

Playful Crowds and the 1886 Toronto Street Railway Strikes

Ian Radforth

Volume 76, Fall 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1034477ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Radforth, I. (2015). Playful Crowds and the 1886 Toronto Street Railway Strikes. *Labour / Le Travail*, 76, 133–164.

ARTICLE

Playful Crowds and the 1886 Toronto Street Railway Strikes

Ian Radforth

AMID JEERS OF “SCABS!” AND “RATS!” a crowd of thousands of working-class Toronto men and boys surged towards the horse-drawn streetcar operated by strikebreakers. Coal heavers had used their wagons to block its passage through the downtown street, and now it was an easy target. Youths grabbed handfuls of mud from the slushy streets, hurling them jubilantly at the car and at both the driver and conductor who stood exposed on front and rear platforms. In frustration, the operators gave up the contest, abandoned the streetcar, and slinked away through the jostling masses. A ringleader from the crowd boarded the car to tell the women passengers they had better get out, which they quickly did. In triumph, a gang of men hefted the car from the tracks and, turning it at right angles to them, set it down ignominiously. Cheers rang again and again from the throng in celebration of their little victory.

It was 11 March 1886, the second day of a labour dispute triggered by unionists in the employ of the privately owned Toronto Street Railway Company (TSR), which had a monopoly on streetcar services in the fast-growing city. Commentators divided over how serious these public disturbances were. Judge McDougall, chairman of the board of police commissioners, was concerned about maintaining public order and insisted it was imperative “to demonstrate the fact that a mob cannot do with this town as it pleases.” The *Toronto World* asked rhetorically, “If a crowd can rule the street whenever it sees fit, where is it all going to end?”¹ Yet, William Howland, Toronto’s urban-reform mayor appeared less perturbed by the crowd actions when he publicly chastised the TSR for provoking the dispute with its anti-union policy. Journalists writing for the daily press were struck by the good-humoured mood of the vast crowds,

1. *Toronto World*, 13 March 1886, 12 March 1886.

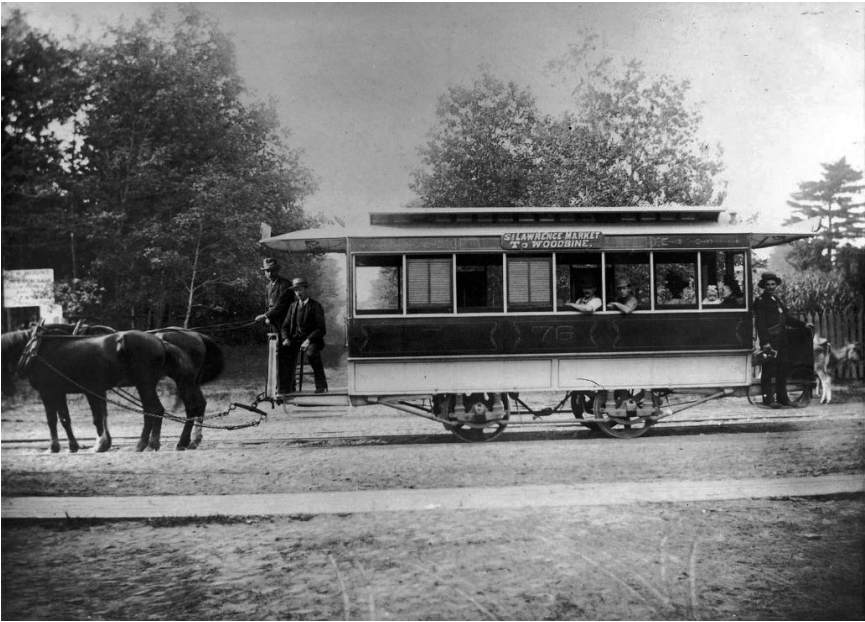
and maintained that even the police, hard pressed as they were to maintain order, seemed to enter into the fun at least in the dispute's early stages. The air of tolerance extended even to commuters who, though deprived of their ride to work, seemed pleased to see the TSR getting its comeuppance.

The incident and similar ones arose during the first of two disputes in the spring of 1886, when about 300 male conductors and drivers employed by the TSR defended their right to belong to a union. The employees were being organized by the Knights of Labor during its heyday in Canada and the United States. The two linked disputes of March and May 1886 demonstrate a struggle prevalent in the late 19th century between fledgling unions and determined employers who, unhampered by the law, would employ only workers who had signed an ironclad agreement not to join a union. Because the TSR held a municipal charter giving it a monopoly on the provision of streetcar service in the city, the large streetcar-dependent public was adversely affected by the disruptions, and yet the vast majority of residents supported the strikers by avoiding the skeleton service the TSR managed to provide with strikebreakers. Moreover, thousands of working-class men and boys took to the streets to express opposition to the company and its strikebreakers, and to participate in the excitement. Large, boisterous, and sometimes violent demonstrations caught the attention of the press, as well as city authorities responsible for maintaining law and order.

Historians have studied this pair of strikes when documenting the rise of the Knights of Labor during Toronto's industrial revolution, when narrating the story of Howland's colourful two-year term as mayor, and when analyzing the legal issues raised by the strikes.² This article uses the detailed coverage of the disputes in daily newspapers to recreate the dramatic street demonstrations and to argue that even these highly contentious disputes had their playful side. In contrast to the self-disciplined behaviour of manly unionists, large numbers of boys and men in the crowds displayed their aggressive masculinity in transgressive and, for them, pleasurable ways that for a while at least entertained the public even while it defied the TSR and worried police authorities and union leaders.

The crowd actions during the streetcar strikes are good examples of what Charles Tilly has called "contentious performances," where people gather to act out their objections to developments in ways that communicate their

2. Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 199–211; Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizens' Candidate* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973); Eric Tucker, "The Faces of Coercion: The Legal Regulation of Labor Conflict in Ontario, 1880–1889," *Law and History Review* 12, 2 (Autumn 1994): 277–339; Eric Tucker "Who's Running the Road? Street Railway Strikes and the Problem of Constructing a Liberal Capitalist Order in Canada, 1886–1914," *Law and Social Inquiry* 35, 2 (Spring 2010): 451–485; Eric Tucker, "Street Railway Strikes, Collective Violence, and the Canadian State, 1886–1914" in Barry Wright and Susan W.W. Binnie, eds., *Canadian State Trials III: Political Trials and Security Measures, 1840–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 257–293.



Two-horse streetcar with driver and conductor, Toronto, ca. 1892.

Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244 (William James Family Fonds), Item 1356.

demands and challenge authority, drawing from a limited repertoire of actions that usually change only incrementally.³ Eighteenth-century English bread riots, with their strong appeals to custom and community standards of fairness, are classic examples of spontaneous but purposive crowd actions, and Tilly has called them contentious performances.⁴ The crowd actions surrounding the 1886 Toronto street railway strikes were part of this tradition of contentious performances. Name-calling as a shaming exercise, mud-sling-

3. Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Christian Borch, *Politics of Crowds: An Alternative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Michael Hanagan, Leslie Page Moch, and Wayne te Brake, eds., *Challenging Authority: The Historical Study of Contentious Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998).

4. E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (February 1976): 76–136; Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 62–72. There is an extensive literature on crowds, which includes, E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), Chapter 3; George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (1964; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1981); Harvey J. Kaye, ed., *The Face of the Crowd: Studies in Revolution, Ideology, and Popular Protest: Selected Essays of George Rudé* (Hampstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1988); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

ing, and the massing of unruly people were components of a repertoire long used by crowds to object to and prevent actions they deemed not to be in the community interest. In the case of the 1886 disputes, the overwhelmingly male crowds targeted the strikebreakers and the streetcars they operated. In back of these handy targets lay the street railway monopoly and the municipal authority, which had granted the charter. Yet, these strikes occurred on the cusp of the modern, industrial age, and Toronto's street railway provided a symbol of industry and modernity.⁵ TSR employees' responses, forming a union and striking, were equally indicative of the new industrial order, and the self-disciplined behaviour of the male picketers was a modern contentious performance that occurred alongside but differed from the more spontaneous and unruly crowd actions.

The mood during the contentious encounters of 1886 varied markedly. The strikers had a serious cause and, with much at stake, approached their task as picketers soberly and with determination. At times the crowds also appeared in earnest as they vigorously challenged the despised streetcar monopoly, especially after the first two days of the March dispute when the police fiercely backed the company's right to operate with strikebreakers. However, what is of particular interest here are the more playful actions of members of the crowd, the sometimes tolerant police responses, and the bemused reporting of the incidents by journalists. At times, a tone of jubilation prevailed on the streets that did not escape the notice of journalists and which they perhaps encouraged by the tone of their reporting. The newspaper reports of the colourful clashes in the streets probably encouraged yet more people to come out to witness the fun and join in the action. My analysis expands on scholars' understanding of contentious performances by underscoring that crowds could be both purposive *and* playful.

The daily press provides the best source for reconstructing these performances in Toronto streets during the streetcar disputes, and indeed aside from the dailies we have little evidence at all about the crowd behaviour.⁶ In 1886 interest in public events was such that five daily newspapers met the demand of the reading public: the *Globe*, the *Toronto Daily Mail*, the *Telegram*, the *Evening News*, and the *Toronto World*.⁷ The newspapers, which were aimed at

5. Street railways and modernity are discussed in Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 34–55. Modernity in Toronto is explored more widely in Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Modern Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

6. The only other sources that touch on street events are court records and these provide only terse depictions of what happened. Tucker has made good use of court records in "Faces of Coercion." The labour press had almost nothing to say about the strike. Even the *Palladium of Labor*, which was highly supportive of the Knights of Labor in Ontario, did not report on the events of the disputes.

7. Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada*

different audiences, ranged from the serious party organs, the Liberal *Globe* and Conservative *Mail*, to the exuberant journalism aimed at mass audiences practiced by the *Telegram*, the *News*, and the *World*. The editorial positions of the newspapers differed sharply on the strikes, the *Mail* being the most hostile to the strikers and the *News* being enthusiastically supportive. The newspapers' slant sometimes shaped their reporting of developments in the streets, and yet there are similarities in the style of reporting across all the dailies. Each newspaper had its reporter or reporters (articles have no byline) in the street observing the events closely and telling stories about them in as lively a manner as the writer could muster.⁸ The close attention given the developments and the human-interest style of reporting – still quite new in journalism at the time – resembled the press coverage of other events in the Victorian city involving large crowds, including strictly celebratory ones.⁹ In all these reports, to the frustration of the historian, journalists did not conduct “man-in-the-street” interviews as would be done in later decades, and so the voices of those engaged in the street encounters are muffled – except when they yelled “rats” and the like.

Following Jürgen Habermas, historians have pointed to the crucial role played by newspapers in making a public and promoting deliberative democracy in 19th-century Ontario.¹⁰ During the 1886 disputes, the press represented a divided public and highlighted actions or divergent modes of behaviour more than competing discourses. Some members of the public chose to ride the

(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). At pp. 238–239 Rutherford provides some reported circulation figures for Toronto dailies in 1880: *Globe* 57,000; *Mail* 69,558; *Telegram* 14,000; *World* 11,500; and in 1883, *News* 31,500.

8. Weekly newspapers did not contain similar detailed coverage, though Toronto weeklies as diverse as the *Week*, the *Palladium of Labor*, and the *Monetary Times* briefly commented on issues raised by them.

9. On celebrations in Victorian Canada, see, for instance, P.G. Goheen, “The Ritual of the Streets in Mid-19th-Century Toronto,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 11, 2 (1993): 127–145; Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, “The Craftsmen’s Spectacle: Labour Day Parades in Canada, the Early Years,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 29, 58 (1996): 357–389; Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Ian Radforth, “Celebrating the Suppression of the North-West Resistance of 1885: The Toronto Press and the Militia Volunteers,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 47, 95 (November 2014): 601–639. On the 19th-century United States, see Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Jeffrey L. McNairn, *Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791–1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), Chapter 3; Duncan Koerber, “Style over Substance: Newspaper Coverage of Early Election Campaigns in Canada, 1820–1841,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, 3 (2011): 435–453.

streetcars operated by strikebreakers. Picketers made use of the public streets strategically against those streetcars to persuade the company to back down on the ironclad. A larger portion of the public formed crowds that physically and verbally inhibited strikebreaking operations and turned the streets into sites of both fun and danger. Much less visible in the press was another large portion of the public that stood aloof from the action. Ultimately, the divisions within the public had an impact on how the disputes ended.

The potential of street railway strikes to provoke crowd actions and violence has long been acknowledged. In the course of the disputes, the *Telegram* editorialized about recent street railway disputes in Chicago, St Louis, and New York, where "public sympathy for the strikers was expressed by obstructions on the rails and in several cases by assaults on the substitutes who manned the cars."¹¹ Labour historians have examined street railway strikes involving crowd actions in Canadian cities such as London, Hamilton, Saint John, and Winnipeg, as well as in US cities. As is evident from these studies, the 1886 street railway disputes in Toronto were part of a wider pattern of public indignation and protest about streetcar service and company labour policies evident when street railway companies attempted to defeat unions by continuing to operate during strikes. A portion of the working-class public dominated the scenes of turmoil, engaging in a form of community involvement that heightened class tensions and brought police suppression and sometimes military intervention.¹²

While the Toronto disputes of 1886 are part of this well-documented pattern of violent confrontation, the conflicts included playful performances that have not been sufficiently appreciated in earlier histories of them or other street railway disputes for that matter. Certainly the stories newspaper journalists told about the Toronto disputes were intended not just to inform but also to entertain. Labour historians have consistently pointed to the serious issues and risks for working people that strikes inevitably involve, but more attention

11. *Telegram*, 9 May 1886.

12. Bryan Palmer, "Give Us the Road and We Will Run It: The Social and Cultural Matrix of an Emerging Labour Movement," in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 106–124; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), 209–216; Craig Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives: Remaking the Workers' City* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 221–226; Patricia Roy, "The British Columbia Electrical Railway and Its Employees," *BC Studies* 16 (1972–73): 3–24; Robert H. Babcock, "The Saint John Street Railwaymen's Strike and Riot, 1914" *Acadiensis* 11, 2 (1982): 3–27; Jonathan Hildebrand, "Class, Community, and Urban Consciousness: The Winnipeg Street Railway, 1906–1910," *Manitoba History* 60 (Spring 2009): 2–13; Scott Molloy, *Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996); Robert Babcock, "'Will You Walk? Yes, We'll Walk': Popular Support for a Street Railway Strike in Portland, Maine," *Labor History* 35, 3 (Summer 1994): 372–398; Harold E. Cox, "The Wilkes-Barre Street Railway Strike of 1905," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History* 94, 1 (January 1970): 75–94.

may be warranted in examining crowd dynamics, the appeal of joining large crowd actions, contrasting collective expressions of masculinity, and shifts in the mood of confrontations during the course of a dispute.

Setting the stage

BY 1886 THE TSR'S CHARTER from the city of Toronto was a quarter century old, and the company had developed an extensive network of routes throughout the metropolitan area, whose population stood at 160,000.¹³ More than 300 employees drove the horse-drawn streetcars, worked as conductors collecting fares aboard them, or toiled in the company's large barns near the commercial centre of the city at George and Front Streets. The drivers and conductors were not regarded as skilled workers at the time. In an era when how to handle horses was widely known, drivers and stable hands could be quickly trained and easily replaced. Conductors were routinely taught the job in about a week. In 1886 the TSR paid most of its employees \$9 per 72-hour week (6 days of 12 hours). The possibility of steady work, however, made it relatively attractive employment at a time when most common labourers expected frequent breaks in employment, including long winter layoffs. The street railwaymen's main threat was sudden dismissals often without explanation. Reports in Toronto's daily press occasionally detailed the hardships of TSR employees. On a rainy day in April 1885 a conductor told a *Globe* reporter that his pay was only nine dollars per six-day week, he actually worked fifteen hours a day, and by the day's end he was exhausted. That day he was drenched to the skin because he had been standing outside on a car platform for his entire shift. He also pointed out that it was up to conductors to come up with the eighteen dollars required each day for tickets and making change.¹⁴ Streetcar workers thus had good reasons to organize for protection and improvement of their jobs, but until the coming to Toronto of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, unionization appeared impossible because existing unions were composed of craftsmen who relied on their scarce skills to build effective organizations.

Toronto's 1886 street railway disputes marked a local highpoint of the continent-wide surge in labour militancy and class conflict during the 1880s. As historians have shown, amid industrialization, unions proliferated, none more so than the Knights of Labor, which arrived in Toronto from the United States in 1882.¹⁵ The Knights organized not only craftsmen into "local assemblies" closely resembling craft-union locals but more innovatively it also organized

13. Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment*, 34–55.

14. *Globe*, 4 April 1885. See also *Rules and Regulations for Drivers and Conductors of the Toronto Street Railway Co.* (Toronto 1880), CIHM No. 33829.

15. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 175–79. See also Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1990* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987), 56–111.

other workers into “mixed assemblies” of wage-earners from various workplaces or with varying levels of skill. Unusual too for the time, the Knights reached out to previously excluded workers, including women and blacks, though not Chinese workers. Their approach was well-suited for workers in the many new factories opening in cities such as Toronto during the period of rapid industrialization that began in the 1870s, and it worked for the street railway employees, too. Throughout Ontario, and especially in Toronto, membership in Knights’ assemblies and strike activity surged from October 1885 to March 1886, a moment dubbed by contemporaries “the great awakening.” During that 8-month period, Toronto workers created no less than 35 local assemblies before the Knights’ key Toronto leader, Irish-Canadian printer Daniel J. O’Donoghue, called for a breather. The Toronto assemblies challenged their employers, often over issues of workers’ control, and sometimes struck, notwithstanding the preference of the Knights, as an organization, for methods of settling disputes other than strikes, which were seen as a risky last resort.¹⁶

Toronto’s 1886 street railway disputes occurred amid ongoing tensions between the public and its sole provider of streetcar services. While the TSR’s monopoly agreement with the city made sense given that competing street railway systems would have been impossibly unwieldy, it meant that few residents had any other option than to travel on the TSR system, which carried more than 8.5 million passengers in 1886.¹⁷ Many riders viewed the TSR as being complacent, unchecked by competitors, and insufficiently responsive to public complaints about the quality of service. Moreover, fuzzy language in the charter left the city unable to compel the company to keep the tracks level with the roadways. The TSR’s failure to maintain the streets in good condition and its success in ducking its obligation to do so in a much publicized legal case added to public grumbling about the TSR.¹⁸ But there was a litany of additional complaints. Suburbanites grouched that they lacked adequate, well-connected services. Sabbath observers decried the TSR’s bid to operate Sunday streetcar service. Women declared the cars uncomfortable.¹⁹ In wintertime, residents objected to the company practice of clearing the tracks of snow by piling it to the sides, thus blocking the roads to the inconvenience of all other vehicles. At one point Yonge Street residents hired boys to shovel the snow back onto the tracks!²⁰

16. Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming*, 56–111.

