

## “The Force of All Our Numbers” New Leftists, Labour, and the 1973 Artistic Woodwork Strike

Ian Milligan

Volume 66, Fall 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt66art02>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Milligan, I. (2010). “The Force of All Our Numbers”: New Leftists, Labour, and the 1973 Artistic Woodwork Strike. *Labour / Le Travail*, 66, 37–71.

Article abstract

Through late 1973, the Artistic Woodwork strike captivated not only the left-wing milieux of Toronto – from young New Leftists, to rank-and-file union members, to activists from a plethora of political groups – but also the entire city. Artistic was a first contract strike by immigrant workers organized by the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union (ctcu). The narrative of the strike came to be dominated by supporters after many of the workers picketing left due to both fear and the availability of alternative employment. By November, mass pickets of four hundred people added to political pressure and helped secure a first contract settlement. Coming at the end of a period of intense political debate and discussion concerning the agent of social change and the role of the working-class, Artistic assumed special significance in the personal trajectories of many supporters. On these violent picket lines, supporters had an opportunity to act out the prevailing Marxist sociology of the time. Artistic demonstrates the confluence of a variety of forces at the end of the long sixties: the widespread turn towards Marxism and the working-class as a necessary component of social and political change; the importance of nationalism as a unifying feature between some New Leftists and unions such as the ctcu; and the continuing social responsibility of the student and the intellectual. While Artistic was decertified in 1975, we can take valuable lessons from the strike concerning the impact of allowing strikebreakers as well as the power and importance of a social network in garnering widespread strike support.

## ARTICLE

# "The Force of All Our Numbers": New Leftists, Labour, and the 1973 Artistic Woodwork Strike

Ian Milligan

*Now the force of all our numbers and our actions on the line  
Won a victory for the workers, and a contract they could sign.  
But while workers are exploited, then our struggle won't decline  
So the lines go marching on.*

– Excerpt from the Artistic Picket Line Song<sup>1</sup>

THE DAILY RITUAL OF VIOLENCE BEGAN at dawn. In a desolate industrial park in Metropolitan Toronto's North York, men and women gathered. Some of them were older immigrants, with weathered yet determined faces. Most, however, were students, social workers, and teachers with long hair representing a wide milieu of the Toronto New Left who came out to stand with these few workers. Here they could put theory into action, a defining moment of nearly a decade of debate and thought on the question of social change, the state, and exploitation. The Canadian Textile and Chemical Union (CTCU)<sup>2</sup> was on a first contract strike against Artistic Woodwork, a picture frame manufacturer, in one of the nastiest and most significant strikes – both in terms of the police

1. Right to Strike Committee, "A Lesson for the Canadian Labour Movement: The Artistic Woodwork Strike, 1973," as found in William R. Ready Division of Archives at McMaster University (hereafter MUA), Pamphlets Collection, Shelf no. 2603.

2. The Canadian Textile and Chemical Union was established in 1954 as an independent union not affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, as opposed to the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA). The CTCU's leaders, Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent, had been instrumental in a series of textiles strikes in Quebec with the UTWA, but had been purged from that union thanks to their militancy. See Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-War Canada* (Toronto 2010), 102–104; and Rick Salutin, *Kent Rowley: The Organizer, a Canadian Union Life* (Toronto 1980).

violence, which shocked many, as well as the sheer number of strike supporters – in Toronto's history.

Around 7 a.m., the police arrived *en masse*, assembling across the street from Artistic and the line of picketers. The chanting began: "Cops are tops the bosses say ... cops are thugs the workers say." One picketer, who had known police only from friendly school visits and neighbourhood settings, realized that "these police look a lot different, menacing and contemptuous."<sup>3</sup> A car arrived, rounding the bend of Densley Avenue, its headlights flickering. Suddenly, havoc ensued. Police charged towards the line, attempting to open Artistic's driveways for cars carrying strikebreakers. Stopping these cars would be essential if the union was going to win the strike. Picketers who reacted slowly were quickly grabbed and thrust out of the way; picketers and police alike descended on the cars, picketers trying to stop them and police trying to facilitate their entry. A *melée* ensued, confusion reigned. One arrest was made, with police carrying away a protester. It was hard to determine why they targeted one over another, although there may have been a special animus towards the long-haired and young. Within ten minutes, all was calm. Another typical morning of now-ritualized violence was complete; the cycle would repeat itself almost every day between 21 August and 5 December 1973.<sup>4</sup>

The strike at Artistic captured not only the attention of the left-wing milieux of Toronto – from students, to rank-and-file militants, to activists from a plethora of political groups – but also the entire city. While New Leftists had been previously active on picket lines, Artistic was one of the first strikes where they were among the true leaders of picket lines and of organizing campaigns.<sup>5</sup> New Leftists were also critical as supporters on the picket line, often numbering into the hundreds. For many supporters, this was about more than just one struggle for a first collective agreement. These young men and women woke well before dawn, on chilly fall mornings, to put their rhetoric into action; here was an opportunity to fight the evils of capitalism – in the guise of the manager or the police officer – head on. Artistic became an opportunity to fight the system and act out the Marxist sociology of the time.

The largely unstudied story of Artistic demonstrates the confluence of a variety of forces at the end of the long sixties: the widespread turn towards Marxism and the working class as a necessary component of social change; the importance of nationalism as a unifying feature between some New

3. Judy Steed, "Officer #362, Are You Listening?" *This Magazine*, 7 (November 1973), 17.

4. Details were drawn from a wide array of sources and interviews, although this particular description of the morning of 22 October 1973 comes from Michael Keating, "Dawn at Artistic and Sides Settle In," *Globe and Mail*, 23 October 1975, 5. Additional details were filled in by Jon Caulfield, "The Little Strike that Grew and Grew..." *Toronto Life*, April 1974, 81–83, 92–93, 97–103.

5. Another important instance of this had earlier happened at Texpack, as detailed in Joan Sangster, "Remembering Texpack: Nationalism, Internationalism, and Militancy in Canadian Unions in the 1970s," *Studies in Political Economy*, 78 (Autumn 2006), 41–66.

Leftists and unions such as the CTCU; and the continuing social responsibility of the student and the intellectual.<sup>6</sup> The debates, discussion, and action that characterized the period 1964–69 continued into the early seventies, albeit in a new political context of labour militancy, state repression (especially during the October Crisis and the subsequent implementation of the *War Measures Act*), and a changed economic context.<sup>7</sup> The October Crisis had pushed New Leftists (among others) onto “entirely new terrain,”<sup>8</sup> as Bryan Palmer has argued, where they now had to confront the more repressive power of the state.<sup>9</sup> Police violence at Artistic certainly illustrated this.

Just as discussions of periodization are complicated, so are definitions of the New Left. Scholarship has moved away from the narrow, organization-

6. The sole academic treatment of the strike is found in J.A. Frank, “The ‘Ingredients’ in Violent Labour Conflict: Patterns in Four Case Studies,” *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (Fall 1983), 87–112. Frank provides a good summary of the strike, arguing that it became violent thanks to the first contract nature, the political goals of the Confederation of Canadian Unions, and its intense methods. His emphasis, however, is reaching a comprehensive argument regarding violent struggles across Canada.

7. There is a voluminous literature on how to periodize the sixties. Earlier definitions which came out of the American literature and largely focused on the Students for a Democratic Society have been replaced by an understanding of the need to see the sixties as an era encompassing a far longer period of time. Tension, however, exists between those who see the terrain as possibly stretching from the 1950s into the late 1970s or even 1980s – a possibility raised in the Canadian literature by Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills and Scott Rutherford in their editors’ introduction to *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto 2009) – and those who see a particular historic “rupture” during the sixties [an interesting discussion of this can be seen in Bryan D. Palmer’s review of *New World Coming* in *Left History*, 14.1 (Spring/Summer 2009), 98–99]. For further discussions of sixties periodization in the Canadian context see discussions in Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto 2009), 23–24 and the introduction by Dimitry Anastakis in *The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style* (Montreal and Kingston 2008), 3–4 and 14n3. In the American context, see the long historiographic discussion in Van Gosse, “A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left,” in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. John-Cristophe Agnew and Roy Rozenzweig (Malden 2006), 277–302, and also in Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York 2005), esp. 5–6. See also Andrew Hunt, “‘When Did the Sixties Happen?’ Searching for New Directions,” *Journal of Social History*, 33 (Autumn 1999), 147–161. There is also a valuable discussion on periodization in Barbara L. Tischler’s introduction to *Sights on the Sixties*, ed. Barbara L. Tischler (New Brunswick, NJ 1992), 5–6.

8. Palmer, *Canada’s 1960’s*, 23.

9. In the American context, Max Elbaum argues against the periodization that takes the Weatherman or Army Mathematics Research Centre bombings in 1970 as the endpoint of the Sixties, noting that this really fits only the white, student New Left model and ignores the emergence of a plethora of revolutionary Marxist organizations. See Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London and New York 2002), especially 35–37. In this, he argues against the periodization put forth in Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York 1986), which has been characterized as the “good sixties/bad sixties.” See Paul Buhle, “Madison Revisited,” *Radical History Review*, 57 (1993), 248.

ally focused studies and towards a more expansive definition.<sup>10</sup> Van Gosse has advanced a definition of a “movement of movements,” which encompasses a wide array of social movements (such as black power, red power, gay liberation, among others) between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s.<sup>11</sup> John McMillian advances a more limited definition, arguing that the New Left was a “mostly white student movement” fighting for participatory democracy, civil rights, university issues, and fighting against the Vietnam War; it existed alongside a much broader “movement,” which was interconnected but distinct.<sup>12</sup> Palmer’s *Canada’s 1960s* takes a similar approach, drawing distinctions between a New Left and other movements such as the Red Power movement.<sup>13</sup> I define the New Left in the more focused definition used by the latter scholars.

This article focuses on the supporters, their reasons for taking to the picket lines at the Artistic strike, and what it meant for the evolving story of the New Left and labour. It is not a history of the strike *per se*, and more work remains to be done on this historically significant event in Ontario’s history. The working conditions in the plant were deplorable, and the story of the strike itself is one that rightfully belongs to the workers. Supporters, however, helped the strike to continue for such a long period of time, led it to dominate news coverage, and very much shaped the character of the ongoing Artistic Woodwork picket-line confrontations essential to the strike. The picketing workers quickly dwindled to a handful, and its narrative became dominated by the role of supporters.<sup>14</sup> This is the story that this article explores.

A note on sources is necessary. I drew textual sources from many archives, such as Library and Archives Canada, the Archives of Ontario, the City of Toronto Archives, as well as other smaller collections. News reports helped to establish the contours of the strike, as well as to demonstrate how it was perceived. Additionally, oral history was critical in unravelling this story. New Leftists were immersed in an oral culture. Outside formal meetings, minutes were rarely taken or reports written, and the events around Artistic Woodwork were little different. As this article demonstrates, many of the people that I interviewed remember Artistic as an important stop along their personal journeys into the mainstream labour movement, including positions

10. For some historiographical background, see Andrew Hunt, “How New Was the New Left?” in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Philadelphia 2003), 141.

11. Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, 5.

12. John McMillian, “‘You Didn’t Have to Be There’: Revisiting the New Left Consensus,” in *The New Left Revisited*, 5–6.

13. Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 258.

14. A process also seen in the 1965–66 Tilco Strike, where women strikers were displaced by male supporters; the subsequent Rand Commission, for example, drew only on males to testify in relation to the Tilco strike (and the entire commission). For this, see Joan Sangster, “‘We No Longer Respect the Law’: The Tilco Strike, Labour Injunctions, and the State,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 53 (Spring 2004), esp. 73–74.

with the United Steelworkers of America and the Canadian Auto Workers. Given the context of the CTCU, many were also left nationalists; hence, I highlight the voices of a particular stream of the New Left, which cannot claim to be representative of the entire movement. Alessandro Portelli has provided useful cautionary notes on oral history when dealing with the sixties, noting the personal states of flux that youngsters were in throughout the sixties, as constant change made it difficult to stabilize memory.<sup>15</sup> Memory can be fraught under the best of circumstances. Dan Heap, a Toronto Alderman who was arrested during the Artistic strike, wrote to Toronto Mayor David Crombie in 1977 – appeals were still being heard – and recalled that he was “embarrassed at not being able to remember events with any clarity even when I read the transcript of my own evidence.”<sup>16</sup> That said, the interviewees had a crisp recollection of the importance and meaning of the Artistic strike, perhaps thanks to the way it influenced some of their personal journeys. Oral and textual sources complemented each other well, and wherever possible, I have combined both.

### New Leftists and Labour, 1964–1973

ARTISTIC REPRESENTED A CONTINUING chapter in a long and often complicated relationship between New Leftists and labour.<sup>17</sup> In his 1960 “Letter to the New Left,” an important document in the United States and Canada alike, sociologist C. Wright Mills decried that New Leftists still clung to the “working class” as “the historic agency, or even the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation.”<sup>18</sup> Similar arguments along this line appeared from other New Left gurus such as Herbert Marcuse. Much of the Student Union for Peace

15. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison 1997), 191–192. A further cautionary note on community and memory can be found in Leon Fink, “When Community Comes Home to Roost: The Southern Milltown as Lost Cause,” *Journal of Social History*, 40 (Fall 2006), 119–145.

16. City of Toronto Archives (hereafter CTA), Dan Heap Collection, SC 327, Box 23, File 17, Letter from Dan Heap to David Crombie, 8 November 1977.

17. For the American story, see Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana and Chicago 1994). Levy discusses the early cooperation between the New Left and labour, followed by the late-1960s tension over Vietnam, Black Power, and the counterculture. His overarching narrative is complemented by several moments of collaboration and co-operation, from organizing drives to boycotts to the United Farm Workers.

18. C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review*, 5 (September–October 1960),

18. While Mills was vitally important in the American context, he was also widely read and discussed in Canada as well. Dimitri Roussopoulos argues that his significance cannot be understated, noting Mills’ critical importance, recalling that “the preoccupation with [the] agency for historic change, referred to as ‘the agent for social change,’ finds its source in Wright Mills.” (Dimitri Roussopoulos, E-Mail Message to Author, 25 October 2009, and Interview with Author, 23 October 2009). Mills’ theory is also discussed in Palmer, *Canada’s 1960s*, 250.

Action (SUPA), Canada's pre-eminent New Left formation in the mid 1960s, took this to heart. They engaged in a series of debates that resulted in a loose consensus that instead of looking to the working class, social change would be found in the Canadian dispossessed – a nebulous concept that variously included students, Aboriginals, the urban poor, and racialized minorities.<sup>19</sup> Rather than pursuing a traditional Old Left strategy of mobilizing the working class, these New Leftists would go into depressed urban and rural areas, work among Aboriginals, and seek to radicalize professionals.

This strategy would eventually become a significant reason for the dissolution of the SUPA, as this approach crashed against the dual shores of a disappointing reality: community organizing was not leading to a revolution and a growing global shift was occurring towards Marxist analysis. The need to agree on an agent of social change, and the failure of the New Left to arrive at any concrete and cohesive sense of self on the essential question of the agent of social change (or any, despite late attempts at ideological clarity), led in part to splintering and factionalism (alongside the impact of the Company of Young Canadians).<sup>20</sup> The umbrella group of the SUPA, as well as the Canadian Union of Students was replaced by a plethora of New Left groups. Subsequent groups such as the Toronto Student Movement, which filled a New Left void in the wake of SUPA, were sundered apart by this essential question.<sup>21</sup> In stark contrast to C. Wright Mills' position, by 1968 and 1969 students were flocking

19. This argument appears in Myrna Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto 1980) and is the subject of a chapter in my larger work. Debates ranged in the SUPA Newsletter, which is preserved at the MUA, Student Union for Peace Action fonds (hereafter SUPA). Other key documents to consult are MUA, SUPA, Box 14, File 7, Peter Warrian, "SUPA 1964–1966: A social-Psychological Portrait," undated, presumably c. 1966 or early 1967; and MUA, SUPA, Box 11, File 14, Tony Hyde, "The Student Union for Peace Action: An Analysis," undated, presumably 1967. An attempt to codify SUPA's ideology was undertaken in 1966 with the development of a manifesto, as seen in MUA, SUPA, Box 7, SUPA Manifesto, 10 June 1967. Information was also obtained from numerous oral interviews.

20. This can be seen in the formation of the New Left Committee, which succeeded SUPA, and expressed in MUA, SUPA, Box 7, File 21, Statement of the New Left Committee, October 1967 and Peggy Morton and Myrna Wood, "1848 and All That or Whatever Happened to the Working Class? *NLC Bulletin*, Vol.1, No. 1[B], November 1967, 9. This was also discussed in Stan Gray, "The Greatest Canadian Shit-Disturber," *Canadian Dimension*, 1 November 2004.

21. The Toronto Student Movement and the New Left Caucus are discussed in Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto 1996), 295–297. Important documents to consult are MUA, Revolutionary Marxist Group fonds, Box 4, File 18, File on TSM, "New Left Caucus (Toronto Student Movement): A Draft Manifesto," by Bob Kellerman, Laurel Limpus, Philip Resnick, and Andrew Wernick, undated; MUA, Canadian Liberation Movement fonds, Box 22a, File 13, "Building a Student-Worker Alliance at University," c. 1969; Dalhousie University Archives (hereafter DUA), Tom Lackey Fonds, ms 10.4.A1, Folder on Correspondence, Bob Dewart, "Students and Workers: Building a Real Alliance"; DUA, Tom Lackey Fonds, ms 10.4.C.2, Folder on WSA, Bob Dewart, "Wernick & Co. Do Their Thing to TSM," special reprint of the *Canadian Worker* and finally a summary discussed in Andy Wernick, "A Guide to the Student Left," *Varsity*, 24 September 1968, 8.

to picket lines and expounding upon the need to support the working class, reflecting a global Marxist shift.

From 1968 onwards, responding to the broader shift within the New Left towards greater community and labour involvement, many New Leftists actively sought to establish a movement that could encompass the working-class. A fit was found in the labour movement, especially those marginalized within the mainstream movement because of their work, their bargaining issues, their predominant gender, or stances on the question of international unions. While cautious labour hierarchies would thwart any attempt at a deeper, lasting student-worker alliance this did not preclude connection on a local, rank-and-file level. As a result, the issues always had to be framed around something: nationalism, workplace autonomy, dignity, poverty, or power. These were issues that struck chords throughout the broader left and redeemed unions in the eyes of many New Leftists that, only a few years earlier, had scorned them as agents of social change. Beginning in 1968, students began to support the struggles of workers on picket lines in an organized fashion (as opposed to the more common, informal joining of a picket line).<sup>22</sup> These were a handful of high profile, long strikes where the opportunity for an organic alliance appeared. Many had picketed before, but as supportive individuals rather than part of an organic New Left mass.

Across the country, strikes are not the whole story. In Regina, students reached out to the community when university administrators withheld student fees during a controversy surrounding the student paper, organizing trips out to smaller communities and trying to emphasize that the university belonged just as much to working-class taxpayers as it did to elites. This brought students into contact with the labour councils and the farmers' union.<sup>23</sup> In British Columbia, much of the struggle at Simon Fraser University revolved around universal accessibility, which took direct aim at the class nature of the university. This was something unionists could get behind, as many wanted a better future and social mobility for their children.<sup>24</sup> Yet in

22. Rather than the retreat to the campus argued in Cyril Levitt, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto 1984), 176.

23. The controversies are well discussed in James Pitsula, *New World Dawning: The Sixties at Regina Campus* (Regina 2008). There are good sources at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, notably the Saskatchewan Waffle fonds and in particular the sub-sets from Don Mitchell, Don Kossick, and Patricia Gallagher. The situation was also discussed in Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), Peter Warrian Fonds, Box 1, File on National Council Meeting Minutes, 25 October 1967 at Rochdale College in a report-back from fieldworker Don Kossick. Information was also found in the *Carillon* as well as several oral interviews.

24. The cause of universal accessibility is discussed in Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver 2005), as well as in *The Peak* and the *Ubysssey*. This point also emphatically came out in oral interviews. Indeed, the entire case of the 114 students arrested in the occupation of the SFU's Administration Building was built around transfer credits and the class issue of greater accessibility for the largely working-class students at nearby community colleges. For more information on this, see also the University of British Columbia



Nova Scotia and Ontario, the relationship between the New Left and labour focused on picket lines.

The Canadian Union of Students (CUS) had its last hurrah at the 1968–69 *Peterborough Examiner* strike, with CUS President Peter Warrian coordinating reinforcements across the country and calling for a more total worker-student alliance in the national press. New Leftists became front-page news as they came to the aid of striking journalists, and were seen by outsiders as almost taking control of the picket line.<sup>25</sup> The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) wrote a report on how the students “joined forces with the striking employees” and that they took control of the picket lines.<sup>26</sup> New Leftists had an education on the cold, soggy picket lines of the *Peterborough Examiner* through the winter of 1968 and 1969, as they took the first steps to putting the rhetoric of finding allies with the working-class into action. Despite the efforts of about 250 students, the police made sure the unionized typographers could cross the picket line, and arrests were widespread.

The *Examiner* strike was the beginning of a larger trend. Along Nova Scotia’s Strait of Canso, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, led by the communist Homer Stevens, actively reached out to the Halifax New Left in assisting his organizational and supportive activities during the long and onerous fishermen’s strike there.<sup>27</sup> For the Halifax New Left, this marked the beginning of a deep relationship with the labour movement and the formation of the explicitly labour-focused East Coast Socialist Movement which directly grew out of the support activities.<sup>28</sup> In 1971 at Texpack, in Brantford, Ontario, Wafflers and New Leftists flocked to picket lines to support a CTCU strike against the American Hospital Supply Corporation, a story that has

---

Special Collections, British Columbia Federation of Labour collection, especially Box 17, File 34 and Box 13, File 37, and LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 72, File 96A-00045, pt. 50, Report on Simon Fraser University, 1 September 1970.

