Labour/Le Travailleur

Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950
I Analysis

Dogulas Cruikshank et Gregory S. Kealey

Volume 20, 1987

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt20rr02

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce document

Cruikshank, D. & Kealey, G. S. (1987). Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950: I Analysis. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *20*, 85–122.

Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950

I. Analysis

Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey

The birth, life and death of a strike could be said to be a classic piece of urban theatre, but it would be a bare stage without the actors. The strikers' actions and cries bring the stage alive; sometimes they even obscure the mechanism and architecture that their great numbers reveal to our dazzled eyes. The strikers do not move at random, however; their playing obeys rules whose code it is up to us to recover.

Michelle Perrot[1]

IN THE YEARS 1891-1950, some 2,600,000 Canadian workers engaged in almost 9,700 strikes which absorbed a total of over 42,000,000 person days. Not surprisingly, these strikes did not occur in any simple pattern of linear growth. Instead, like strikes elsewhere, they came in bursts or waves that initially drew on workers' sense of opportunities to be seized and subsequently fed on initial successes. Disaggregated by decade, the war decades 1911-1920 and 1941-1950 emerge as the most active with 4,886 of the strikes (50 per cent), 1,654,000 of the strikers (64 per cent), and almost 25,000,000 person days of duration (59 per cent). (See Table 1 and Figure A.)[2]

Indeed, if we move beyond the decadal data, we can discern a series of strike waves, similar to those described by Shorter and Tilly, Cronin, and Edwards in their respective studies of France, Britain, and the United States.[3] After some introductory discussion of the general shape of the findings, this paper will look more intensively at the strike waves of this sixty-year period. The paper will close with some brief and preliminary reflections on international comparisons of strike activity in this period.

This three-part report presents the results of a major research project un-

[1] Michelle Perrot, *Workers on Strike: France 1871-1890* (New Haven 1987), 12. For the full, original, magisterial work see her *Les Ouvriers en Grève. France, 1871-1890* (Paris 1974), 2 vols.

[2] Tables and Figures with alphabetic designations appear in Part III of this report. Those with numeric designations are placed in the text.

[3] To cite only their major strike monographs: Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge 1974); James Cronin, *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain* (London 1979); and P.K. Edwards, *Strikes in the United States, 1881-1974* (Oxford 1981). Indeed this entire project is indebted to their stimulating and innovative reconstructions of their respective national strike stories, especially to their methods and techniques.

Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 85-145.

Table 1

National Strike Estimates by Decade, 1891-1950

	Number of Strikes	Number of Workers Involved (000)[1]	Duration in Person Days (000)
1891-1900	511	78	1742
1901-1910	1548	230	5492
1911-1920	2349	521	10821
1921-1930	989	261	6626
1931-1940	1760	376	3444
1941-1950	2537	1133	14142
Total	9694	2599	42267

[1]Workers involved in strikes extending beyond 31 December are counted twice in these totals.

dertaken in the early 1980s. The project aimed to establish a new statistical time series for strikes in Canada. The final results of this work will appear in 1990 in volume three of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* which will contain a series of four plates on Canadian labour in the years 1891-1961. In this report we shall focus on the data concerning the years 1891-1950. An essay on method and sources is published here as Part II of this report and the data set is presented fully in Part III. In addition, we want to state at the outset that the more we work on this data, the more fully we agree with David Montgomery's assertion that "any attempt to formulate a positivistic 'natural history of strikes' is doomed to failure. Strikes can only be understood in the context of the changing totality of class conflicts, of which they are a part."[4]

I

A BRIEF REVIEW of Bryan Palmer's research report on nineteenth-century strikes suggests that in the years prior to our study, Canadian workers also struck in cyclical waves. The early 1850s and 1870s and the mid 1880s represent years of intense strike activity well beyond the levels of the surrounding years. Thus, Palmer's work appears to lend considerable support to Tilly/Shorter's and Cronin's arguments concerning the nature of indus-

[4] David Montgomery, "Strikes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 81-104.

trial conflict, which emphasize bursts of activity.[5] If we continue simply to look at the absolute frequency of strikes in Canada, we can discern an overall pattern in the first half of the twentieth century as well. Strikes grew in absolute numbers in the 1890s, 1900s, and especially the 1910s but fell in the 1920s well below the level established in the 1900s. The number climbed above that level again in the 1930s and reached a peak in the 1940s higher even than the World War I decade. (See Figure A)

This decadal data, of course, disguises the peaks and troughs within the decades which can be more clearly seen on Figure B.

Here the important national strike waves, as defined by Charles Tilly,[6] of 1899-1903, 1912-1913, 1917-1920, 1934, 1937, and 1941-1943 stand out. Especially arresting is the pronounced importance of the war-time strike waves, 1917-1920 and 1941-1943. We shall return to these waves later.

Another way to consider the frequency of strikes is to control for the size of the labour force and measure strikes per 1,000,000 non-agricultural employees. (For details on methodology see Part II.) When this statistic is calculated the strike-prone first two decades of the twentieth century lead the way with the 1930s and 1940s following. (See Table 2)

Table 2

National Strike Dimensions, 1891-1950

	Frequency (Strikes/lm. non-agricultural employees)	Size (Workers involved/strike)	Duration (Working days/strike)
1891-1900	55	218	25
1901-1910	115	180	23
1911-1920	123	286	20
1921-1930	43	270	30
1931-1940	61	218	11
1941-1950	70	452	9

[5] Cronin, *Industrial Conflict*, esp. ch. 3-5, but *passim*; Shorter and Tilly, *Strikes in France*, ch. 5. Moreover, the general timing of the waves from 1870-1920 run parallel to those discussed in Friedhelm Boll, "International Strike Waves: a Critical Assessment," in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Hans-Gerhard Husung, eds., *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great Britain and Germany, 1880-1914* (London 1985), 78-99.

[6] For Tilly a strike wave occurs "when both the number of strikes and the number of strikers in a given year exceed the means of the previous five years by more than 50 per cent." Tilly and Shorter, *Strikes in France*, 106-7.

In addition to frequency, of course, there are other important measures of strike activity. The number of strikers and the duration of strikes are the two other most-cited strike variables. On a national level, strikes declined in size in the 1900s, increased in the 1910s, fell slightly in the 1920s and more rapidly in the 1930s, and then exploded in the 1940s. Meanwhile, duration fell constantly with the exception of the 1920s when it increased to its highest point in the decades under study. The decline in duration in the 1930s and 1940s was especially sharp.

In this paper we must assume the general contours of the national economic picture as we currently understand them. Let me describe them briefly, however, so there is no confusion.[7] Canada burst out of the 1890s depression into a period of rapid and sustained economic growth before World War I. Massive immigration, western settlement, the construction of two new transcontinental railroad systems, metal mining booms in the west and in Northern Ontario, all figured in this major surge. In addition, immense imports of American capital in the form of branch plants brought to Canada all the advances in United States corporate strategies. A Canadian "second" industrial revolution took place simultaneous with the American and transformed Canadian workplaces in all the same ways. Scientific managers, multi-plant organization, assembly line production, all arrived in the two decades before World War I. The war experience simply intensified these changes. After an initial post-war depression the national economy recovered in the 1920s and received another major infusion of American capital in the late 1920s. As in the earlier wave, this set off a merger movement of significant proportions. In general, Canadian economic development closely parallelled the American in this period and the better-known generalizations of Brody, Montgomery, and Gordon, Reich and Edwards on the interaction of economic change and the working-class movement are broadly applicable.[8] The 1930s, of course, were a decade of depression, ended only by the outbreak of World War II. As in World War I the working class mobilized strongly and made major strides in the later war years which they fought to maintain in the war's aftermath.