17. Armstrong and Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment*, 53.

18. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company: Sunday Streetcars and Municipal Reform in Toronto, 1888–1897* (1977; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30–31; *Globe*, 26 January 1885, 14 November 1885.

19. *Globe*, 9 April and 10 July 1885 (line extensions); 5 March 1886 (Sunday service); 20 September 1886 (women).

20. *Globe*, 9 December 1885.

The TSR and its president, Senator Frank Smith, had many critics, as well as some admirers. A prominent Torontonians, Smith was Conservative leader in the Senate, a cabinet colleague of Sir John A. Macdonald, and a wealthy businessman with diverse interests, including liquor wholesaling.²¹ Still, it must have been easy for street railway employees and other workers to imagine that Smith derived his riches and power from the too-generous terms of the TSR charter and the company's cost-cutting that resulted in a mean-spirited labour policy. Certainly Toronto's many Orangemen were no admirers of such a wealthy Irish Roman Catholic power broker as Smith, and charged that he gave preference in hiring to Catholics and was using his connections in a plan to bring in French-Canadian Catholics as strikebreakers.²² Toronto's Irish Catholics probably had a different view of a dispenser of federal Tory patronage to local Catholics, an employer who at least did not discriminate against them, and a Horatio Alger whose rags-to-riches life showed what Catholics could achieve locally, though many Catholic workers objected fiercely to Smith's anti-union policies. Ongoing disputes involving the TSR and Senator Smith got much public attention, such as the company's failure to comply with the charter clause requiring a conductor on every car. When Smith complained that doing so for all the one-horse cars would bankrupt the company, the *Globe* questioned his inability to pay and pointed out the need for public reports on the TSR accounts. A dispute over the city's tax assessment of the TSR and its officials later revealed to a fascinated public that in 1886 Smith's income from TSR sources alone totalled \$11,506 – rather more than the poor conductor who at best made \$468 annually in the unlikely event that he worked every week in the year.²³ Moreover, in the view of the *Globe*, Smith and the TSR got away with earning too much money and escaping from its contractual obligations because the company exercised undue influence on municipal government: "It has practically in its pay several aldermen who always take the Company's side in every dispute."²⁴

The surge in the Knights of Labor in the mid-1880s alarmed the president of the TSR who in 1885 ordered his employees to sign an ironclad agreement, whereby each man vowed on the pain of discharge never to join the Knights or any other labour organization. Smith wanted nothing to do with unions, and he must have seen them as a threat to his profits in a business

21. Mark McGowan, "SMITH, Sir FRANK," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 4 February 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/smith_frank_13E.html.

22. Whether French-Canadian strikebreakers from Montréal were actually arranged for by Smith was a matter of dispute. See *News* charges, 11 March 1886; Smith's denials, *World*, 13 March 1886.

23. *Globe*, 4 December 1886.

24. *Globe*, 26 March 1886. On the TSR charter and Smith's business strategy, see Armstrong and Nelles, *Revenge*, 29–34.

where wages made up a substantial part of operating costs. The ironclad was a familiar employer's weapon in the period and had recently been given local prominence when the *Mail* imposed it on its printing staff.²⁵ Smith's imposition of the ironclad prompted some TSR employees to form a Knights of Labor assembly in early November, but Smith succeeded in halting the union drive. Four months later, in early March 1886, pro-union street railwaymen revived their organizing attempt, enlisting a few dozen men in the Knights of Labor.²⁶ Almost immediately it became clear that Smith and his superintendent knew about the renewed activity because the company hired several men who began a week's training to be drivers and conductors, apparently in readiness to replace the unionists once weeded out. In response to this provocation, late in the evening of Tuesday, 9 March, unionists held an emergency meeting at the Knights' offices in the fashionable Arcade Building on Yonge Street. Smith's timekeepers stood at the door, noting down the names of employees entering the hall. The blatant intimidation did not stop the meeting – a sign of the determination of at least a core of the company's employees.²⁷

The March Dispute

ARMED WITH UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION on the activists, the morning after the union meeting the company made its move. When employees arrived at the streetcar barns early on Wednesday, 10 March, the union men were barred from entering. Nearly all the other employees there at the time – 150 to 200 men – opted to act in solidarity by not starting work. The TSR was able to send out only a few streetcars early that morning.

Toronto newspapers immediately cast blame for the dispute. In its report headed "Trouble in Toronto," the unsympathetic *Mail* blamed the disruption of an essential service on employees who had "readily assented" to signing the ironclad but had now broken their contracts by organizing a Knights of Labor assembly.²⁸ By contrast, the pro-union *News*, presented the dispute as a lockout and "another illustration of the arbitrary and inconsiderate policy actuating the management of the monopoly which we have frequently had reason to condemn."²⁹ Whether the dispute was a strike or a lockout continued

25. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 91–92, 233. Striking printers defeated the ironclad and, in a contentious performance, burned the contract in the *Mail* offices on 3 February 1886 (*Toronto Workers*, 235).

26. The name and number of the assembly is not mentioned by the press, and Kealey lists it as "?" (*Toronto Workers*, 196).

27. *News*, 10 March 1886; *World*, 11 March 1886.

28. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

29. *News*, 11 March 1886; on the *News* and labour, see Russell G. Hann, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E.E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson and the *Toronto News*, 1883–1887," in Kealey and Warrian, *Essays*, 35–57.

to be debated. The employer position held that the men had chosen to withdraw their labour – to strike – in protest of the firing of the contract-breaking unionists, whereas the union maintained that the company had locked out its employees for insisting on their right to belong to a union.

During the early hours of the dispute, confusion prevailed. The union had not known when the dismissals would come exactly, nor the extent of support from drivers and conductors not in the union. Understandably, men clustered in knots in the streets outside the TSR barns conferring about the turn of events and what to do next. Also on the scene from the start were at least 60 police constables who pressed the groups of men to disperse.³⁰ Into the scene stepped locked-out unionized driver Matthew Maloney who shouted to the men, saying there would be a meeting in the union hall and inviting all to attend. By taking charge of the situation, he aimed to rally the unorganized men to the Knights and to get the street railwaymen off the streets so that they would not be tempted to disturb the peace and thus antagonize the public or trigger arrests. Under the criminal law, the activities of picketers were tightly bound and authorities had discretion in making arrests for “watching and besetting” and “obstructing,” vaguely defined offences that gave much latitude to law enforcers.³¹ On orders from the chief constable, Francis Collier Draper, an officer charged Maloney with disorderly conduct. None of the reporters described anything at all disorderly about Maloney’s behaviour, but certainly it was conduct not in the interest of the TSR. In any event, the locked-out men were soon off the scene, discussing their situation in a meeting closed to the press. The *Telegram* nevertheless reported that at the meeting 100 new members joined the union.³²

Most Torontonians gained wind of the dispute when no streetcar arrived to take them to work. Residents walked to their jobs that morning, an unfamiliar but not impossible prospect in a city with still-limited sprawl. Large numbers of people who were not at work instead took to the streets in the vicinity of the barns. “The streets and sidewalks presented a surging mass of humanity,” reported the *Mail*. “Men and boys stood ankle-deep in mud and slush, eagerly discussing the different phases of the rights between capital and labour.”³³ The crowds soon showed sympathy with the locked-out men and hostility to the TSR. When the company used its remaining skeleton staff of mostly older employees to send out some streetcars, the crowds grew excited, hurling insults at the drivers and conductors continuing to work. Men shouted “Scabs!” “Rats!” and “Get off the car!” Men and boys slung mud at the streetcars, which were easy targets. It was good fun for those doing the throwing, no doubt, but

30. *World*, 12 March 1886.

31. Tucker, “Faces of Coercion,” *passim*.

32. *Telegram*, 11 March 1886.

33. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

the behaviour had meaning for the public. When the mud splattered the cars, it violated but did not actually damage company property. Such conduct indicates the ritualistic character of the demonstrations, the self-imposed limits to the hostility, which reduced the likelihood of criminal charges but still conveyed a firm message. Furthermore, when the cars emerged from the city core into streets less crowded with spectators, the mud on the cars reminded any would-be patrons that it was not business as usual. The design of the street-cars ensured that drivers standing on the open front platforms and conductors standing on open rear ones received their share of muddy missiles too. The *World* expressed some sympathy for one of the targets, saying: "The conductor grown gray and feeble to the service, stood at his post on the back platform, and in reward for the fulfillment of his duty received an extra share of hard words and both eyes full of mud."³⁴ Slinging mud at drivers and conductors did not injure them, but rather it was meant to shame them into abandoning their work.