25. Wilfred List, “15 Arrested in Examiner Strike as Students Reinforce Picket Line,” *Globe and Mail*, 7 December 1968, 1; Wilfred List, “Students to Bolster Examiner Picket Line,” *Globe and Mail*, 6 December 1968, 13; “Students hope for 500 at Peterboro Strike,” *Chevron*, 10 January 1968, 4. There was widespread coverage in the student press.

26. LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 78, File 98-A-00078, Report on Students at Peterborough Examiner, 16 January 1969.

27. The best treatment of this is found in Silver Donald Cameron, *The Education of Everett Richardson: The Nova Scotia Fishermen’s Strike, 1970–71* (Toronto 1977), 91. See also Rolf Knight and Homer Stevens, *Homer Stevens: A Life in Fishing* (Madiera Park, BC 1992), 137. It is available online at [http://www.rolfknight.ca/Homer\\_Stevens\\_Jan92.doc](http://www.rolfknight.ca/Homer_Stevens_Jan92.doc). For information on this, see the extensive files available in DUA, MS-9-11, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour – Fishermen’s Strike Files. See also DUA, MS-10-6-A-3, Al Storey Fonds, Folder ‘Fishermen-Pamphlets,’ “Chronology of Events,” undated; “The Cycle is Not Eternal Like the Tides of Fundy But Something We Can End,” *Dalhousie Gazette*, 9 October 1970, 3.

28. The entire run of the *East Coast Worker*, the organ of the *East Coast Socialist Movement*, is available at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. Information also came from oral interviews.

been recounted elsewhere by Joan Sangster.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the 1972 Dare Cookies strike saw widespread support from students at the nearby radical campus of the University of Waterloo. With a mostly female workforce, Dare also saw involvement from the growing feminist movement – both on-campus and the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women – showing a commitment to working-class politics. Students took to the picket lines on a moment's notice, fighting professional strikebreakers.<sup>30</sup>

These events formed part of a broader eruption of working-class militancy. Beginning in 1965, and continuing through the mid-1970s, strikes and lockouts were becoming ever more common: there was a consistently high number of strikes and lockouts from 1965 onwards, and hours lost to strikes exceeded 5 million every year from 1968 onwards save 1971.<sup>31</sup> 1973 would see 677 strikes and lockouts across Canada, the highest such number ever recorded by the Department of Labour. In Quebec, the 1972 Common Front general strike saw unions representing some 210,000 workers out on the street, radiating radical energy, discussion and action across the province and beyond, vividly demonstrating the potential of working-class militancy.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the manifestos of the Common Front were assembled in a 1972 anthology edited by Daniel Drache who, as discussed below, was a union organizer at Artistic.<sup>33</sup> By 1973, however, hope would soon begin to give way under sustained attack upon trade unions by the state, a process discussed extensively by Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz. These scholars demonstrate that by the early 1970s, the

29. The best account of Texpack can be found in Sangster, "Remembering Texpack." For the role of supporters, see MUA, New Democratic Party Waffle collection; York University Archives, Council of the York Student Federation, Box 1974-019/027, File on Texpack; and crucially the RCMP security report at LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 5, File 1025-9-91042, Constable A.A. Scott, Report on Texpack Labour Unrest, 20 September 1971. Information also came from oral interviews.

30. There was good coverage of the Dare strike in both the student and mainstream press. The coverage in the *Chevron*, the student paper at the University of Waterloo, is especially significant. There is some information at the University of Ottawa Archives, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, Box 326.

31. Data from *Strikes and Lockouts in Canada* (Ottawa: Department of Labour, various dates from 1965–1973). This is also discussed briefly in Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Aurora 2003), 16–17. For insightful and valuable treatments of the wildcat wave, see Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 212–244 and the forthcoming Peter McNinnis, "Hothead Troubles: 1960s-Era Wildcat Strike Culture in Canada," in *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties*, Eds. Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey (Toronto 2010).

32. See Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston 2010), especially 198–206. See also Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto 1992), 312–313.

33. *Quebec, Only the Beginning: The Manifestos of the Common Front*, ed. Daniel Drache (Toronto 1972).

postwar settlement was coming to an end, giving way to more frequent use of back-to-work legislation, and by 1975 additional restrictions were realized with Trudeau's implementation of price and wage controls.<sup>34</sup>

These were significant incidents and events that profoundly shaped the relationship of the New Left and labour which took place within and altered the ideological attitudes towards labour. By 1973, then, there was a widespread sympathy towards labour issues among New Leftists, but also a particular focus on the dispossessed. Artistic would represent the merging of those tendencies, and mark a new incarnation of this relationship between the New Left and labour.

### **"A Medieval Fiefdom:"<sup>35</sup> Organizing Artistic**

THE CTCU STUMBLED UPON Artistic by accident. By 1971, the union was organizing female immigrant workers in knitting mills throughout the city. Some of these women had husbands who manufactured picture frames for Artistic and they brought their familial concerns to the union's attention. Artistic was a small plant of 115 mostly male immigrant workers with four plants in Metro Toronto and smaller branches in Montreal, Vancouver, and Cleveland.<sup>36</sup> Six Estonian immigrants had founded Artistic, and the firm's management style was characterized as "anti-communist, anti-union, conservative, and authoritarian."<sup>37</sup> This conservatism would be epitomized by Artistic's spokesperson during the strike, assistant general manager Sorel Van Zyl who embodied "a mix of manipulative paternalism and an army style barracks discipline."<sup>38</sup>

Artistic was representative of small manufacturing firms that were largely unorganized given the difficulties organizing their small number of employees.<sup>39</sup> Fairly large industrial parks dotted Metropolitan Toronto's suburbs, including many small firms with specialized products and smaller production runs such as Artistic Woodwork.<sup>40</sup> These expanses of short, nondescript

34. Panitch and Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion*, 25–29.

35. Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from Walter Jurashek, President and Russel Biggar, Recording Secretary, Local 216 CBRT, Toronto, 10 November 1973.

36. John Lang, "Carrying on the Struggle in Ontario, 1952–1973," in *Madeleine Parent: Activist*, ed. Andr  e L  vesque (Toronto 2005), 82. See also Frank, "The 'Ingredients' in Violent Labour Conflict," 105.

37. Frank, "The 'Ingredients' in Violent Labour Conflict," 105. The "success story" of the six Estonian immigrants and Artistic was also discussed in Keating, "Dawn at Artistic," 5.

38. Frank, "The 'Ingredients,' in Violent Labour Conflict," 105.

39. As discussed in Daniel Drache, Interview with Author, 20 April 2010.

40. There is fairly limited information available on the manufacturing and economic context of Toronto, although some historic context on an earlier period can be found in Gunter Gad,

brick buildings hosted a variety of industrial activities, largely hidden from the main arterial streets of Toronto on winding suburban roads. Throughout the 1960s, southern Europeans (Italians, Portuguese, and Greeks) were entering the labour market *en masse*, finding waged employment in poorly-paid manufacturing and service sectors; non-British immigrants made far lower than the average Canadian family, many hovering around the poverty line.<sup>41</sup> They often found employment with these small, exploitative firms with no history of unionization.

Organizing Artistic was thus accordingly difficult due to the linguistic diversity of the largely immigrant workforce. Artistic was a “United Nations” of groups, many of which remained linguistically and socially isolated. As a result, the CTCU relied on a few workers who spoke English to translate for the others. Most of the men were eager for a union.<sup>42</sup> One worker in particular, Joe Sinagoga (or “Synagogue”), an Abyssinian War veteran under Mussolini, emerged as a central figure in the union drive. He had a position that allowed free movement around the plant, and he secretly carried messages relating to the organizing campaign between workers throughout the plant and the organizers outside. This mobility, combined with his personality and good English, allowed union supporters to sign enough cards – 85 of the 115 workers – to see a union certified.<sup>43</sup> He was the “key person” in the drive.<sup>44</sup> The immigrant nature of the plant added an additional dimension. Union organizer Daniel Drache recalls that workers from Latin America and Greece had a tradition of resistance, whereas those from the Caribbean and the outports of Newfoundland had little.<sup>45</sup> This can be seen in the organizing flyers, translated into English, Greek, Italian and Portuguese.<sup>46</sup> In this, both aspects of the relationship between the immigrant experience and radicalism can be seen – some immigrants were politicized by virtue of “old world” radicalism, but the

---

“The Suburbanization of Manufacturing in Toronto, 1881–1951,” in *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe*, ed. Robert Lewis (Philadelphia 2004), 143–177.

41. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 306–307. The earlier story of Italian immigration can be found in Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Toronto 1993), and a new study of the Portuguese in Toronto can be seen in Susana Miranda, “‘Not Ashamed or Afraid’: Portuguese Immigrant Women in Toronto’s Cleaning Industry, 1950s–1995,” PhD dissertation, York University, 2010.

42. Salutin, *Kent Rowley*, 105.

43. Drache, Interview. Information on certification was found in LAC, Frank Park Fonds, Box 29, File 422, Memorandum for File re: Artistic Woodwork Company Labour Board, undated.

44. Rick Salutin, Interview with Author, 24 April 2009.

45. Drache, Interview.

46. LAC, Frank Park Fonds, Box 29, File 422, Organizing posters, March 1973.

different languages could be used to inhibit solidarity. After certification on 19 April 1973, bargaining began for a first agreement.<sup>47</sup>

The usual sticking issue of wages and benefits was quickly resolved. By early August, all indications were that a contract would be reached.<sup>48</sup> A wage increase of 65-cents an hour had been agreed upon; given pre-strike wages of \$2 to \$2.95/hour, a sizeable wage increase had been granted even in the context of inflation.<sup>49</sup> The strike would be fought over non-monetary issues: seniority, security, and management rights.

The management rights clause was especially insidious, as it gave management the right to change rules at any time, and dismiss workers without recourse to a grievance procedure. While the fundamental issue of management rights was unsurprising, part of a broader conflict over the role of the union that continued to be waged, the subsequent discipline clause gave management the ability to unilaterally terminate workers for any breach. The clause would have led to a union in name only. While it is unsurprising that management had the ability to make the rules, what was startling was its demand to enforce them – however arbitrary – through unilateral dismissal. Grievances would be limited to determining whether or not the employee broke the rule, regardless of the severity of said rule. Madeleine Parent described this clause as one of “the most pernicious clauses I’ve seen in 30 years of union bargaining. If the negotiators had agreed to it, they would have sold out the workers. The rest of the contract would be worthless.”<sup>50</sup> If they wanted to continue as a genuine union, there was no option left but to strike. The strike was called on 20 August 1973.

