

## Journal of the Canadian Historical Association Revue de la Société historique du Canada



# The Strange Tale of Tom Cassidy and Catherine Rose, or, Free Love, Heterosexuality, and the One Big Union

Todd McCallum

Volume 9, numéro 1, 1998

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030495ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/030495ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

McCallum, T. (1998). The Strange Tale of Tom Cassidy and Catherine Rose, or, Free Love, Heterosexuality, and the One Big Union. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 9(1), 125–154. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030495ar>

### Résumé de l'article

En octobre 1923, l'expulsion de Tom Cassidy et de Catherine Rose du syndicat One Big Union (OBU), en raison de leurs relations sexuelles illicites, a déclenché à l'intérieur du syndicat une série de confrontations intenses et parfois orageuses qui a duré plus de six mois pendant lesquels des membres qui défendaient les idéaux de « l'amour libre » sont devenus la pire menace à son existence. Fait étonnant, pendant ces débats survenus lors de douzaines de réunions syndicales, jamais la question des rapports sexuels n'a été publiquement soulevée. Les membres de la direction du OBU ont escamoté l'aspect sexuel de l'affaire Cassidy-Rose en portant le débat à un autre niveau, celui d'un jugement de valeur à propos de ce qui compromettrait les progrès du syndicat. Ils soutenaient qu'en parlant de sexualité, ils prêteraient flanc au scandale dans la presse bourgeoise. La panique suscitée par les allégations « d'amour libre » détruirait l'OBU et le mouvement de libération de la classe ouvrière serait miné. Mais cette préoccupation pour la réputation du syndicat cachait des notions patriarcales à propos de l'hétérosexualité, à la fois pratique sexuelle et structure familiale, qui étaient le fondement même du syndicat, de ses tactiques organisationnelles et de sa quête d'un avenir meilleur. Ainsi, la question n'était pas tant que la direction de l'OBU refusait de contester des valeurs sexuelles traditionnelles afin de protéger le syndicat, mais plutôt qu'elle préconisait ces valeurs.

# **The Strange Tale of Tom Cassidy and Catherine Rose, or, Free Love, Heterosexuality, and the One Big Union**

**TODD McCALLUM**

**I**t was 14 February 1924, Valentine's Day. William McAllister sat at his desk in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, looking over his letter to Tommy Roberts, a fellow member of the One Big Union General Executive Board (OBU-GEB). Having spent several days in Winnipeg talking about the conduct of former organiser Tom Cassidy, McAllister was weary of the whole affair. Rumours had circulated among OBU members for over five months about Cassidy's purported sexual relationship with Catherine Rose, General Secretary of the OBU-GEB and the Winnipeg Central Labour Council (CLC). A married man in his thirties, Cassidy had apparently taken to visiting the decade-younger Miss Rose at her boarding house late in the evening. A story that Tom had three wives provided additional grist for the rumour mill. Upon hearing the gossip in late September 1923, the all-male Executive of the CLC moved into action, firing Catherine and suspending and later firing Tom. Despite the Executive's wish to contain the sexual scandal, which they believed endangered the union, OBU meetings for months afterwards threatened to collapse under the weight of the Cassidy-Rose affair.

Instead of concentrating on the ideals of revolutionary industrial unionism so central to their lives, delegates found themselves inundated with fantastic charges about fur coats and female spies, private detectives and potions for abortions. Acting as a mediator, McAllister had sifted through the numerous reports and concluded that Cassidy was "guilty" of "sufficient misdemeanour to warrant his being relieved." McAllister was convinced that the relationship of Catherine and Tom was "more than that of a friendly nature – [it was] in fact that of a married couple." And the crisis extended beyond their sexual liaison into the realm of ideology. "[W]hile in Brandon," McAllister informed Roberts,

---

Financial support was provided by the Faculties of Graduate Studies at Simon Fraser and Queen's and by the SSHRC. Thanks to the anonymous readers of this journal as well as to Mike Dawson, Annette DeFaveri, Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Gidney, Paul Jackson, Steven Maynard, Bryan Palmer, Joy Parr, Andy Parnaby, Carolyn Strange, and especially Joy Frith and Mark Leier for their comments and support.

"Cassidy addressed the Labor Church on . . . 'Birth Control,' and advised the younger sex when the sex passion . . . caught them to go out and satisfy it, and also recommended a recipe he had for causing abortion." McAllister tried to assuage Roberts' concerns about the union's future – both Tom and Catherine had been valuable activists – by emphasising that their dalliance was detrimental to the organisation as a whole. Given what had happened, he asked Roberts, "How long before the OBU would be labelled a 'Free Love' or probably worse propaganda institution, eh?" While confirming Cassidy planned to write a book attacking the OBU, McAllister did "not put any great stock in [its] crystallization."<sup>1</sup> In this regard, his instincts were correct. Tom Cassidy would not be writing a book on the One Big Union, as he had died the night before, 13 February, of tuberculosis.<sup>2</sup> It was as if, given what had happened, Tom could not live through another Valentine's Day.

I first encountered the Cassidy-Rose affair through David Bercuson's brief account in *Fools and Wise Men*.<sup>3</sup> I next came across the letter of William McAllister. My first thought was that the scandal that had enveloped Tom and Catherine could be a Canadian version of *Reds*, an Oscar-worthy tale of the struggle of sex radicalism and socialism.<sup>4</sup> It was not to be. McAllister's February 1924 letter to Tommy Roberts was to be one of the few overt references to sex in the archives. In six months of carefully worded union minutes in which the scandal played out, these workers made only veiled allusions to what exactly Tom and Catherine had done. And consequently, without any public discussion of the sexual nature of this sensitive matter, delegates to the Winnipeg CLC ratified the Executive's decision to fire Cassidy and Rose. In what was a potential opportunity to critically examine the OBU's sexual politics, no formal debate took place. Instead, OBU leaders contained the sexual content of Cassidy's and Rose's affair by posing the question of their relationship in terms of a value judgement about what would hinder the progress of the union. Through an intense and at times dramatic series of confrontations in which members said to advocate the ideals of "free love" became the greatest threat to the organisation's existence, union men and women raised issues around female respectability and male responsibility, but rarely in sexual terms.

The difficulty for the historian is how to recover something that OBU members wished would go away. While the union's minutes are detailed in

---

1 University of British Columbia, Special Collections (UBCSC), Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, William McAllister to Tommy Roberts, 14 February 1924.

2 *One Big Union Bulletin*, 21 February 1924.

3 David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto, 1978), 230-34. Bercuson did not spend much time on the scandal, using it only to reinforce his argument about the foolish behaviour of OBU men.

4 See the commentary on the movie by Christine Stansell in Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (New York, 1996), 192-95.

comparison to records of other matters, there are still many elements, the actual "free love" politics of Tom and Catherine for example, that remain ambiguous. But the problem of evidence is historically significant because it speaks to what happened to sexuality within the union's social space. Historians of Canadian sexuality have shed light on the power of narrative in constituting sexual relations.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Cassidy and Rose, unionists did not explicitly articulate a discourse about sexuality to publically explain their actions at meetings of the Central Labour Council and other executive committees.<sup>6</sup> And because OBU activists were successful in keeping the scandal a private union matter, the possibility that their stories would be connected to other popular discourses on sexuality was intentionally circumscribed. Instead, this heterosexual scandal played out within the union's particular Marxist framework for interpreting class experience. In listening to what they said, it appeared to me that they always tried to speak as good OBUers. Their membership in a particular kind of union, and the history of that union, was of crucial importance, because this collective history was usually the reason they were speaking. This is not to suggest that socialist unionists lived in a vacuum, cut off from conflicts over sexuality in other settings; sex already occupied a place within union ideology on questions such as birth control, prostitution, and venereal disease. But in reading these minutes, I was struck by just how difficult it was for them to talk about sexual matters – McAllister's reference to the "younger sex" is one example. By eschewing talk of the sex politics of Rose and Cassidy for talk about the union's future, OBU leaders framed the issue in terms they knew well and could use with authority.

The purge of Catherine and Tom from the One Big Union allows us to examine a particular group of Canadian unionists as they became caught up in a specific moment of sexual regulation. Power relationships within the OBU were different from those of other spaces of regulation such as courts or dance halls, and the conflicts around heterosexuality during the Cassidy-Rose affair were inseparable from the context of organising a socialist union. The stories

- 
- 5 See Karen Dubinsky, "'The Pleasure Is Exquisite But Violent': The Imaginary Geography of Niagara Falls in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, No.2 (1994): 64-88; Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 No.2 (October 1994): 207-242; Carolyn Strange, "Wounded Womanhood and Dead Men: Chivalry and the Trials of Clara Ford and Carrie Davies," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds. (Toronto, 1992), 149-88. For the theoretical assumptions behind narratology, see Mariana Valverde, "As if subjects existed: analysing social discourses," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 28 No.2 (1991): 173-87.
- 6 I have been influenced by Steven Maynard, "'Horrible Temptations': Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935," *Canadian Historical Review* 78 No.2 (1997): 191-235; and R.W. Connell's discussion of social practice in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, 1987).

told about Tom and Catherine, for example, were not commodified and translated into mass culture, and so reactions to their affair were not shaped by its purchase on the market. This suggests important differences between this scandal's rhythm and other controversies such as Judith Walkowitz's account of Jack the Ripper.<sup>7</sup> The Cassidy-Rose affair was also set off from other forms of sexual regulation, such as court proceedings on the issue of how power was exercised. In this case, the politics of sexuality were mediated by the union's bureaucratic leadership; their power to dictate how debate proceeded and their influence over union affairs enabled them to regulate the sexual practices of members within certain limits.<sup>8</sup> Tom and Catherine offered a different narrative about their actions, but to no avail, as they lacked the social power within the organisation to make their representation of events stick. In the end, leaders successfully linked the debate about Cassidy and Rose to what they defined as the OBU's progress: if their sexual relationship became public, it would be manipulated by the bourgeois press. The OBU would be destroyed in the ensuing panic over charges of "free love," and the working-class movement for liberation would be undermined.