In Canadian historical writing since the 1960s region has received con-

[7] What follows draws on G.S. Kealey, "The Structure of Canadian Working-Class History" in W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985) and Craig Heron and Robert Storey, "On the Job in Canada," in their *On the Job* (Montreal 1986).

[8] David Montgomery, *Workers Control in America* (New York 1979); David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America* (New York 1980); and David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The historical transformation of labor in the United States* (New York 1982). Finally for skeptics who like their economic history undiluted, see M.C. Urquhart, "New Estimates of Gross National Product, Canada, 1870-1926: Some Implications for Canadian Development," Queen's University Institute for Economic Research, Discussion Paper, No. 586.

siderable attention. This regional influence has also been evident in the historiography of the working class. Heavily influenced by the work of Herbert Gutman, much recent work in the field has consisted of community studies either of towns or cities or of coal-mining districts.[9] Even specific studies of strike activity have tended to be regional in focus such as McKay's work on the Maritimes from 1901-1914, Heron and Palmer's on Southern Ontario in the same period, and Jacques Rouillard and James Thwaite's studies of Quebec.[10] On occasion this regional interpretation had almost degenerated into cheerleading for the militancy of a regions' workers, often at the expense of some other regions' putative lack of radicalism. This problem is most evident in David Bercuson's attempt to retain a "western exceptionalist" argument in the face of compelling contrary evidence.[11] Indeed, to a large degree, the assertiveness of the western historian's claims has led to a distorted debate.[12]

Our data has been disaggregated by province which allows a consideration of Canadian strike activity in terms of regional variation. (See Tables 3, D, and E.)

[9] Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario* (Montreal 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism* (Toronto 1980); David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miner's, 1917-1926," Ph.D., Dalhousie, 1979; Nolan Reilly, "Emergence of Class Consciousness in Industrial Nova Scotia: Amherst, 1891-1925," Ph.D., Dalhousie, 1983; Allen Seager, "The Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Coal Miners, 1905-1945," Ph.D., York, 1982; Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930," Ph.D., Dalhousie, 1981; Wayne Roberts, "Studies in the Toronto Labour Movement," Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1978; Robert Storey, "Workers, Unions, and Steel: The Shaping of the Hamilton Working Class, 1935-1948," Ph.D., Toronto, 1982.

[10] Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," *Acadiensis*, 13 (1983); Craig Heron and Bryan Palmer, "Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-1914," *Canadian Historical Review*, 57 (1977), 423-58; Jacques Rouillard, "Le militantisme des travailleurs au Québec et en Ontario niveau de syndicalisation et mouvement des grèves (1900-1980)," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 37 (1983), 201-25; and James Thwaites, "La grève au Québec: Une analyse quantitative exploratoire portant sur la période 1896-1915," *Labour/Le Travail*, 14 (1984), 183-204.

[11] David Jay Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 154-75.

[12] In addition to the above, see also his *Confrontation at Winnipeg* (Montreal 1974) and *Fools and Wise Men* (Toronto 1978). Other similar claims are made in Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries* (Toronto 1977) and, more carefully, in H.C. Pentland, "The Western Canadian Labour Movement, 1847-1919," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3 (1979), 53-78.

Table 3

Canadian Strikes by Region, 1891-1950

	Percentage of Total Strikes[A]									
	B.C. & Alberta		Sask. & Manitoba		Ontario		Quebec		Maritimes	
	%strikes	%workers involved	%strikes	%workers involved	%strikes	%workers involved	%strikes	%workers involved	%strikes	%workers involved
1891-1900	15	28	5	2	49	21	19	30	10	10
1901-1910	14	19	7	5	43	24	19	26	17	18
1911-1920	26	32	8	9	39	24	16	20	10	14
1921-1930	24	21	6	1	35	15	19	20	15	39
1931-1940	17	13	8	2	41	28	14	22	19	32
1941-1950	16	18	4	1	36	32	23	24	20	25

[A] Totals do not equal 100 because Yukon, Northwest Territories, Newfoundland, and interprovincial (except coal mining) strikes have been omitted.

Table 3 shows the results of this regional tabulation. As can be seen, there has been significant variation over time, although central Canada has never fallen below 54 per cent of the total strikes. The western strike scene has been dominated by Alberta and British Columbia and peaked in the 1910s and 1920s, whereas in eastern Canada, equally dominated by Nova Scotia, the peaks came in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Quebec, too, enjoyed later prominence, while Ontario's highest figures occurred before World War I and during the Great Depression.

One rough method of measuring leadership in provincial strike activity, which incorporates the three measures (frequency, size, and duration), is simply to rank each province by decade on all three measures. When this is done using the data presented in Table G, we achieve an ordering which shows Alberta, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia leading in strike frequency; Nova Scotia, Quebec, and British Columbia ahead in strike size; and British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario at the top in the length of strikes. Running the three measures together for an even rougher proxy for strike leadership, we find British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec in the lead.[13]

A more intensive look at the 1891-1950 data allows further comment on provincial variation. (See Figure D and Tables D and E.) Prince Edward Island, primarily an agricultural province, trailed national statistics on almost all measures for each decade. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, however, calling into further question their putative image of conservatism, often exceeded the national levels. Nova Scotia, for example, exceeded national figures for strike frequency in the 1900s and 1920s and for size in all six decades, leading the nation in five of the six. In each case, coal and steel help to explain the higher numbers. New Brunswick exceeded national frequency in the 1900s and 1910s, and again in the 1940s, largely owing to the militancy of Saint John workers, but, lacking Nova Scotia's industrial concentration, was consistently beneath national size figures except in the 1930s. In duration, Nova Scotia saw longer than national average strikes in the 1900s,

[13] These rank orderings were calculated simply by assigning a ranking of one to nine to each province on each of the three measures for each decade and then summing the scores for each measure and for the three measures together. The 1890s were excluded owing to the lack of comparability in the data. The resultant rankings:

	Total	Frequency	Size	Duration
BC	39	16	15	8
NS	48	15	5	28
Alta	55	8	22	25
Ont	66	22	26	18
Que	74	36	15	23
NB	76	19	29	28
Man	76	30	29	17
Sask	110	41	40	29
PEI	126	38	44	44

largely owing to the tri-partite Great Strike of 1909-1911 in the coal fields of Springhill, Inverness, and Glace Bay. In general, the old accepted wisdom of Atlantic provinces' labour quiescence is badly damaged by this data. Moreover, it is not simply a phenomenon of the pre-World War I period as studied by McKay or the 1920s insurrection in Cape Breton. Indeed Nova Scotia's national prominence reached its peak in the 1930s and 1940s when the province was the scene not only for the most frequent strikes in the nation but also the largest. Meanwhile New Brunswick saw the nations' third largest strikes in the Depression and third most frequent in the 1940s, both above the national average.

In Central Canada, Quebec was consistently beneath the national figures for frequency but consistently above them for size, partially owing to large strikes in textiles and boot and shoe in the early years especially. In duration it was lower in all decades except the 1920s when it led the nation. Ontario simply reversed that pattern. Often higher in frequency, owing to the preponderance of small manufacturing and building trades strikes, it trailed the national figures for size in each decade. While Ontario strikes exceeded the national duration figures in the 1890s, thereafter they were almost identical to the national average.