The strike quickly drew attention – especially significant in light of the facility’s relatively invisible suburban location, small immigrant workforce, and niche service of producing picture frames. Despite all of these potential obstacles, the strike became a cause. Union organizer John Lang remembers returning home from his vacation on the Sunday after the strike began and calling around to his friends. Nobody was home – they were out on the picket lines. It was only late that night, when people had returned home, that he learned of the strike.<sup>51</sup> This speaks to the power of New Left networks throughout Toronto, as the picket lines were invisible, tucked away in a north Toronto industrial park. Word had spread quickly about the strike, facilitated

47. LAC, Frank Park Fonds, Box 29, File 423, Ontario Labour Relations Board Certification Paperwork, 19 April 1973.

48. John Lang, Interview with Author, 11 May 2009.

49. “Textile Union Walkout Hits Artistic Factory,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1973, B02. This point is also made by Lang, “Carrying on the Struggle,” and Salutin, *Kent Rowley*.

50. As quoted in Caulfield, “The Little Strike,” 82.

51. Lang, Interview.

by the press coverage that had appeared right from the outset, but especially by a New Left web of contacts.

### **New Leftists Meet the Confederation of Canadian Unions**

WHEREAS THE PREVIOUS interactions between New Leftists and labour had seen the former providing critical logistical support and resources, Artistic saw supporters adopting leading roles of organizing, recruitment, leadership, and eventually sustaining the picket line. These organizers are important for several reasons. Firstly, brief biographies of each establish their links to various strands of the sixties – from New Left activism, to counterculture, to educational reform. Secondly, the organizers were the glue that made the strike edifice possible, as many picketers came because of their presence. They were able to tap into the broader New Leftist social networks established throughout the city.<sup>52</sup>

The CTCU, and the umbrella group of independent nationalist unions known as the Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU), were appealing to both organizers and supporters alike. Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent had been militant union leaders in Quebec, organizing with the United Textile Workers of America, before breaking with the international unions and founding the CTCU as an independent union in 1954.<sup>53</sup> Rowley and Parent were able to rally supporters around them thanks both to their charismatic personalities but also because unlike the mainstream, American-dominated labour movement, which had been virulently criticized by much of the New Left as bureaucratic sell-outs, the independent labour movement represented an alternative. It was seen as a force standing up to international labour and thus the American empire more broadly.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the organizers and high-profile picket line leaders, notably Laurell Ritchie, John Lang, Daniel Drache and Rick Salutin, found their way into the CCU through a fortuitous meeting with Parent and Rowley. These future organizers met Parent and Rowley when the older duo dropped by the “Anti-Imperialist Squad” at some point in 1970 or 1971, a small reading group including Lang, Salutin, Drache, and Ritchie among others that met weekly to discuss left and labour topics. Salutin remembers when they came to the meeting: “They looked like an elderly couple ... on their way back from church. But they had this incredible history, and at the end of the talk, they said ‘did any of us want to work with them?’”<sup>55</sup> Rowley and Parent convinced several of

52. D’Arcy Martin, Interview with Author, 26 July 2009.

53. Sangster, “Remembering Texpack,” 43.

54. Ibid.

55. Salutin, Interview.

them to go work for the CCU, which would set in motion a longer relationship between these New Leftists and the nationalist union movement.

All had links to the world of student organizing, and would form the backbone of the CTCU before, during, and after Artistic. Ritchie had taken a "circuitous route" into the union, having been involved with the York University student government, although her time there was cut short by a lack of money. Living in a housing project at Jane-Finch, Ritchie was identified "by others as somebody who could talk about poverty issues."<sup>56</sup> She went from there to Ontario Welfare Council, the Toronto Social Planning Council, Rochdale College, and was an activist with a variety of leftist social justice groups such as Just Society and the Poor People's Conference, as well as being involved with the first Women's Press Collective. The variety of groups Ritchie engaged with demonstrates both an enduring commitment to social justice, but also how intertwined these groups were, forming a progressive network in Toronto. Along with John Lang, Ritchie would become a full-time employee and CTCU organizer.

John Lang, then a contract professor at York University, had come out of working-class Sudbury where his father had been a Mine Mill organizer. Doing well in his Sudbury schooling, Lang spent two years as a seminarian at St. Michael's College where his politicization began in the context of the Catholic debates brought on by the Second Vatican Council. Graduating from the University of Toronto in 1967, he took his Masters at Guelph and wrote a thesis on the history of Mine Mill in Sudbury and continued on to the doctoral program at the University of Toronto.<sup>57</sup> Dropping out of the program after discovering that he was spending "more time in the union hall than in the classroom," Lang became involved with the Waffle and through his work fighting the Americanization of the university and labour movement first came into contact with Parent and Rowley. He was also involved at Texpack through the Waffle, where he was injured after jumping onto and attempting to disable a bus carrying strikebreakers.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the strike, he was a course director at York, although the time demands of the Artistic strike would force him to step down from the position.<sup>59</sup>

Daniel Drache was a student activist and political scientist who came out of the disarmament movement and who had worked with the Student Union for Peace Action and later co-founded the Canadian Liberation Movement. He had also authored the "Drache report," part of the Commission on University Government at the University of Toronto, which addressed student

56. Laurell Ritchie, Interview with Author, 28 April 2009.

57. Lang's MA thesis is commonly used throughout the labour historiography. See John Lang, "A Lion in a Den of Daniels: A History of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, Sudbury, Ontario, 1942–1962," MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 1970.

58. Sangster, "Remembering Texpack," 48.

59. Lang, Interview.

participation, authority, and decision-making in the university. He had participated in the Texpack strike, where he was arrested.<sup>60</sup> Active throughout the Toronto left, Drache was also teaching at York University during the Artistic strike and the organizing campaign. Coming out of both the Marxist and nationalist traditions of the Canadian left, Drache was an organizer during the Artistic strike and was often cited in the press, particularly the student press.

Rick Salutin had recently returned to Toronto after spending the sixties in New York City (and a year in Israel), doing his doctorate at the New School for Social Research. He was a veteran of protests at Columbia University and the New School. Running out of money, and finding himself barred from further work at the C.W. Post College of Long Island University, where he had been teaching for a year, due to his student agitation, Salutin returned to Toronto to focus on becoming a writer. After meeting Parent and Rowley, he went to work as a CTCU volunteer, assisting in organizing on top of his day job as a freelance writer, writing satires and radio documentaries for the CBC as well as his own highly successful plays.<sup>61</sup>

Two other individuals, Sarah Spinks and Bob Davis, who were partners with a young child, came into the Artistic strike after first encountering labour at Texpack, where they met the other organizers. Spinks, one of the organizers and the individual responsible for liaising with the police and arranging legal council during the Artistic strike, had her roots in the nuclear disarmament movement and subsequently SUPA's Kingston Community Project in her last summer after high school. An active participant in the New Left, she moved into the women's liberation movement. In 1969, Spinks was involved in starting the University of Toronto's daycare centre and became a leader in the sit-ins over the issue. After the day care struggle, Spinks became involved in the Texpack strike along with Davis and several other friends, and then moved to the CCU.<sup>62</sup>

Bob Davis made a large transition in the strike from educational reformer to picket captain, capping off his earlier volunteering at Texpack. He had been involved in the Everdale alternative school in Guelph. A teacher and founder of *This Magazine Is About Schools*, Davis had become quite taken by the CCU after Texpack; this fit well with his politics of being a "revolutionary hippie." After several of the leaders had been arrested and prevented from taking active roles on the picket lines, Davis became a picket captain at Artistic.<sup>63</sup> During the important early morning shift – 6 a.m. until 11 a.m. – Davis helped not only run the picket line but also reached out to supporters.<sup>64</sup> His presence inspired

60. Drache, Interview and Sangster, "Remembering Texpack," 47.

61. Salutin, Interview.

62. Sarah Spinks, Interview with Author, 18 September 2009.

63. Bob Davis, Interview with Author, 16 July 2009.

64. Bob Davis, *What Our High Schools Could Be: A Teacher's Reflections from the 60s to the 90s*





The fruits of organizing can be seen in this undated photograph showing a mass picket outside of the Artistic Woodwork plant. Police officers appear on the left towards the entrance to the plant. The youthfulness of the crowd can be seen from the hair and the outfits.

Credit: Original photographs housed at the MUA, Canadian Textile and Chemical Union Strike Collection [hereafter CTCU Collection], Photograph by Janice Acton, undated. (Used with permission.)

others to join the picket line. As D'Arcy Martin recalls "[i]t was certainly Bob who got me there. Bob and Sarah [Spinks]."<sup>65</sup>

These men and women drew on their personal networks and legacies of the sixties when they came to organize Artistic. Their presence was all the more important as Kent Rowley suffered a stroke in July 1973, forcing him to remain in Montreal throughout the strike and putting more pressure on the volunteer organizers.<sup>66</sup> The group drew on various parts of the broader New Left milieu: the free educational movement, university governance, Canadian nationalism, and left nationalist unions. They would help make Artistic what it was, and speak to the continuing involvement of the New Left into the early 1970s. It was the broader Marxist ideology of the New Left, however, that brought the supporters out. These organizers interpreted the struggle in a way that cast it as an important fight against a brutal capitalist system, in the guise of management and police, rather than simply a bread-and-butter union struggle.

---

(Toronto 1990), 233.

65. Martin, Interview.

66. Salutin, *Kent Rowley*, 105 and Salutin, Interview.



**Artistic Picket Support, with Ted Burnett, far left (partially obscured), and early Labour/Le Travail contributor, Wayne Roberts, second from left, in black leather jacket.**

Credit: MUA, CTCU Collection, Photograph by Janice Action, undated. (Used with permission.)

### **Turning Rhetoric into Action: Supporting the Artistic Woodworkers**

THE CTCU NEEDED SUPPORTERS on the picket line. Isolated from mainstream labour, having small numbers, and facing an employer determined to keep the plant open through the use of strikebreakers, a picket line was essential to pressure the employer into giving them a first contract. "Without the supporters we wouldn't have won," concluded one unnamed Artistic worker; a second agreed, "[w]hen the support started to come in big and we had a big picket line, the workers started to believe again that we had a chance to win."<sup>67</sup> Yet the supporters became the dominant story of this strike, the lightning rod of controversy in both their very presence but also the ensuing violence.

The number of actual workers on strike was small for several reasons. Many of the workers who either did not go on strike or returned to work fairly quickly were Newfoundlanders from outports with little history of resistance

67. Right to Strike Committee, "A Lesson for the Canadian Labour Movement: The Artistic Woodwork Strike, 1973," as found in MUA, Pamphlet Collection, Shelf no. 2603.

or unionization.<sup>68</sup> Others may simply have returned for the security of paid employment. Life on the line was tough. Yet some who left the picket line did so under better circumstances. The pay was so low at Artistic that workers could find better jobs elsewhere, even in the economic climate of 1973. "People realized that they could get better jobs than this," remembers John Lang. For example, one young Italian man picketed for about three weeks and realized this would be a long strike. Artistic had been his first job. One day, the man left the picket line and returned to tell the union that he had got a new job as a unionized forklift operator, making twice what he had been making before. For some, the strike became an opportunity to re-enter the labour market and gain confidence.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the violent police actions frightened some foreign workers, especially those from police states.<sup>70</sup> Those without Canadian citizenship must also have feared retaliation.