After the unionists and employees who supported them ended their meeting, according to the sympathetic *News*, they marched "in orderly manner" down to the barns and "formed themselves on either side of the street, laughing at the few men who came along on the cars." Probably they jeered rather than laughed at the strikebreakers, but it certainly appears that as picketers they avoided behaviour that might have led to arrests. Journalists were agreed that, unlike so many in the excited crowds, the unionists and supportive employees showed self-control and behaved peacefully.

Around noon, the crowd near the barns grew much larger as men and boys freed for mealtime from their workplaces joined in the action. The reporter from the *Telegram* observed that anyone expressing support for the company "was at once singled out as a target for a mud fusillade."³⁵ At that time about eighteen cars were still attempting to operate, but one by one the operators gave up. When men signified their decision to stop operating, "long and loud cheers rent the air, renewed again and again."³⁶ Forced to abandon his car and passengers by the crowd which took control of the streetcar, one older driver "made tracks as speedily as possible from the scene of his defeat."³⁷ These were indeed contests where militant demonstrators challenged the operators amid the roar of an audience.

Adding to the crowd's delight, a comedy routine played out in the street. When a constable would arrive with a team of horses to remove an abandoned car, the officer would attach one horse, and then, while he set about attaching the other, a lad would unhitch the first one. As quickly as the policeman could

34. *World*, 11 March 1886.

35. *Telegram*, 11 March 1886.

36. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

37. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

circle round and re-hitch the other horse, the lad would undo the opposite one. The charade could go on for some time amid howls from the appreciative audience.³⁸

In the afternoon the crowd actions escalated, and wagon-drivers intervened to disrupt streetcar service. Shortly after 2:00 p.m. coal carts, express wagons, and other vehicles blocked the passage of two North Toronto cars coming down Yonge Street. The coal carters, whose sympathy for the Knights was strongest among the drivers, showed special determination in using their wagons in a show of solidarity with the locked-out men.

A scene deserving of vaudeville then played out. Police urged the driver of the lead vehicle blocking the North Toronto streetcars to move along, and it moved a little ahead, but none of the others budged an inch. The constable was forced to proceed down the line urging each vehicle along. But of course, by the time the constables reached further down the line, the lead vehicles had halted. Back the police had to go to the beginning of the line to try once again. The futile exercise amused the growing crowd of mocking observers.³⁹

Within a few minutes many more vehicles arrived on the scene, and the two streetcars, as well as a northbound one which had arrived in the interim, were at the centre of a huge jam. The *Mail* reporter called this situation "very dangerous" with so many horse-drawn vehicles being crushed together.⁴⁰ Men unhitched the horses from one of the streetcars, putting them in the charge of "a small boy" to take them to the barns. "As the boy mounted the horses," said the *News*, "cheer after cheer broke from the victorious crowd." The men then picked up the traces and pulled one of the cars along the tracks. When they rested, a crowd lifted the car and placed it crosswise on the rails, another marker of victory loudly celebrated by the throng. Eventually, after boys had plastered the entire car with mud, it was lifted back onto the tracks, boys boarded it for a free ride, and men exuberantly pushed it to the barns.⁴¹

Throughout the afternoon people continued to disrupt service and persuade the few remaining operators to abandon their duties. For instance, the driver of an express wagon blocked a streetcar and, pulling out his purse, offered the streetcar driver a dollar to quit and declared that folks in the throng would also contribute and make up his week's wages. People cheered encouragingly, but the street railwayman rejected the offer.⁴² When women passengers were travelling in a streetcar, the demonstrators showed their chivalry: "A ring-leader would come late into the car and say: 'Now ladies, you'd better come out;

38. *News*, 10 March 1886.

39. *News*, 10 March 1886.

40. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

41. *News*, 10 March 1886.

42. *News*, 11 March 1886; *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

they're going to turn her over."⁴³ They never did turn over a car, but instead turned cars crossways on the tracks.

So things continued until the end of the afternoon, when the company abandoned all attempts to provide service for fear of escalating trouble from protesters emboldened by the growing darkness. To ensure peace, 150 police were ordered out for duty that night but they encountered no unrest. Reflecting on the first day of the strike, the press commended the police for tolerating some teasing and for desisting from forceful interventions. The *News* complemented the officers on their "excellent judgement" in exercising crowd control and succeeding in averting "a riot of considerable dimensions." The *Mail* similarly praised the police for their level-headedness but noted too that the crowd's good humour had prevented ugly confrontations.⁴⁴ Whether the constables were under orders to go gently was not made clear, but it is likely that their approach was affected by the mayor's sympathy for the opponents of the TSR, widespread community indignation about its provocative labour policy, and the continuing good mood on the streets. The press might have represented the day's spirited crowd actions as violence bordering on riot, but according even to the unsympathetic *Mail*, "the whole performance appeared more like a practical joke than anything else, as the utmost good humour prevailed, injury being done to neither person nor property." Similarly, the *Globe* called the vast, jostling crowd "generally very good-natured." The *World* joked about the situation by relating a corny story: "An Englishman who lives in Yorkville could not get home to his dinner. 'Bless me,' said he, 'this strike is doing me out of my dinner.' 'Well, I'll tell you what to do,' said a neighbor ... 'Why, you strike too – not to eat any dinner – and then you'll be even!'"⁴⁵

Predictably there were also critics of the rowdiness and the police tolerance of it. The *Monetary Times*, Toronto's business newspaper, registered its concern that youths at the start of the dispute had gotten away with law-breaking at a moment when law enforcement had been lax: "The street gamins got a lesson in violence which, for the rest of their lives, will give them false notions of the impunity with which the laws may be violated and property and life endangered."⁴⁶

The crowds that flowed into Toronto streets on this occasion were some of the largest seen in the city during strikes in the 19th century, though similarly large crowds appeared in other cities during streetcar disputes. Historians have accounted for these exceptional numbers by observing that residents could not ignore the disputes because they were so inconvenienced when deprived of their essential means of transportation. Moreover, the disputes

43. *World*, 11 March 1886.

44. *World*, 11 March 1886; *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

45. *World*, 12 March 1886.

46. *Monetary Times*, 19 May 1886.

gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their many complaints about the monopolies that ran the systems, and not least the injustices companies did to their employees who came most directly into the line of fire of ruthless, cost-cutting monopolists.⁴⁷ In the case of the Toronto dispute, a “moral economy” argument has been advanced. Sympathetic working-class residents perceived the lockout as a break of public trust whereby the TSR deprived the public of an essential service, denied working men the fundamental right to form a union, and employed despised strikebreakers in a bid to defeat the workers and their union.⁴⁸ This argument is persuasive. In addition, however, the crowds were probably swollen by people drawn by the thrill of participating in a lively public event where the everyday rules of behaviour were temporarily suspended, where boys and men could let loose, and where the excitement intensified because the outcomes of the conflicts were uncertain.⁴⁹

Who were the people who formed crowds in the streets? The *News* referred to them as being composed of “working men” and occasionally noted the presence of a “boy.” The less sympathetic *Globe* described some of the most active in the crowds as “street arabs and message boys,” a depiction that denigrated those involved. It noted as well the presence on the sidelines of factory employees who appeared at the windows and doorways of their work places to jeer the streetcar employees on duty. The *Mail* referred to “the idle element” and to “thousands of sympathizing artisans” who supported the locked-out workers, and it noted specifically the vigour of various “youngsters of the newsboy persuasion” and “stalwart boys.” The reporter from the *World* preferred to speak of “crowds” or the “mob,” though he noted there were “full-grown men” as well as “gamins.”⁵⁰ What seems clear is that the demonstrators were overwhelmingly male, but of varying ages from young boys on up, and that they were working-class. Some of the demonstrators were employed men who found ways of participating during their noon meal break, but most appear to have been available to spend long hours on the streets, probably because they were unemployed.

Also unexamined and barely mentioned in the press was any presence of women either as demonstrators or bystanders. No doubt some women would have encountered the confrontations as they travelled through city streets doing their marketing and other errands. Other women came out to witness the excitement or to register their own objections to the company, as women

47. See works cited above in note 11.

48. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 203–204. In part, Kealey echoes an analysis made in David Frank, “Trouble in Toronto: The Street Railway Lockout and Strike, 1886,” unpublished paper, 1972.

49. For a study of recent rioting that documents such motivations, see Laura Naegler, “The Ritual of Insurrection and the ‘Thrill-Seeking Youth’: An Instant Ethnography of Inner-City Riots in Germany,” in Paul Pritchard and Francis Pakes, eds., *Riot, Unrest and Protest on the Global Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 151–169.

50. *News*, 10 March 1886; *Globe*, 12 March 1886; *Mail*, 12 March 1886; *World*, 11 March 1886.

did in the 1906 Hamilton streetcar strike where such behaviour was documented.⁵¹ Yet I have found only three brief asides that allude to women being in the crowds or on the sidelines in 1886. The women who do get mentioned frequently were “ladies” – middle-class women – who chose to ride the TSR streetcars operated by strikebreakers. The press emphasized again and again that the crowds were composed of men and boys.