In the west, largely agricultural Saskatchewan behaved like Prince Edward Island in the east, falling below national figures on all measures except duration in the 1930s and 1940s. Manitoba on the other hand, had more frequent strikes in the 1890s, 1900s, and 1930s. Only in the World War I decade were Manitoba strikes larger than the national average, primarily because of the general strikes of 1918 and 1919, while throughout the first 40 years they were always shorter, although this reversed itself in the 1930s and 1940s. Alberta and British Columbia, on the other hand, exceeded national figures for frequency for all decades (except for B.C. in the 1940s), and with the exception of B.C. in the 1920s and Alberta in the 1940s did the same for duration. In size Alberta strikes in the 1910s and 1920s exceeded national figures as did B.C. strikes in all but the 1920s and 1930s. (See Table G)

Extremely important in contributing to the provincial and regional patterns of Canadian strike activity has been the geographic distribution in the country of manufacturing and of resource extraction. The shifting regional balance of strike activity was related not only to the opening of the west but also to the nation's resource/industrial mix. The literature on strike propensity is by now huge and cannot be reviewed here. The Canadian data contain few surprises. Data problems limit these discussions to the years after 1911. (See Table F and Figure D.) The massive importance of mining in terms of frequency and size, far exceeding national figures in every decade, makes clear why it dominates the industrial side of Figure D and in the process also helps to explain the graphic dominance of British Columbia, Alberta, and Nova Scotia on the provincial side. In frequency, construction with many small local building trades strikes held second place in the 1910s and 1920s

with manufacturing replacing it in second in the 1930s and 1940s, with the rise of industrial unionism, and exceeding the national average throughout. Meanwhile transportation and service trailed behind throughout the period with transportation exceeding the national level only once in the 1910s. In size, however, transportation, owing to a number of massive railroad strikes, switched places with construction and surpassed manufacturing as well in the 1910s and 1940s. The service and public administration sectors with few organized workers, were last on both measures and never exceeded the national figures. In duration manufacturing struggles led with the longest average strikes followed by mining and construction in the 1910s, by transportation in the 1920s, and by service in the 1930s and 1940s.

The discussion of strike issues is fraught with ambiguity. Needless to say, wages almost always figure prominently, both in times of union strength and weakness. What changes, of course, is whether the strike aims to increase workers' earnings or to prevent employers' incursions against the wage packet. Thus one anticipates struggles for higher wages in period of boom accompanied by tight labour markets and battles to maintain wage levels in period of economic decline and high unemployment. Table 4 demonstrates this hypothesis rather well with 15 years in which strikes for wage increases exceeded 40 per cent. Of these 15, fully 10 were associated with the strike waves that we identified earlier. In the 11 years in which strikes against wage cuts surpassed 20 per cent, all were in periods of economic distress. The multiplicity of issues involved in almost every strike makes generalizations about other elements in each dispute hard to sustain, but Table 4 minimally demonstrates the pervasiveness of work-related struggles and battles concerning union rights.

Similarly, methods of dispute settlement throw only limited light at this gross aggregate level, especially given the high number for which the method was unknown. Yet in the years of the strike waves we can detect increases in settlements by negotiation and third-party intervention combined and, more obviously, decreases in resolutions involving the return or replacement of the striking workers. In contrast, years of economic trauma for workers led to disastrous strike records. (See Table 5.)

A perusal of strike results in Table 6 shows some interesting patterns. Until the early 1920s generally 20 to 30 per cent of strike results were either indefinite or undetermined. In that period, the strike wave years of 1902-1903, 1912, and 1917-1919 were the only years in which strikers won more strikes than employers in the box scores (with the sole exception of 1916). Similarly, if we add workers' victories and compromises together, it is only in the strike wave years of 1900-1902, 1912, and 1917-1919 that workers exceeded a success rate of 50 per cent (again with the exception of 1916). On the employers' side the depression years of 1893-1894, 1896, 1908, and 1921-1924 all saw bosses' victories rocket above 40 per cent. In the period from the

Table 4

Strike Issues, 1891-1950[1]

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
Earnings										
For change	26	25	24	17	27	18	36	30	42	40
Against change	3	20	22	40	18	21	15	8	9	6
Working Conditions										
Hours	16	15	-	2	9	5	13	8	3	8
Other	24	20	38	27	32	21	21	25	23	19
Unionism	18	15	8	6	7	23	8	25	18	22
Other & Indefinite	13	5	8	8	7	13	8	5	6	6

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Earnings										
For change	39	39	40	35	35	38	44	25	44	38
Against change	8	3	3	6	5	2	4	23	8	5
Working Conditions										
Hours	13	15	12	11	11	15	12	10	5	9
Other	25	13	16	26	26	17	16	23	18	23
Unionism	11	20	20	18	16	21	20	10	21	15
Other & Indefinite	5	10	8	3	7	8	5	9	4	10

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Earnings										
For change	40	41	44	23	30	50	46	44	39	45
Against change	5	3	6	24	15	6	4	3	3	3
Working Conditions										
Hours	11	16	13	4	4	9	14	13	26	15
Other	16	18	13	19	26	16	13	15	10	16
Unionism	22	16	15	23	20	16	17	16	14	16
Other & Indefinite	7	6	10	8	6	3	5	10	8	5

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Earnings										
For change	12	18	37	29	23	32	32	33	41	32
Against change	41	38	8	16	20	8	4	9	3	15
Working Conditions										
Hours	16	7	9	11	9	12	11	5	6	8
Other	13	12	19	22	19	21	23	23	31	17
Unionism	15	21	20	18	27	23	23	25	16	25
Other & Indefinite	3	4	7	3	2	4	6	6	3	2

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Earnings										
For change	13	14	33	35	36	35	42	28	29	33
Against change	29	31	10	6	2	3	1	8	5	3
Working Conditions										
Hours	3	5	11	15	10	10	9	10	8	6
Other	23	27	19	15	24	19	18	21	34	36
Unionism	26	20	24	26	25	30	28	30	20	16
Other & Indefinite	6	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	5

Issues	Percentage of Total Issues									
	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
Earnings										
For change	45	47	39	28	29	33	37	38	34	30
Against change	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	3
Working Conditions										
Hours	4	4	3	3	2	14	8	5	7	8
Other	23	28	36	43	39	20	12	13	16	20
Unionism	21	16	18	16	19	21	28	30	30	31
Other & Indefinite	5	3	3	7	9	12	15	13	11	10

[1]Issues articulated at the beginning of each strike. More than one issue for some strikes.