Given this, the union had to reach out for external support – it could not sustain a picket line itself, and it was clear that the picket line would be key to winning the strike because of continued production.<sup>71</sup> In early September, Andreas Papandreou, a former Greek cabinet minister who would later become Prime Minister of Greece, Toronto politician John Sewell, and Waffle leader James Laxer came to the picket line to demonstrate their solidarity.<sup>72</sup> Sewell and Laxer would emerge as important in drumming up New Left support; the former in successfully convincing the Toronto City Council that police actions and strikebreaking were out of hand at Artistic, the latter in using it as a vivid example of the necessity of Canadian nationalism.

New Leftists had been involved in an array of activities throughout the previous decade – demonstrating against the Vietnam War, agitating for greater involvement in governance, attempting to form an extra-parliamentary opposition, protesting for civil rights. The Artistic strike was an accessible struggle, reachable by public transportation – essential to bring out as many supporters as possible – and together they could make a difference. The issues were also comparatively simple: "a small plant, with immigrant workers, trying to get a first contract, being paid minimum wage most of the time, and a vicious management. And the fact is that in Canada, workers do have the right to a union contract. I think it was as plain as that."<sup>73</sup> The immigrant Artistic workers could be used to make a sweeping argument about the rights of all workers to unfettered unionization and bargaining. Beyond this, their specific struggle was marshaled to an even bigger cause. Workers' rights were being

68. Lang, Interview and Drache, Interview.

69. Lang, Interview.

70. Spinks, Interview.

71. Lang and Drache, "Lessons," 4.

72. "Politicians Join the Picket Line," *Globe and Mail*, 5 September 1973, 5.

73. Spinks, Interview.

trampled by the capitalist system, as exemplified by management and backed by a violent police force. Supporters may not have been fully versed in the collective bargaining issues, but they saw the capitalist system in action – and an opportunity to contest it.

The CTCU employed a deliberate strategy of distilling a strike down to a simple message that could be rallied around, in this case that of a shared belief in the rights of workers to unionize. Whereas Texpack was fought around the Americanization of the economy and the exploitation of Canadians by an American corporation, and the later Pure-Tex strike around the issue of worker surveillance, the Artistic organizers conveyed a message around the “exploitation of new immigrants.”<sup>74</sup> Parent and Rowley had wonderful skills at interpreting “workers battles to the general public,”<sup>75</sup> as seen in their ability to isolate a sympathetic non-wage issue for supporters to capitalize upon.<sup>76</sup> When 19-year old supporter Peter Dorfman was violently arrested on the Artistic picket lines, and beaten in a paddy wagon by a police officer who claimed he had kicked his “crown jewels,” Parent arranged a media interview immediately after he had been bailed out later that morning. “But I was worried that instead of sounding reasonable, I think I sounded, I was lashing out, so I think I blew the interview. ... I remember Madeleine was mad at me. Because it was an opportunity to kind of be a poor boy who was harmed by the police, and instead I was a militant.”<sup>77</sup> Throughout, Parent kept the narrative straight. Sometimes this meant that the union did not always equally support their supporters. When a Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) member was beaten in a cell after being arrested on the line, lawyer Bob Kellerman recalls that “the union didn’t raise a peep, even though they were talking about police violence and all that, because they didn’t want the CPC(M-L) to get [access to] the microphones.”<sup>78</sup>

Supporters became increasingly important throughout the strike. The initial number of employees in the CTCU bargaining unit was 115, although management claimed only 68 actually went on strike.<sup>79</sup> In mid October, union and management agreed that there were around 60 employees on strike, with the rest either crossing the line or working elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> By the end of the strike

74. Salutin, Interview.

75. Davis, Interview.

76. Ritchie, Interview.

77. Peter Dorfman, Interview with Author, 29 November 2009.

78. Bob Kellerman, Interview with Author, 5 December 2009.

79. “Textile Union Walkout Hits Artistic Factory,” *Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1973, B02 and Wilfred List, “Picketing Resumes at Artistic Factory as Talks Break Down,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 November 1973, 5.

80. Robert Douglas, “Arrests Outnumber Workers on Strike,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1973, A3.



**Artistic Woodwork strike supporters confront the police. Condemnations of police action, here physically expressed, would recur throughout the strike. Here we see the stark cultural and generational contrast between the strike supporters and the seemingly bewildered police.**

Credit: MUA, CTCU Collection, Photograph by Janice Acton, undated. (Used with permission.)

in December, the number had dropped to around 47 workers.<sup>81</sup> As picket numbers averaged around 175 by November and sometimes reached as high as four hundred, workers were far outnumbered by supporters.

A conscious attempt was made to attract supporters, with union organizers such as Sarah Spinks going to universities throughout the area, as well as large supportive union locals such as that at Hamilton's Stelco.<sup>82</sup> A large conference was held downtown at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in late September, with 200 people discussing the then-young strike and opportunities for further involvement. Students came, as well as a smaller number of rank-and-file workers from other unions. Rick Salutin remembers militant rank-and-filers speaking in their thick Scottish brogues reflecting a militant old world unionism: "I know these people are supposed to be outside the house of labour, but a strike is a strike, and a scab is a scab."<sup>83</sup> Throughout the strike, a concerted effort was made to reach out to the community, tapping into the civic spirit that had been mobilized to stop the Spadina expressway in the

81. "Union Bows on Rehiring to End Artistic Strike," *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1973, 5.

82. Spinks, Interview.

83. Salutin, Interview.

early 1970s, linking the struggle to the top-down process which had characterized that earlier conflict: "An overriding issue that we are all involved in is regaining control over our lives and the decisions that directly affect us. This is what is at stake for the strikers at Artistic."<sup>84</sup>

The strike was about bigger issues, both for the labour movement and for immigrants in Toronto: "many people believed far more was at stake than the future of just one union local in one small company."<sup>85</sup> As Bob Spencer, the Students Administrative Council president at the University of Toronto, declared when his group took an explicit supportive stance of the Artistic strikers in November: "This strike [a]ffects every worker, not just those at Artistic Woodwork."<sup>86</sup> This struggle resonated with the people of the city in a way that other strikes did not. It was about power and poverty level wages. Some other unions did come out. As the president of UAW Local 439 (Massey Ferguson) declared "We have ideological differences [with the CTCU]. We're defending the rights of the immigrant workers."<sup>87</sup>

### Gasoline on the Fire: Violence at Artistic

YET THE REAL ATTENTION came with the violence, the arrests, and the escalating political rhetoric from all sides. Violence began almost immediately – picketers trying to stop strikebreakers, police trying to stop them, leading to rough arrests. Such violence lost the support of the mainstream media, including the liberal *Toronto Star* which denounced City Council when it urged police – as early as 4 September 1973 – to refrain from violence on picket lines; "Police have to protect the rights of strikers, but they also must uphold the right of non-striking workers and other authorized persons to enter the plant."<sup>88</sup> A similar line was taken by the *Globe and Mail*.<sup>89</sup>

Police violence was widespread at the Artistic plant. Artistic was determined to continue production, and the Metropolitan Toronto police force was determined to allow them to exercise their legal right to do so. As the lines grew, the Toronto police, according to Drache, believed "they had an

84. LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 5, File 1025-9-91042, Flyer "The Artistic Woodwork Strike and your Community," November 1973.

85. Caulfield, "The Little Strike," 81.

86. Gloria Thompson, "Strike Support Formed," *Varsity*, 9 November 1973, 6.

87. Tim Gallagher, "Artistic Violence Mounts as Over 300 Picket," *Varsity*, 14 November 1973, 3.

88. "Don't Condemn Police Unheard," *Toronto Star*, 14 September 1973, B2. The request from the City of Toronto Executive Committee can be found in CTA, Dan Heap Collection, SC 327, Box 23, File 17, City of Toronto Executive Committee Report No. 42, page 3632–3636. The Committee called for an examination of police actions with a view to rectifying them so that they would not be abetting management's strike breaking efforts.

89. Richard J. Needham, "Why Picketing Should be Banned," *Globe and Mail*, 26 September 1973, 6.

imperative from God to keep the factory open.”<sup>90</sup> All agreed that there was violence on the picket lines, although whether one blamed it on the police themselves, their mandate to keep the plant open and protect private property, or the supporters for forcing the hand (or baton) of the police was generally up to their pre-existing bias.

The law was certainly being enforced zealously, as the arrest figures demonstrate. Thirty-seven had been arrested by 25 September, most of whom had been charged with mischief as a result of blocking the entry driveway to the struck plants.<sup>91</sup> By mid-October, the number had risen to 60,<sup>92</sup> by late November to 111.<sup>93</sup> Only nine were striking workers.<sup>94</sup> This point was made by the *Toronto Star*'s article that “Arrests Outnumber Workers on Strike.”<sup>95</sup> Given the imbalance between the numbers of supporters and strikers, the workers themselves were becoming symbolic of the broader struggle of immigrant workers. There was an attempt to make sure that the struggle did not become entirely symbolic in the minds of supporters – workers continued to be on strike at great personal risk, an issue that Parent would not let anybody forget.<sup>96</sup>

The daily arrest rolls read as lists of twenty-somethings, clustered from residential addresses in the downtown Annex neighbourhood near the University of Toronto, a favourite residential area for students. For instance, on 26 September of the seven arraigned, two were York community members (one 25-year-old professor and one 22-year old student) and six lived in or near the Annex. Except for one 41-year-old man, all seven were also in their twenties. Similarly, on 16 October, four were arrested: two 29-year olds, a 22-year-old and a 21-year-old, all of downtown addresses.<sup>97</sup> These young people made the very early morning trip north from downtown. The physical and cultural differences between the leafy environs of the University of Toronto and the comparatively desolate industrial parks of North York must be emphasized.

90. Drache, Interview.

91. “Total of 37 Pickets Arrested in Artistic Woodwork Strike,” *Toronto Star*, 25 September 1973, 1.

92. “Four Arrested in Another Clash at Artistic Picket Line,” *Globe and Mail*, 17 October 1973, 47.

93. Wilfred List, “Picketing Resumes at Artistic Factory as Talks Break Down,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 November 1973, 5.

94. “Union Bows on Rehiring to End Artistic Strike,” *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1973, 5.

95. Robert Douglas, “Arrests Outnumber Workers on Strike,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1973, A3.

96. Spinks, Interview.

97. Robert Douglas, “Arrests Outnumber Workers on Strike,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1973, A3.

Debate spanned the municipal, Metro, and provincial levels. Some Toronto municipal politicians were victims of police violence, and one, Dan Heap, was arrested on 15 October for allegedly assaulting a police officer.<sup>98</sup> Aldermen John Sewell (later Mayor of Toronto from 1978 to 1980), William Kilbourn, and Dorothy Thomas were also on the picket line.<sup>99</sup> Toronto City Council was supportive and sympathetic of the strikers. They implored the provincial Labour Minister, Fern Guindon, to use his powers to settle the strike quickly and heard testimony from Sewell about police violence on the picket line.<sup>100</sup> They faced the wrath of the police chief, Harold Adamson, who had to apologize for his “steamed up” behaviour towards City Council when he had refused to release police video tapes taken at the line to a Council questioning him over police violence.<sup>101</sup>

## Other Supporters

THE CTCU’S POSITION ON OUTSIDE supporters was that they were welcome to “come out and get their heads cracked by the cops ... but they have no say, because the union is run by the workers.”<sup>102</sup> As Spinks recalls, Madeleine Parent was quite firm on this idea, making it perfectly clear that the local “was making the decisions, and the other people were supporters.”<sup>103</sup> The union attempted to delineate these roles. Disagreement ensued, especially with several groups who demanded meetings with the union leadership on strategy. Salutin recalls an incident where Parent phoned him at home, asking him to come to the office; a group of “revolutionaries” had gathered in the CTCU office, and she was afraid that files would be stolen. Upon arriving, the office was full, and Salutin gathered with some CCU-affiliated Bricklayers to simply stand there, arms crossed, to let the intruders know that a fight would happen should they try to move on the files.<sup>104</sup> They stood down. The story is indicative of the

98. “Aldermen Accused of Backing Strike for the Publicity,” *Toronto Star*, 20 October 1973, A2.