The One Big Union had its origins both in large-scale global processes set in motion by the emergence of monopoly capitalism, and in local conflicts over demands for union recognition and the right of collective bargaining following World War One. In March 1919, more than 230 union representatives gathered for the Western Labor Conference, where they initiated plans for a new organisation embodying the principles of revolutionary industrial unionism.<sup>9</sup> Events overwhelmed this fledgling group of radicals, as close to one hundred thousand workers across Canada initiated a wave of general, sympathetic, and local strikes – the largest in Winnipeg – beginning that May. Workers in most major Canadian cities as well as dozens of smaller communities took part in public displays of solidarity and power throughout the remaining months of 1919,

---

7 Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), esp. 81-134.

8 For more on the relationship between union bureaucracies and gender identities, see Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, 1991); Keith McClelland, "Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-1880," *Gender & History* 1 No.2 (1989):164-77; and Sonya O. Rose, "Respectable Men, Disorderly Others: The Language of Gender and the Lancashire Weavers' Strike of 1878 in Britain," *Gender & History* 5 No.3 (1993): 382-97. For a Canadian study, see Mark Leier, *Red Flags and Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy in Vancouver* (Toronto, 1995).

9 The One Big Union has previously been confused with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which was also popularly known as the OBU. While the Canadian OBU did attract some former Wobblies, the two organisations were at odds over basic issues such as union structure (industrial vs. geographical) and the question of syndicalism. See Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1990), 119-20; David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Cambridge, 1987), 426-30.

crafting an independent political culture that openly challenged traditional identities rooted in the capitalist logic of exploitation.<sup>10</sup> In the words of one OBU activist, William Pritchard, "the workers would not be saved by any great man but [by] themselves. 'The great . . . appear great to us because we are on our knees. Let us rise.'"<sup>11</sup> Socialists sought to shape the diverse experiences of Canadian workers into a unified movement that welcomed all wage labourers "irrespective of nationality, sex, or craft."<sup>12</sup> The political culture of the union blended residual and emergent elements in which a traditional appeal to the nobility of skilled labour, one aspect of the nineteenth-century producer ideology articulated by Canadian labourists, could be followed by Marxist conceptions of industrial unionism, racial inclusion, and the collective unity of skilled and unskilled that shared much with the Wobblie tradition.<sup>13</sup> With the organisation of frontier labourers and crafts in crisis, two overlapping yet distinctive masculine subcultures were to be transformed through collective action into a desire for revolution and the One Big Union.<sup>14</sup>

- 10 The literature on the 1919 labour revolt and the One Big Union is voluminous and ever-increasing. I have relied on: J. Peter Campbell, "'Stalwarts of the Struggle': Canadian Marxists of the Third Way, 1879-1939," PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1991; James R. Conley, "Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis, and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989): 9-37; Gillian Creese, "Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the 'Oriental Problem'," in *Canadian Working Class History: Selected Readings*. Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds. (Toronto, 1992), 311-32; Gerald Friesen, "'Yours In Revolt': The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 1 (1976): 139-57; Mary Horodyski, "Women and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919," *Manitoba History* 11 (1986): 28-37; Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (1984): 11-44; Linda Kealey, "'No Special Protection - No Sympathy': Women's Activism in the Canadian Labour Revolt of 1919," in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*. Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey, eds. (St. John's, 1989), 134-59; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Toronto, 1992); Larry Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 7 (1981): 41-66; Patricia Roome, "Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935," in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds. (Toronto, 1989), 89-117; and Peter Warrian, "The Challenge of the One Big Union Movement in Canada, 1919-1921," MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1971.
- 11 "'Saving the World From Democracy': The Winnipeg General Sympathetic Strike, May-June 1919," in *Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers' Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike*. 2nd ed. Norman Penner, ed. (Toronto, 1975), 144.
- 12 UBCSC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, Box 33, File 6, Constitution and Laws of the One Big Union, nd [late 1919].
- 13 Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," in *Canadian Working-Class History: Selected Readings*. Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds. (Toronto, 1992), 355-82; Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*.
- 14 An excellent analysis of skilled and unskilled workers is Andrea Graziosi, "Common Laborers, Unskilled Workers, 1880-1915," *Labor History* 4 (1981): 512-44. For the Canadian context, see Conley, "Frontier Labourers."

While the union's call for working women to organise stood in sharp contrast to the domestic ideals of craft union leaders, the One Big Union was firmly enmeshed in patriarchal undercurrents influencing both structure and ideology. Much of the OBU's appeal lay in the connections its advocates made between male gender identities and their particular brand of socialist politics.<sup>15</sup> The fact that some men during the 1919 strike wave threatened women who scabbed with sexual violence was a reminder that the union movement was not free from misogynistic displays.<sup>16</sup> Feminist scholarship reveals that Canadian labour radicals of different stripes were united in a chivalrous critique of "evil" bourgeois men who assaulted "innocent" working women, a reluctance to explore sexual conflict between working men and women, a general silence on same-sex sexual activity, and a narrow conception of sexual desire.<sup>17</sup> As Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh sardonically observe, the dominant sexual ideology of scientific socialism at this time rested on the conviction that "when women are engaged in wage labour on equal terms with men, and when housework has been socialized, we shall arrive at the nirvana of proletarian heterosexual serial monogamy."<sup>18</sup> With this patriarchal inheritance, the One Big Union was always something more than a union. It was also an attempt by groups of working men to organise around a Marxist reading of gender and sexual identities and interests.

By 1923, the banner of the One Big Union was tattered and torn. The economic depression of the early 1920s coupled with what OBU Secretary, Victor Midgley, called the "Unholy Trinity" of capital, the state, and international craft union leaders effectively ended the OBU's incipient challenge to the bourgeois order.<sup>19</sup> Coercion loomed large over the union's first year of organising, as members were beaten, blacklisted, kidnapped, and jailed by state authorities and vigilante groups.<sup>20</sup> With the first year of the organisation's history occupied with defensive battles against state trials and other legal machinations, anti-union drives by employers, and the propaganda of conservative union bureau-

15 I have discussed the OBU's gender politics during 1919 in "'Not a Sex Question'? The One Big Union and the Politics of Radical Manhood," *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (1998): 15-54.

16 Steven Maynard, "Sex, Court Records, and Labour History," *Labour/Le Travail* 33 (1994): 190-91.

17 Karen Dubinsky, "'The Modern Chivalry': Women and the Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1891," MA thesis, Carleton University, 1985; Linda Kealey, "Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900-1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (1984): 77-100; Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918* (Kingston and Montreal, 1995); and Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto, 1989).

18 Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-social Family*, 2nd Ed. (London, 1991), 18.

19 *OBU Bulletin*, 8 November 1919.

20 See, for examples, Saskatchewan Archives Board, W.S. Martin Papers, Microfilm #R7.2, File 35338-35345, Re: Kidnapping of P.M. Christophers; *OBU Bulletin*, 24 July, 25 September 1920; Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *RCMP Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919-1929* (St. John's, 1994), 42-43, 71, 284.

crats, the OBU's strength waned. Nor was it to remain the largest centre of Canadian radicalism, as organisers in the newly formed Workers' Party of Canada, a front for the Communist Party, advocated the Leninist policy of "boring from within," encouraging workers to leave the OBU and join international unions.<sup>21</sup> OBU activists, particularly Bob Russell, put forth a nuanced critique of the communist emphasis on vanguard leadership, hoping that the OBU's policy of rank-and-file control would win back workers, but they were unsuccessful. Theoretically, the membership had control over their unions; in reality, the rank and file was growing smaller year by year.<sup>22</sup>

The union's plight did not escape the attention of organiser Ben Legere, who believed that conditions had changed substantially since 1919. Legere spoke out against policies that strengthened the power of union leaders, preferring to ground the movement in the collective action of "wage slaves." "The community spirit has got to be planted in the labor movement . . . and self-reliance and strength infused into it," Legere maintained. The OBU needed "NEW material," the "right men to do the work" as the movement's "old-timers" were "in such a hopeless muddle." On a survey of OBU activity across the West in September 1923, Legere arrived in the small community of Nakusp, BC, where he was forced to postpone the meeting because "the local comrades considered it unwise to attempt to compete with the movies." After the gathering, Ben concluded that "the slaves . . . there are thoroughly subdued." This was not the case in Sandon, where metal miners under the direction of Tommy Roberts had created a union "in the healthiest condition I've found anywhere . . . altho it is very small." Still, the local in Nanaimo was a "badly managed affair," and Victoria too was "a dying community." Pointing to the need to instill "the right OBU psychology," Legere suggested that they establish permanent organisers in major urban centres: "We are in such a great need of men who understand the OBU structure and who can clearly explain the OBU idea without confusing it with the old industrial union propaganda and who can develop the community psychology needed to build OBU organization." Thus, Legere proposed that Tom Cassidy, the union's best organiser, be sent to Calgary for the next year, a move which also took into consideration "the importance of conserving Cassidy's health . . . I think Calgary with its high altitude and dry air would be the best place in the West for him and I have no doubt that by spring-time he would be laughing at the doctors that told him he was done."<sup>23</sup> When

21 Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal, 1981); Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*; Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective."

