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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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RESEARCH REPORTS/ NOTES DE RECHERCHE

Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada, 1820-1890

Bryan D. Palmer

RECENTLY-PUBLISHED STUDIES of labour in nineteenth-century Canada have expanded our understanding of the forms and extent of working-class protest and organization.[1] But we still lack an accessible concise depiction of the general contours of conflict and union formation. Earlier regional tabulations of strike activity, moreover, are now clearly dated and their partial findings inadequate.[2] The following data, drawn from a range of nineteenth-century sources and the findings of the scholarship of the last decade, are presented as an attempt to begin to overcome these deficiencies and fill this void in our knowledge. Accumulated for Volume II of the Historical Atlas of Canada, they are presented here with caution and considerable qualification. Unlike the twentieth century, where statistics on strikes and unions were generated through the efforts of the Department of Labour, often with the interests of capital and the state in mind, the nineteenth century provides us with no formal source to consult on the numbers of strikes, lock-

[1] See Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1860-1892* (Toronto 1980); H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860* (Toronto 1981); Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982); Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution* of Canada Labour, 1800-1983 (Toronto 1983), 1-135; Palmer, "Social Formation and Class Formation in North America, 1800-1900," in David Levine, ed., *Proletarianization and Family History* (New York 1984), 229-309; W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985), 7-58.

[2] Jean Hamelin, Paul Larocque, and Jacques Rouillard, *Répertoire des grèves dans la province de Québec au XIXe siècle* (Montréal 1971).

Bryan D. Palmer, "Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth-Century Canada, 1820-1890," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 61-83.

outs, and labour organizations in any given period.[3] It is thus extremely difficult to reproduce for the nineteenth century the kinds of studies of strike activity that have appeared for the years 1901-1914.[4] If the data allow us to establish patterns in the evolution of conflict, they do not lend themselves to efforts to compute the number of worker-days lost to strikes, nor can we ascertain with any certainty the percentage of the workforce organized or even the mere number of unionists. Here and there, to be sure, through painstaking local studies, it may be possible to accumulate sufficient data to develop this kind of grasp of specific aspects of labour's history. But across the regions, over the course of a century, such rigorous reconstruction can not yet be sustained.

By wading through decades of newspapers, scrutinizing the early labour and craft union press, looking at a variety of archival and printed sources, and taking copious notes from recent studies, however, it is possible to begin to build an awareness, for the first time, of the national contours of working-class protest and organization in the years 1820 to 1890. The following data therefore seek to reveal general trends and basic changes over time, rather than plot specifics and settle decisively and precisely the quantitative dimensions of protest and organization. Aimed at stimulating research and broad understanding, they are rough notes that hope to tease out of future work more detail and substance. They will ultimately be presented cartographically, but are offered here in the less attractive form of figures and tables.

I

BEFORE THERE WERE WORKERS with any level of consciousness of themselves as part of a collectivity — labour — there were social tensions and confrontations. Before there were unions, there were strikes. Protest, then, is the prior phenomenon, preceding the organization that would eventually be associated with it. And the most elementary collective form of protest in nineteenth-century Canada was the riot. One historian has accumulated detailed data on over 400 such riots in the years prior to 1855.[5] Some 350 crowd actions that occurred between 1820 and 1875 are considered here,

[3] See Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980).

[4] Bryan D. Palmer and Craig Heron, "Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-1914," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 423-58; Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," *Acadiensis*, 13 (1983), 3-46.