99. Ibid.

100. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from David Crombie, Mayor of Toronto to Guindon, 30 October 1973. Before the formal letter was sent, much was made of this in the media. See “Guindon aid sought in Artistic Woodwork,” *Globe and Mail*, 24 October 1973, 4, and “Adamson is Angered by Anti-Labor Charges,” *Globe and Mail*, 27 October 1973, 5. The discussion surrounding this request can be seen in CTA, Dan Heap Collection, SC 327, Box 23, File 17, City of Toronto Executive Committee Report No. 51, page 4558–4559.

101. CTA, Series 11, File 898, Board of Police Commissioners, Artistic Woodwork Company Strike: Strike Correspondence [Box 47863, Folio 6], Minutes of the Metropolitan Executive Committee, 29 October 1973 and “Adamson is Angered,” *Globe*, 5.

102. Steed, “Officer #362,” 17.

103. Spinks, Interview.

104. Salutin, Interview.



tensions that emerged during the strike from the strike leadership towards some supporters.

We can see this demonstrated elsewhere, as organized groups such as the Revolutionary Marxist Group, the Canadian Party of Labour, the League for Socialist Action/Young Socialists, and the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) (CPC[M-L]) attempted to play roles in the strike but were rebuffed by the CTCU for being divisive.<sup>105</sup> Despite this, the CPC(M-L) issued pamphlets calling for armed revolutionary struggle; they commended the “unity amongst the workers in Toronto and amongst the students and democratic people in support of the Artistic strike,” seeing the Artistic strike as part of a broader class war against monopoly capitalism.<sup>106</sup> The Trotskyist Revolutionary Marxist Group saw Artistic as both an opportunity to support the working-class and gain experience doing so, as well as intervening “politically in the dispersed left milieu” of students and youth. Their views on the strike were that the union needed to begin an “off-picket line” strategy, with picketing at City Hall, the Labour Council/Ontario Federation of Labour, and to pursue a more militant, possibly illegal strategy.<sup>107</sup> They claimed to face “red-baiting” and hostility from the CTCU. The latter point certainly had validity, as seen earlier in my discussion of how the union failed to support a CPC(M-L) member violently arrested on the line due to concerns over optics.

Other unionists did bolster the picket lines on occasion. The mainstream leadership of the CLC and OFL were largely unsupportive of the strike, a legacy of the long-standing tension between the mainstream labour movement and nationalist unions.<sup>108</sup> In particular, the CTCU and the OFL had a history of sparring. As recently as 1971 during Texpack, the CTCU had accused the OFL of allowing the Textile Workers Union of America to organize strikebreakers at a suburban satellite location.<sup>109</sup> While there could be limited cooperation of issues of shared significance – such as strikebreakers and violence on the picket lines – the reaction of mainstream labour was generally restrained. Support instead came from local unions themselves. Two notable locals were the United Electrical (UE) workers at Toronto’s Northern Telecom plant, as well as the United Auto Workers Local 1967 at McDonnell-Douglas.<sup>110</sup>

105. MUA, Revolutionary Marxist Group fonds (hereafter RMG), Box 5, File on Artistic Woodwork Strike, “Artistic Balance Sheet.”

106. LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 5, File 1025-9-91042, CPC (M-L) Flyer, “Long Live the Fighting Spirit of the Artistic Strikers and Supporters!” November 1973.

107. MUA, RMG, Box 5, File on Artistic Woodwork Strike, “Artistic Balance Sheet.”

108. The historic origins of this are discussed in Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935–1956* (Toronto 1973).

109. Sangster, “Remembering Texpack,” 49–50.

110. Lang, “Carrying on the Struggle,” 83.

UE was particularly important, as the Communist-led union had been purged from the Canadian Congress of Labour in 1949.<sup>111</sup> As both the CTCU and UE were outside of the mainstream labour movement, there was sympathy between them, despite the obvious difference of the former being nationalist and the latter being an international union. David Monie, a UE leader at Telecom, came to the picket line to offer “financial and moral assistance.” He was arrested for common assault on two police officers during a mass picket on 14 November 1973; despite the testimonies of two police officers, his charges were dropped after it became apparent he had been singled out for arrest by aggressive police officers who started things off by yelling “Let’s get this fucking bastard.”<sup>112</sup>

Members of United Auto Workers (UAW) local 1967, which represented the workers at Douglas Aircraft, came to the line as well. Bargaining chairman Archie Wilson and two other members, including one of the local’s vice-presidents, came out to the morning picket lines in early October, arriving late for their scheduled shifts at Douglas due to heavy traffic. This led to the company alleging that they were picketing during company time. The three men were suspended. The next day members of UAW 1967 responded by calling in sick, an action seen by the company as “an attempted illegal work interruption.”<sup>113</sup> Five union leaders, including Archie Wilson, were dismissed for either encouraging the walkout or failing to stop it. This dismissal was seen by the Strike Support Committee as proof that “BOSSES STAND TOGETHER,” and was used as a rallying call in Artistic strike propaganda.<sup>114</sup> This would be the last straw for Wilson, who had been suspended three times since an earlier 1971 strike which had been carried out contrary to the international union’s wishes. Salutin has suggested that the UAW international headquarters rejoiced, as their internal problem was solved.<sup>115</sup>

Other unions contributed through correspondence. The Minister of Labour, Fern Guindon, received voluminous amounts of correspondence from labour unions regarding the Artistic strike. Many took the opportunity to use Artistic as a way to argue for the wholesale revision of labour legislation in the province, especially laws revolving around allowing strikebreakers to work

111. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, 154–155. See also the extensive discussion of UE, specifically their progressive treatment of women’s issues (especially compared to its international equivalent, the International Union of Electrical Workers) in Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 90–98.

112. John Lang Personal Collection, Canadian Textile and Chemical Union files, Document on Artistic strike trials, undated.

113. “Malton Aircraft Plant Fires 5 Union Leaders after 400 Stay Out,” *Toronto Star*, 3 October 1973, A01.

114. Craig Heron Personal Collection, Waffle Files, “Support the Artistic Woodworkers’ Strike,” October 1973.

115. Salutin, *Kent Rowley*, 106.

at struck plants. UAW Local 673, representing technical, office and professional workers in Etobicoke, wrote to protest legislation, demanding an end to police attacks.<sup>116</sup> Similar arguments came from other unions.<sup>117</sup> The Municipal Committee of the Labour Council of Metro Toronto unanimously passed a resolution calling on Metro Council to protest the police actions and do anything possible to impede the company.<sup>118</sup>

Just as many unions used Artistic as an opportunity to argue for bigger causes than the strike itself, the Canadian Manufacturers Association (CMA) wrote to Guindon to counterbalance the public attacks being made on him for his inaction in the labour dispute. It denounced the “interlopers” on the picket lines. The CMA’s Manager of Industrial Relations was quick to support the police officers’ actions and to express disdain for the union: “I will resist the temptation to comment on the union leadership and their past history or on some of the personalities who have chosen to involve themselves.”<sup>119</sup> Similar sentiments came from the Vice-President of Corporate Relations at Toronto’s head office of Noranda Mines.<sup>120</sup> These representatives of capital hoped that the public would learn about the rights of struck enterprises.

## The Endgame

WITH THE REVELATIONS of a video, taped on 12 November by Laura Sky from the National Film Board’s Challenge for Change program, and released to city council the next day, the debate became increasingly charged. The video showed the daily morning violence, and “a policeman could be seen pulling a fist back and punching a picket several times.” It also showed “three policemen seizing one picket, dragging him up against a door, and banging his head against the door several times while taking him into custody.” Police officers were seen removing their hats, which had their badge numbers on them. Law student Vicki Trerise, a supporter, was seen on camera being dragged

116. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from UAW Local 673 Executive to Guindon, 19 November 1973.

117. Unions included Teamsters Local 879, the CBRT Local 216 in Toronto, CUPE Local 1, UE Local 535, UER Local 504, UAW Local 222, USWA Local 1005, CUPW and UE Local 507. Letters and telegrams from all of these unions are found in AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061.

118. CTA, Series 11, File 898, Board of Police Commissioners, Artistic Woodwork Company Strike: Strike Correspondence [Box 47863, Folio 6], Letter from James Buller, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Labour council of Metro Toronto to Paul Godfrey, 24 October 1973.

119. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from W.H. Wightman, Manager, Industrial Relations Department of the Canadian Manufacturers Association to Guindon, 23 October 1973.

120. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from R.P. Riggins to Guindon, 23 October 1973.

by her hair.<sup>121</sup> That day was the most violent of the strike yet; twelve strikers had been arrested, and several sent to the hospital with injuries. William Temple, a 76-year-old former Co-operative Commonwealth Federation MPP and long-time temperance crusader who had been arrested on the picket lines, was interviewed and described the events of the day as “a disgrace to civilized society ... I’ve never been so disgusted and sickened in my life ... and I’ve been in two world wars.”<sup>122</sup> Temple had been arrested on charges of drunkenness, which supporter Bob Kellerman recalls as the cop’s sense of humour, as well as attacking a police officer.<sup>123</sup> That a long-time temperance crusader and 76-year-old man was accused of such acts stretched credibility, perhaps contributing to a wider sense that the police were out of control. Indeed, Dorothy Thomas quoted Temple in a letter sent out to the members of Metro Toronto council, imploring them to watch Laura Sky’s video. She booked the members’ lounge and invited councilors to “see the video themselves.”<sup>124</sup>

It was this video that made the situation clear to those who were not near the lines. The video’s release polarized and shocked the city. Many “middle class people couldn’t believe what they were seeing,” recalls John Lang.<sup>125</sup> The politicians who had been active in the strike were outraged, whereas conservative politicians saw the police doing a “fantastic job,” as Scarborough Controller Brian Harrison declared.<sup>126</sup> A group of Toronto city councilors, led by Arthur Eggleton (Mayor of Toronto from 1980 to 1991, and Liberal federal MP from 1993 to 2004), called for the police to be withdrawn from the picket lines; this was predictably denounced as “[i]nsanity.”<sup>127</sup> Eggleton later clarified his views in a long letter to city council, describing his visit to the line on 16 November. He described seeing arrests, police rushing the picket lines, and how disturbed he was that the police were clearly abetting management and the strikebreakers. Eggleton wanted the mass presence of police removed so they could no longer break the lines.<sup>128</sup> In response, the North York Council

121. John Lang Personal Collection, Canadian Textile and Chemical Union files, Document on Artistic strike trials, undated.