The bolder boys and men in the crowds, the ones not content to be bystanders, expressed an aggressive and sometimes transgressive masculinity honed in boyhoods spent on the streets. Craig Heron has argued that urban, working-class boys developed in the streets “bonds of male solidarity with their peers [that] became central to young male lives, as boys spent increasing time outside adult supervision in loosely structured gangs, where they cultivated important and often apparently contradictory attitudes and behaviours – intense loyalty, aggressive display, personal toughness, competitiveness, peer recognition through performance, and the disowning of any ‘feminine tendencies.’”⁵² “Boy culture” in 19th-century America featured stone-throwing for sport and improvised games of warfare, activities not far removed from the actions taken by boys and men in Toronto streets in 1886.⁵³ Patterns of behaviour learned in boyhood were practiced by large numbers of working-class men when circumstances were right, as in the street railway disputes. Spontaneously and without thinking they drew on a deep well of masculine experience. Theirs was a tough manliness that could transgress everyday community standards and risk breaking the law. T. Phillips Thompson, the labour journalist and intellectual advocate of the Knights of Labor, saw the kind of violence engaged in by the Toronto crowd as reprehensible but understandable. “Whenever human rights are defied and trampled upon,” he wrote in the *Palladium of Labor*, “there will be aroused a spirit of resistance which may overpass its bonds and find vent in actions which no reasonable or humane man can approve.”⁵⁴

All the newspapers stressed that, unlike the crowds, the union men avoided violence. “To the strikers’ credit,” said the *World*, “they took little or no part in the street disturbances.”⁵⁵ Keeping their cool, the unionists expressed their masculinity in ways that had more to do with the proud family provider and model citizen or subject. When challenged by reporters about having broken

51. Heron, *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, 224–225.

52. Craig Heron, “The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890–1946,” *Canadian Historical Review* 86, 3 (September 2005): 416.

53. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 35–37; David Nassau, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1985); Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2004).

54. *Palladium of Labor*, 8 April 1886. Thompson was writing under his pen name “Enjolras.”

55. *World*, 12 March 1886.

the ironclad contract, one man asked rhetorically: "If my family was starving, do you not think I would do anything to get them bread?"⁵⁶ He positioned the workers as male breadwinners forced by the company to compromise principles in order to provide for their families, but now in a position to assert their rights as men and British subjects. (This position – justifying striking and standing up to the boss by referencing men's need as breadwinners to provide for families – would be taken in other strikes in industrial Canada.⁵⁷) Moreover, the self-control displayed by the street railway unionists in a hot situation, where men around them were displaying the physicality and impatience with the law, positioned the unionists as responsible men, determined to win their cause by acting within the law. The opposite of the spontaneous and seemingly instinctual behaviour of boys and men in the surrounding crowds, the picketers' consciously controlled behaviour was meant to advance their collective goal of winning the right to unionize. Bonds of solidarity among the picketers helped to regulate the behaviour so as to benefit their cause. No doubt the admonishments of the Knights leaders, who remained acutely aware of the need to avoid antagonizing the police and the community, curbed aggression and encouraged picketers to leave the unruliness to others with less at stake. That the Knights' leadership sought to keep the unionists out of trouble was underscored by their insistence at the close of the first day of the strike that the men "not ... loaf around," but to go straight home and "abstain from intoxicating liquors."⁵⁸

Senator Smith, the Unionists, and Mayor Howland

THE FIRST MORNING OF THE LOCKOUT, TSR President Frank Smith met the various city daily reporters in his office to publicize his view of the situation, framing it in a way intended to win him public support. Smith charged that the disruption was entirely the fault of the union, which sought to interfere in the company's good relationship with its employees. He was outraged that outside agitators (non-employees) were riding the streetcars trying to organize the men, and that the union wanted to judge whether the company's reasons for dismissing any employee were acceptable. The TSR needed full authority to dismiss men who broke the regulations by being drunk on duty (a threat to public safety) or failing to collect fares. "The union wants us to employ these

56. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

57. For a perceptive analysis of such rhetoric, see Steven Penfold, "Have You No Manhood in You?": Gender and Class in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1920–1926," *Acadiensis* 23, 2 (Spring 1994): 21–44. On masculinity and the Ontario working class, see also Christina Burr, *Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth Century Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

58. *News*, 11 March 1886.

thieves and scoundrels that we won't have," the *News* quoted him as saying. According to the *Mail*, Smith said, "it is a monstrous thing that a company cannot control its own affairs without being dictated to by men who are making capital out of agitation."⁵⁹

Smith contended that the company could operate a full service, but the union was preventing willing men from working. He also attacked the city, which he held responsible for the company's lost revenues because its police protection for operators had been inadequate. "I will make the city pay every dollar I lose by the cars not running," he vowed. In reference to the stablemen, he declared, "I know where I stand in the law, and if they go out and leave the horses standing there to starve I will have them arrested for cruelty to animals."⁶⁰ According to the *Mail*, he said, "I will run the road independent of the Knights of Labour or will perish in the attempt."⁶¹ Strong words but in line with the views of a great many employers in the late 19th century who insisted on their right to command their businesses and employees untrammelled by unions.

In an attempt at full coverage, the press also gave space for the other side to air its views, though the speakers were left unidentified probably to protect them. "As far as the men are concerned," reported the *Mail*, "the fight was a fair and square one on a question of principle." One employee explained that the company's ironclad contract was "an interference with the liberty of the subject when he is prevented from exercising his own free will," a liberal position that might well have resonated favourably even with residents who had little sympathy with unions. To the charge that employees had broken their contracts, unionists said they had only signed the contracts "under protest and owing to circumstances." Once they were better prepared to insist on their right to associate, they did so.⁶²

Mayor Howland, who owed his election victory partly to organized labour's endorsement, sympathized with the unionists' fight for the right to associate, and took exception to some of Senator Smith's public remarks.⁶³ The mayor denied the city had responsibility for lost TSR revenues and held Smith accountable for any costs because he had locked out the men. Moreover, Howland said that the TSR had violated the terms of its municipal charter by failing to provide regular service. Expressing his sympathy with the locked-out men, he said they were "simply ... exercising a legal liberty in joining a lawful

59. *News*, 11 March 1886; *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

60. The stable staff did mostly walk out; the animals were cared for by a skeleton staff (*World*, 11 March 1886).

61. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

62. *Mail*, 11 March 1886.

63. Ron Sawatsky, "Howland, William Holmes," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 4 February 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/howland_william_holmes_12E.html.

body of society.”⁶⁴ Of course, all of this went down well with the union men, and a *News* editorial praised the mayor for being “really the friend of the people.”⁶⁵ (Other voices, however, lambasted the mayor for taking sides in the dispute.⁶⁶) Howland’s stance must have encouraged the strikers to stand up for their rights as the mayor intended, but inadvertently it probably also encouraged the rowdiness of crowds composed of men and boys Howland later called “scalawags and loafers.”⁶⁷

Late on Wednesday a delegation of the locked-out men met with Chief Constable Draper to object both to the assignment of additional officers to protect TSR property and to the arrest of Maloney. Union leaders charged that local officialdom had shown a class bias by acting against the workers, even though it was Smith and the company that had caused the service disruption. They complained about police harassment of unionists both in the morning, when only naturally they had wanted to gather to discuss matters, and later on as constables shadowed their every move. One man said that the idea that TSR property needed police protection was “all bosh” because the men themselves would protect it. In response, Chief Draper simply promised to act as fairly as possible.⁶⁸ The unionists also approached the mayor, making the same points to him, apparently hoping he would intervene as he had in an earlier strike, when he removed a police guard from the employer’s property.⁶⁹ This time he did not comply. Meanwhile, Smith publicly complained that police protection of company property and operators was inadequate.⁷⁰

From five o’clock in the morning on the second day of the strike people began congregating near the TSR barns, as the *World* reporter put it, “to see the sport.” However, it was not until 7:30 that the company sent out a street-car. Almost immediately coal carts obstructed it, but once beyond the vicinity of the barns its progress was unimpeded. Another car made its way past the jeering throng, sustaining no damage “other than to the driver’s and conductor’s feelings.”⁷¹ On its return, however, a crowd stopped it and unhitched the horses. Police inspectors Seymour and Archibald were aboard the car, one at each end. Inspector Archibald “removed the dirty fingers of the little boys as

64. *News*, 11 March 1886.

65. *News*, 12 March 1886.

66. *Telegram*, editorial, 12 March 1886; *Mail*, 13 March 1886, reported that a delegation of aldermen had approached the mayor, claiming his position encouraged “the locked-out men to become law breakers.”

67. *Mail*, 20 May 1886.

68. *Telegram*, 11 March 1886.

69. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 198.

70. *World*, 12 March 1886.

71. *World*, 12 March 1886.

they grabbed the rear platform.”⁷² Soon, said the *News* reporter, the inspectors “wisely saw that there was no use in keeping the car standing on the street, and so they told the boys to shove ahead.” Amid cheers, the captured car and inspectors were pushed rapidly down the street.⁷³ Farther on, another crowd blocked the car, picked it up, and placed it crossways on the tracks to loud cheering. At this point several attempts were made to turn the car over, but according to the *News*, police intervened to prevent damage. The *Globe* reporter observed that the police “apparently ... enjoyed the situation as much as any of the spectators.” And it credited the crowd of a thousand engaged in the “lively scrimmages” with being “generally very good-natured.”⁷⁴

Eventually, after a half hour, a squad of police arrived and set the car back on the tracks and hitched a team of horses for the car’s return to the barns. Then, one after the other, wagons blocked its progress. At last the way was cleared and the car was run down to the barns. On the way, it was pelted with frozen mud by boys, two of whom were arrested, John Landers, age thirteen, and James Ryan, age twelve.

All morning supporters of the locked-out workers taunted men working inside the TSR barns by running inside and crying “rats” and “come out.” Drivers of vehicles arrived every few minutes to watch the scene. The reporter from the *Mail* thought that they “seemed to have nothing to do but talk of the ‘fun,’ as some called it.”⁷⁵

After these morning incidents, the strikebreakers declared their unwillingness to operate streetcars without better police protection. Senator Smith supported them, calling off operations for the day. That afternoon further discussions took place about crowd control and policing. At a meeting of the police commissioners (Judge McDougall, Police Magistrate Denison, and Mayor Howland) the TSR’s lawyer made the case for a more aggressive police presence. Yet, the force was stretched; already some officers had been continuously on duty since the start of the dispute. (Given that they were receiving no overtime pay, the *World* quipped they should consider forming a Knights of Labor assembly!)⁷⁶ Consideration was given to swearing in special police to beef up the force if needed. In the end, the commissioners simply ordered the chief to dispatch such force as might be necessary for company operations to resume.⁷⁷

On the Friday, the third day of the strike, 130 policemen assembled in the vicinity of the streetcar barns with orders to use their batons freely. Each car

72. *Globe*, 12 March 1886.

73. *News*, 11 March 1886.

74. *Globe*, 12 March 1886.

75. *Telegram*, 13 March 1886.

76. *World*, 11 March 1886.

77. *Globe*, 12 March 1886.

sent out had several police aboard to act as guards, and mounted police were detailed to clear the way in front of cars. The TSR superintendent opined that “determined and fearless” operators had been hired who could be relied upon to get the cars out and back “or perish in the attempt.”⁷⁸

Notwithstanding the preparations, Friday got off to a poor start for the police and TSR. Constables lined the first few blocks of King Street, fully ready to prevent any interference with the King car, the first car scheduled to go out. The enormous crowd, estimated at 7,000, included “some women,” as well as many men who marched over from their workplaces to jeer operators and hinder the progress of any car sent out.⁷⁹ Inexplicably, after the King car left the barn it turned along Front Street rather than King Street. Demonstrators quickly surrounded it, which left the police scrambling to circle in behind the crowd. With difficulty the constables cleared a space around the car. But when the streetcar tried to proceed, a driver blocked its way with his lorry, managing to escape the swipes of baton-wielding police by standing in his lorry perched on a tall stack of boxes.⁸⁰ Demonstrators rushed to overturn the streetcar but police stopped them with their nightsticks. Nevertheless, the crowd was victorious, the car being abandoned in the street. In the melee the driver was “pretty roughly handled” and suffered a gash from a stone, but to balance things out, a man in the crowd got a serious scalp wound from a police baton.⁸¹ According to the *Telegram*, once the operators abandoned the car, the crowd rushed through the police guard and “amid deafening shouts broke the windows ... and wrecked the car generally.” (The damage was not mentioned by other newspapers.) Constables arrested two men, and were able to get them to the police station only because a posse of twelve mounted police surrounded them and, “charging the crowd, ran over any who did not get out of their way.”⁸² The increased police presence no doubt explains the less playful and more violent confrontation on this, the third day of the dispute.

Police authorities then declared what today we would call a “zero-tolerance” policy for anyone disturbing the peace. When the first man to step out of line, Edward Moran, was apprehended, people rushed to free him. A battle ensued, but mounted and baton-wielding police drove the crowd down to the lake and brought Moran to the police station. According to the *Telegram*, this was a turning point. Police, managing to stay relatively calm, brought order to the scene.⁸³

78. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

79. *Mail*, 13 March 1886.

80. *World*, 13 March 1886.

81. *News*, 13 March 1886.

82. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

83. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

The test came when another car was put into service. To block its way there appeared an enormous crowd made up of males of all ages and, according to the *News*, “even women.” “Do you think you can get us through?” asked one of the operators. “I can take you to the devil,” replied a defiant Chief Draper.⁸⁴ An aggressive posse of mounted police rushed at the crowd, scattering people into doorways, alleyways, and anywhere they could escape. Police guards walked with the car, and 50 constables formed a moving cordon to keep back the surging crowd. Amid a fuselage of mud and deafening jeers, the policemen and streetcar made their way along its route. When another throng appeared, the mounted police again cleared the way. Soon the beaten crowd made no further attempts to block the car’s progress, although people still “howled and hissed” and called out “‘rats,’ ‘scabs,’ ‘suckers,’ and ‘skunks.’”⁸⁵

Battles occurred throughout the day, including one shortly after noon when a wagon blocked a streetcar on Yonge Street near Adelaide Street. When the crowd began stoning the car carrying police guards, a posse of constables, assisted by mounted police, rushed the crowd. One of the policemen was struck on the head with a stone, which, according to the *News*, “seemed to infuriate the rest, and batons were used with energy though indiscriminately.” One man knocked down and trampled by a police horse was removed for treatment of his injuries to his face and body. At one point, according to the *Telegram*, a drunken man came out of a saloon and egged on young demonstrators by shouting “Why don’t you kill the rats!”⁸⁶ The lads began throwing not just mud but stones at operators and constables riding the streetcars, one of whom was hurt. Police arrested one mud-slinging demonstrator identified as furrier Frederick Charles Klopp. Altogether that day police arrested one striker and at least fourteen other men, laying charges for offences such as disorderly conduct, obstruction, and assault. The Knights of Labor formally complained to civic authorities about the police’s excessive use of force that day.⁸⁷

Men arrested in the disturbances appeared before the Toronto Police Court magistrate, Col. George Taylor Denison, who dealt harshly with them. A familiar figure to readers of the reports on police court proceedings in the city dailies, Denison was known for his impatience with the rules of evidence, idiosyncratic rulings in rapidly heard cases, and fierce insistence on public order.⁸⁸

84. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

85. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

86. *Telegram*, 12 March 1886.

87. Tucker, “Faces of Coercion,” 299.

88. Norman Knowles, “Denison, George Taylor,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed February 5, 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/denison_george_taylor_1839_1925_15E.html; Gene Howard Homel, “Denison’s Law: Criminal Justice and the Police Court in Toronto, 1877–1921,” *Ontario History* 73 (1980), 171–86.

The *Mail* quoted the magistrate as saying of the street railway dispute, "The peace of the city must be preserved at any cost." In the wake of the public disturbances, he found most of the men brought before him guilty and fined them heavily.⁸⁹ T. Phillips Thompson in the *Palladium of Labor* attributed the harshness to the Toronto courts' "bias in favour of wealth and social position."⁹⁰

That same Friday afternoon, the police commissioners met to consider swearing in 100 specials to augment the police presence, and calling out the militia in defence of the civil order. However, on the advice of Chief Draper, both measures were rejected, at least for the time being.⁹¹ Mayor Howland took the opportunity to issue a proclamation forbidding assembling in the streets and threatening prosecution of "persons interfering with the free passage of street cars."⁹²

Meantime, on the Friday afternoon, a deputation of aldermen approached Senator Smith in an attempt to end the dispute. After a long discussion, Smith agreed that the aldermen should tell the men that he was willing "to receive them back on exactly the same conditions as before the unfortunate difference arose." When informed the men could all go back to work "unconditionally," Knights leader Alfred Jury, thinking of the union men, asked "All the men?" The aldermen assured him that Smith would take all the men back, "no questions asked." The union executive explained that the offer would need to be taken to a general meeting of the locked-out men. There, some employees proposed waiting for other grievances to be resolved before a return to work, but the executive advised ending the dispute because it had taken "an unanticipated turn," a reference to the public violence and powerful police presence. The men accepted Smith's offer "amid enthusiastic cheering" and returned to work the next morning.⁹³

Whether or not the crowd actions had assisted the TSR employees' cause was not discussed in the press. In retrospect, it is evident that the playful performances drew yet more people into the streets and the escalating crowd actions were fed by increasing police aggression. Toronto had become a divided city with at least a substantial part of the working class taking to the streets in support for the strikers, while many other residents opted to avoid doing so. Clear evidence of hostility to the strikers' cause came from residents who chose to ride whatever streetcars remained in service. The growing conflicts in the streets and the deep division of the city put increased public pressure on both the TSR and the union to settle. Both sides sought a quick end to the dispute. The negotiated settlement was not a lasting one, however.

89. Tucker, "Faces of Coercion," 300.

90. *Palladium of Labor*, 3 April 1886.

91. *Palladium of Labor*, 3 April 1886.

92. *Mail*, 13 March 1886.

93. *Mail*, 13 March 1886.

The May Strike

IN THE WEEKS AFTER THE MARCH dispute, the company systematically fired union men, picking off one at a time. The Knights held several meetings to discuss the dismissals and drew up a list of grievances, but Smith would not deal with them. He insisted that in March he had agreed to take the men back on the same terms as when the dispute began; the ironclad had been in place then, as now, and so he was justified in firing unionists. His critics pointed out that the men had returned to work jubilantly only because they had been led to believe the ironclad had been lifted. Smith had acquiesced in their view for the moment, pleased to get his business up and running at a time when public censure of him was at a peak. He left the cleaning out of unionists for later.⁹⁴ Finally, on Friday, 8 May, the men voted to strike in protest of the dismissals and Smith's betrayal on the issue of the ironclad, and for an increase in pay to at least ten dollars per week for all employees. As the executive committee of the strikers put it, employees and the public needed to stand up to a company that "tyrannically deprives their unfortunate employees of their undoubted right to join or belong to any legal organization they may deem advisable."⁹⁵

When the May strike got underway on Saturday, 9 May, people wondered whether there would be violence – a possibility now more worrying because the shocking events at Chicago's Haymarket had occurred in the interim since the March dispute. A *News* editorial observed that the Toronto strike leaders took the men out knowing that because of "the atrocities committed by anarchists in Chicago," shows of public sympathy would be "less prompt than on the occasion of the former strike."⁹⁶ Taking heed, the executive committee of the union emphatically declared that "they do not contemplate, nor will they countenance any violence or any disturbance of the public peace."⁹⁷ At the outset of the strike Mayor Howland also took a firm stand against violence, emphasizing to the public that assembling or loitering in the streets were "unlawful, and especially under the present circumstances." On the eve of the May strike, civic officials announced that the police would protect TSR property and employees operating the cars during the strike. When interviewed by reporters, police inspector Seymour said police were "determined to protect life and property, and we will have no Chicago 'monkeying' around here."⁹⁸ Special provisions included having the entire force at the ready, directing constables to carry revolvers during daytime duty, deploying constables on the streetcars, and ordering the mounted police detachment to do crowd duty.

94. *World*, 10 May 1886. Senator Smith's version of events is given in the *Globe*, 10 May 1886, and the Knights' version in the *Globe*, 11 May 1886.

95. "Statement of the Executive Committee of the Strikers," *Telegram*, 10 May 1886.

96. *News*, 10 May 1886.

97. *Globe*, 10 May 1886.

98. *Globe*, 10 May 1886.

On the first morning of the strike, the union posted picketers at the railway station to advise men coming into the city to refuse job offers from the TSR because a strike was underway.⁹⁹ It was quiet at the streetcar barns at 6:15 a.m., when an old employee named Cosgrove took out the first car. Police were on the scene. Only about 100 people had gathered there, including a dozen printers who following their shift on the morning papers had “dropped by to see the fun.” No attempt was made to block the car. Indeed, peace prevailed not just at the outset but throughout the first day of the strike.¹⁰⁰ By Monday, the strikers were better organized and succeeded in nearly stopping streetcar service altogether. They managed to do so without physical confrontations and by observing the moratorium on name-calling. According to the *News*, the only person who heckled a strikebreaker was “a young woman, who called ‘scab’ and ‘rat’ from a window of a house on Front Street.”¹⁰¹ It appears that her gender and location inside the house protected her from police action. By the early afternoon, as thousands walked the streets in the vicinity of the barns and the entire police force of 170 patrolled the scene, order still prevailed. Occasionally police broke up gatherings on the street corners, but there were no disturbances.

Indeed, much less violence occurred throughout the far longer May strike, a development praised by many commentators who commended the unionists and other Torontonians for their peaceful behaviour. “We could not have wished for a quieter day,” declared a police official at the conclusion of the first day of the strike.¹⁰² Ten days into the dispute, Mayor Howland congratulated the community for the orderly behaviour, saying that the “conduct of the men reflected honour upon themselves and upon the city of Toronto.” Labour leader O’Donoghue remarked that the only threat of violence came from the police commissioners who had placed “armed and mounted men on the streets when there was ... no occasion for it.”¹⁰³

It appears that the crowd performances of March were not repeated in May because of a combination of factors: the tougher stance of the mayor and police officials, the Knights leaders’ acute awareness of Haymarket’s damage to the union’s reputation, and public memories of how nasty the March confrontation had eventually become. Since March, various judges had had an opportunity to expound on the illegality of intimidation and the serious consequences for perpetrators.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, by May, the spring season’s increased

99. *Mail*, 8 May 1886.

100. *News*, 8 May 1886.

101. *News*, 8 May 1886.

102. *Telegram*, 12 May 1886.

103. *Mail*, 20 May 1886.

104. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 205; Tucker, “Faces of Coercion,” 302.

demand for casual labour meant that far fewer men and boys had free daytime hours to spend on the streets.

During the May strike, the unionists and their supporters widened the repertoire of contentious performances by arranging for a large, public meeting held at the city's commodious St. Lawrence Hall. Unionists planned to take charge of the occasion and to use the techniques of the meeting hall and a display of well-ordered opposition to the TSR to gain a measure of public endorsement for their cause. Following a convention familiar to Toronto residents, the meeting was called by Mayor Howland in response to a requisition signed by a large number of ratepayers.¹⁰⁵ Some 2,000 people, virtually all workingmen supportive of the strikers, packed the hall, and more were turned away at the door. Howland presided and, being the first to speak, praised the peacefulness of the strikers and assured them they would win over "the great heart of the public." He also praised the orderly conduct of those at the meeting. Knights' leaders moved all three of the meeting's motions: one condemning Smith for depriving his employees of the right to belong to a lawful organization, a second expressing the meeting's support for the strike, and a third both condemning the TSR's refusal to comply with the terms of its charter and endorsing an alternative bus service. These were enthusiastically supported.¹⁰⁶ Keeping to the orderly agenda, the evening closed with a conventional show of loyalty: three cheers for the queen. The meeting got mixed reviews. The *Telegram* doubted its value where attention-seekers pushed to the front – a reference to the role played by the Knights' leadership. The *News* praised the initiative and the fine conduct of those in attendance, but regretted that it produced no indication that a settlement was any nearer.¹⁰⁷

At their own meetings the strikers also debated matters civilly and passed formal resolutions intended to pressure Senator Smith to end the strike. The strikers' executive, for instance, resolved to ask supporters to withdraw their deposits from the Home Savings and Loan Company, where Smith was president. A large meeting of the Knights of Labor opted to send a delegation to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Macdonald and urge him to remove Smith from the cabinet because of his opposition to organized labour.¹⁰⁸

What violence occurred in the course of the May strike was generally the action of an individual rather than a crowd, and the perpetrators, if caught, were dealt with harshly. Charles Grassett, arrested on the first day of the May strike for simply calling strikebreaking drivers "rats," got a \$5 fine or 30

105. *Globe*, 15 May 1886, prints a copy of the requisition and names and addresses of its signatories.

106. *Globe*, 20 May 1886.

107. *Telegram*, 18 May 1886; *News*, 20 May 1886.

108. *Mail*, 17 May 1886.

days, whereas in March such calls were tolerated.¹⁰⁹ The following day, two carters, named Bryant and Doherty, were charged for obstructing the cars, and police arrested a dray man, named Bernard McGuffin, for having thrown a stone at a passing streetcar.¹¹⁰ One boy nabbed by police for placing a fog horn on the street railway tracks was fined \$10 by Col. Denison, who threatened \$50 fines in future.¹¹¹ Another boy named John Gowans was charged by police for stealing a cushion and switch pins from a streetcar. He pleaded guilty, and his mother asked the police court magistrate to send him to a reformatory because he had by "his outrageous conduct nearly broken her heart." Happy to comply, Col. Denison sent young John to the reformatory at Penetanguishene for three years. The most bizarre performance saw one Michael Durham shaking a dead rat "menacingly" at the streetcar men operating on Yonge Street. He apparently had a string attached to its tail, and when asked what he was doing, replied "I want the scabs to smell it." Later in court, he had a different story, claiming implausibly that he simply had been removing the poor, dead creature for interment in some secluded spot. It appears that Col. Denison was amused by the tall tale, for he discharged the man.¹¹² Generally, though, Denison was so tough that the Toronto Trades and Labour Council resolved to request an interview with Ontario's attorney general to draw "the attention of the Government of the undisguised animus of the Police magistrate in cases the most remotely connected with organized labour."¹¹³

Rather than confronting the strikebreakers in the streets, the union opted for less direct tactics. Picketers pressured keepers of boarding-houses and restaurateurs to refuse services to striker-breakers, apparently with some success.¹¹⁴ Much more significantly, it sought to undercut the TSR's business by offering Torontonians an alternative means of public transport: a system of free buses operated as a co-operative by strikers. The Knights of Labor leadership very much approved of co-operatives, and they had been attempted during various strikes in Ontario and during a recent street railway strike in New York where a bus service was organized.¹¹⁵ In Toronto, many riders were sufficiently ticked off by the TSR – for whatever reason – that they made extensive use of the buses and were even willing to make a donation to the co-operative each time they rode. Less comfortable than the streetcars, the buses, it was said, were not the preferred option of many "ladies." (No mention

109. *News*, 10 May 1886.

110. *Globe*, 12 May 1886; *Telegram*, 13 May 1886.

111. *World*, 22 May 1886.

112. *Mail*, 17 May 1886.

113. *Mail*, 22 May 1886.

114. *Telegram*, 12 May 1886; *Mail*, 17 May 1886.

115. Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming*, 366–367; on New York, see Mayor Howland's comments, *Telegram*, 10 May 1886 (5:00 p.m. edition).

was made of complaints from working-class women.) The strikers' co-operative asked its bus riders to avoid smoking in an attempt to win over some of the middle-class women, but that tactic only partially succeeded.¹¹⁶ Still, the Knights' service was sufficiently patronized that the strikers' main challenge was finding enough buses to meet public demand.