Table 5

Methods of Strike Settlement, 1891-1950

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
Negotiations	23	35	30	26	23	32	24	38	38	35
Third Party	5	8	5	3	10	3	9	2	3	10
Retnrn of Workers	15	13	23	28	36	19	15	14	3	20
Replacement of Workers	18	13	18	10	5	19	18	18	22	11
Indefinite	38	33	25	33	26	26	35	28	30	25

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1809	1910
Negotiations	40	38	37	40	43	46	44	28	29	38
Third Party	12	12	10	8	2	4	7	5	7	6
Retnrn of Workers	12	9	13	17	10	14	12	27	15	15
Replacement of Workers	17	11	11	13	24	22	15	24	22	16
Indefinite	19	29	29	22	21	15	23	16	27	24

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Negotiations	33	47	38	28	40	43	43	41	49	38
Third Party	7	6	7	10	13	13	18	23	13	12
Return of Workers	14	10	14	12	12	13	11	13	13	13
Replacement of Workers	16	15	15	22	20	11	7	6	8	13
Indefinite	31	23	28	27	16	20	21	17	17	24

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Negotiations	37	39	40	41	57	46	49	47	41	41
Third Party	10	6	13	15	9	7	9	12	14	14
Return of Workers	14	16	20	25	6	12	20	18	17	19
Replacement of Workers	18	19	14	15	16	23	12	16	18	20
Indefinite	21	20	12	4	11	12	9	7	10	7

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Negotiations	40	44	56	55	49	51	49	37	32	35
Third Party	13	12	12	12	21	20	24	34	25	23
Return of Workers	19	18	14	14	8	9	11	14	30	28
Replacement of Workers	19	21	11	16	14	13	11	9	7	9
Indefinite	9	4	8	4	6	8	5	6	6	5

Methods	Percentages of Total Strikes									
	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
Negotiations	30	23	26	17	17	24	36	37	45	32
Third Party	37	50	54	56	49	46	32	30	26	23
Return of Workers	23	19	17	20	31	22	17	20	16	20
Replacement of Workers	7	5	2	3	1	5	8	4	4	7
Indefinite	3	3	2	4	3	4	7	8	9	18

mid 1920s to 1950 the undetermined or indefinite category almost always fell well below 20 per cent. In these years workers' victories exceeded employers' in 1925, and, perhaps surprisingly, in 1933-1938. The combination of victories and compromises exceeded 60 per cent in 1933-1938, 1941, and 1947. Meanwhile, employers' successes topped 40 per cent in 1930, 1932, and 1943-1945. Thus, the pattern of the first three decades which clearly related the strike waves and high success rates is less apparent during the Great Depression and World War II. Workers in the 1930s enjoyed high rates of success in both the strike wave years of 1934 and 1937 and in 1933, 1935-1936, and 1938. On the other hand, the militancy of workers during World War II was rewarded with far lower rates of success, even in one of the three years of the 1941-1943 strike wave. It seems likely that the extremely high rate of third party settlements of 1941-1945 (Table 5) is related to the lower rate of success. During World War II state involvement in labour relations reached unprecedented heights with the advent of PC1003 in 1944, which was later entrenched as the Industrial Relations and Labour Disputes Investigation Act of 1948.[14]

While the state's role as conciliator, mediator, and "umpire" in class conflict has received considerable attention in Canadian labour historiography recently, the state's coercive function was also extremely important throughont this period as can be seen in Tables 7-9.[15] Despite the state's enthusiastic recourse to coercion, violence of a serious kind was rare in Canadian strikes. Workers remained aware of the state's potential for violence and behaved in a generally disciplined fashion. As can be seen in Table 7 strikes involving collective violence fluctuated in number over our period reaching a peak during the Great Depression. On the other hand, military intervention all but disappeared by the 1930s suggesting that it was not closely related to labour "violence." Its disappearance arose from an increasing public sentiment that sending in the troops was not an acceptable response to a labour dispute. The removal of the army, however, should not be equated with any decline in coercion. Police forces — national, provincial, and municipal — quickly filled any gap left by the changes in legislation governing military aid to the civil power.[16] Table 8 shows the pattern of collective

[14] Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War II," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 175-196.

[15] Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980) and Leo Panitch and Don Swartz, "Towards Permanent Exceptionalism: Coercion and Consent in Canadian Labour Relations," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 133-57.

[16] On military aid to the civil power see Desmond Morton, "Aid to the civil power: the Canadian militia in support of social order," *Canadian Historical Review*, 51 (1970), 407-25; Don Macgillivray, "Military aid to the civil power: the Cape Breton experience in the 1920's," *Acadiensis*, 3 (1974), 45-64; Major J.J.B. Pariseau, *Disorders, Strikes, and Disasters: Military Aid to the Civil Power in Canada, 1867-1933* (Ottawa 1973); and his "Forces armées et maintien de l'ordre an Canada 1867-1967: un siècle d'aide au pouvoir civil," thèse presentée pour obtenir le doctorat 3è cycle, Universite Paul Valéry III, Montpelier, 1981.

Table 6

Strike Results, 1891-1950

Results	Percentage of Total Strikes									
	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900
Workers' Favour	18	28	16	13	8	19	6	8	23	23
Compromise	10	8	9	10	18	16	21	22	12	16
Employers' Favour	33	30	52	44	38	42	38	38	32	31
Indefinite	38	35	23	33	36	23	35	32	34	29

Results	Percentage of Total Strikes									
	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910
Workers' Favour	27	35	34	28	25	24	21	20	19	19
Compromise	23	21	21	20	14	21	26	10	18	16
Employers' Favour	30	19	23	31	36	37	31	53	39	37
Indefiuite	20	25	22	21	25	18	23	18	24	28

Results	Percentage of Total Strikea									
	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Workers' Favour	15	29	21	16	21	26	40	34	30	18
Compromise	17	23	21	16	21	30	20	26	24	23
Employers' Favour	33	27	29	34	35	25	19	16	28	32
Indefinite	35	21	29	33	23	19	21	24	18	27

Results	Percentage of Total Strikes									
	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Workers' Favour	16	14	26	16	36	26	31	28	30	27
Compromise	13	22	19	23	23	22	21	26	24	24
Employers' Favour	47	43	42	47	28	36	37	37	35	43
Indefinite	24	20	13	15	13	15	11	9	11	5

Resnlts	Percentage of Total Strikes									
	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Workers' Favour	27	29	34	37	41	41	29	29	26	16
Compromise	24	20	27	26	27	24	37	35	31	41
Employers' Favour	37	46	32	33	25	24	25	26	35	35
Iudefinite	13	5	6	4	7	11	9	11	8	7

Results	Percentage of Total Strikes									
	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
Workers' Favour	22	27	34	28	19	24	25	22	15	18
Compromiae	38	23	20	22	25	33	35	37	36	33
Employers' Favour	30	39	40	43	48	32	25	25	23	29
Indefinite	10	11	6	7	8	10	14	16	26	20

violence in strikes on an industrial basis and demonstrates the significant shift that occurred in the 1930s with the spread of strike "violence" into the manufacturing sector and the invention of the sit-down strike as a weapon in labour's arsenal. Coal mining maintained its position throughout the period. Without doubt the 1930s witnessed the most "intense" strikes, to use Stuart Jamieson's phrase to describe strikes involving violence and illegality.[17] Over 40 per cent of all "violent" strikes occurred in that decade with Ontario leading the way with 47 incidents of strike-related collective violence, followed by Quebec (18), British Columbia (10), and Nova Scotia (8). Over the 40 years for which we collected this information those same four provinces led all others with 95, 59, 26, and 26 "violent" strikes respectively.

Table 7

Strikes with collective violence[1] and military intervention,[2] 1891-1940[3]

Decade	Percentage of total strikes with collective violence	Percentage of total strikes with military intervention
1891-1900	4.5	1.0
1901-1910	2.6	1.0
1911-1920	2.1	.7
1921-1930	2.9	.5
1931-1940	5.6	.2
1891-1940	3.3	.6

[1]These statistics were not intended originally to provide a measure of violence, but rather of an alternative form of collective action which, in this instance, happened to be strike related. They count strikes in which a group of 50 or more acted together and attempted to seize or damage persons or objects not belonging to itself. This definition was adapted from C., L., and R. Tilly, The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930 (Cambridge, MA 1975), Appendix D, 313.
[2]Military aid to the civil power. Our work here was aided immensely by the work of Major J.J.B. Pariseau. See n.15.
[3]Totals for 1930s exclude sitdowns which did not involve the use of force.