122. Gallagher, “Artistic Violence Mounts as Over 300 Picket,” 3.

123. Kellerman, Interview.

124. CTA, Series 11, File 898, Board of Police Commissioners, Artistic Woodwork Company Strike: Strike Correspondence [Box 47863, Folio 6], Letter from Dorothy Thomas to Metro Council, 13 November 1973.

125. Lang, Interview, 11 May 2009.

126. Graham Fraser, “Film Shows Police Banging Man’s Head Against Door at Artistic Plant,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 November 1973, 5.

127. “Insanity,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 November 1973.

128. CTA, Series 11, File 898, Board of Police Commissioners, Artistic Woodwork Company Strike: Strike Correspondence [Box 47863, Folio 6], Letter from Arthur Eggleton to Metro Council, 16 November 1973. A reproduction of the request by the Borough of North York’s

voted to *commend* the Metro Police and asked Toronto Council to “stop ‘its political interference’ in a borough matter.”<sup>129</sup>

The video of 12 November also set in motion a week that Lang and Drache, as well as others, would later consider the “turning point.”<sup>130</sup> The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention had begun in downtown Toronto. Leaflets circulated at the convention calling for support on the picket lines. By 14 November, OFL delegates joined to create a mass picket. This, combined with the video, led to growing pressure on Guindon who agreed to the City Council’s recommendation that the labour ministry become more involved. Both Guindon and William H. Dickie, the assistant labour minister for industrial relations, became personally involved in late November and met with both Artistic and CTCU representatives. By this time, union hierarchies had to act in light of growing rank-and-file pressure.<sup>131</sup>

The RCMP Security Service also took an interest in the events of November. An unnamed agent submitted an extensive report during the week. The writer noted the larger-than-normal picket lines, observing approximately 400 supporters on the next Monday, and large lines on the following Wednesday and Friday as well. Violence was described: large rocks were being thrown indiscriminately into the mob of pickets and police. The agent also made a claim that many of the injuries reported by picketers were wholly fabricated:

Also observed were a few pickets with faces covered with a blood-like substance and holering police brutality and talking to the news media. Some police officers also found this substance on their uniforms and on examination of this blood-like substance by the centre of forensic science, revealed it to be a type of theatrical makeup.<sup>132</sup>

While it is impossible to fully verify or disprove this claim, this is unlikely – nothing of the sort is claimed in the vast majority of the archival records or the interviews that I have conducted. It also did not appear in any of the post-strike trial proceedings.<sup>133</sup>

---

Clerk’s Department was found in CTA, Dan Heap Collection, sc 327, Box 23, File 17, Resolution from Council of the Borough of North York regarding Artistic Woodwork police, 20 November 1973.

129. Raymond Aboud, “Borough Will Commend Police for Actions at Artistic Strike,” *Globe and Mail*, 20 November 1973, 5.

130. Lang and Drache, “Lessons,” 4 and “Artistic Strike,” *1230 Break*, vol. 4, no. 1 (April 1974), 17 as found in University of Toronto Archives and Records Management, CUPE 1230 fonds, Box 13, file on 1974 *1230 Break*.

131. “Artistic Strike,” *1230 Break*, 17.

132. LAC, RCMP/CSIS fonds, RG 146-3, Volume 5, File 1025-9-91042, Security Service report on Artistic Woodwork Strike, presumably November 1973 although date has been redacted.

133. The one exception is a letter from Vello Sermat, a York University professor, to the Toronto City Council’s Executive Committee. Sermat mentions it in passing alongside a number of other activities carried out by “various extremist political groups” at the Artistic strike, although he provides no evidence or sources in his letter. See CTA, Dan Heap collection, sc 327,

The combined pressures of media coverage, mass picketing, the Minister of Labour, and Metro Council finally forced Artistic to cave on several key bargaining issues. An initial agreement was reached in late November, although this quickly collapsed when it became clear that the issue of rehiring arrested workers was unresolved, prompting banner headlines in the *Toronto Star*.<sup>134</sup> While the terms of the collective agreement had been settled, the two sides fought over the back-to-work protocol for several more days. While the back-to-work protocol is never part of the formal collective agreement, it would be necessary for both parties to reach agreement in order to end the strike.<sup>135</sup> Wrangling over these issues seemed to lose the attention of the many supporters, with pickets dwindling to 100 or less.<sup>136</sup>

Artistic's management was quite firm on this protocol. Eight workers had been charged during the strike. Artistic framed the issue as being that of worker safety, raising the spectre of law-abiding workers who exercised their rights to work in the struck plant being forced to work alongside arrested and convicted picketers. They did, however, offer to submit the issue of rehiring convicted workers to binding arbitration. The union eventually conceded. Two weeks later the union relented on union security clauses, won the crucial issue of management rights, and mutually decided to send the issue of rehiring workers to arbitration.<sup>137</sup> A triumphant Fern Guindon rose in the provincial parliament to address the strike. He blamed the lengthy strike on "outsiders" who "contributed nothing ... although many had the best of intentions." He continued, "outsiders may well have found it personally satisfying to raise the Artistic dispute to the symbolic level, where they could find their own meanings in the struggles of others."<sup>138</sup>

The strike was over, with substantial material gains made by the union. They had stood up to the desire of Artistic to have a union in name only, and the originally-proposed discipline clause was entirely lost. This, coupled with the wage gains, represented a very real change in the daily lives of Artistic workers. The paternalistic authority of management had been dispersed and effectively shown to be vulnerable. The union was legally entrenched in the plant. It had been a long and brutal strike. Many of the workers had found work elsewhere

---

Box 23, File 17, Letter from Vello Sermat to City of Toronto Council Executive Committee, 31 January 1974.

134. "Artistic Negotiations Collapse, pickets out Monday," *Toronto Star*, 24 November 1973, A1.

135. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Letter from Guindon to UAW 673, 3 December 1973.

136. Tim Gallagher, "Artistic Settles; Some May Still Lose Jobs," *Varsity*, 5 December 1973, 3.

137. "Union Bows on Rehiring to End Artistic Strike," *Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1973, 5.

138. AO, RG 7-1-0-2163, Container b236061, Address by Guindon to Ontario Parliament, undated.

and would not return to Artistic, and several core members of the union found themselves unable to return to work thanks to the back-to-work clause due to their arrests on the picket line. At the end of the struggle, it may have been a pyrrhic victory.

The supporters did not crystallize around the Artistic strike for long, perhaps reflecting the *ad hoc* nature of much of the support as opposed to more formally organized political groupings. While individuals continued their journeys into the labour movement, there was no sustained activity on the scale of the mass pickets. One attempt that continued out of the strike was the Right to Strike Movement, which published a series of booklets – beginning with Artistic – on important strikes and stressed the need to continually fight for the right to strike.<sup>139</sup> The organization continued for at least another year, highlighting province-wide strikebreaking and attempting to cement links between left-wing strike supporters and trade unionists.<sup>140</sup> After Artistic, the Revolutionary Marxist Group had a sustained discussion about the future direction of such picket-line involvements: had Artistic been a success? How should revolutionary groups work with reformist institutions such as the CTCU? A current emerged in the responses that the Group had to decisively move in front of more reformist groups such as the union, and post-strike analysis focused on their betrayal and ostracism from the mainstream CTCU.<sup>141</sup> While Artistic may not have been as central to the personal trajectories of members on the Marxist-Leninist left, it certainly played an important role in their thinking vis-à-vis the state, unions, and the broader left.<sup>142</sup>

While the strike was declared a clear victory, with Joe Sinagoga and Parent writing their supporters that the victory was “especially significant because it concerns mostly immigrant workers, typical of hundreds of thousands in unorganized plants in Metro Toronto, where exploitation is rampant and insecurity is the rule,” the charged workers were not rehired after the grievance procedure broke down.<sup>143</sup> Arbitration broke down when the process took

139. Right to Strike Committee, “A Lesson for the Canadian Labour Movement: The Artistic Woodwork Strike, 1973,” as found in MUA, Pamphlet Collection, Shelf no. 2603.

140. A collection of Right to Strike Newsletters was found in the Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatchewan Waffle fonds, Patsy Gallagher collection, File V.B.8, Right to Strike Newsletters, c. 1973–1974.

141. These discussion papers are found in MUA, RMG, Box 5, File on Artistic Woodwork. Note especially the document entitled the Artistic Balance Sheet, and then responses by B. Brayman, Michael Palladin, and Zetlin.

142. As Bryan Palmer has noted in *Canada's 1960s*, there continues to be much work to do on the plethora of revolutionary organizations which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and these comments here can do little but suggest further avenues for research.

143. University of Ottawa Archives (hereafter UOA), Canadian Women's Movement Archives (hereafter CWMMA), Box 326, File 'Unions – Miscellaneous,' Letter from Joe Sinagoga and Madeleine Parent to Peoples, Unions, Organizations who supported the strikers of Artistic Woodwork, 13 December 1973.

too long, as expected with a complicated legal procedure. Workers were suspended without pay during the proceedings, and after six months with no end in sight, the union representatives walked out of the hearings.<sup>144</sup> After the union walked out, the suspensions became terminations.<sup>145</sup> Without the rehiring of the most militant union members, this meant that the remaining strikers returned to the plant where “they were outnumbered by the scabs,” both those who stayed inside during the strike and those who were hired as strikebreakers and later kept on.<sup>146</sup> Two years later, 84 signatures out of a workforce of 110 were presented to the Ontario Labour Relations Board asking for decertification from the CTCU.<sup>147</sup>

The decertification campaign against the CTCU drew heavily on the experience of the strike. Letters were distributed throughout the plant, drawing on anti-communist themes, questioning what the strike was fought for. Numerous posters were distributed, emblazoned with sensational headlines that highlighted the violence of the strike. They stressed the role of outside supporters – of students, politicians, etc., accusing them of opportunistically using the strike. The Artistic strike controversy was presented to the membership, along with stark invitations to help prevent it all from happening again.<sup>148</sup> In the face of both the campaign as well as the employee make-up of the facility – many of the strikebreakers and those who had not found alternative employment – the eventual vote was 62–36 in favour of decertification.<sup>149</sup> While the workers voted their hard-fought union out of existence, appeals continued through the system for those arrested on the picket lines; a shocking thirty people awaited their appeals of summary convictions five years after the strike.<sup>150</sup>

144. LAC, Frank Park Fonds, Box 29, File 421, CTCU Notes on the Arbitration Process, 10 June 1974.

145. “Grievances Against Artistic Dismissed,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 June 1974, 4.

146. Lang and Drache, “Lessons,” 7 and “No Jobs at Artistic for Arrested Strikers,” *Globe and Mail*, 5.

147. “Artistic Union Wants to Delay Vote,” *Toronto Star*, 24 September 1975, A19 and “Members Ask Board to Decertify Union,” *Globe and Mail*, 12 August 1975, 4.