[5] Michael S. Cross, "Social Violence in Pre-Industrial Canada," unpublished paper presented at Simon Fraser University, 28 September 1983; Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Pre-Industrial Canada, 1760-1849* (Toronto 1982), 139.

among them the first instances of "collective bargaining by riot" in Canada. Defining what is and what is not a riot poses a series of difficulties. While scholastic hairs may be split infinitely over the ways in which riots are identified, I have followed contemporary practice and considered those crowd actions that were specifically named "riots" in the source consulted. Generally this referred to a gathering of a dozen or more persons engaged in "disorderly" conduct. I have not included, however, incidents of this sort that were clearly identified as something other than riots, such as charivaris' tavern brawls without riotous content (Orange vs Green), or strike-related processions.[6]

Considering riots as related to labour protest admittedly casts the analytic net rather indiscriminately. Riots were hardly unambiguous instances of working-class mobilization and protest and many grew out of the political turmoil of the pre-Confederation period (the rebellions of 1837-38, the Durham meetings of 1841, or the opposition to the Rebellion Losses Bill of 1849) or the ethnocultural cleavages of a social order in which 12 July was habitually marked by confrontation. Many of these kinds of crowd actions swept classes together rather than pitting them against one another. Nevertheless, as Kealey has shown, such expressions of social discontent were often layered with class meaning.[7] Moreover, in a series of generalized struggles turning on a wide range of socio-economic issues that saw the plebeian masses confront constituted authority in the guise of the magistrate, the militia, or the contractor, early class antagonism did surface. Where the occupations of rioters was unmistakable it was the canallers studied by Pentland, Bleasdale, and Boily, who were most likely to turn up.[8] Of 139 riots in which occupation was clearly identified, 68 were led by canallers, almost 20 per cent of the total. Many riots, admittedly, stood worker against worker, as French and Irish raftsmen competed for jobs in the Ottawa Valley Shiners' Wars of the 1830s, or feuding Munster and Connaught canallers battled one another for the meagre wages provided by work on the canal systems of Upper and Lower Canada. But others were nothing less than mass strikes of desperate communities of labourers, and a state of civil war was said to exist along

[6] Bryan D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 5-62.

[7] Gregory S. Kealey, "Orangemen and the Corporation: the Politics of Class during the Union of the Canadas," in Victor L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto 1984), 41-86.

[8] Pentland, *Labour and Capital*, esp. 113-121; Pentland, "The Lachine Strike of 1843," *Canadian Historical Review*, 29 (1948), 255-77; Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 9-39; Raymond Boily, *Les Irlandis et le canal du Lachine: La grève de 1843* (Montréal 1980).

the Welland Canal in the summer and fall of 1842.[9]

Indeed, the very calendar of riot, with July, August, and September accounting for 130, or 37 per cent, of the 350 riots examined, suggests the importance of the linked class and ethnocultural tensions that would erupt in months when workers could afford to disrupt seasonally circumscribed job sites like the canals and on traditional days of ritualized combat such as the Glorious Twelfth. The concentration of riot in some urban centres — Toronto, Quebec City, and Montreal were the sites of 141, or 40 per cent, of the 350 clashes — hints at the importance of concentrations of disaffected, propertyless, often transient people, especially in the ports that, by virtue of the presence of seamen and soldiers, were always volatile environments.[10] But, most significantly, it is the rise and fall of the riot that tells us something about the nature of both productive life and the character of class experience.

TABLE 1
Regionalism and Riots, 1820-1875

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	185	52.9
Quebec	142	40.6
Maritimes	23	6.5
Total	350	100

[9] Michael S. Cross, "The Shiners' War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review*, 59 (1973), 1-26; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 38. On the image of timber workers see Graeme Wynn, " 'Deplorably Dark and Demeoralized Lumberers'? Rhetoric and Reality in Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick," *Journal of Forest History*, 24 (1980), 168-87.

[10] Note Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto 1982); Elinor Kyte Senior, *Senior Regulars in Montreal: An Imperial Garrison, 1832-1854* (Montreal 1981); Patricia E. Malcolmson, "The Poor in Kingston, 1815-1850," in Gerald Tulchinsky, ed., *To Preserve and Defend: Essays on Kingston in the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal 1976), 281-98; Fingard, "The Winters' Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-Industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815-1860," CHA *Papers* (1974), 65-94.

TABLE 2
The Place of Riot, 1820-1875

Place	Number	Percentage
Montreal	60	17.1
Quebec	41	11.7
Toronto	40	11.4
Ottawa	21	6.0
Kingston	11	3.1
Brockville	9	2.6
Cornwall	8	2.3
Lachine	7	2.0
Fredericton	5	1.4
Total	202	57.6

TABLE 3
Occupations of Rioters

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Canallers	68	19.4
Railway, Ship, and other labourers	18	5.1
Sailors	16	4.6
Soldiers	14	4.0
Raftsmen	14	4.0
Mechanics	9	2.9
Total	139	39.7

TABLE 4
The Causes of Riot, 1820-1875

	Number	Percentage
Political	95	27.1
Ethnocultural	86	24.6
Socio-Economic Counter Authority	54	15.4
Other/Ambiguous	115	32.9

TABLE 5
The Calendar of Riot, 1820-1875

Months	*Number*	*Percentage*
January, February, March	69	19.7
April, May, June	72	20.6
July, August, September	130	37.1
October, November, December	70	20.0
Unknown	9	2.6
Total	350	100

TABLE 6
The Periodization of Riot, 1820-1875

Years	Number	Percentage
1820-1829	24	6.9
1830-1839	87	24.9
1840-1849	131	37.4
1850-1859	54	15.4
1860-1869	32	9.1
1870-1875	22	6.3

Fully 272 of the 350 riots (78 per cent) took place between 1830-1860, with the bulk of these, 218 or 62 per cent, taking place in the 1830s and 1840s. These were years that marked the movement toward an industrial capitalist order, years in which canal building took the first steps toward integration of the home market and years that witnessed the first mass recruitment of labourers. This was a period, then, in which the preconditions of the accumulation process and the beginnings of a class presence were being established. As such, this was a time in which the emerging tensions and hostilities of a class-ordered society would be appearing, but they would be filtered through experiences clouded by contradiction and confusion. The riot was a vehicle of protest that grew out of this context: purposeful yet relatively spontaneous, it struck out at a wide range of discontents without necessarily focussing them on the essential class issues that remained to be clarified in the post-1850 years. Many of the 54 riots of the 1850s were associated with the railway labourers and were more clearly rooted in class grievance than the riotous combat of the previous two decades. By the 1860s and 1870s, however,

the riot as a form of protest was waning. As capital and labour consolidated, new forms of protest followed in their wake. The strike, an unambiguously working-class action, appeared in increasing numbers at just the moment the riot was fading from the scene of conflict.

II

PRIOR TO 1850 STRIKES did occur in the Canadas, but they were relatively rare, 56 being waged between 1815 and 1849. Over the course of the 1850s, paced by an intensification of capitalist industrialization and technological change symbolized in the rise of the railway, that number soared to 76. Many of these conflicts took place in 1853-54, when an "insurrection of labour" was much reported in the press.[11] Tending to cluster in the spring months when craft workers would be well placed to win their annual demand for better wages and improved conditions, 60 of the 132 conflicts fought out prior to 1860, or 46 per cent, occurred in April, May, and June. The wage push was predominant in these early confrontations, with 88 strikes concerned primarily with the hourly remuneration of workers. Concentrated in central Canada, approximately 89 per cent of these strikes were located in what is now Ontario and Quebec, with the cities of Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, and Hamilton accounting for 54 per cent of all labour-capital conflicts. Skilled and unskilled workers participated in these strike actions almost equally, with the former leading 53 per cent of all work stoppages. Carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, and stonecutters were all active participants in strikes, but the two leading occupations were the railway and canal labourers, involved respectively in 17 and 15 per cent of all confrontations.

TABLE 7
Strikes by Years, 1815-1859

Years	Number	Percentage
1815-1829	6	4.5
1830-1835	16	12.1
1836-1840	7	5.3
1841-1845	20	15.1
1846-1850	10	7.5
1851-1855	62	47.0
1856-1859	11	8.3
Total	132	99.8

[11] Paul Campbell Appleton, " 'The Sunshine and the Shade': Labour Activism in Central Canada, 1850-1860," MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1974; J.V. Barkans, "Labour, Capital, and the State: Canadian Railroads and Emergent Social Relations of Production," MA thesis, McMaster University, 1976.

TABLE 8
The Calendar of Strikes, 1815-1859

Months	Number	*Percentage*
January, February, March	30	22.7
April, May, June	60	45.6
July, August, September	15	11.4
October, November, December	18	13.6
Unknown	9	6.8

TABLE 9
Causes of Strikes, 1815-1859

	Number	Percentage
Wages	88	66.6
Authority	19	14.4
Hours	10	7.6
Unknown	15	11.4

TABLE 10
Regionalism and Strikes, 1815-1859

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	64	48.5
Quebec	53	40.2
Maritimes	13	9.8
British Columbia	2	1.5

TABLE 11
Strikes in Major Cities, 1815-1859

Region	Number	Percentage
Toronto	22	16.7
Montreal	21	15.9
Quebec City	17	12.9
Hamilton	11	8.3
Total	71	53.8

TABLE 12
Occupation of Strikers, 1815-1859

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Railway labourers	22	16.6
Canal labourers	20	15.1
Carpenters	10	7.6
Tailors	10	7.6
Shoemakers	8	6.1
Stonecutters	8	6.1
Seamen/sailors	6	4.5
Bakers	5	3.8
Miners	5	3.8
Printers	5	3.8
Miscellaneous Skilled	17	12.9
Miscellaneous Unskilled	16	12.1
Total Unskilled	70	53.0
Total Skilled	62	47.0

Capital's increasing transformation of economic life continued apace throughout the 1860s and 1870s, the consolidation of the home market through political unification in 1867 and the increasing presence of the railway mirrored in the rise of the factory system in central Canada.[12] In the realm of strikes, a holding pattern characterized the 1860s, with workers balancing their euphoria for Confederation with modest levels of hostility toward their employers, 72 known confrontations disrupting the relations of labour and capital. But with patriotism wearing thin at the edges by the early 1870s, the nine-hour agitation of 1872 signalled the arrival of discontent in many workplaces, and the strike count spiralled to 204 over the course of the decade.[13] As industrial capital secured a more stable presence, such strikes were less likely to be seasonally concentrated and the April, May, and June months, while still the leading quarter, were now accounting for a diminished 41 per cent of all conflict. Moreover, the causes of the strike, still fueled by wage demands, were more varied: 48 per cent turned on the wage, but 33 per cent, some 93 conflicts, were now concerned with shorter hours or attempts to secure a greater degree of control over the working en-

[12] Note Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, 3-34; John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto 1980).

[13] On the nine-hour struggle see John Battye, "The Nine Hour Pioneers: The Genesis of the Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 25-56. More generally, note Frank W. Watt, "The National Policy, the Workingman, and Proletarian ideas in Victorian Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 40 (1959), 1-26.

virnoment.[14] Ontario and Quebec continued to lead the way, the former more decisively than ever, with some 49 per cent of all strikes taking place within its borders. But at least 52 conflicts were fought out in Atlantic Canada, approximately 19 per cent of the total. Strikes were becoming more and more urban actions, with 74 per cent of all clashes with the employer happening in eight cities; Montreal and Toronto were the sites of almost 37 per cent of all confrontations. If conflict was increasingly associated with urban places, it was also coming to be the prerogative of the skilled worker: between 1860 and 1879 craftsmen were three times as likely to initiate protest as labourers. The unskilled and the unorganized of various sorts, so prominent in the canal and rail strikes and riots of earlier years, were displaced by moulders, stonecutters, miners, and shoemakers. These four occupations waged 95 work stoppages during the 1860s and 1870s, or 34 per cent of all strikes.

TABLE 13
Strikes by Year, 1860-1879

	Year	Number	Percentage
	1860	0	0
	1861	5	1.8
	1862	2	0.7
	1863	2	0.7
	1864	12	4.3
	1865	2	0.7
	1866	7	2.6
	1867	11	4.0
	1868	8	2.9
	1869	23	8.3
	1870	17	6.2
	1871	17	6.2
	1872	47	17.0
	1873	16	5.8
	1874	28	10.1
	1875	25	9.1
	1876	7	2.6
	1877	16	5.8
	1878	11	4.0
	1879	20	7.2
Total	1860s	72	26.1
	1870s	204	73.9
Total		276	100

[14] Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, 71-96; Gregory S. Kealey, "The 'Honest Workingman' and Workers' Control: The Experience of Toronto's Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 32-68.

TABLE 14
The Calendar of Strikes, 1860-1879

Months	Number	Percentage
January, February, March	39	14.1
April, May, June	112	40.6
July, August, September	40	14.5
October, November, December	46	16.7
Unknown	39	14.1

TABLE 15
Causes of Strikes, 1860-1879

	Number	Percentage
Wages	131	47.5
Hours	36	13.0
Authority	57	20.7
Miscellaneous/Unknown	60	21.7
Total	284*	102.9*

*Totals exceed 276 and 100 because of double-counting in a few cases.

TABLE 16
Regionalism and Strikes, 1860-1879

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	134	48.6
Quebec	84	30.4
Maritimes	52	18.8
British Columbia	5	1.8
Prairie West	1	0.4

TABLE 17
Strikes by Major Cities, 1860-1879

Place	Number	Percentage
Montreal	55	19.9
Toronto	47	17.0
Hamilton	24	8.7
Ottawa	22	8.0
Saint John	20	7.2
Quebec	16	5.8
Halifax	12	4.3
London	9	3.3
Total	205	74.2

TABLE 18
Occupations of Strikers, 1860-1879

a) Skilled Occupation	Number	Percentage
Moulders	27	9.8
Stonecutters	26	9.4
Miners	22	8.0
Shoemakers	20	7.2
Cigarmakers	13	4.7
Printers	12	4.3
Bricklayers	11	4.0
Carpenters	11	4.0
Shipwrights, caulkers, riggers	9	3.3
Bakers	8	2.9
Coopers	6	2.2
Painters, plasterers	5	1.8
Sailors	5	1.8
Glassworkers	4	1.4
Miscellaneous	25	9.0
Total	204	73.8
b) Unskilled Occupations		
Labourers	17	6.2
Rail/canal labourers	13	4.7
Factory operatives	11	4.0
Ship labourers	13	4.7
Mill operatives	6	2.2
Miscellaneous	12	4.3
Total	72	26.1

If the 1860 to 1879 years had seen the numbers of strikes more than double the totals of the entire 1815 to 1859 period, the unprecedented economic growth of the 1880s pushed workers to a virtual revolt.[15] During the 1880s some 425 known strikes occurred, 1883 and 1886 being the highwater marks of confrontation. The pattern of less seasonal conflict continued, with the spring months now providing only 31 per cent of all strikes. Ontario increased its dominance as the centre of conflict, with almost 60 per cent of strike action, but labour-capital confrontation was spreading to the west, where 28 strikes took place. Skilled workers, especially moulders (38 strikes or 9 per cent of all conflicts), remained pivotal, but new organizational forms allowed the unskilled more of a place in the class struggle: while craft workers led 61 per cent of all of the decade's strikes, unskilled labourers and operatives were involved in 39 per cent of the battles of the 1880s. Ten cities accounted for 73 per cent of these struggles, with Toronto now replacing Montreal as the capital of conflict: 122 of the 425 strikes of the 1880s, or 29 per cent, took place in the Queen City.

TABLE 19
Strikes in the 1880s

Year	Number	Percentage
1880	34	8.0
1881	38	8.9
1882	36	8.5
1883	63	14.8
1884	22	5.2
1885	16	3.8
1886	63	14.8
1887	44	10.4
1888	41	9.6
1889	30	7.1
1890	31	7.3
Unknown	7	1.6
Total	425	100

[15] See Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *'Dreaming of What Might Be': The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (New York 1982), 27-56.

TABLE 20
The Calendar of Strikes, 1880-1890

Months	Number	Percentage
January, February, March	61	14.3
April, May, June	130	30.6
July, August, September	78	18.4
October, November, December	28	6.6
Unknown	128	30.1

TABLE 21
Regionalism and Strikes, 1880-1890

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	253	59.5
Quebec	96	22.5
Maritimes	48	11.3
British Columbia	21	5.0
Prairie West	7	1.6

TABLE 22
Strikes and Major Cities, 1880-1890

Place	Number	Percentage
Toronto	122	28.7
Montreal	76	17.9
Hamilton	41	9.6
Halifax	15	3.5
London	13	3.1
Brockville	11	2.6
Saint John	10	2.4
Kingston	9	2.1
Quebec	8	1.8
Vancouver	7	1.6
Total	312	73.3

TABLE 23
Occupations of Strikers, 1880-1890

a) Leading Skilled	Number	Percentage
Moulders	38	8.9
Printers	23	5.4
Shoemakers	20	4.7
Miners	15	3.5
Bricklayers	14	3.3
Carpenters	12	2.8
Stonecutters	11	2.6
Cigarmakers	11	2.6
Bakers	10	2.4
b) Remaining Skilled by Sector		
Building Trades	34	8.0
Metal Trades	19	4.5
Clothing Trades	13	3.1
Railway Trades	7	1.6
Miscellaneous Crafts	31	7.3
Total Skilled	258	60.7
c) Unskilled and New Sectors		
Labourers	37	8.7
Ship Labourers	25	5.9
Mill Operatives	23	5.4
Railway-canal labourers	19	4.5
Carters/transport labourers	17	4.0
Miscellaneous unskilled	8	1.9
Telegraph Operatives	30	7.0
Clerks	3	0.7
Unknown	5	1.1
Total	167	39.3

The strike's rise and the riot's fall, as well as the quantitative explosion of overt labour-capital conflict, were of course related directly to the increasing clarity and impersonality of class relations, the tensions associated with accumulation and exploitation. The number of strikes in the 1870s and 1880s —701— had increased 12.5 times over the numbers waged in the longer period from 1815-1849, and in these two decades 3.5 times more conflicts occurred than had taken place in the previous seventy years. Such escalating confrontation was not unrelated to worker organization and the growth of unionism.

III

PRIOR TO 1850 UNIONISM in Canada was a local affair, legally precarious and for the most part formally unconnected to wider constituencies: 47 local worker societies were known to exist during the first half of the nineteenth century, almost all serving the interests of craft workers and concentrated in specific centres of organization, such as the port city of Saint John, New Brunswick.[16] Between 1850 and 1879 local unionism continued to be an important form of organization, especially in the Maritimes, where fully 41 per cent of all such bodies had been located earlier. Overwhelmingly a skilled phenomenon, local unionism was also understandably strongest in the leading cities, with Saint John, Montreal, Toronto, and Quebec City harbouring two of every three local unions in the country. International unionism began to offer an alternative to the limitations of local organization in the years 1850 to 1879, as organizers from either Great Britain or the United States chartered locals of specific craft unions associated with international bodies. Twenty-six lodges of the Knights of St. Crispin were founded from Saint John to Petrolia in the late 1860s and early 1870s, while railway crafts and engineer-machinists established a further 22 locals before 1880. Moulders, printers, cigarmakers, and woodworkers were also active, and on the eve of the depression of 1873 to 1879 craft unionists could be found in some 81 internationally-connected bodies. Most of these, 76 per cent, were concentrated in Ontario. But they were not overwhelmingly a big city phenomenon. Toronto had six such international locals, but so did the much smaller London, and industrial centres like Hamilton and St. Catharines each boasted five international unions, which was as many as could be found in the far larger centre of Montreal. Before 1880, counting local unions and these internationally-connected organizations, 165 labour bodies had been formed in Canada.[17]

TABLE 24
Local Unions By Date of Origin, 1798-1859

Date of Origin	Number	Percentage
1798-1829	7	9.9
1830-1839	16	22.5
1840-1849	23	32.4
1850-1859	25	35.2
Total	71	100

[16] See the excellent early study, Richard Rice, "A History of Organized Labour in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1813-1890," MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968.
[17] The starting point is Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada*.

TABLE 25
Local Unions By Occupation, 1798-1859

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Carpenters/Shipwrights	14	19.7
Shoemakers	7	9.9
Metalworkers	7	9.9
Printers	6	8.5
Tailors	6	8.5
Painters	4	5.6
Bakers	3	4.2
Stonecutters	3	4.2
Ship Labourers	2	2.8
Miscellaneous Mechanics	13	18.3
Miscellaneous Unskilled	6	8.5

TABLE 26
Regionalism and Local Unionism, 1798-1859

Region	Number	Percentage
Maritimes	29	40.8
Ontario	23	32.4
Quebec	18	25.4
British Columbia	1	1.4

TABLE 27
Local Unionism and Leading Cities, 1798-1859

Place	Number	Percentage
Saint John	19	26.8
Montreal	12	16.9
Toronto	11	15.5
Quebec	6	8.5
Total	48	67.7

TABLE 28
International Unionism and Regionalism, 1850-1879

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	71	75.5
Quebec	16	17.0
Maritimes	7	7.5
Total	94	100

TABLE 29
International Unions by Locale, 1850-1879

Place	Number
Toronto	6
London	6
Montreal	5
Hamilton	5
St. Catharines	5
Brantford	3
Kingston	3
Quebec	3
Saint John	2
Halifax	2
Oshawa	2
12 places	1

TABLE 30
International Unions by Occupational Section, 1850-1879

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Shoemakers	26	27.7
Moulders	18	19.1
Railway Crafts	14	14.9
Woodworkers	12	12.8
Printers	11	11.7
Engineers-machinists	8	8.5
Cigarmakers	5	5.3
Total	94	100

Small wonder that the 1880s would come to be know as "the Great Upheaval." For during that decade, in the midst of the post-National Policy economic boom and the resulting prominence of the "labour question," those 165 unions (not all of which would have been functional in 1879) increased 4.6 times.[18] At least 759 labour bodies were organized or existed over the course of and within the decade, among them 393 local assemblies of the Knights of Labor, 220 local unions, 111 internationally-connected organizations, and 35 lodges of the Nova Scotia-based Provincial Workmen's Association.[19] The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor was by far the most significant and innovative development, presenting a powerful magnet drawing skilled and unskilled, men and women, Catholic and Protestant, French and English to its ranks. It was strongest in Ontario, where 64 per cent of all assemblies were located, but Montreal had more LAs than any other locale (65).[20] All told, the Order accounted for 52 per cent of all labour organization during "the Great Upheaval."

TABLE 31
Regionalism and Local Unions in the 1880s

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	104	47.3
Quebec	49	22.3
Maritimes	39	17.7
British Columbia	18	8.2
Prairie West	10	4.5
Total	220	100

[18] See Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming*; Greg Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Toronto 1973); Fernand Harvey, *Revolution industrielle et travailleurs* (Montreal 1978).

[19] Note Ian McKay, "The Provincial Workmen's Association," in Cherwinski and Kealey, eds., *Lectures*, 127-34; and McKay's more substantial revisionist discussion of the PWA, "By Wisdom, Wile or War: The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in Nova Scotia, 1879-1897," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (1986), 13-62.

[20] Jacques Martin, "Les Chevaliers du Travail et le syndicalisme international à Montreal," MA thesis, Université de Montréal, 1965.