[17] Stuart Jamieson, "Militancy and Violence in Canadian Labour Relations: 1900-1975," University of British Columbia, Department of Economics, Discussion Paper No. 79-17, April 1979. Jamieson's measure of violence is different than ours. His statistics show:

1900-1913	25
1914-1919	12
1920-1929	15
1930-1939	125
1940-1949	24

Table 8

Strikes with collective violence and military intervention by industry, 1891-1940

1891-1930

Industry	Percentage of total strikes with collective violence	Percentage of total strikes with military intervention
Logging	-	-
Fishing & trapping	9.8	2.4
Mining	4.5	1.1
Manufacturing-Total	1.7	.4
Manuf.-Leather & textile	2.4	.4
Manuf.-Wood	2.9	1.1
Manuf.-Metal & ships	1.5	.4
Construction	1.4	.2
Transport.& Pub. Util.-Total	6.7	1.7
T.& P.U.-Steam Railway	6.3	1.0
T.& P.U.-Electric Railway	20.7	8.1
T.& P.U.-Water	7.2	1.4
Trade	1.7	-
Service	1.2	.9
General	15.4	7.7
All Industries	2.6	.6

1931-1940[1]

Industry	Percentage of total strikes with collective violence	Percentage of total strikes with sitdowns[2]	Percentage of total strikes with collective violence or sitdowns
Logging	10.0	1.4	11.4
Fishing & trapping	-	-	-
Mining	4.5	1.2	5.7
Manufacturing-Total	7.8	2.5	10.0
Manuf.-Leather & textile	8.9	1.0	9.9
Manuf.-Wood	7.0	.8	7.8
Manuf.-Metal & ships	6.3	7.3	11.5
Construction	1.2	2.9	3.5
Transport.& Pub. Util.-Total	5.0	2.5	7.5
Trade	8.3	-	8.3
Service	-	3.9	3.9
General	-	-	-
All Industries	5.6	2.3	7.7

[1]The military only intervened in four strikes in the 1930s (.3 per cent of mining and .4 per cent of manufacturing.)

[2]Strikes in which workers occupied the workplace against the wishes of the employer and in which observers or participants termed this action a "sitdown" or "staydown."

Table 9

Strikes with collective violence, military intervention, and sitdowns by province and decade, 1891-1940[1]

	1891-1900		1901-1910		1911-1920		1921-1930		1931-1940			Total		
	CV	MI	CV	MI	CV	MI	CV	MI	CV	MI	SD	CV	MI	SD
N.S.	3	0	5	4	4	1	6	3	8	0	2	26	8	2
N.B.	0	0	1	0	2	2	2	1	3	0	0	8	3	0
P.Q.	7	2	12	2	13	3	9	1	18	0	1	59	8	1
Ont.	12	2	18	8	16	6	2	0	47	2	24	95	18	24
Man.	0	0	3	1	2	1	1	0	8	0	0	14	2	0
Sask.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	3	2	1
Alta.	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	0	2	0	6	10	0	6
B.C.	1	1	3	0	10	4	2	0	10	0	3	26	5	3
Total[2]	23	5	41	15	48	17	29	5	98	4	37	239	46	37

[1]Includes strikes in which the military was put on alert. Collective violence occurred in 36 of the 46 cases of military intervention.

[2]Two railway strikes (CPR in 1908 and GTR in 1910) which featured collective violence in more than one province, are counted only once in the totals.

II

LET US NOW TURN to the six strike waves of the period 1891-1950 — 1899-1903, 1912-1913, 1917-1920, 1934, 1937, and 1942-1943. (See Table 10.) In many ways the first three waves are closely related. Certainly it can be argued that the 1917-1920 wave was simply a continuation of the struggles of 1912-1913 which came to an abrupt halt owing both to a depressed economy and to the outbreak of World War I. Yet, as we shall see, there were also key differences in these first three waves, shifts in both geographic and industrial focus which imbued the third wave, 1917-1920, with a more menacing and insurgent character.

The 1899-1903 and 1912-1913 strike waves were heavily dominated by the combination of manufacturing, construction, and transportation strikes both in terms of number of strikes and number of strikers. (See Table 11.) Geographically the 1899-1903 wave was concentrated in Ontario, while the 1912-1913 found a more national focus. The greater contrast, however, comes in the 1917-1920 wave in which the strikes spread themselves somewhat more evenly through the entire working class in terms of both occupational and geographic mix. The labour revolt of 1917-1920 represented an insurgency involving almost all elements of the working class and covering the entire nation.

Table 10

National Strike Waves, 1891-1950

	Year	Given Measure as a Percentage of its Mean Over the Previous Five Years[1]	
		Number of Strikes (N)	Number of workers involved (W)
I	1899	264	382
	1900	219	448
	1901	198	219
	1902	199	98
	1903	205	224
II	1912	158	164
	1913	150	147
III	1917	132	190
	1918	190	296
	1919	244	412
	1920	190	119
IV	1934	204	266
V	1937	203	221
	1941	128	187
VI	1942	182	202
	1943	183	333

[1]The above list includes years for which N or W is above 150 if they are contiguous to years in which both N and W exceed 150. This is a slight modification on the Tilly and Shorter useage but is in line with Edwards, Strikes, 258. In the stricter useage 1902, 1913, 1917, 1920, and 1941 would be deleted.

Table 11

National Strike Waves by Region and Industry

	Waves											
	1899-1903		1912-1913		1917-1920		1934		1937		1941-1943	
	% strikes	% workers involved	% strikes	% workers involved	% strikes	% workers involved	% strikes	% workers involved	% strikes	% workers involved	% strikes	% workers involved
East[1]	12	9	13	6	10	16	13	24	18	25	24	31
Quebec	19	33	13	18	17	19	17	28	15	34	28	31
Ontario	50	21	45	31	35	23	49	34	49	35	31	22
West	18	30	28	43	38	39	20	14	18	7	17	15
Mining[2]	5	13	5	13	12	25	13	28	15	24	21	26
Mfrg.	49	34	35	26	41	36	59	55	48	64	58	59
Const.	23	13	36	38	15	8	4	1	11	2	7	2
Transp.	17	22	15	14	12	13	6	1	7	2	5	3
Trade & Serv.	4	-	8	1	11	4	9	2	13	2	7	3

[1]Totals do not equal 100 because territorial and interprovincial (except coal mining) strikes have been excluded.

[2]Totals do not equal 100 because agricultural, fishing, logging, miscellaneous, and interindustrial strikes have been excluded.

In the first wave of this period, 1899-1903, the 726 strikes involved roughly 120,000 workers. Manufacturing figured prominently averaging 49 per cent of the strikes in progress each year and 34 per cent of the strikers. Construction workers accounted for 23 per cent of the strikes but only 13 per cent of the strikers, while transportation workers' strikes made up 17 per cent of the total but involved 22 per cent of all strikers. The final major industrial actor, mining, accounted for 5 per cent of the strikes and 13 per cent of the strikers.