148. All of these flyers are found in LAC, Frank Park Fonds, Box 29, File 424.

149. “Workers Vote to Decertify Union at Artistic Woodwork,” *Toronto Star*, 30 December 1974, B02.

150. “Charged in ’73 Strike, 30 Await Appeal Ruling,” *Globe and Mail*, 21 October 1977, 5. Appeal trials began to be heard in November 1977, prompting Dan Heap to write to Mayor David Crombie imploring him to use his influence with the Attorney-General to have the trials called off in light of the long wait, difficulty of finding evidence after four years, and the “unusually provocative atmosphere of the strike.” See CTA, Dan Heap collection, SC 327, Box 23, File 17, Letter from Dan Heap to David Crombie, 8 November 1977. The trials had continued despite calls for the Attorney-General to use his discretion to withdraw the charges, as had been argued by some city politicians as well as prominent lawyers such as Clayton Ruby. See CTA, Dan Heap Collection, SC 327, Box 23, File 17, Letter from Clayton Ruby to Dan Heap, 1 March 1974.



In light of the union's decertification, the obvious reaction would be to characterize the Artistic strike as a defeat. On one level, it was: the union was decertified and fears were marshaled to lead the majority of workers to vote against collective representation. It also certainly did not set in motion wide-spread organizing throughout the city; if anything, the high costs of organizing small facilities were revealed to be even higher in the face of intransigent employers. For some, Artistic had been conceived as a "jump off for a general organizing strategy," but a decisive victory was needed to create a dynamic; this never occurred. It was a "missed opportunity" in that respect.<sup>151</sup> Yet others continued to organize small operations, leading to subsequent conflagrations such as the Fleck and Radio Shack strikes, both in 1978.<sup>152</sup>

There were positive developments out of the strike, however. First, as John Lang later argued, it had shown that Canadians *could* run a viable strike without the support of the mainstream labour leadership.<sup>153</sup> Rick Salutin agrees, holding that the Artistic strike showed the possibilities of idealistic, Canadian unionism.<sup>154</sup> Even without many picketers and without wider labour-movement support, the strikers held on for 109 days and made significant gains against an intransigent employer. Other lessons were learned by labour. Labour activist and educator D'Arcy Martin holds that Artistic "showed the potential for social networking ... it showed the path that was later picked up by these other places that were not CCU."<sup>155</sup> Indeed, Daniel Drache and Harry Glasbeek would later argue that the strike helped make clear the need for "invoking the support of popular groups."<sup>156</sup>

The Artistic strike influenced the realm of public policy and opinion. Using strikebreakers presented a stark example to the public of what legalized strikebreaking could lead to. While picket violence on this scale has not been seen in Toronto since – there were far more arrests than workers on strike – Artistic was a vivid example of the threat to public order posed by allowing strikebreakers to threaten the livelihood of workers exercising their right to bargain collectively and withhold their labour. It thus contributed to a realization that anti-scab legislation at least needed consideration. Currently, British Columbia and Quebec are the only two provinces to have such legislation on their books – Ontario's short-lived legislation under the Rae government having been revoked by the neo-conservative Mike Harris government.

151. Drache, Interview.

152. For more on Fleck see Heather Jon Maroney, "Feminism at Work," *New Left Review*, 141 (September–October 1983), 60–61.

153. Lang, Interview.

154. Rick Salutin, E-Mail Message to Author, 16 January 2010.

155. Martin, Interview.

156. Daniel Drache and Harry Glasbeek, *The Changing Workplace: Reshaping Canada's Industrial Relations System* (Toronto 1992), 118.

Strikebreaking continues to be a pertinent public policy issue. Standing in the federal parliament in April 2005, federal New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton – who had been an active picketer at Artistic and firsthand witness to police brutality<sup>157</sup> – evoked the spirit of the Artistic strike when he argued that the Canada Labour Code be amended to outlaw strikebreakers in federal jurisdiction strikes:

When replacement workers are brought in and they cross the picket lines and striking workers see busload after busload of these workers taking their jobs, as I witnessed myself in the early 1970s at the famous Artistic Woodwork strike, undercutting their very ability to bargain a fair deal, it does not bode well for a future of harmonious labour relations.<sup>158</sup>

At the municipal level, many of the Toronto city councilors had been arrested and/or shocked by what they had seen at Artistic – Arthur Eggleton, David Crombie, Dorothy Thomas, Dan Heap, among others – and it reinforced a “concern about labour and an emerging working-class in the city that might not have been the case up until then.”<sup>159</sup>

Finally, there was the strong personal impact that Artistic had on participants as a lesson that you “had to stand up and fight for what you believe in.”<sup>160</sup> For Bob Davis, who went on to play a large role in the 1975 Metro teachers’ strike and lead a life of educational activism, the Artistic strike was a great influence in his teaching.<sup>161</sup> Yet for many more, this was an opportunity to put politics into action, as supporters saw “the connection between this broader vision of social justice where the left intellectuals were and a tangible moment in our community in which you could do something about it.”<sup>162</sup>

After all of the discussion, which had stretched from the early 1960s onwards, about how to effect social change – and debates over the role of the working-class – a decisive opportunity was opened to the progressive milieu of Toronto to play a role. And they did. The connection between theory and concrete action was demonstrated, just as it had been hinted at in growing degrees at Peterborough, Canso, Dare, and Texpack. For the immigrant workers too, this strike was significant. Their issues were publicized, as Parent would later recall in 1979 on the occasion of her retirement.<sup>163</sup> Ritchie argues that Artistic continues to be a “touchstone for a lot of people. People will say ‘were you at Artistic?’ ‘Did I first meet you at Artistic?’ ‘Do I remember you

157. Jack Layton, “The Odd Couple,” *Canadian Woman Studies*, 18 (1999), 112.

158. Canada. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 38th Parliament, 1st Session, Number 78, 7 April 2005.

159. Ritchie, Interview.

160. Lang, Interview.

161. Davis, *What Our High Schools Could Be*, 234.

162. Martin, Interview.

163. Wilfred List, “A Zealous Champion of Working Women,” *Globe and Mail*, 24 January 1979, 7.

from Artistic?’ ‘Was that guy at Artistic?’<sup>164</sup> It helped bring immigrant society a little further into the mainstream and under the spotlight. Spinks concurs: “it was one of the first times that immigrant workers struggles had been publicly revealed, and how difficult their working conditions could be. So a lot more people came to know about this.”<sup>165</sup>

Artistic, in the minds of many, was a very significant strike.<sup>166</sup> The lessons learned would later be put to use at two aforementioned 1978 strikes: the Fleck strike in Huron Park, Ontario – a touchstone in the feminist movement, involving 120 workers also trying to get a first collective agreement – as well as the Collingwood Radio Shack (Tandy) strike.<sup>167</sup> Artistic was also significant enough in that it arguably drew several activists off the campus. Former CUS president Peter Warrian argues that Artistic “burned up a lot of people who either went off in their own political activism stuff, or decided to get involved directly from the bottom up in the labour movement as union members and disengaged people from the campus struggle.”<sup>168</sup> Many supporters did come to be involved in the labour movement out of these struggles, and were on the picket line at Artistic: Judy Darcy, who subsequently rose to prominence in the library workers union at the University of Toronto and later became national president of CUPE; D’Arcy Martin, a labour educator and activist; Peter Warrian, later research director with the United Steelworkers of America. The opportunities were there, and they seized them. For some, this first encounter with labour militancy opened up the labour movement as a career option: “It certainly contrasted with going to school ... As an inspiration and a sort of direction in my life, it was huge, and made school just seem totally irrelevant.”<sup>169</sup>

The Artistic strike is a compelling study of how several currents within the Toronto New Left milieu – from the intellectual turn towards Marxism, to the rise of nationalism and the continuing emphasis put upon social responsibility – converged near the end of the long sixties. The opportunity for change and improvement represented at Artistic was in some ways representative of a period that was about to end. For as the seventies progressed, the labour movement would find itself on increasingly unsettled ground as it faced escalating repression, best exemplified by federally initiated 1975 wage and price controls. This period would see defensive struggles fought by organized labour, as

164. Ritchie, Interview.

165. Spinks, Interview.

166. Martin, Interview; Ritchie, Interview; Davis, Interview.

167. Martin, Interview. The Fleck strike is discussed in Maroney, “Feminism at Work” and 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.

168. Warrian, Interview.

169. Dorfman, Interview.

the postwar settlement of labour crumbled under sustained attack by governments and employers.<sup>170</sup> A new chapter of labour history would begin.

Although the political and economic context today is far removed from that of the early seventies, we can still take valuable contemporary lessons from a significant event like Artistic. Artistic presents a valuable lesson for policymakers considering anti-strikebreaking legislation. In addition, the power and importance of social networking was avidly demonstrated at Artistic, tapping on groups of friends to take action and join each other on early morning picket lines. New Leftist organizers were able to do so by framing the narrative as an opportunity to fight the system and act out the increasingly pervasive Marxist sociology of the time, connecting Artistic with ongoing social issues and concerns. Supporters were not there for the critically important bread-and-butter matters of a new collective agreement, but for more abstract ideals of justice and rights. In 1973, the Artistic organizers were able to capitalize on these various currents, presenting supporters with an opportunity to put theory into action, leading many to wake up early on dark, cold mornings, stand against oppression, and put their bodies on the line for what they felt was right and just. For three months, the Toronto left milieu was able to put its principles into action – principles crafted by a decade of debate, writing and political action – and they did so.

*My sincerest thanks to those who shared their thoughts and experiences with me. Thanks are also due to my supervisor, Craig Heron, as well as to Paul Axelrod, Jennifer Bleakney, Brittany Luby, Cecile Mutton and Marlene Shore. The Toronto Labour Studies Group and the Reznikoff's Cafe group (Alban Bargain, Dan Bullard, Valerie Deacon, Christine McLaughlin and Tom Peace) were helpful and always supportive. Bryan Palmer and the four anonymous readers provided invaluable suggestions and greatly improved this manuscript. Finally, I acknowledge the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.*

170. A process extensively discussed by Panitch and Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion*, Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, chapter 7 and Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto 1996), chapter 5.

# Social Science History

*The official journal of  
the Social Science  
History Association*



The Social Science History Association (SSHA) is a coalition of distinctive scholarly communities with a shared interest in social life and theory, historiography, and historical and social-scientific methodologies.

The SSHA's journal, *Social Science History*, seeks to advance the study of the past by publishing research that appeals to an interdisciplinary audience.

Douglas L. Anderton, editor

The benefits of membership include

- a reduced rate for the annual conference
- a one-year print subscription to *Social Science History* (four issues)
- online access to *Social Science History* content from 2000 to the present

**Become a member of the SSHA today!**

Individuals, \$70

Students, \$25 (photocopy of valid student ID required)

*Additional postage fees apply for international orders.*

To join the SSHA,  
please visit **dukeupress.edu/ssha**.

DUKE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS