid.*, 1, 405 includes ten 500-ton coasters, but these were delivered in 1946 after Quebec Shipyards Ltd. had been wound up.

board report. But members made no attempt to organize unskilled workers or semi-skilled workers in the plant.[71] Indeed, they condemned unskilled workers who, at about the same time, struck spontaneously in the industrial engineering department to gain recognition of their self-made Independent Industrial Union of Shipyard Workers. These workers lost a representational vote by a wide margin in favour of a company union, but as their strike occurred before PC 7440 went into effect, they, too, gained a ten per cent wage increase.[72]

The situation became much more confused after the International Association of Machinists (AFL), which had been vigorously organizing workers in Montreal's aircraft industry since 1940, joined with boilermakers and sheet metal workers locals to form a Montreal Metal Trades Council to organize munitions plants and other war industries, including Vickers' shipyards, on an industrial basis.[73] In December 1941, the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of Canada claimed to represent Vickers marine division employees, although the company refused to recognize it. This local directly chartered by the CCL appeared to have been organized by the Steel Workers' Organization Committee (SWOC) and was a Canadian version of the American CIO union of the same name.[74] In June 1942, SWOC won a representational vote in the yard, but to little effect.[75] With the government's collusion, Canadian Vickers successfully evaded recognizing the union or signing an agreement while endeavouring to consult AFL unions already in the yard.[76] In March 1943, the CCL transferred members from Local 2524 United Steel Workers of America into the newly chartered Local 13 of the BISUC, but company recognition did not follow, and the confused situation continued to heighten tensions.[77]

On 14 July, about fifty employees in Vickers' boiler shop ceased work to protest against not having received the full cost-of-living bonus that had been the subject of a joint application made a fortnight earlier by the company and union to the National War Labour Board. These craft union members blamed the Labour Department's provocation, having "callously turned a deaf ear to

71. LAC, RG 27, Box 407, no. 156, QUA microfilm 2457; also *Labour Gazette* 40 (November and December, 1940), 1,007–14, 1,111–14, and 1,234. See Copp, "The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montreal, 1935–1945," 858–9 for a fuller treatment of labour struggle in wartime Montreal.

72. *Labour Gazette*, 40 (November 1940), 1144.

73. Copp, "The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montreal," 857, 865–6.

74. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 53, file 15, Conroy to R. J. Lamoureaux, field representative SWOC, 30 December 1941; *Labour Gazette*, 42 (August 1942), 883–4.

75. Copp, "The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montreal," 865.

76. *Ibid.* Box 53, file 5, Conroy to McAuslane, 17 January 1942; LAC, RG 27, Box 421, file 276, DOL press release, 1 August 1942.

77. *Ibid.* Box 54, file 4, Marquette to Conroy, 9 March 1942; also McAuslane to Dowd, 8 July 1943.

Men at work on a 10,000-ton dry cargo ship in a Montreal shipyard. Note the burner at left operating an oxy-acetylene torch. Behind him standing on deck is a heater with his portable furnace for heating rivets. At the right a group of workers include a riveter and a holder on.

Credit: National Film Board of Canada, Photo Thequé/ LAC/ e000761658.

their earlier demands for improved conditions over a long time."[78] During the next two days, 310 other workers and about sixty welders struck in sympathy. By Saturday, 17 July, the strike had spread to all sectors of the shipyard involving 3,500 men demanding the full cost-of-living bonus. All operations ceased.[79]

By agreeing to receive a workers' delegation in Ottawa the next morning, Labour Department conciliators persuaded members of Local 373, International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers of America and three other AFL locals to return to work on Monday 19 July and allow the NWLB to deal with the matter in the ordinary way. After company representatives agreed to join the unions in applying to the NWLB for paid holidays, the AFL strike was over. Members wanted to return to work, but CCL picketers intervened to prevent them from doing so.

78. "Mitchell Is Wrong Say Labor Leaders," *Montreal Gazette*, 4 August 1943.

79. LAC, RG 27, Box 430; QUA microfilm. no. 2473, file 249, DIR Report; *Labour Gazette*, (August 1943), 1122, 1123, and 1126.

That afternoon, Murdock M. Maclean, the labour department's director of industrial relations, met delegates from the CCL who claimed to represent employees covered by the previous year's agreement negotiated by the United Steel Workers of America. The CCL had initially handed jurisdiction to a newly chartered Local 5 Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of Canada, subsequently changed to Local 13 BISUC. While this union was not responsible for the strike and had not called it, CCL officials claimed to see little hope of getting the men back to work before company representatives met them regarding the bonus question and other grievances.

On 21 July, a federal industrial relations officer, Bernard Wilson, succeeded in arranging a conference between management and CCL representatives, but drew the line at any attempt to include discussions concerning AFL unions covered by current agreements. During the day, David Côté, chief CCL organizer at the Vickers marine yard, urged employees from one or more craft unions not to return to work, calling them "scabs, saboteurs and strikebreakers"[80] The Labour Department threatened to withdraw from the conference if such behavior continued, and an agreement was reached the next day and subsequently ratified by the workers. The settlement provided that all existing agreements between the company and the craft unions would be maintained and full cost-of-living bonuses and paid vacations would be recommended to the NWLB.[81] But inter-union tension had increased to the point that AFL representatives published an open letter to Prime Minister King alleging the DOL favoured the CCL in the settlement of the dispute and sought to drive AFL unions from the shipyard. They demanded Murdock Maclean's resignation and threatened a general strike. Maclean had been one-time national secretary of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, an executive member of the CCL, and a close associate of Aaron Mosher before joining the DOL in 1942.[82] The craft unions and their local organization, the Montreal Metal Trades Council, also alleged the Labour Department had forced the company to recognize the CCL industrial union.[83] This was not true. Since the beginning of the war, the company had dealt only with the international craft-based unions.

The RCMP took David Côté into custody for allegedly inciting workers to continue their strike at Vickers' Viau Street yard.[84] The Minister of Labour, Humphrey Mitchell, invited the signatories of the open letter and the presi-

80. "Organizer Fined For Inciting Strike," *Ottawa Morning Citizen,* 19 August 1943.

81. "Shipyard Strike Ended By Workers," *Montreal Gazette*, 23 July 1943; "La travail reprendre demain à la Vickers," *Montréal La Presse,* le 22 juillet 1943.

82. Michael D. Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle: National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources during World War* II (Montreal and Kingston 2001), 11; Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973), 44, 52.

83. LAC, RG 27, Box 430, no 249, "Lettre Ouverte au Premier Ministre King"

84. "Labor Organizer David Côté Held For Urging Men To Continue Strike," *Montreal Gazette*, 24 July 1943.

dent of the AFL-affiliated Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) to meet him for a frank discussion, which they did on 30 July. The next day the minister issued a statement defending himself and his department officials from the allegations of recent days. The inter-union damage had nonetheless been done and continued to have ramifications.

In August, the National War Labor Board announced that effective immediately vacations with pay would prevail in all shipyards under its jurisdiction but that existing wage structures were still under consideration.[85] Both the company and the unions objected to the board's delays. T. R. "Rodgie" McLagan, Canadian Vickers general manager, complained that the board had to handle these matters more expeditiously or risk a general strike, and Aaron Mosher pleaded with union locals not to go on strike, explaining that delays were owing to "apparent differences of opinion that exist between members of the Board."[86] AFL leaders still rankled at the Labour Department's favoritism towards "demagogic agitators of the Canadian Labour Congress."[87] David Côté was found guilty as charged and fined $500 or three months in jail, but Quebec shipyards' long, angry summer was not yet over.[88]

The bitter struggle between craft and industrial trade unionism also occurred at United Shipyards where, in May, workers had obtained a CCL union charter as Local 12 BISUC.[89] Two months later, the local union executive requested a supervised vote to determine which union represented the majority of employees in the yard. Although Local 12 BISUC claimed to represent 4,400 of the approximately 7,000 employees, company management refused to sign any agreement until a representational vote determined the question, and a very bitter dispute with four craft unions ensued that dragged on into the fall. The craft unions were the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders, Welders and Helpers, whose numbers were unknown; the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which claimed 100 to 125

85. LAC, RG 27, Box 430, no. 249, DOL, news release, 6 August 1943. Earlier in the year the government reconstituted the NWLB as an independent, three-man board under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice C. P. McTague. In April, the government requested the board to commence an inquiry into labour relations and wage conditions, which greatly increased the board's work and accounted for the delays. In August the board recommended to the government that it be given authority to adjust wages previously held down by the government and that family allowances be introduced if wage agreements appeared inflationary; see MacDowell, "The 1943 Steel Strike," 308–9 and J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's War; The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939–1945* (1975; Toronto 1990), 279–80.

86. LAC, RG 27, Box 430, no. 249, DIR Report, 2. See Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *Renegade Lawyer; the Life of J. L. Cohen* (Toronto 2001), 132–44 for more on these differences.

87. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 53, file 8, Mosher to J.B.H. Thivierge, president of Local 7 BISUC, 23 August 1943; and "Mitchell Is Wrong Say Labor Leaders," *Montreal Gazette*, 4 August 1943.

88. "Organizer Fined For Inciting Strike," *Ottawa Morning Citizen*, 19 August 1943; *Labour Gazette* (September 1943), 1243.

89. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 54, file 2, Dowd to Marquette, regional director, 9 June 1943.

of 161 electricians in the yard; six members of Local 116 International Sheet Metal Workers; and the International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners with 200 to 250 of 417 carpenters in the plant. All sought a representational vote by trade. Members of Local 12 BISUC called, unsurprisingly, for industry-wide voting. The outcome was a foregone conclusion, but the government allowed the issue to drag on for months.

Once again the DOL established a board of conciliation and investigation and after hearings were held, a report was issued on 19 October. Board members could not agree and issued majority and minority reports with predictable recommendations. To give management its due, general manager John Rannie feared he would lose his best and critically important tradesmen if an industry-wide vote was permitted. Not only did he fear AFL members would strike the plant, but members of Local 144 International Brotherhood of Plumbers and Steamfitters had an agreement pending and said that they would quit rather than strike.[90] With plenty of war work available in Montreal this was no idle threat. Representative votes by craft were held during November with mixed results, but it appeared that Local 12 BISUC won a substantial majority covering most job classifications at United Shipyards and the union executive began to negotiate an agreement which was not signed, however, until the following summer.[91]

The inter-union rivalry continued into the fall at Canadian Vickers permitting the company to refuse to negotiate until the question of worker representation was settled. At the end of October and in mid-November, the DOL appointed two industrial disputes commissioners. The first reported that no evidence was submitted to indicate that existing agreements with AFL unions were invalid or proof that Local 13 BISUC represented a majority of employees. The second commissioner closed the investigation after receiving assurances from union officials that the dispute with AFL locals had been settled privately. Inter-union rivalry had delayed workers' demands being met until after the government issued PC 1003 in February 1944. Indeed, World War II appeared incidental to the deadly struggle between the AFL and CIO that continued for more than a decade after the war ended.[92]

Contextualizing Conflict: Militant Spontaneity

IN THE MIDST OF THE summer strike at Canadian Vickers, a third variant of labour unrest in which no unions appeared to be active at all occurred at Marine Industries Limited at Sorel. On 17 July, the same day the Vickers strike

90. *Ibid.* Box 52 file 2, Report of board of conciliation, 19 October 1943.

91. *Ibid.* Box 54, file 2, Maclean to Eugene Leroux, president Local 12 BISUC, 26 November, and Conroy to Marquette, 30 November 1943.

92. LAC, MG 28, I103 Box 54, file 4, J.S. McCullogh DOL to Conroy, 15 November 1943; Maclean to A. Rutherford, secretary-treasurer, Local 13, 30 November 1943.

spread to the entire plant at Montreal, 250 unorganized burners and closers brought Marine Industries Limited to a halt, affecting 5,400 shipyard workers.[93] Mostly young men, the strikers refused to work for the same reasons as elsewhere: wage increases already applied for by the company, full cost-of-living bonuses, increased wages for "improvers" (a classification omitted from a recent application to the NWLB), and approved wages retroactive to 2 May not yet paid. Work resumed three days later after Frank Lafortune, a federal industrial conciliator, reached agreement with the company to implement immediately the last NWLB finding and direction with the men to await the board's decision on the bonus question.[94] The company made some adjustments in job classifications, the NWLB approved a five cents an hour increase for improvers, and the strike appeared settled.[95] But there were some interesting and disturbing features.

According to managing director A. Luger Simard, "no union questions [were] involved whatsoever," and an RCMP telegram reported the strike was "spontaneous" and "unorganized."[96] More significant, the strikers had pelted members of the RCMP sent to maintain order with rocks and stones. According to the young strikers the stone throwing was "just fun" though a few Mounties suffered bruises about the head and shoulders.[97] None of the strikers, mostly improver types or apprentices, would accept responsibility for the strike. Hiding their identities, they claimed "city officials and other big shots" were discussing their case for them, and with no one to negotiate labour conciliators had finally met their match.

The unorganized strike was all the more interesting because an inter-union struggle at Sorel Industries Limited, the large gun manufacturing plant next door, had just concluded. On 16 July the *Confédération des Travailleurs Catholique du Canada* (CTCC) won a supervised vote against the Sorel Metal Trades Council (AFL) over which union central would represent some 2,000 workers, but the Catholic central appeared to have no presence in the adjacent shipyard and made no attempt to intervene.[98] Nor was the CCL present at Sorel.

This was very curious because the *Syndicate national catholique de l'industrie maritime de Sorel* had carried out a hard struggle with Marine Industries in 1937 and had been present in the shipyard as recently as six months before. Following a vote taken on 9 December 1942, 55 per cent (1,933)

93. LAC, RG 27, Box 430; QUA microfilm. no. 2473, no. 257 employment report, 22 July 1943.

94. *Ibid.* DIR Report; F. Lafortune to Maclean, 27 July 1943.

95. *Labour Gazette* (August 1943), 1,123.

96. LAC, RG 27, Box 430, no. 257, telegram H.A.R. Gagnon to Commissioner RCMP, 19 July 1943.

97. "Strikers Pelt RCMP Guards At Sorel Plant," *Montreal Gazette*, 20 July 1943.

98. "Le syndicate remporte une victoire à Sorel," *Montréal La Presse*, le 20 juillet 1943; "La 'Marine Industries' annonce un règlement de la grève," *Montréal La Patrie*, le 20 juilliet 1943.

An armed guard stands on duty amidst ship parts in the stores yard of United Shipyards Limited, Montreal. The yard's six berths are visible in the background.
Credit: National Film Board of Canada, PhotoThequé/ LAC/ e000761662.

had cast ballots in favour of the union, and the company had almost immediately signed a contract recognizing the syndicate although no salary increases or changed conditions of work occurred.[99] Although Marine Industries signed the agreement with the syndicate on 9 January 1943, members may have faded away, for six months later it was the AFL-affiliated Sorel Metal Trades Council (*conseil des métiers de la métallurgie de Sorel*) that stepped in to represent the young shipyard workers but with little effect.[100]

Across the province morale among shipyard workers remained low. More than 16,000 men had gone on strike during the previous 30 days. At Quebec City, after negotiating a new collective agreement with BISUC locals, lack of enthusiasm among workers continued to thwart Quebec Shipyards Limited.[101]

99. BANQ-CAQ, E24, 1960-01-040, Box 240, file L29-42-43, J. Edouard Simard, vice president Sorel Industries Ltd. to Edgar Rochette, ministre du travail, le 17 février 1943, 3,518 of 4,339 employees cast ballots.

100. *Ibid.* Box 256, file G160-and G162-1945-46 for some of the history.

101. LAC, RG 28, Box 32, DMS History – Quebec Shipyards, Wilfrid Gagnon to J. deN. Kennedy, 26 October 1948.

While management kept all three yards in close contact and saw there was a proper interchange of useful information and production methods in an effort to increase efficiency, "loafing in the yards" remained prevalent well into September.[102] Dismissal of the union's business agent, who sat on the grievance committee at Davie Shipbuilding and Repairing, led 900 men to strike briefly on 24 July. Four days later at Montreal, 100 unorganized testers at Canadian Vickers dropped their tools to obtain restoration of their five cent per hour wage differential above the basic rate paid to labourers. Many of the men had been reclassified the previous week, and those left out had stopped work.[103] On 4 September, caulkers at George T. Davie & Sons, now a part of Quebec Shipyards Limited, struck the plant for two days after improved wages promised two weeks before were not paid. "Caulkers were riled up and refused to work," reported the president of the union local."[104] The same Saturday morning, similar trouble flared up at the Morton yard, also part of the crown corporation. Plant manager H. L. Clifford blamed the NWLB's delays in approving the terms of settlement of the June strike for this and "the likelihood of recurrences, possibly of a more serious nature." Writing to C. D. Howe, he concluded that unless this obstacle was solved, Quebec Shipyards Limited "will never efficiently carry out the duties imposed upon it."[105] The minister's much vaunted crown corporation would solve little until working conditions improved.[106]

Throughout the province's shipyards, NWLB delays in announcing wage adjustments already agreed to between companies and unions caused a steady run of brief strikes as workers protested alleged mistakes and omissions in one department or another. A spontaneous strike by 1,800 workers at Marine Industries occurred in November after overly officious company police began taking down employees' badge numbers for allegedly breaking company rules. Rather than face another indefinite work stoppage, managing director Luger Simard ignored government conciliators and used the yard's public address

102. Kennedy, *History of DMS*, 1: 404; RG 28, Box 32, DMS History – Quebec Shipyards, H. L. Clifford, managing director, to Howe 14 September 1943.

103. LAC, RG 27, Box 430, file 265; QUA microfilm. no. 2473, DIR Report; *Labour Gazette* (September 1943), 1242; *Ibid.* no. 271, DIR Report and Mead to Deputy Minister of Labour, 19 July 1943.

104. LAC, MG 28, I103, Box 54, file 9, A. L. Bergeron, president Local 6, to Mosher, 5 September 1943.

105. LAC, RG 28, Box 321, file 104, Clifford to Howe, 14 September 1943.

106. Historians are nearly unanimous in praising C. D. Howe's use of crown corporations; see Kennedy, *History of DMS*, 1: 304–6; Robert Bothwell and William Kilbourn, *C. D. Howe: A Biography* (Toronto 1979), 89, 133–4; Sanford S. Borins, "World War II Crown Corporations: Their functions and Their Fate," in J. Robert S. Prichard, ed., *Crown Corporations in Canada: The Calculus of Investment Choice* (Toronto 1983), 447–75. For an alternative view see James Pritchard, "Fifty-Six Minesweepers and the Toronto Shipbuilding Company during the Second World War," *The Northern Mariner/ Le Marin du nord*, 16, (October 2006), 29–48.

system to announce the indefinite withdrawal of so-called "labour supervisors" until further notice. In future, the police would confine their activities to police work.[107] In mid-December, workers at Morton Engineering complained that subscription lists to provide Christmas and New Year's gifts to foremen and superintendents were circulating and that those who opposed them had been dismissed, but management was unable to halt *la pratique reprehensible* before mid-January.[108] In 1944, during the same month that PC 1003 was issued, Anglo-Canadian Pulp and Paper (Shipbuilding Division) Limited refused to recognize and dismissed members of the Quebec Professional Union of Construction Workers. It had the support of the international union in the plant even though no valid contract of any kind existed between the company and its employees.[109]

Conclusion

Most strikes in Quebec's shipbuilding industry were small affairs. Before 1943, they had been largely spontaneous protests against wages and working conditions. Government labour conciliators intervened to delay strikes rather than solve problems, and boards of conciliation and investigation rarely made unanimous recommendations, further postponing decisions and undermining the efforts of officials at the Department of Munitions and Supply to increase production through achieving greater efficiency. By 1943, the government's labour relations and wage control policy had reached a crossroads. The strikes among Quebec's shipyard workers commencing in June and extending through July and intermittently during the rest of the summer were but part of the year-long process that finally convinced the government that it had to change direction, to abandon coercion and recognize workers' rights to collective bargaining. What is most significant is that the shipyard workers at Quebec City actually won wage increases and improved working conditions through a legal strike long before PC 1003 occurred.

By the beginning of 1943, the Canadian Congress of Labour had made great strides in organizing Quebec City shipyard workers. From a single union local chartered in March 1940 through three frustrating years of non-recognition in all but one yard, and with only one signed agreement, and that with the smallest yard in the province, the struggle of industrial trade unionism

107. LAC, RG 27, Box 434; QUA microfilm. no. 2477, no. 433 strike report, 13 December 1943 and undated RCMP report and Commissioner S. T. Wood to Deputy Minister of Labour, 26 November 1943; *Labour Gazette* (December 1943), 1,692.

108. BANQ-CAQ, E24, 1960-01-040, Box 22, file A40-42-43, Wilfrid Beaulac, directeur à Gérard Tremblay, ministre de travail, 14 décembre 1943; Raymond A. Robic, chef du personnel, à Tremblay, 12 janvier 1944.

109. *Ibid.* Box 226, file G84-43-44, Application for a board of conciliation and investigation by the Quebec Professional Union of Construction Workers, 9 February 1944.

appeared futile. By the same token, labour militancy had grown enormously during the same period, complementing CCL organizing efforts. Communists do not appear to have played any role in Quebec's shipyards. At Montreal, the behaviour of AFL-affiliated craft unions, ignoring semi-skilled and unskilled workers during the early years and fighting the efforts of CCL industrial union organizers later on, diverted resources from the main struggle. The apparent absence of both the CCL and CCTC from Marine Industries Limited remains puzzling and deserves further research. Taken as a whole, however, evidence from Quebec's wartime shipbuilding industry appears to contradict, at least partially, the claim of most historians that trade unions were the most significant agents of change in labour relations during the war. The sudden appearance during the winter and spring of 1943 of four new union locals to join the original one, all belonging to the Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders Union of Canada, confirms rather than contradicts this claim, for they were as much a product of shipyard workers themselves as of national or regional union organizers.

Organizing workers in Quebec shipyards was difficult and unfinished at the end of the war. Despite popular understanding of the domestic war effort, the war introduced a period of industrial upheaval that included several essential war industries like shipbuilding. While the urgent need to produce military goods quickly brought full employment and should have represented a massive shift of power in favour of workers, this did not occur. Although government constraints on wages and movement and refusal to permit collective bargaining and union recognition were deeply resented, the war did not bring about big changes for Quebec shipbuilders so much as prepare the ground for struggles yet to come. Rather than big unions with planned strikes leading the way, the growing militancy in Quebec's shipyards suggests that the war years prepared workers for the post-war struggles against capital more than is normally recognized. Militant shipyard workers had certainly recognized the importance of union organization in their continuing struggle, but this lesson learned had been taught in ways rather different than those generally suggested in the historical literature. The contextualization of labour relations in Quebec's shipyards during the long, angry summer of 1943 lends support to those historians who argue that workers' struggle rather than politicians' acuity had a greater impact on the eventual appearance of PC 1003 than others would allow.

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