As the above figures suggest transportation and mining strikes tended to be much larger than manufacturing and especially construction strikes. Transportation and mining strikes, because of their size, militancy, and often national character, frequently seized the attention of the public and the state in this period. National strikes by Grand Trunk Railway trackmen in 1899, Canadian Pacific Railway trackmen in 1901, and non-running trades CPR workers, organized into the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, an American Labor Union affiliate, in 1903, all gained a national audience. Equally prominent were the struggles of Western Federation of Miners metal miners in the B.C. interior in 1899, 1900, and 1901, and especially the Vancouver Island and Crows Nest Pass coal mining strikes of 1903. The 1903 struggles led to the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate labour unrest in British Columbia, to the passage of the Railway Labour Disputes Act, the state's first major effort to create a role for itself in "harmonizing" class relations, and to the virulent denunciation of all unions, initially only the so-called revolutionary unions such as the UBRE and the WFM, but later broadened to include an attack on all international unions.[18]

The state's fear of the ALU unions invokes no surprise, but the state attack on the AFL, disdainfully termed the American "separation of labor" by syndicalists, demands further explanation. The strikes in the manufacturing and construction sectors provide part of the answer, although dramatic strikes on the Quebec, Vancouver, Montreal, and Halifax waterfronts in 1901, 1902, and 1903,[19] led by AFL-affiliated unions, and violence-laden strikes on the street railway systems of London, Toronto, and Montreal in 1899, 1902, and 1903 which culminated in the use of the military against the

[18] For more detailed accounts of these strikes see: Allen Seager, "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-21," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 23-59; Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater - A Century of Labour in BC* (Vancouver 1967); Stuart Jamieson, *Time of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* (Ottawa 1968); J. Hugh Tuck, "The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905," *Labour/Le Travail*, 11 (1983), 63-88. For the broader national response, see Robert Babcock, *Gompers in Canada* (Toronto 1974) and Craven, *An Impartial Umpire*.

[19] On the Halifax Waterfront, see Ian McKay, "Class Struggle and Merchant Capital: Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1902" in Bryan Palmer, ed. *The Character of Class Struggle* (Toronto 1986).

striking AFL members of the Amalgamated Street Railway Workers Union, also played a role.[20]

A closer look at the manufacturing and construction sector reveals national patterns which closely resemble the detailed city and craft studies we have of this period. In manufacturing the strikes clustered in three major areas — the metal trades and shipbuilding, boot and shoe, and clothing and textiles. Over the five-year period these three groups accounted for 55 per cent of the strikers. The metal trades and shipbuilding accounted for 32 per cent of the manufacturing strikes and almost 20 per cent of the sector's strikers; clothing and textiles 16 per cent of strikes and 33 per cent of strikers; and boot and shoe 7 per cent of the strikes but 25 per cent of the strikers. Clearly the shape of strikes in these three manufacturing areas was quite different. In the metal trades strikes were small but frequent, while in clothing and textile, and in boot and shoe they tended to be less frequent but much larger.

Metal workers' strikes primarily revolved around shop floor struggles concerning control issues. Moulders and machinists fought the largest number of such battles but boiler, core, and pattern makers also participated. While active in most major Canadian cities, Ontario metal workers were the most prominent in these strikes. One particularly bitter struggle in Toronto involved almost 300 moulders against the city's major foundries. The moulders sought the nine-hour day and over eight months found themselves facing scabs, injunctions, and even *agents provocateurs*. The strike ultimately failed.[21]

Quebec workers, however, played the major role in the other strike-prone manufacturing sectors of boot and shoe and clothing and textiles. Major conflicts in boot and shoe came in Quebec City in 1900 and 1903 when industry-wide strikes occurred involving 4,000 and 5,000 workers respectively in lengthy struggles. Similarly, the major textile strikes occurred in Quebec. The troops were sent in to Magog to quell a strike of 900 unorganized workers against Dominion Cotton in early August 1900. Dominion Cotton defeated its workers and rid its mill of a union in Montmorency where it simply outlasted 600 Knights of Labor strikers who were forced to concede after two months on the picket line. In Valleyfield, however, 1,500 workers at Montreal Cot-

[20] For a study of the London street railway strike, see Bryan Palmer, " 'Give us the road and we will run it': The Social and Cultural Matrix of an Emerging Labour Movement," in G.S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds. *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto 1976). See also, Peter D. Lambly, "Working Conditions and Industrial Relations on Canada's Street Railways, 1900-1920," MA, Dalhousie, 1983 and Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930* (Philadelphia 1986), 213-48.

[21] Craig Heron, "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century" and Wayne Roberts, "Toronto Metal Workers and the Second Industrial Revolution, 1889-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 6 (1980), 7-48, 49-72.

ton walked out in late January for six days but returned pending an increase. They struck again on 21 February in even larger numbers (2,500), after rejecting the company's offer. They subsequently compromised and again returned, but struck again in July for four days against company employment policy. In October, when the militia was called in to break a strike by 200 construction workers building a new cotton mill, 3,000 cotton workers walked out in sympathy and returned only after the troops were withdrawn.[22]

Construction strikes in this period were dominated by the building trades which constituted 81 per cent of the 174 strikes and 91 per cent of the approximately 16,000 strikers. The other construction strikes were on nine railroad, seven canal, and five highway or bridge projects. Although ubiquitous in Canadian towns and cities in these years and while generally short in duration and small in number of workers involved, there were exceptions. Some 700 Sydney, Nova Scotia bricklayers, stonemasons, and plasterers, for example, struck for seven months in 1901 before gaining a wage increase and shorter hours. That same summer almost 400 Ottawa carpenters were off the job for about six weeks to win wage increases and changes in work rules. Later that year 400 Winnipeg carpenters failed in their almost two-month long strike to gain higher wages and shorter hours. In 1903, however, Toronto was the site for a city-wide building trades strike which involved almost 1,000 carpenters, over 3,000 building labourers, 250 painters, and over 100 structural iron workers in a 10-week strike which the employers ultimately won.[23] The issues for Canadian building trades workers in these years were identical to those faced by their English comrades. *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* described the experience of North American building trades workers.

Despite defeats such as those mentioned above, strikers did well in the years 1899-1903. Strikes were largely offensive and the success rate (victories plus compromises) ranged from an 1899 low of 35 per cent to a 1902 high of 56 per cent. In 1902 and 1903 clear-cut victories outnumbered defeats. (See Table 6.)

Similarly during the second strike wave, 1912-1913, the primarily offensive strikes led to a 52 per cent success rate in 1912 and 42 per cent in 1913, although in the latter year employers' clear-cut victories rose above full workers' victories. As we noted earlier the dominance of manufacturing, con-

[22] *Globe* (Toronto), 21 February, 1 March, 18 July, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31 October 1900; *Gazette* (Montreal), 25, 26, 27 October 1900; and *Star* (Montreal), 22, 23 February, and 14, 16 July 1900. See also Jacques Rouillard, *Les travailleurs du coton au Québec, 1900-1915* (Montréal 1974), 107-29.

[23] For discussions of building trade workers see Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handyuien: Politics and Trade Unionism among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 1 (1976), 92-121 and Ian McKay, *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax 1985).

struction, and transportation and of B.C., Ontario, and Quebec still prevailed in this pre-World War I strike wave but some broadening in geographic and industrial mix is evident compared to 1899-1903. (See Table 11.) This widening is more apparent geographically and can be explained by the much greater presence of the west. The admittedly less clear spread in industrial mix stems from a rise in strikes in the trade and service sector. Numerous small trade and service sector strikes composed 8 per cent of the strike total but only 1 per cent of strikers. Nevertheless, union incursions into trades and services indicates a broadening of the labour movement in this pre-war period.