TABLE 32
Regionalism and International Unions in the 1880s

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	75	67.6
British Columbia	16	14.4
Quebec	8	7.2
Prairie West	6	5.4
Maritimes	6	5.4
Total	111	100

TABLE 33
Regionalism and Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	253	64.4
Quebec	104	26.5
Maritimes	15	3.8
British Columbia	14	3.6
Prairie West	7	1.7
Total	393	100

TABLE 34
Regionalism and All Organizations in the 1880s

Region	Number	Percentage
Ontario	432	56.9
Quebec	161	21.2
Maritimes	95	12.5
British Columbia	48	6.3
Prairie West	23	3.0
Total	759	99.9

TABLE 35
Labour Organization by Type in the 1880s

Organization	Number	Percentage
Knights of Labor	393	51.8
Local Unions	220	29.0
International Unions	111	14.6
Provincial Workmen's Association	35	4.6

TABLE 36
Labor Organization in Leading Locales
a) Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor, 1875-1902

Place	Number	Percentage of all LAs
Montreal	65	16.5
Toronto	58	14.8
Hamilton	30	7.6
Quebec and environs	23	5.9
Ottawa-Hull	18	4.6
St. Catharines	9	2.3
St. Thomas	8	2.0
London	7	1.8
Kingston	7	1.8
Winnipeg	6	1.5
Vancouver	6	1.5
Cape Breton	5	1.3
Guelph	5	1.3
Stratford	5	1.3
Berlin	5	1.3
Brantford	5	1.3
Total	262	66.8

b) Lodges of the Provincial Workmen's Association, 1879-1898

Place	Number	Percentage of all Lodges
Cape Breton	20	57.1
Springfield	4	11.4
Westville	4	11.4
New Glasgow	2	5.7
Total	30	85.6

c) Local Unions in the 1880s

Place	Number	Percentage of all Local Unions
Toronto	40	18.2
Montreal	30	13.6
Hamilton	23	10.5
Quebec	18	8.2
Saint John	17	7.7
Halifax	16	7.3
Winnipeg	9	4.1
London	9	4.1
Ottawa	9	4.1
Nanaimo/Wellington	7	3.2
Total	178	81.0

d) International Unions in the 1880s

Place	Number	Percentage of all International Unions
Toronto	16	14.4
Hamilton	15	13.5
Vancouver	8	7.2
London	7	6.3
Montreal	6	5.4
Winnipeg	5	4.5
Ottawa	5	4.5
Victoria	5	4.5
Total	67	60.3

The 1880s was perhaps local unionism's last stand, and over 220 such bodies existed throughout the decade. Ontario again led the way (104 organizations or 47 per cent of all local bodies), but local unions were present in all of the country's regions and were especially significant in Quebec and the Maritimes where some 88 unions comprised 40 per cent of the nation's local organizations. International unions were numerically weaker than local forms of organization, with barely half the number of organizations, 111. But they were to be the more lasting force, and their overwhelming concentration in Ontario (with 75 unions representing 68 per cent of all international organization) suggested the industrial dominance of the province. Combining all forms of organization, Ontario was home to 432, or 57 per cent, of all unions, Quebec supported 161 labour bodies (21 per cent), while

the Maritimes with 95 organizations, British Columbia with 48, and the Prairie West with 23, combined to nourish 22 per cent of the total number of unions in the country.

What all of this tells us is how significant a decade the 1880s was in the making of the Canadian working class. In a brief ten years the number of strikes across the country almost doubled and the number of unions increased almost five times. When Daniel J. O'Donoghue, the first worker elected to the Ontario legislature in 1874, and a leading figure in both the International Typographical Union and the Knights of Labor, travelled to Montreal in 1875 to speak to an assembly of workers, he noted that they "came shrinking along in the shadows of the walls so much did they fear lest their employers know where they had been." Eleven years later, in 1886, at the height of "the Great Upheaval," he returned to Montreal and exclaimed: "There is no such fear today."[21] Behind the confidence of his assertion, undoubtedly overly optimistic, lay the self-activity of the Canadian working class reflected in the above figures on the expansion of labour protest and organization between 1820 and 1890, culminating in the unprecedented activism of the 1880s. However much future research corrects and adds to the above data, especially for the regions of Atlantic Canada, the West, and Quebec, that essential transformation will likely remain an analytic starting point for historians of nineteenth-century workers.

[21] Quoted in Palmer, "Labour in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Cherwinski and Kealey, eds., *Lectures*, 51.