22 The most detailed analysis of the OBU's challenge to the Communist Party's notions of vanguardism is Peter Campbell's "Stalwarts in the Struggle."

23 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 160, File 8, Ben Legere to the Members of the General Executive Board, 4 October 1923.



Ben Legere wrote this report on 4 October 1923, he had no way of knowing that the Executive had just suspended the "right man."

Cassidy was a long-time member of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC); one activist recalled his involvement as early as 1910.<sup>24</sup> A strong supporter of industrial unionism, Cassidy was attracted to militant tactics such as the general strike.<sup>25</sup> Tom was particularly well-known for the charismatic wit with which he entertained working-class audiences in hundreds of Canadian and American locales.<sup>26</sup> With the increase in labour protest during the latter stages of the War, Cassidy believed that the socialist movement was lagging behind the spontaneous displays of working-class militancy. He asked Chris Stephenson, a member of the SPC Dominion Executive Committee, "are you formulating any plans for the future or are you sitting tight and waiting for the grace of God or the Government to grant you permission to do things[?]" Cassidy maintained that the change in material conditions necessitated a new kind of industrial manhood to bring about socialism: "The man who alone, knows his Marx his day is past. It is the man who knows his Marx and is in possession of the technology of industry as well, who is the man of the immediate future."<sup>27</sup> In a letter to long-time radical, Richard Kerrigan, in April 1919, Cassidy again stressed the need for active men, as "passive resistance to labor fakery will no longer suffice, it must be attacked & that ruthlessly & now is a good time." However, Cassidy's call for manly action was constrained by his role as family breadwinner. "I am still holding the job down, or rather the job is holding me down," he wrote Kerrigan, "for the signs of spring are germinating feelings that only change can satisfy. But when one has domestic responsibilities one can only move with a healthy Bank accou[n]t."<sup>28</sup> Like other OBU men, Cassidy continually had to negotiate between his union organising, which

24 UBCSC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, Box 52, File 12, Dorothy Steeves, Interview with Tom O'Connor, 12 October 1958.

25 For Cassidy's views on the general strike, see David Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1925," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (1992): 17.

26 Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), MG10F2, Manitoba Historical Society, Orlikow Tapes, Interview with R.B. Russell, C813-816, Transcript of Tape 6, 13.

27 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 10, File 56, Tom Cassidy to Chris Stephenson, 24 February 1919.

28 PAM, RG4A1, Manitoba Court Records - King's Bench, "The King vs. William Ivens et al." Trial Evidence, Box 7, Tom Cassidy to Richard Kerrigan, 6 April 1919. Kerrigan had a long history of radicalism beginning with a role in the Knights of Labor. He also attended the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, was a key advisor to OBU activists in Eastern Canada during 1919, and penned a history of the Canadian trade union movement for the *OBU Bulletin* in 1925-26. See Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Toronto, 1987), 18-19, 171, 276-77.

in his case meant travel, and his “domestic responsibilities.”<sup>29</sup> By early May 1919, he was in Winnipeg, speaking to a gathering of three thousand in support of the fledgling OBU. According to a police spy, Cassidy told the crowd that, as soon as he arrived, “I landed in the arms of the law. I was held up by a Policeman challenging me as to how I earn my livelihood. I told him that life seemed to come to me naturally (Cheers & Applause).” Tom was also reported to have “criticised Religion & Worshippers, denying the Bible and God”; the meeting concluded with the cry, “Long Live Comrade Cassidy and Bolshevism.”<sup>30</sup> Cassidy became one of the few OBU organisers in Eastern Canada and the United States, struggling to build a militant union against the backdrop of the Red Scare. With the decline of the OBU in the East and in America in 1920, Cassidy’s energies were better served elsewhere, and he travelled throughout Western Canada for several years. In May of 1923, Cassidy’s wife, who now lived in San Francisco, became ill, and Tom left to be with her. It was shortly after his arrival that he was diagnosed with tuberculosis.<sup>31</sup> Tom stayed in San Francisco for treatment until August, when he travelled to Winnipeg to attend the One Big Union’s Fourth General Convention.

Cassidy’s overwhelming importance to the union was made clear at the Convention. Comrade Cowie from Brandon reported that “we had tried for some time to get members, but Cassidy come there and got somewhere around 70 members.” In a similar vein, Comrade Skinner maintained that “Cassidy did a lot of good work” in Winnipeg’s railway shops, “but immediately he leaves the activity leaves with him.”<sup>32</sup> With the decline in OBU fortunes, talk repeatedly returned to the theme of new organising strategies, and Cassidy was prominent among those emphasising the need for rank-and-file-oriented tactics like those of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Ben Legere also spoke out against the growth of a bureaucratic leadership removed from the “men on the job.” “We should always try to place our organisers in a position where they must either produce the goods or get off the job,” Legere maintained. “It is the man on the job on all occasions that has any strength, that has stamina, that can

29 I have explored this theme in “‘A Modern Weapon for Modern Man’: Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924,” MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995, 67-75.

30 National Archives of Canada (NA). RCMP Papers, 88-A-73, R.B. Russell Personal File, Unidentified to Cortland Starnes, 5 May 1919. Thanks to Prof. Gregory S. Kealey of Memorial University of Newfoundland for allowing me access to his voluminous collection of RCMP reports.

31 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 7, R.B. Russell to Catherine Rose, 24 May 1923; Catherine Rose to Tommy Roberts, 8 June 1923. Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover why Mrs. Cassidy was living in San Francisco at this time.

32 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 9, File 49, Minutes of the Fourth General Convention of the One Big Union, 3-5 August 1923, 7, 13, 30.

put up any defense . . . . Give any man too much power, and he will abuse it.”<sup>33</sup> This idea was seconded by Cassidy, who stressed the need for hard-working men who “should expect to do the same as he would on an ordinary job, get out and work; he must expect to get up early and get on the job.”<sup>34</sup> The difference in visions between the position of Legere and Cassidy and that of OBU leaders in and around Winnipeg emerged in the discussion of a proposal from Brandon delegates to have the OBU establish an insurance plan and pension fund for its members. IWW sympathiser, Tommy Roberts, ridiculed the plan, stating, “we must function on the job, not as an insurance organisation.” Cassidy also disagreed with the Brandon proposal because it “would mean a much larger revenue coming in to the office from the rank and file, and the more money you place in their hands, the more power they have.”<sup>35</sup> With others advocating a united front with the Wobblies, the craft-oriented strategies of OBU delegates based in Brandon and Winnipeg came under increasing criticism.

Despite these conflicts, the delegates were able to agree on the high quality of Catherine Rose’s work as General Secretary, and they voted her a raise in salary.<sup>36</sup> To view Catherine Rose as a clerical secretary is to miss both the importance of her work and her status in the union.<sup>37</sup> As General Secretary, Rose addressed the 1923 Convention, providing an optimistic report about OBU activities. Rose was the most prominent woman in a position of responsibility outside the Women’s Auxiliaries, and was involved in basic decisions that were essential to the daily functioning of the union. With leaders like Bob Russell travelling through Canada trying to increase membership, Rose was often in the position of resolving internal conflicts. When Tommy Roberts threatened that the Sandon metal miners would break from the OBU to join the IWW because British Columbia lacked a permanent organiser, it was Catherine who persuaded him otherwise. Like Legere and Cassidy at the 1923 Convention, Rose appealed to Tommy’s rank-and-file instincts, asking him to “do your best to impress on your members that if they think of going over to the IWW, let it be because they think that it is the best organisation for them, not for the reason that we do not send you an organiser.”<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the convention, the GEB decided to reassign Rose to the position of Business Manager of the *OBU Bulletin*. A sign of the union’s declining fortunes was the fact that the newspaper, which ran a profitable lottery scheme, was more popular than the union itself. At the same time, they received a request from workers in Port

33 Ibid., 10-12.

34 Ibid., 19.

35 Ibid., 16-17.

36 Ibid., 37.

37 In his account of the scandal, David Bercuson understates the importance of Rose’s activities as OBU General Secretary. See Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 230-34.

38 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 7, Catherine Rose to Tommy Roberts, 8 June 1923.

Arthur that Cassidy be sent there to organise. This the Board refused, feeling that Tom could accomplish little there before spring.<sup>39</sup> Within days, they reversed this decision, hoping that sending him out of town might quell the sexual rumours swirling around the pair.

On 26 September 1923, Catherine Rose, as was her custom, went to the meeting of the Winnipeg CLC Executive. Upon arriving, she was informed that her services were not needed that day; the minutes would be taken by someone else.<sup>40</sup> She departed, and Tom Cassidy entered the room. Comrade Wooler began by asking Cassidy to recount their earlier conversation; he replied that he had been told he “was to be laid off on account of no funds, and that [he] could go to Port Arthur.” After some verbal sparring, Cassidy exclaimed that “we were trying to kid one another or kid ourselves” by pretending that he was to go to Port Arthur because of union finances. In reality, he was being ostracised because of the sexual innuendo surrounding himself and Catherine, and it was pointless to pretend otherwise. “We might as well act like men,” Tom exclaimed, “and get at the real reason.” This challenge to the manhood of Executive members did not sit well, and Frank Woodward retorted that it was Cassidy who should “face the issue like a man”: “Would not, say the episode at Brandon, in view of the fact that you were Gen. Organizer and Miss Rose was Sec’y of the GEB and of the CLC, would the Executive not be justified in taking the action they did[?]” Here Woodward implicitly admitted that the reason for Cassidy’s transfer was his relationship with Catherine without naming the problem as sexual. In response, Tom demanded that the CLC Executive “Prove the Brandon Episode”:

Rumour ha[s] it that [myself] and Miss Rose had registered [at a hotel] as man and wife, but when the charge is made I will then present my defense. Rumour has it also that I was drunk in Swift Current. I was too, and I admit it, also I am willing to proclaim from the house tops anything I have done, but I am not going to be a victim of a frame up either by those outside or inside the organization.

His long history as an activist was a source of pride, and he recoiled at the thought of being purged. “I have a reputation to look after. I am known in every large city on the American Continent,” Cassidy maintained, “and I don’t propose to leave here or sneak out quietly with a cloud hanging over me.” Unwilling to discuss the sexual content of the rumours, Comrade Clancy ducked the issue, asking Cassidy, “You admit the truth of the rumo[u]r of being drunk. Why don’t you either affirm or deny the affair at Brandon?” This

39 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 4, File 18, OBU General Executive Board Minutes, September 1923.

40 Ibid., Box 4, File 17, CLC Minutes, 2 October 1923.

angered Tom, and he manoeuvred to have the matter brought into the open, stating with more than a hint of bravado:

Just let a charge be laid. I can puncture any charge presented so full of holes it will look like a sieve. In fact just to show you how sure I am I will admit that I was registered at a Brandon Hotel as T. Cassidy & Wife. I will also admit that Miss Rose was seen in my company at that time, but even admitting all this I can knock any charge that is made into a cocked hat.

The Executive refused to engage Cassidy in a debate over the truth, seeking instead to reverse his charges of unmanly behaviour. Woodward declared that he was “surprised at Com. Cassidy who had gloried in having the only real Revolutionary Morality, and yet now before the Executive he was seeking to hide it.” Sadly, the minutes of the meeting end here; a note informs us that “considerable discussion” ensued. Without explaining their rationale, the Executive voted to approach Catherine’s father, John, himself an OBU member, and ask him to secure her resignation. If she refused to quit, she was to be fired with two weeks’ salary as severance pay.<sup>41</sup> They made no decision regarding Cassidy, whom they had already suspended, until two weeks later, when the Executive decided he had to be let go as well.<sup>42</sup> While they initially hoped Tom would accept their decision and go to Port Arthur, leaving behind his “real Revolutionary Morality,” Catherine was not given a chance to rehabilitate herself. Nor would the Executive deal with Catherine directly, instead conveying their decision through her father. She refused their offer, and was promptly fired.

The Executive’s response to the affair suggests some important features of the OBU’s sexual inheritance. From the union’s inception, OBU men tried to build an organisation that could encompass both skilled workers in urban areas and unskilled workers in bush camps and company towns. Radicals were thus faced with the task of bringing together two different working-class subcultures. This process of class formation had a sexual dimension, as one element of the different experiences of skilled and unskilled workers was the varied sexual settings of large urban centres and small frontier towns, as analysed in Carolyn Strange’s *Toronto’s Girl Problem* and Karen Dubinsky’s *Improper Advances*.<sup>43</sup> This is not to assert that skill was the central determinant in working men’s sexual histories, but to suggest that the different forms of commercial amusements and sexual regulation related to uneven economic and state

41 Ibid., Box 4, File 19, CLC Executive Minutes, 26 September 1923.

42 Ibid., 9 October 1923.

43 Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago, 1993); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto, 1995).

development fostered important social differences in the lives of urban craftsmen and frontier labourers.<sup>44</sup> The subjectivity of craftsmen was infused with long-standing elements of skill, job control, and respectability that clashed with the transient and often brutal aspects of unskilled work. Craftsmen rooted their sense of manhood in the connections they made among their control of the workplace, their position as family breadwinner, and their collective morality of self-discipline, convictions which Keith McClelland suggests included sexual respectability.<sup>45</sup> This familial-oriented sense of self, which was not held by all skilled men, diverged from the “boom and bust” cycle of sexual relations afforded unskilled men in company towns and bush camps in many respects. These men, commentators like Edmund Bradwin of Frontier College believed, “are deprived during months at a stretch of the companionship of women, of home ties, and all that elevates life in a man; they are starved by isolation and monotony.” Transient workers thus headed to the city to satisfy their urges, and “the all-night orgies, the drunken sprees lasting for days in some top room of a hotel or lodging house” left them “silent, sore, sick, and seamed with debauch.”<sup>46</sup>

Of course, we should not view Bradwin’s comments as indicative of the lives of all unskilled men in frontier towns. After all, as Steven Maynard observes, workers in all-male environments did not lack opportunities for sex.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, I would like to tentatively offer the idea that the varied sexual experiences of working men in the One Big Union might have shaped the union’s practices even if these differences were not acknowledged by OBU organisers. For example, OBU propaganda did not consider the question of same-sex sexual activity. For the many urban unionists who viewed their OBU activity as central to preserving their status as family breadwinners, homosexuality could have been interpreted as a bourgeois problem of the Oscar Wilde variety rather than a practice engaged in by working men and women struggling against what they saw as capitalism’s gradual destruction of working-class families. For some unskilled labourers, the issue may have looked quite different. George Chauncey suggests that groups such as transient workers “who were exceptionally disengaged from the family and neighbourhood systems that regulated normative sexuality” developed an erotic system premised not on a heterosexual/homosexual binary, but rather on an understanding of masculine and

---

44 On campaigns of moral and sexual regulation, see Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto, 1997), 84-88; Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada* (Montreal, 1987) discusses the uneven development of sexual regulation in the Canadian West.

45 McClelland, “Some Thoughts on Masculinity.”

46 Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man* (Toronto, 1972), 137.

47 Steven Maynard, “Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History,” *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (1989): 159-69.

feminine roles in sexual activity.<sup>48</sup> OBU organisers, like Tom Cassidy, who spent time recruiting transients may have recognised the existence of same-sex sexual activity among working men, including themselves, but opted not to discuss it publicly for fear of giving credence to elite views of working-class sexual corruption. In other words, the absence of representations of homosexual activities and identities in union propaganda was not necessarily the result of a single shared conception of sexual deviance.

With the affair of Catherine and Tom, the uneven development of institutions of working-class sexual regulation could have contributed to the internal tensions between skilled and unskilled which confronted union leaders. Cassidy's life as a travelling organiser meant that he spent most of his time away from his wife, and so his union experience was quite different from those of the Winnipeg craftsmen, who lived a relatively rooted existence. That the complaints about Tom's and Catherine's sexual conduct originated from Brandon members suggests the possibility that Tom's earlier opposition to the craft-oriented vision of Brandon delegates at the 1923 Convention might have been an important factor in reporting their supposed misconduct, particularly if Rose had also been critical of their proposal.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the idea of an assertive woman like Catherine, who held more institutional power than the union men from Brandon, now asserting herself by flaunting conventional sexual morality might have been their primary motivation to inform on the pair. Differences in the sexual practices of the urban skilled and transient unskilled might thus partially explain why opposition to the sexual radicalism of Cassidy and Rose initially came from delegates in craft-based unions and was translated into policy by the union's leadership who, while supporters of industrial unionism, also drew from craft union traditions. This account of the sexual dimension of social divisions in the One Big Union is provisional. Obviously, same-sex sexual activity was not confined to bush camps, and many historians have focussed on the importance of urban environments to the creation of homosexual communities.<sup>50</sup> The different cultural backgrounds of immigrant workers were also important in determining sexual subjectivities. Nonetheless, Chauncey's analysis of the connections between forms of sexual regulation and identity presents a challenge for labour history, and in a union like the OBU that attempted to bridge the gap between skilled and unskilled, sexuality could have been an important factor in the ongoing tensions.<sup>51</sup>

48 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York, 1994), esp. 65-97; quote at 88.

49 Unfortunately, Rose's opinions on the Brandon plan are not recorded in the Convention minutes.

50 See, for example, Steven Maynard's "Horrible Temptations."

51 I am exploring the differences in sexual subjectivities among the urban unemployed and hobos in my doctoral thesis at Queen's University, tentatively entitled "'In this country we do not die of starvation, we live it': The Experiences of Unemployed Single Men in Vancouver During the Depression."

While OBU leaders dealt with Cassidy through formal union channels, they could not bring themselves to publicly accuse Catherine Rose of sleeping with a married man. When the Executive's purge of Cassidy was used by activists in Northern Ontario to swing OBU loggers to the IWW that December, Bob Russell informed one dissident that a trial was impossible since "the Executive had promised the girl's parents they would not publicly accuse" her.<sup>52</sup> This spoke to their chivalrous concern, shared by Rose's father, to protect her womanly respectability, at least in public. It also exposed their desire to preserve paternal authority by having Rose's father be active in the union's regulation of her sexual behaviour, despite the fact that Catherine, like many other "working girls," resided in a boarding house. In his appeal to Tommy Roberts, William McAllister echoed this notion, emphasising that "Father and Brother of Miss Rose [e]ndorsed the action of the GEB," making it clear that their voices were more important than Catherine's. The Executive's reasoning harkened back to nineteenth-century Canadian seduction laws in which, before marriage, women were property to be controlled by their fathers.<sup>53</sup> There was also an element of collective apprehension in their decision. In the words of McAllister, "who is going to be this young woman's accuser? Not for me."<sup>54</sup> The idea expressed by McAllister here – that male union executive members, whose institutional power far outweighed what Catherine Rose could bring to bear at such a confrontation, were afraid to publicly say what they privately knew to be the truth – speaks to the depths of their uncertainty when faced with sexual politics. Like socialists in other countries, OBU leaders feared "the emotionally charged atmosphere surrounding sexuality as a public issue."<sup>55</sup> And the substance of the Cassidy-Rose affair meant that a trial would have given a public hearing to "free love" ideals, in particular the advocacy of sexual activity outside of marriage and the belief in the centrality of sex to individual identity, not to mention the portrayal of the union's top organiser as an adulterer and possible polygamist. But the Executive's reluctance also spoke to their personal anxiety about talking about heterosexuality in a formal union trial, because such an event would dissolve the boundaries that kept sexual matters in their proper place, both practical and psychological, in the social world of these union men.<sup>56</sup> The problem, then, was how to secure the support of union mem-

52 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, R.B. Russell to P.W. Dunning, 7 January 1924.

53 See Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto, 1991); Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*.

54 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, William McAllister to Tommy Roberts, 14 February 1924.

55 Helmut Gruber, "Sexuality in 'Red Vienna': Socialist Party Conceptions and Programs and Working-Class Life, 1920-34," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 31 (1987): 44.

56 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. 2nd ed. Carole S. Vance, ed. (London, 1992), 267, 297.



bers without having to publically discuss exactly what Tom and Catherine had done to justify their expulsion.

On 2 October 1923, the Executive issued a circular to members of the Winnipeg CLC, the largest body of workers affiliated with the OBU, to bring to their attention "a matter that [we] are convinced was going to wreck the movement . . . just at a time when it is necessary to put forth our best efforts to take advantage of a situation which was becoming favourable to us." They said nothing of the actual conduct of Cassidy and Rose. Instead, they outlined their efforts to convince him to go to Port Arthur and to get her to resign willingly to "protec[t] the organization from any harmful publicity." Her obstinate refusal meant that "the Executive had no other course left but to discharge her." Cassidy, too, was "determined not to have the matter cleaned up quietly." Tom and Catherine believed the Executive had "no right to interfere with their moral conduct, something we are prepared to admit provided it does not hurt this movement." The Executive requested "that the Council endorse [our] actions without calling upon us to divulge the details of the unfortunate situation . . . . [W]e assure you as Comrades in the movement, comrade to comrade, that we have got all the necessary data to warrant the action we have taken." This response, designed to enable the Executive to control the parameters of discussion, raised questions about the organisation's political priorities. While Cassidy and Rose were "egotistical enough to consider the vindication of their moral standards of greater importance than the development of the movement," the Executive was "composed of Comrades who [were] not blinded by orthodox moral concepts." Of course, in this situation, not being "blinded by orthodox moral concepts" meant refusing to discuss sexual politics and their relationship to socialism. Indeed, the Executive boldly proclaimed that "we are so positively convinced that an exposure of the whole affair which means that it becomes public property, would retard the progress of the organization, we ask you to endorse our actions, otherwise we respectfully ask you to accept our resignations."<sup>57</sup> Instead of discussing the OBU's sexual ideology, the Executive demanded silence, suggesting that any talk about sex would destroy whatever public respectability the movement had. And while the decline of the OBU meant in reality that there was little left of its illustrious dream, in the fantastic world of this Marxist moral panic, circumstances were "becoming favourable."

The reactions of CLC delegates to the Executive's position were not unanimously supportive. Comrade McIvor bluntly stated that "as far as I am concerned . . . they can resign," as their threat to quit was a coercive tactic. Mrs. Bray was also not convinced, asking "if the executive had any proof." Comrade

---

57 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 4, File 18, Executive Circular to the CLC, n.d.

Wooler rose to reiterate their position: "the Executive were not going to start any argument on the floor of the Council. Its position was clear." From the gallery, Tom Cassidy said that "he would not leave under that Cloud" since "no charges have been laid against me." He even offered to work without pay for two months "if it was proven to him that he had done anything to hurt the movement." Catherine Rose was considerably more blunt in her defence, claiming, "I do not care one iota what you think of my actions. If you think my actions are detrimental to the movement, prove it." Rose believed that OBU leaders were attempting to impose their views on union members; she and Tom were being forced out of their jobs without any charges being laid, "a fine thing for a rank and file movement." Ironically, their refusal to discuss the specifics of their involvement except at a hearing enabled the Executive to maintain their silence on sexual matters by simply ignoring the pair's request for a trial. Tom Mace recalled a scandal in the Socialist Party of America "which the capitalist press are still using to the detriment of the working class movement by playing up the 'free love' scare." With this reminder of the importance of the issue before them, the Executive refused to discuss the "Brandon Episode" further; their position was endorsed by the CLC by a vote of twenty to six.<sup>58</sup> Catherine was not rehired, and Tom remained on suspension until several weeks later, when he was fired as well. This was a victory for the Executive; their position had been ratified in a closed union meeting without the publicity which, in their eyes, would have linked the One Big Union to images of adulterous Marxist radicals undermining the family through "free love" practices involving young women. That the Cassidy-Rose affair was not sensationalised through its articulation as mass culture – in their words, turned into "public property" – meant that they were not forced into a public debate about heterosexual norms to counter representations of the union as a "'free love' propaganda institution." Nor was the scandal fought out on the terrain of legal discourse; the procedures through which leaders secured the support of delegates, for example, did not require testimony on Catherine's and Tom's "crime" against the movement. Indeed, the CLC proceedings assumed that delegates knew what Tom and Catherine had done, but also knew enough not to publically make reference to it. One of the ironies of the affair is that the One Big Union had consistently opposed international unions, whether led by conservatives or communists, because they invested too much power in the hands of leaders. Instead, policy was to be determined by the union's rank and file. But now with the scandal,

58 Ibid., Box 4, File 17, CLC Minutes, 2 October 1923. Mace may have been referring to the 1910-1911 controversy over free love involving two prominent members of the Socialist Party of America, Lena Morrow Lewis and J. Mahlon Barnes. See Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana, 1981), 165. Thanks to Grace Palladino and David Montgomery for providing this reference via H-Labor.

their politics were dictated by leaders; the rank and file were to assent to their ruling without being allowed to discuss what exactly had happened.

In one sense, unionists were right to fear the possible consequences of the scandal becoming “public property.” The labour revolt of 1919 was not confined to economic questions, as socialists and the elite contested a host of moral issues. As Strange and Loo observe, many felt that “Anarchism and Bolshevism threatened to corrupt the morality of the dominion itself.”<sup>59</sup> One aspect of the bourgeois reaction was the association of socialism with the deviant sexual practices attributed to “alien” men, drawing on the residues of other recent moral panics.<sup>60</sup> In March 1919, C.O. Knowles, General Manager of Canadian Press Limited, provided the Dominion government’s Chief Press Censor, Ernest Chambers, with an upcoming article about the “nationalisation” of women in Russia, a tale “so repellant to any man with any sense of decency” that Knowles contemplated suppressing it. He decided against this course because of the need to influence public opinion: “There is an element in this country which is still deluded with the idea that if the Bolsheviks got the upper hand we would have the millennium next week instead of which we would have hell.”<sup>61</sup> Reporting from Siberia, correspondent W.E. Playfair wrote that the manifesto of the “Bolshevik Anarchists” proclaimed that, under capitalism, “all the most beautiful women and best specimens have been the property of the Bourgeoisie.” Under socialist rule, women were “declared to be the property of the whole nation,” and those who refused were said to be “on strike.” The “nationalisation” programme of the Bolshevik Anarchists was far from anarchy, however; Playfair’s report included a detailed list of regulations governing male entitlement. For example, “male citizens have th[e] right to use one woman not oftener [sic] than three times a week for three hours,” but only if they had a union card. Husbands, “the former owners” of these women, were allowed access to “their wives without waiting for their turn.” The women were accorded a monthly allowance, four months maternity leave, and a bonus if they gave birth to twins – a veritable welfare state for heterosexual services.<sup>62</sup>

59 Strange and Loo, *Making Good*, 129.

60 The relationship between immigrant men, sexuality and nativism is well-documented. See Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 155-58; Lisa M. Fine, “Our Big Factory Family: Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan,” *Labor History* 34 Nos. 2-3 (1993): 274-91; Colleen O’Neill, “Domesticity Deployed: Gender, Race, and the Construction of Class Struggle in the Bisbee Deportation,” *Labor History* 34 Nos. 2-3 (1993): 256-73; Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, esp. 152-57; and Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto, 1991). For earlier associations of socialism with free love, see Newton, *Feminist Challenge*, 112.

61 NA, RG 6, Secretary of State, Files of the Chief Press Censor 1918-1920, Series E, Vol. 614, File 292, Pt. 3, C.O. Knowles to Ernest Chambers, 24 March 1919.

62 Ibid, Report of W.E. Playfair, 11 February 1919.

Playfair's story was confirmed by an Associated Press report stating that, upon turning 18, Russian women "must register [their] name[s] in the bureau of free love." Canadian readers were also told that "many of the girls are carried off and there have been suicides and murders as a result."<sup>63</sup>

Outrageous stories such as these, which bore no resemblance to the actual sexual politics of Bolshevik Russia, let alone the One Big Union, were central to the moral crusade of bourgeois politicians, church leaders, and news writers fearing the "desecration and defilement of womanhood."<sup>64</sup> Newspapers across the country – our example is from the *Belleville Intelligencer* – informed readers that, in Russia, "the honor and respect of womankind has been scrapped along with all other high ideals."<sup>65</sup> RNWMP Assistant Commissioner W.H. Routledge thought that "the recent decree socializing women in Russia should be given the widest publicity amongst the various women's organisations throughout the country."<sup>66</sup> The OBU was linked to these stories by Manitoba Prosecutor A.J. Andrews during the trial of Bob Russell. In his summation, Andrews emphasised that the seditious programme of Russell and his comrades involved more than just the collectivisation of industry. "They abolish the family," proclaimed Andrews, "and they take that woman that we have put on a pedestal from that pedestal."<sup>67</sup> In opposition to Bolshevik tyranny was Canada, where gender relations were naturally harmonious: "There is no place in society where the home is more sacred, where the family is more hallowed, than in the family of the good, honest working man."<sup>68</sup> Andrews thus presented for the jury's view the image of the Canadian family threatened by the deviant desires and moral corruption of foreign revolutionaries.

So prevalent were stories of the "nationalisation" of women in Russia that Canadian socialists felt the need to counter them. In May 1919, the *Red Flag*, the SPC newspaper in Vancouver, printed a story confirming that the

63 Ibid., Associated Press Clipping, 15 April 1919.

64 See Theresa Catherine Baxter, "Selected Aspects of Canadian Public Opinion on the Russian Revolution and on Its Impact in Canada," MA thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1972, 5, 63, 165. For the Bolsheviks and sexuality, see Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993); Simon Karlinsky, "Russia's Gay Literature and Culture: The Impact of the October Revolution," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr., eds. (New York, 1989), 347-64.

65 *Belleville Intelligencer*, 20 May 1919, quoted in J.E. Rea, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto, 1973), 35.

66 NA, HV 28, Volume 2, Assistant Commissioner W.H. Routledge, Notes for Commissioner's Perusal Re Report of [Censored] re Interprovincial Labour Convention, nd. Courtesy of Greg Kealey.

67 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 10, File 54, A.J. Andrews, Address to the Jury, 36-37.

68 Ibid., 39. Andrews also informed the Jury that "there are no classes in this country."

Bolsheviks had put a stop to the “nationalisation” programme, which had emanated from an anarchist group in Siberia. One writer suggested that these stories were actually products of the “bestial, pornographic imaginations” of the Canadian elite, and as a corrective provided several accounts of working-class women’s exploitation at the hands of their bosses.<sup>69</sup> In tales such as these, OBU ideologues appropriated feminist concepts and reworked them into a Marxist critique of bourgeois men’s sexual corruption. Their coupling of an attack on capitalism as an anti-family social system with a defence of socialism from charges of “free love” was in line with traditional leftist views on sexuality.<sup>70</sup> During his trial for sedition, the Reverend William Ivens, then Associate Editor of the *OBU Bulletin*, defended the ideal of working-class chivalry, suggesting that “no people put woman on a higher pedestal than labor.”<sup>71</sup> Along with stories on the “Women of the Russian Revolution,” the *Bulletin* proclaimed that “women in Soviet Russia are politically, economical[l]y and morally more cared for than in any other place on earth.”<sup>72</sup> The paper also favourably cited Lenin’s suggestion that “We are too few to free women from the chains of household slavery. If the emancipation of the workman is the business of the workman himself, that of the women must be their own affair.”<sup>73</sup> While this position reaffirmed the policy of encouraging women to be active in the movement and gave voice to the idea that women could in fact secure their emancipation, it also justified the gendered separation of political work, reinforcing male dominance in the name of proletarian women’s self-determination.

Given the sexual dimensions of the 1919 Red Scare, the fears of the Executive that the elite would capitalise on any scandal were understandable. Nonetheless, their reasoning was also rooted in political priorities. The refusal to consider the issue of “free love” was, they thought, a pragmatic judgement that sexuality would stir up public reaction against the OBU. However, given the power of elite representations of socialism, especially during the wave of general strikes, if OBU men were to be truly pragmatic, they would have relinquished their politics as a whole. But this was not the case. They continued to be Marxists, whether or not their views were popular, because they ardently believed that socialism was the only humane response to the class struggle. They could abstain from questions of sexuality, however, because they were inconsequential to the revolutionary movement. Or were they? While OBU

69 *Red Flag*, 10 May 1919. For Lenin’s attack on “free love” as bourgeois, see Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 18.

70 Linda Kealey, “Canadian Socialism,” 96; Janice Newton, “From Wage Slave to White Slave: The Prostitution Controversy and the Early Canadian Left,” in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds. (Toronto, 1989), 217-36.

71 *OBU Bulletin*, 27 March 1919.

72 *Ibid.*, 25 September 1920, 22 November 1919.

73 *Ibid.*, 22 November 1919.

writers rarely theorised about sexuality, there was a set of assumptions that grounded their critique of capitalism. Specifically, sex entered OBU discourse as an expression of class exploitation, and was thus articulated differently than the forms of regulation produced by, for instance, the law.<sup>74</sup> Central to their sexual ideology were generalisations about the importance of the heterosexual family to workers and the threat to family life posed by capitalism.

Their functionalist understanding of sexual politics was prominent in the discussion of birth control. As Angus McLaren observes, OBU writers feared that birth control would be used by a Malthusian-inspired elite to coercively regulate workers' families.<sup>75</sup> Instead, union writers saw the use of birth control as a matter for the working class to decide, without specifying how such a decision was to be made. Husbands and wives were, one assumes, to choose to control fertility together, a stance which did not consider the power relationships at work among working-class family members. OBU men also put forth a multifaceted critique of what they called "Capitalist Chivalry," following earlier socialists in offering prostitution as the most devastating symbol of the social problems associated with capitalism.<sup>76</sup> The *OBU Bulletin* published several columns and poems by radicals such as Edward Carpenter which emphasised the class-bound dimensions of the sex trade.<sup>77</sup> One writer suggested that "the fine noble 'gentlemen,' ever courteous to the ladies of their own class, were quite within their 'rights' when making the women of the working class the miserable and powerless victim of their sensual lusts."<sup>78</sup> Most columns on prostitution expressed sympathy for the "poor, dejected girl" for whom it was easy, "sweating her weary life out . . . working long hours for small wages, in unhealthy, irksome surroundings, to be induced to enrich herself financially at the cost of moral, and, later, physical degeneration." However, OBUers also sought empathy for the working man, who, because of capitalism, was unable to have a "natural" life: "What is a young man to do, who, longing for a home of his own and desirous of living a natural and happy life, finds himself unable, through financial difficulties, to carry out his ambitions? He has to forfeit his dearest desire." This two-sided approach, which rooted prostitution in female economic and male familial need, meant that the negative effects of capitalism extended beyond the alienation of labour. Socialism would not only stop women from selling their bodies, but also enable working men to enjoy the comforts of the heterosexual family:

74 Loo and Strange, *Making Good*, is a helpful overview of the role of the courts in sexual politics.

75 Angus McLaren, "'What Has This to Do with Working Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 28 (1981): 435-54.

76 *OBU Bulletin*, 10 April 1920; Newton, *Feminist Challenge*, 116-17.

77 See, for example, *OBU Bulletin*, 3 April, 4 September, and 2 October 1920.

78 *Ibid.*, 17 January 1920.

Just so long as a woman wants for bread, so long will prostitution exist. Not until every man can be assured of having the wherewithal to live a happy, full and natural life, will prostitution cease . . . . The daughters of the working class are the victims. No worker's daughter is safe while the present system lasts. No toiler's son is immune from the temptation while his future rests on such an unstable economic foundation. The remedy is to organize. Change the system, so that no worker's children shall be the vassals of the rich.<sup>79</sup>

The OBU's Marxist narrative did historicise sexual politics. The bourgeois man's lechery towards the innocent working girl was not the result of a deviant nature, but rather of his power. If the prostitute was morally degraded, it was because of material factors and not a flaw in her character. By seeing sexual exploitation as a problem of class relations, however, the writer implied that married men did not frequent prostitutes or assault their daughters and sons, revealing what Janice Newton calls a "remarkable blindness to the sexual exploitation of women by working-class men."<sup>80</sup>

The OBU's emphasis on the innocent working girl, their response to contemporary ideas about the corrupt sexual practices of workers in general, established her agency in specific terms: she chose prostitution over starvation. She would also, they hoped, choose a "normal" family life over other sexual alternatives, which were not mentioned let alone debated in the union's propaganda. This restrictive range of choices, Newton notes, meant that most Canadian socialists did not address the issue of women's sexual autonomy.<sup>81</sup> Such a framework helped to maintain the OBU's patriarchal politics because it negated a feminist focus on male power, however class-specific, in favour of economism. It also enabled OBU men to idealise the working-class family. In this instance, while normalising men's heterosexual desire, the writer conveyed it in familial terms. The language of sexual desire held little currency in the OBU; instead, working men's visits to prostitutes were quests for the "natural and happy life" associated with the working-class family. Thus, sexual desire was not explicitly made representable in this narrative; working men went to prostitutes because of their longing for domesticity. This manner of discussing sex undercut any debate about the "free love" ideal of sexual activity as essential to one's identity by positioning sex outside of marriage as the result of economic necessity rather than as a rejection of conservative sexual politics. Of course, union channels of regulation did not reach into every facet of the lives of its members. No doubt the sexual proclivities of hundreds of unionists went unpoliced by leaders. However, as with the situation of Tom and Catherine, the Executive was committed to regulating the sexual activity of OBU members

79 Ibid., 15 May 1920.

80 Newton, *Feminist Challenge*, 125.

81 Ibid., esp. 115-16, 134-35.

when it was seen to threaten their idealisation of family, revealing the importance of a patriarchal sexual ideology, no matter how inarticulate, to the union.

While the Executive managed to win support in October for their firing of Catherine and Tom, they were unable to prevent the issue from resurfacing. On 20 November, almost two months after the initial purge, Bob Russell rose to address a “whispering campaign” that was “discrediting the officials and embarrassing the progress of the organization.” According to Russell, “Comrade Cassidy had been very free in expressing himself around the building,” as had others “with chips on the[ir] shoulders.” This “propaganda” only “hinder[ed] the progress of the organization” and he recommended that these people “get out of the way and hide themselves.” *Bulletin* Editor, Frank Woodward, echoed Russell’s words, telling CLC members of the mysterious phone calls he had received from a woman asking about Cassidy’s firing. This, for Woodward, was evidence of a “deep-laid plot” against him. Also present was the unrepentant Cassidy, who “made a vicious attack on the Executive Board,” maintaining that “the very lowest depths had been gone to in order to frame him . . . [H]e had learned to fight fire with fire and he would choose the time and the place and the weapons with which the battle would take place.” This promise of manly combat was justified because “he had been attacked when he was a sick man.” The Executive moved to stifle his opposition; when Tom attempted to speak again, Russell and John Rose, Catherine’s father, noted that he was not a delegate anymore, and therefore not entitled to speak.<sup>82</sup>

The Executive came to regret this move, as they shifted strategies, proposing to meet with Cassidy to resolve their differences. Tom bluntly refused, and demanded that the organisation pay for him and his wife to return to San Francisco.<sup>83</sup> OBU members from Transcona were brought in, and informed the CLC that Cassidy was “a physical wreck.” Comrade Schick reported that the Cassidys were in such financial straits that they had to sell Mrs. Cassidy’s fur coat and Tom’s typewriter. Schick was challenged by Executive member Clancy, who said that “Cassidy’s sickness and poverty was [not] the real cause of bringing this up. It was only another attempt to open this issue up again.” In a similar vein, Comrade Foster complained of “the council dissipating its energy” by discussing the matter. Comrade McIvor, now standing with the Executive, claimed that “there was an attempt being made to stop the progress of this organization.” Bob Russell went further, replying to Cassidy’s masculine challenge by stating “he was prepared to fight Cassidy or any other individual, whether he was sick or not, if he attempted to disrupt the organization.” Threats such as this testified to the process through which the Cassidy-Rose affair was constructed as manly combat, as Russell was not suggesting that he would fight

82 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 4, File 17, CLC Minutes, 20 November 1923.

83 Ibid., Box 4, File 19, CLC Executive Minutes, 11 December 1923.



Catherine Rose. Indeed, Catherine disappeared from the public debate at this point, and her absence helped to preserve the overtly masculine nature of the conflict. While she may have continued to attend meetings as an observer, her voice is absent from the minutes of the OBU-GEB and the Winnipeg CLC, an indication of the extent to which the union's political priorities were masculinised. Those who opposed the purge of Cassidy and Rose focussed their discontent on rehabilitating Tom as an organiser; they did not champion Rose's reinstatement as one of their primary demands. In part, any public defence of Catherine would have been awkward, given John Rose's presence at meetings; men seeking to assist Catherine might have shied away from challenging her father, who supported her removal. The absence of a campaign may also have stemmed from her powerful position in the One Big Union. As General Secretary, Catherine spent the majority of her time working with other members of the Executive, all men, and was thus isolated from other women, who were involved with the OBU Women's Auxiliary. Thus, when the Executive closed ranks against her, Rose most likely lacked the female support networks that could have enabled her to fight back effectively within the union. She also may have faced opposition from men unable to accept her as General Secretary because she threatened the association between union activities and masculine norms. To the extent that women were popularly associated with sexual immorality, Rose's marginality helped the Executive to refuse talk of sex and instead centre the debate in terms of the union's progress.<sup>84</sup> Married women might also have resented Rose's behaviour, thinking her disruptive of the family in general, if not their own. Unfortunately, the lack of support for Catherine translated into her absence in the continuing conflict, and we are thus unable to ascertain in any detail her sexual politics. Did she feel the same as Tom about the need to satisfy "the sex passion," or did she believe that, in the absence of gender equality, "free love" politics were a matter of potentially dire consequences for women who lacked access to birth control? Questions about her relations with other women in the OBU and her father and brother, which could shed light on the connections between heterosexuality, unionism, and working-class families during this period, also must remain unanswered.

In late 1923, the direction of events shifted dramatically, as the Executive's prediction about the organisation's future began to materialise – workers began to leave the OBU. While it is not possible to assess how many left the Winnipeg CLC out of disgust, the affair clearly had a concrete effect on union membership, as Cassidy wrote to long-time activists such as William McAllister and Tommy Roberts to inform them of his plight. One pair of Sudbury comrades, Dunning and Freeman, used the information provided by Tom, including details of the union's real membership total, to swing more than one thousand loggers

---

84 See Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, for the connections between working women and sexuality.

into the IWW in December 1923.<sup>85</sup> In January, Bob Russell attempted to convince these radicals to remain in the OBU by attacking Cassidy, who "has demonstrated that he is even prepared to destroy the movement to satisfy his own ego" with his "god damn lie." Russell told Freeman that they had had little choice, as "the procedure that has been followed has been the one that has, or will, cause the least friction in the movement."<sup>86</sup> By this time, Russell was thoroughly exasperated with the whole affair; at a CLC meeting the next evening, he advised members to "forget this matter and to get down to the real work and business of the organization." This was now impossible, as the CLC appointed a committee to investigate Cassidy's accusation that Woodward hired a private detective to tail him.<sup>87</sup> Several weeks later, after receiving a letter from Cassidy attacking Woodward, William McAllister volunteered to act as a mediator. He travelled to Winnipeg to interview Cassidy and John Rose, who "deeply impressed him."<sup>88</sup> That McAllister did not talk to Catherine Rose is evidence of her marginality in the continuing conflict.

McAllister's efforts failed to resolve the organisation's problems, which were now ever increasing. While hundreds of loggers in Northern Ontario were leaving, OBU women in Winnipeg were demanding a greater role in the organisation. The night after McAllister's failure, elections were held for positions on CLC committees, resulting in an all-male leadership. Mrs. Lamb of the Winnipeg Women's Auxiliary rose and informed those present that she "was surprised that none of the women delegates had been elected or nominated to any position on the Councils." In response, one man replied that this reflected "a desire on the part of delegates not to throw any more work upon the women comrades than they already had." The stalwart Mrs. Lamb was "not satisfied that this was the correct reason," and neither was Bob Russell, who believed that the failure to elect women was "purely an oversight" that occurred because "they had not thought on the matter."<sup>89</sup> This exchange captures the problems faced by working-class women in light of the OBU's gender politics. While some took up the union's call, they were provided with little in the way of practical resources and support from their male comrades. At the next meeting, three women were elected to the CLC's organising committee, but only after

85 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 4, File 18, GEB Minutes, 24 December 1923; Box 4, File 19, Meeting of the Winnipeg CLC Executive and Resident Members of the OBU-GEB, 2 January 1924; UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, R.B. Russell to C. Freeman, 7 January 1924. Ian Radforth estimates that between 1,200 to 1,500 workers left the OBU to join the IWW. See *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto, 1987), 119-20.

86 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, R.B. Russell to P.W. Dunning, 7 January 1924.

87 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 5, File 20, CLC Minutes, 8 January 1924.

88 Ibid., Box 4, File 18, GEB Minutes, 20 January 1924, 21 January 1924.

89 Ibid., Box 5, File 20, CLC Minutes, 22 January 1924.

the Executive had approved this decision in principle, indicating the power of male leaders to control the union's direction.<sup>90</sup> When considering the role of women, OBU men were either disingenuous, supposedly not wanting to put a strain on women, or thoughtless, it had not occurred to them to broach the subject; and it is arguable which was worse. Indeed, OBU meetings were occasionally the site of outright hostility towards women. Later in 1924, Comrade Clancy declared that "during the last war every woman, practically, wanted a hero," perhaps voicing an element of personal envy considering many male socialists' history of avoiding conscription. He also derisively added that "it was the women who could stop all wars, if they cared to do so."<sup>91</sup> Women were typically defined by familial bonds; the Women's Auxiliary was repeatedly seen as a group of their wives and daughters. Given the small numbers of working women in the union, this is not surprising. However, it is significant that following the 1919 strike wave, OBU men were mainly concerned with how to involve their female relatives rather than organising the large numbers of unorganised women.

This evidence points to the dual nature of public life in the One Big Union, in which men and women lived interconnected but essentially separate lives. While OBU men and women held social functions designed to foster the spirit of community, union minutes contain frequent complaints that men simply did not attend gatherings organised by the Women's Auxiliary. When the Auxiliary sent a letter to the CLC stating that they "did not receive the support they expected from the Council Members," John Rose noted that it took courage for the women to take a public stand, indicating the general apathy of male members towards their activities.<sup>92</sup> The failure of working men to support the Women's Auxiliary was exacerbated by the gendered separation of the union's resources, which made women virtually dependent on the male union hierarchy for money, organisers, and space in the newspaper – the material from which organisations were fashioned. The two-sided process of exclusion, the neglect of Women's Auxiliaries and the absence of working women in OBU locals, flowed directly from how working men defined the central concerns of the labour movement. This power went beyond their disregard of working-class women's experiences to encompass the ways in which OBU men fashioned their sense of self and the world around them.