A dissection of the statistics for the three largest industrial groups also shows some changes from the previous strike wave. Construction displaced manufacturing as the leader in both strikes and strikers with 36 per cent and 38 per cent compared to manufacturing's 35 and 26 per cent. Transportation trailed each with 15 per cent of strikes and 14 per cent of strikers, perhaps indicating at least one minor area of success for the IDIA.

The primacy of construction strikes is based not only on the 141 building trades strikes in the two years but on significant strike actions among construction workers on railroad, canal, and road projects who added 28 strikes which accounted for 45 per cent of total construction strikers. By far the most dramatic of these was the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) strike in British Columbia on the construction sites of the Canadian Northern Railway. Some 6,000 - 7,000 railway navvies, almost all immigrants, struck for five months in the face of severe state repression and overt co-operation between the construction companies and the provincial government. At least 250 Wobblies were jailed, receiving sentences of up to 12 months for offenses such as vagrancy and infractions of the Public Health Act. Not surprisingly, in the face of such repression the strike was broken. Needless to say its memory lived on, commemorated in Joe Hill's "Where the Fraser River Flows."[24]

Among the urban building trade strikes of these two years one of the largest involved 2,000 Winnipeg carpenters for almost six weeks in the summer of 1912. Their strike to win recognition, wage increases, and shorter hours was eventually successful.[25] Similarly, some 300 Halifax carpenters left work on 1 April 1913 and returned about a month later with a settlement largely in their favour. The historian of these carpenters notes that this strike "marked a new level of militancy and a significant broadening of perspective on the part of Local 83." He further argues, and our Winnipeg ex-

[24] On this strike, see A. Ross McCormack, "Wobblies and Blanket-stiffs: The Constituency of the IWW in Western Canada," in Cherwinski and Kealey, eds. *Lectures* and his "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada, 1905-1914," *Historical Papers* (1975), 167-90. See also, James Mark Leier, "Through the Lense of Syndicalism: Fragmeutation on the Vancouver and British Columbia Left Before the Great War," MA, Simon Fraser University, 1987, esp. 37-46.

[25] *Voice* (Winnipeg), 5, 12 July 1912; PAC, RG37, vol. 300, file 3531.

ample would support his claim, that their pre-war apprenticeship in the "new rules" of monopoly capitalist society lay the groundwork for "their post-war radicalism."[26]

Interestingly, not all urban construction strikes involved skilled craftsmen and craft unions. In Ottawa in 1912 and in Hamilton in 1913 large groups of unskilled labourers, the urban equivalents of the railway navvies, struck for higher wages. In Ottawa about 1,100 labourers employed on sewer projects succeeded in increasing their wages after three days of marching and demonstrating. The next year 250 Hamilton labourers, largely immigrant, working on electrical transmission lines struck for a wage increase but failed after three days which included a battle with strikebreakers.[27] Again in this case the importance lies in the suggestion that resort to strike action was spreading to workers previously uninvolved in labour activities.

In manufacturing a disaggregation of the general data suggests an intensification of the 1899-1903 pattern. In 1912 and 1913, metal trades strikes accounted for 37 per cent of all manufacturing strikes and 20 per cent of that sector's strikers; clothing and textile 25 per cent of strikes and a remarkable 50 per cent of strikers; and boot and shoe 7 and 16 per cent. The three together then represent 69 per cent of all manufacturing strikes and 86 per cent of all manufacturing strikers. One major development hidden in these statistics is the emergence of garment strikes as a major component of the textile and clothing category. Major garment strikes were fought by the United Garment Workers of America (UGWA) in Montreal in 1912 and 1913, the first involving 4,500 workers in the men's clothing industry for six weeks. The industry-wide 1912 strike succeeded in increasing wages, shortening hours, and changing pay systems and shop rules. The following year, a strike against a wage reduction at one shop involving 450 workers dragged on for five months before failing. In Hamilton in April 1913, 2,000 garment workers led by the UGWA struck the city's four major clothing factories and within two weeks had won a victory. The solidarity of women workers was crucial in this victory as in the 1912 Montreal case.[28] The other major garment strike took place in Toronto in 1912 against Eaton's, the city's major department store. The strike, led by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), quickly became a cause célèbre because of the national prominence of the firm and its Methodist owners. Originating with male sewing machine operators who refused to perform women's work (finishing) for no increase in pay, the strike was fought avowedly to save women's jobs and its Yiddish slogan translates as "We will not take morsels

[26] McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, 54-63.

[27] *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 July 1912; *Ottawa Journal*, 10 July 1912; *Stratford Herald*, 20 September 1913.

[28] Mercedes Steedman, "Skill and Gender in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940" in Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job*, 152-76.

of bread from our sisters' mouths." Over 1,000 garment workers, about one-third women, struck in support of the 65 men. The strikers gained wide support from the labour movement and a national boycott against Eaton's enjoyed some limited success. In Montreal ILGWU workers in Eaton's shops stuck in sympathy with their Toronto counterparts. Nevertheless the strike was broken after four months and the ILGWU took some years to recover in Toronto.[29] Here again the important point to note is the spread of unionism and militancy among previously unorganized sectors and specifically among immigrants and women. Also important was the concerted turn to industrial unionism by many of the craft unions, particularly in the metal trades.[30]

This process is evident as well in some of the transportation-related strikes of the period. Coal handlers on the Port Arthur docks, primarily Southern European, struck in 1912. The 250 workers won their strike but only at considerable cost because two of their Italian members received ten-year jail terms for assaulting the Chief of Police in a violent picket line altercation which left several strikers wounded and resulted in the militia being called out.[31]

Similarly street railway strikes in Port Arthur and Halifax in 1913 led to violent encounters between crowds and strikebreakers. In the Lakehead the workers lost after a month-long war with scabs and the ubiquitous Thiel detectives; the major battle in this campaign came in mid-May when a crowd overturned a street car and then attacked a police station in an attempt to free an arrested comrade. In the foray against the police station a striker was killed. In Halifax, the strike lasted only one week before a compromise settlement was reached.

Major mining struggles in Canada have played a major part in the national strike waves, and indeed miners have maintained high levels of struggle even in periods outside of the national waves. The Vancouver Island coal strike of 1912-1914 which lasted from 16 September 1912 to 19 August 1914, was a major struggle of this wave. Military metaphors seem only too appropriate for the strike because it was actually closer to war than any other strike in this period. Violence incited by strikebreakers, special police, and the Canadian army was endemic and the two-year experience could only be described as a state invasion of the coal towns. The miners finally returned to the mines in late summer 1914 when the outbreak of war ended the possibility of a proposed B.C. Federation of Labor-led general strikes.[32] Lest

[29] Ruth Frager, "Sewing Solidarity: The Eaton's Strike of 1912," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 7 (1986), 96-8.

[30] Roberts, "Toronto Metal Workers," 71-2.

[31] Jean Morrison, "Ethnicity and Violence: The Lakehead Freight Handlers Before World War I" in Kealey and Warrian, *Essays*, 143-60.

[32] P.G. Silverman, "Aid of the Civil Power: The Nanaimo Coal Miners' Strike, 1912-1914," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 4 (1974), 16-52; Lynn Bowen, *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember* (Lantzville, BC 1982), 131-98.