The largest street demonstration during the May dispute grew out of a union-organized parade intended to build morale by celebrating the arrival from Kingston on 25 May of seven buses and a contingent of supporters. Upon reaching the Don River on their way into town from the east, the visitors were met by a procession of twenty Toronto buses and hundreds of strikers and supporters, headed by the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union brass band. After an exchange of fraternal greetings, the procession of visitors and hosts passed through the city's principal streets as the band played "lively airs." Crowds along the route cheered the procession and then they and more vehicles fell in behind it.¹¹⁷

Without warning, the celebratory mood shifted. At the centre of town, some youngsters in the crowd attacked an eastbound streetcar, smashing its windows and injuring a woman passenger, whose cheek was badly cut. Further west near Bathurst Street, the crowd pelted and damaged some passing streetcars. "The drivers and conductors appeared almost frightened out of their wits," said the *Mail* reporter who thought that the fear of the employees "emboldened the mob which followed the K of L buses in their destructive course, as no car passing east or west escaped their violence."¹¹⁸ A spokesman for the strikers' executive committee, who regretted the violence, maintained that boys had triggered it by throwing rocks at the cars, and then a "few of the rowdy element, taking advantage of the large crowd and enthusiasm displayed, took a hand in and finished the work the boys had commenced."¹¹⁹

By this point some 70 vehicles had joined the procession and the crowd had grown to "alarming proportions." Pleas from the strikers' executive committee begging people to avoid damaging TSR property for fear of reprisals had little effect, "and the wildest excitement prevailed." To calm things down, strike leaders decided to break up the procession, but the brass band's attempt to lead the crowd away from the scene of the trouble brought only mixed results. A second rampage resulted in several streetcars having their windows smashed. At last the crowd dispersed around St. Lawrence Hall. Altogether some 30 to 40 streetcars were damaged, most of them suffering broken windows. Passengers nearly all escaped unharmed. The only arrest was

116. *Telegram*, 13 May 1886.

117. *Mail*, 26 May 1886.

118. *Mail*, 26 May 1886.

119. *News*, 27 May 1886.

of a boy, Joseph McGilligan, age twelve, caught attempting to derail a streetcar by placing stones on the track.¹²⁰

What success the co-operative bus company enjoyed resulted from the considerable public support for an alternative to the much-resented TSR service. The co-operative overcame obstacles, including its hasty formation, meagre capital resources, Smith's attempt to declare its service in contravention of the TSR charter, and hostile aldermen who tried to quadruple the city's license charge per bus. However, the bus co-operative's temporary success was partly the undoing of the strike. Toronto riders were well served by the two systems, so much so that the strike as a withdrawal of services lost effectiveness. Moreover, the eager committee behind the bus co-operative chose to plow earnings back into the co-operative rather than using them to assist needy strikers. Some suffering, unaided strikers drifted back to their jobs or to other work. Cynicism about political squabbles within the Knights' leadership between Conservatives and Reformers might also have played a role in some strikers' growing disillusionment.¹²¹ Inevitably, the bus co-operative gradually lost riders as the novelty wore off. A disastrous fire at the bus barns on 30 June was the last straw.¹²²

Senator Smith won the May contest, but organized labour and many supporters vowed that he would be punished when his municipal charter came up for renewal in 1891. Indeed, he was squeezed out, though he managed to do well financially.¹²³ Workers on the Toronto streetcar system struck successfully in 1902, gaining union recognition, a grievance procedure, and a wage increase as part of an organizing campaign by the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees first chartered in 1892 by the American Federation of Labor.¹²⁴

Conclusion

THE RICHLY DETAILED PRESS STORIES of these linked street railway disputes of March and May 1886 reveal two categories of contentious performances. First, there were the actions of the male union members and strikers who expressed their masculinity in self-disciplined behaviour aimed at preventing the TSR from operating, minimizing public censure and police repression, and earning support from residents. By presenting themselves as law-abiding but determined opponents of the company, the strikers succeeded in winning considerable support from the working class for their campaign to gain union

120. *Mail*, 26 May 1886.

121. Kealey and Palmer, 124–126; "Anti Blatherskite" to editor of the *Globe*, 21 May 1886.

122. Morton, *Mayor Howland*, 55.

123. Armstrong and Nelles, *Revenge*, 33–34.

124. Tucker, "Who's Running the Road," 459, 462.

rights. The Knights of Labor leaders choreographed the performances as best they could, urging self-control to avoid antagonizing citizens, and they publicly differentiated their own members' manly level-headedness from the erratic behaviour of the public demonstrators. Apart from street activities, the unionists' repertoire extended to an orderly public meeting, where Knights' leaders presented prepared motions and the lively participation never got out of hand, as well as to the organization of the bus co-operative, a peaceful strategy intended to reduce public use of streetcars run by strikebreakers. Near the end of the May strike, the *News*, the newspaper closest to the union leadership, summed up the unionists' performance style when it observed: "This self-respect and self-restraint has done more to restore public confidence to show that the men are determined to carry on their fight peaceably, orderly, and in a law-abiding spirit."¹²⁵

In the second category of contentious performances were the many crowd actions characteristic especially of the March dispute. A portion of the wider working-class public took to the streets both to join in the excitement and to register their disapproval of the TSR in general and its anti-labour policy in particular. The exuberant, sometimes aggressive and transgressive behaviour could teeter on the brink of riot, and yet contests between the crowd and strikebreakers and police sometimes had an air of vaudeville about them, certainly as depicted by a daily press that aimed to entertain as much as to inform. Playful boys had an important role in the streets as eager risk-takers, the first to sling handfuls of mud at operators and streetcars alike. Their mischievous initiatives provoked men in the crowds, themselves not far removed from boyhood transgressions, who took the confrontations to new levels. On the first two days of the March dispute the crowd scenes had a joyous quality to them, reports of which probably drew yet more people eager to join in the fun and perhaps not strictly motivated by the issues. The attacks on the operators and streetcars were intended to shame the former and stop the latter – serious damage to property seldom being the demonstrators' intention or the result. Police increasingly scurried to restore complete public order, but seemed for the most part to play along with the game.

Yet the mood of the crowd could shift. On the third day of the March dispute, at the insistence of Senator Smith of the TSR, the police took a much more forceful part in facilitating the resumption of streetcar service. Now the confrontations appeared less jovial, more threatening and potentially dangerous. During the May dispute, a shift in mood is notable, too. While the procession welcoming the buses and supporters from Kingston began jubilantly, things turned nasty as violence erupted. Scholars looking at "joyful crowds" have noted how even purely celebratory occasions can turn menacing, and these strike developments illustrate similar shifts.¹²⁶

125. *News*, 21 May 1886.

126. J. Lofland, "Crowd Joys," *Urban Life* 10, 4 (1982): 355–381. The term "playful crowds"

The presence of Toronto's playful crowd had consequences for the union and its campaign for legitimacy. In the early stages of the March dispute, the playfulness attracted people into the streets and added momentum to the union cause. For the unionists and their many advocates, the unscripted and unstable behaviour was exhilarating, drawing attention and adding bite to the demonstrations of the much more constrained picketers. When massed in such large numbers, however, some individuals lost their inhibitions, emotions heightened, and violence became more likely. Playfulness gave way to aggression – all the more so when law enforcement tactics shifted and constables drew their nightsticks. Civic authorities, including the union-friendly mayor, felt compelled to put a stop to the street demonstrations because the escalating confrontations were causing public alarm and because of the relentless pressure exerted by the influential TSR president who insisted that his property and strikebreakers deserved the full protection of the law. Knights of Labor leaders were left distancing themselves from the trouble in the streets. The union's defeat in the two disputes was the result of many factors, ranging from the duplicity of Frank Smith who misled employees back to work in March to the difficulties of running a co-operative venture, but the playful crowds must bear some responsibility, too. Though they added to the unionists' momentum in the early stages, ultimately the playful mood was unsustainable, and authorities opted to repress the crowd behaviour.

When studying strikes, historians have persistently documented the grave issues at stake and conveyed a sense of the seriousness of the conflicts, but little has been said about activities of a playful sort. It may be that the 1886 labour demonstrations in Toronto were unusual in having such a jovial aspect, but it would be worthwhile to look closely for evidence of playfulness and its consequences in other labour confrontations. Broad public participation in demonstrations may signify both the importance of the issues *and* peoples' eagerness to join in the excitement that breaks the monotony of everyday life.

The two categories of contentious performances evident in 1886 came at the conjuncture of an emergent culture and a residual one during a period of social transition.¹²⁷ On the one hand, the closely scripted and disciplined actions of the unionists represented the emergent culture of the new industrial era, when organized workers struck to protect and improve their situation, purposive behaviour aimed at both undermining employer operations during a dispute and currying public support. Always contentious at some level, strikes and picketing were nevertheless coming to be condoned in a mass society becoming modern. On the other hand, the fluid and more spontaneous behaviour

has been used in a study of amusement parks: Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

127. The terms "emergent" and "residual," which Kealey applies in *Toronto Workers*, 65, come from Raymond Williams, "Base and Super-structure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973): 3–16.

of the crowds looked backwards to practices deployed over many decades if not centuries in countless situations where community norms were transgressed. In the case of the 1886 streetcar strikes, crowd actions heightened public interest in, and concern about, the disputes, making confrontations that already directly affected the public all the more intense.

My thanks to Craig Heron and Steve Penfold for their constructive comments and encouragement.