When situating the OBU in relation to the consolidation of mass culture in the 1920s, it appears that certain elements of the movement stemmed from working men's insecurity about the encroachment of women into what were

---

90 Ibid., Box 4, File 19, CLC Executive Minutes, 29 January 1924; Box 5, File 20, CLC Minutes, 5 February 1924.

91 Ibid., 16 September 1924.

92 Ibid., 4 March 1924.

traditionally defined as male arenas.<sup>93</sup> Traditional lines of patriarchal authority in the family were threatened, as was the gender identity of union men, through young women's wage work, which enabled them, as was the case with Catherine Rose, to live independently outside of the family home and parental supervision. One element of this transformation was the growth of mass culture, which, as Suzanne Morton and Bryan Palmer observe, many union activists saw as a threat to their movement for economic justice.<sup>94</sup> Given the association of mass culture with the lifestyles of single working girls, OBU men's perceptions about the supposed erosion of their power in the family and working women's attraction to what they saw as a distraction from the revolutionary movement, combined to produce a rather ambivalent ensemble of attitudes about bringing working women into the organisation. When one Winnipeg labour activist proclaimed that "The Labour Temple is no longer a masculine preserve," he articulated both a judgement about the tactical need to organise women and a sense of loss steeped in the collective importance of masculine solidarity in union struggles.<sup>95</sup> Within the OBU, the marginalisation of women and the exclusion of feminist politics spoke to working men's fears about the decline of patriarchal authority, and was a necessary part of making OBU men.

Thus, it is not surprising that they reacted so strongly against a public consideration of "free love" politics. On his fact-finding tour in Winnipeg, William McAllister discovered that the Executive was worried about Tom Cassidy's "Revolutionary Moral Concept":

While in Brandon, Cassidy addressed the Labor Church on a subject in ToTo, 'Birth Control,' and advised the younger sex when the sex passion . . . caught them to go out and satisfy it, and also recommended a recipe he had for causing abortion . . . . Let me state he gave a similar address at the Forum in Winnipeg and caused a furore of disgust and discontent amongst the lady members of the OBU and those who attended the Forum.<sup>96</sup>

93 On the growth of heterosocial mass culture in Canada and its gendered dimensions, see Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 114-20; Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire*, 53-54; Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto, 1995), esp. 33, 37-49; and Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*. These works draw from path-breaking American studies: Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1988); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women in Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986); and Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana, 1987).

94 Morton, *Ideal Surroundings*, 118-19, 150; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 229-36.

95 Quoted in Bob Russell, "A Fair or a Minimum Wage? Women Workers, the State, and the Origins of Wage Regulation in Western Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 28 (1991): 78.

96 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, William McAllister to Tommy Roberts, 14 February 1924.

Ideas like these were the stuff of sex radicals, who voiced the importance of sexuality to individual identity along with a critique of middle-class sexual morality.<sup>97</sup> In this light, the Executive's refusal to publicly discuss the Cassidy-Rose affair was a rejection of sexual radicalism, a denial consistent with the traditions of Canadian socialism.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, McAllister went as far as to suggest that Cassidy's speech to the Brandon Labour Church "alon[e] . . . was of sufficient misdemeanour to warrant his being relieved."<sup>99</sup> Thus, it was not that the OBU Executive refused to challenge conservative sexual values to protect the union, but that they advocated these values, attempting to claim the familial high ground from bourgeois men who depicted socialism as an anti-family movement. They were, to use their own words, "blinded by orthodox moral concepts." The firings most likely strengthened views in the organisation that normalised heterosexuality, confined sexual activity to marriage, and forestalled the development of feminist analyses of sexuality. There was, however, no consensus on these issues; that Tom Cassidy and Catherine Rose came out of the same tradition as other OBU men and women reminds us that there was never a single socialist position on sexuality. For some, sexual radicalism was intimately connected to economic radicalism, and they thus demanded changes to union practices, while others viewed sexual politics as subordinate to the future vision offered by the One Big Union and other socialist movements.

The One Big Union continued to be haunted by Tom Cassidy after his death on 13 February 1924. After debating the issue, the General Executive Board decided not to attend the funeral. This prompted a strong response from John Rose, who labelled the act "callous, almost to brutality." He also suggested that "Cassidy [was] not . . . as black as he was painted," perhaps revealing that Catherine had had some influence on her father. This charge was unacceptable to the Executive; Comrade Clancy proclaimed that he "would not let anyone say that the Executive had not acted right in the matter," while Comrade Wooler steadfastly maintained that "the vindictiveness that had been displayed all during this trouble had been on Cassidy's part."<sup>100</sup> A week later, *Bulletin* editor, Woodward, conducted an inquisition into the charges of Comrade Schick that Woodward had hounded Cassidy, starting the rumour that he was a polyga-

97 Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (London, 1977), 186-245; John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988), 233.

98 For the work of Canadian sex radicals and the antipathetic reaction of socialists during this period, see Angus McLaren, "Sex Radicalism in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 No.4 (1992): 527-46; Newton, *Feminist Challenge*, 113-14.

99 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, William McAllister to Tommy Roberts, 14 February 1924.

100 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 5, File 20, CLC Minutes, 19 February 1924.

mist.<sup>101</sup> While Schick eventually signed a retraction after being threatened with expulsion, he questioned Woodward's patriarchal stance, telling delegates that "if my daughter cared to do anything I would not attempt to bully her from doing it. I might advise her, but whatever she done was her own God damn business." Woodward countered that "Schick's attitude was a cowardly one," while Comrade Keegan admonished Schick to "be man enough" to accept union discipline.<sup>102</sup> Eventually, the CLC passed a motion "instructing the chairman . . . to rule out of order any discussion dealing with the Cassidy case."<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, the Brandon local sent their congratulations to the leadership in Winnipeg, complimenting them on "the successful manner in which they had kept this matter from becoming a public scandal."<sup>104</sup>

The Cassidy-Rose affair drained the OBU of much-needed emotional energy. William McAllister, who so ardently threw himself into the fray as a mediator in January, left the OBU two months later after, in the derogatory words of Bob Russell, being "promoted to a Boss's job" on the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, workers who read the *Bulletin* would find nothing of these matters. Instead, they learned of Cassidy's death through a short obituary, explaining that Cassidy had ceased his role as organiser in November because of "ill health": "The system has thus claimed another victim." They were treated to a brief biography which asserted that "Comrade Cassidy had rare ability both as a speaker and an organizer, and his passing means a distinct loss to the working class movement, for there was never a time in working class history when fighters were more urgently needed and when there was a more limited supply."<sup>106</sup> Cassidy's "rare ability" was not of concern six months before, when the CLC Executive used its power to regulate the heterosexual activities of Catherine and Tom. From the first Executive meeting with Tom in September 1923 to his obituary in February 1924, OBU leaders refused to discuss the possible relationships between sexuality and socialism. Tom and Catherine thought differently, and they are not alone. Indeed, some commentators have suggested that the OBU's radicalism was sexualised from the beginning. Consider Margaret Sweatman's fictionalised account of the Winnipeg General Strike, *Fox*. Bonnie, a Winnipeg working girl and occasional prostitute, is dragged to a service at the Labour Church by her friend Aileen. Her reaction?

101 Interestingly, the rumour about Cassidy's three wives seems to have attracted much less public attention than that of his relationship with Catherine Rose.

102 PAM, MG10A14-2, R.B. Russell Papers, Box 5, File 20, CLC Minutes, 26 February 1924.

103 *Ibid.*

104 *Ibid.*, Box 4, File 18, GEB Minutes, 27 February 1924.

105 UBCSC, Mine Mill Papers, Box 161, File 8, R.B. Russell to Tommy Roberts, 25 March 1924.

106 *OBU Bulletin*, 21 February 1924.

Everybody here, every single son of a bitch here, got a place in the sun. Brotherhood. Tell me about it. I got Brothers lining up night after night and every one of them putting a dollar in the collection box, right? Brotherhood . . . . It ain't no new church, not to me it ain't. Most ways, it's worse, like they tossed some more coal on the old fire, it burns hotter, but me it still leaves cold . . . . But the funny thing about this, me and Aileen are sitting proper and the minister or whatchacallim kind of saying the world's gonna go up in smoke and some kind of new one and I wanna laugh cause every word he's saying I could whisper to some john in bed and it'd finish the job quick as a dime.<sup>107</sup>

Sweatman's connection between sexuality and the politics of radical "brotherhood" wonderfully conveys working men's desire for revolution and working women's alienation from the movement. Advocates of the One Big Union offered what became normalised beliefs about heterosexuality, both as sexual practice and family structure, to explain the union's existence, its organisational tactics, and their dream of a better future. Could OBU men have imagined a different way of organising for socialism? The short answer, given the work of socialist sex radicals like Edward Carpenter and Emma Goldman, not to mention Tom Cassidy and Catherine Rose, is yes. That they did not is testimony to the power of the union leadership to shape their movement in accordance with their patriarchal vision.

---

107 Margaret Sweatman, *Fox* (Winnipeg, 1991), 66.