B.C. coal miners be thought to have received special treatment at the hands of the Canadian state, let us consider the parallel case of Northern Ontario gold miners who endured a seven-month struggle from mid-November 1912 to mid-June 1913 in an attempt to gain an increase in wages and shorter hours. These South Porcupine members of the Western Federation of Miners faced strikebreakers, Thiel detectives, and changes and convictions under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act.[33]

The most dramatic strike wave consisted of the labour revolt of 1917-1920. In those four years workers struck more frequently and in larger numbers than ever before in Canadian history. From 1917-1920 there were 1384 strikes involving almost 360,000 workers which expressed as percentages means those four years accounted for just over 14 per cent of all Canadian strikes between 1891 and 1950 and about 14 per cent of all strikers. As Table 11 shows this strike wave, more than its predecessors, was national in scope. The previous dominance of Ontario here gives way to a more balanced nation-wide effort, although with a very heavy western presence. Most evident, however, is the sectoral balance. Mining struggles played a much more significant role in the 1917-1920 strike wave, as did the impressive increase in trade and service strikes, many of them, as we shall see, involving public sector workers. Equally important the vast increase in the "other" category which includes general strikes and also the spread of trade uniomism and strike activity among loggers.

As in most strike waves, success fed on success. In 1917 outright workers' victories hit their highest level in the 60-year period (except for 1935 and 1936) and when combined with compromises totalled 60 per cent. The same held true for 1918, when employers' victories reached their 60 year low. In 1919 employers' victories began to climb back up, however, reaching 28 per cent, although worker gains stayed high at 54 per cent. By 1920, the wave was breaking and employers won 32 per cent outright, while workers' victories and compromises fell to 41 per cent. (See Table 6.)

The literature on the events of 1917 to 1920 and especially of 1919 is huge; and, one of us has been adding to it recently.[34] Here we would simply like to emphasize some points made in these earlier articles and amplify on some other which we feel were not adequately emphasized.

First, the 1917-1920 events in Canada were part of the same international working-class insurgency that engulfed all industrial nations in those years. The new international literature on the working-class revolt at war's end focusses on issues reflected in Canadian events. Thus James Cronin's com-

[33] PAC, RG27, vol.300, file 3618 and vol.302, file 13 (90) A.

[34] Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 11-44 and "The State, the Foreign-Language Press, and the Canadian Labour Revolt of 1917-1920," in Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, eds., *The Press of Labour Migrants in Europe and North America, 1880s-1930s* (Bremen 1985).

ments about the movements' "similarity and simultaneity" applies to Canada, indeed to North America, as well as to Europe.[35] In addition, as Cronin argues for Europe, the labour revolt should be seen as continuous from the pre-war crisis. While much that was new occurred in 1917-1920, the general patterns had been amply prefigured in 1912-1913. The war contributed an intensity and a breadth to the later struggles but it did not create them.

A disaggregation of Canadian manufacturing strike data for these years demonstrates these continuities and a few discontinuities. Using the same categories as before, we discover that boot and shoe almost disappeared from the strike statistics. Over the four years the industry contained only 2 per cent of the manufacturing strikes and less than 1 per cent of the strikers. Clothing and textiles, on the other hand, while nowhere near as prominent as in 1912-1913, accounted for 16 per cent of both strikes and strikers. In both industries a renewed militancy struggled for industrial unionism. Our third category, metal and shipbuilding, provides the most significant story. For here the continuities of struggle and their particular intensification owing to the war experience become clearest. The metal trades constituted 33 per cent of manufacturing strikes and 30 per cent of strikers, while its cognate industry shipbuilding added 11 per cent of strikes and 24 per cent of strikers. Workers in other manufacturing sectors who begin to show up in the data for the first time included pulp and paper (5 per cent of manufacturing strikes and strikers), rubber (2 and 3 per cent) and meat packing (2 and 4 per cent). In meat packing successful industry-wide strikes in Toronto and Montreal in 1919 set a pattern for the industry which workers in other meat packing centres fought to gain in the next two years. Here again it was new industrial unionism that won the day.[36]

In addition to the new industrial unions, which were primarily sanctioned by the AFL, trade unionism spread into other new areas. The spread of organization to increased numbers of women workers we shall not pursue here and the great importance of immigrant workers one of us has discussed elsewhere. We would note here, however, the crucial and innovative rise of public sector unionism especially at the municipal level but also among some provincial and federal workers.

Two major strikes represent two distinct manifestations of this process. The first was the month-long Winnipeg civic workers' strike of May 1918

[35] James Cronin, "Labor Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917-1920 in Europe," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 125-52. See also James Cronin and Carmen Sirianni, eds., *Work, Community and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and North America, 1900-1925* (Philadelphia 1983). For a third North America case see Peter McInnis, "Newfoundland Labour and World War I: The Emergence of the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association," M.A., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987.
[36] J.T. Montague, "Trade Unionism in the Canadian Meat Packing Industry," Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1950, 31-8 and George Sayers Bain, "The United Packinghouse, Food and Allied Workers," M.A., University of Manitoba, 1964, 35-67.

which ended only when Borden's Minister of Labour, Senator Gideon Robertson, hurried to Winnipeg to prevent the expansion of sympathy strikes into a threatened city-wide general sympathetic strike.[37] Such discussions were led by the Winnipeg TLC but were not confined to it. The Jewish immigrant left, for example, organized a late May Help the Strikers Conference which brought together all radical elements of the Jewish community — revolutionary Marxist, Socialist-Zionist, and anarchist.[38] To end the crisis and avoid a general strike, Robertson capitulated to almost all of the civic workers' demands. In the process, he helped to cement in Winnipeg and Canadian workers' minds the efficacy of the general strike tactic. But Robertson's concession was not singular, a similar threat by the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council led to the recognition of the firemen's union in that city. In general, there was a massive expansion throughout the country of civic employees' unionism usually organized into Federal Labour Unions directly chartered by the TLC.

Federal employees also expressed massive dissatisfaction with wartime conditions. For example, the Civil Service Federation of Canada enjoyed major growth, which unfortunately remains unstudied.[39] Instead let us consider the second major public sector strike of 1918 namely the July 1918 national postal strike led by the Federal Association of Letter Carriers.[40] Commencing in Toronto on 22 July 1918, with at best half-hearted support from the union's national leader Alex McMordie, the strike spread across the country involving over 20 cities and led to sympathetic walkouts by other postal workers. Supposedly settled on 15 July by McMordie, who ordered his workers back in return for a promise of a cabinet investigation, the strike continued across the country as many rank-and-file letter carriers angrily rejected the settlement. A week later Borden Cabinet Ministers Crothers and Meighen arrived in Winnipeg to negotiate a new agreement with an *ad hoc* Joint Strike Committee again in the face of a series of threatened general strikes in a number of western cities, including Winnipeg, Vancouver, and

[37] A.E. Johnson, "The Strikes in Winnipeg in May 1918. The Prelude to 1919?," M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1978.

[38] R. Usiskin, "Toward a Theoretical Reformulation of the Relationship Between Political Ideology, Social Class, & Ethnicity: A Case Study of the Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community, 1905-1920," M.A. thesis, University of Winniepg, 1978, esp. ch.5, and her "The Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community: Its Early Formation, 1905-1918," in *Jewish Life and Times. A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg 1983), 155-68.

[39] William Doherty, "Slaves of the Lamp: A History of the Staff Association Movement in the Canadian Civil Service, 1860-1924," unpublished manuscript, is a promising beginning. See also Anthony Thomson, " 'The Large and Generous View': The Debate on Labour Affiliation in the Canadian Civil Service, 1918-1928," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 108-36.

[40] William Doherty, "Slave of the Lamp," esp. chapter 9. See also PAC, Post Office Papers, RG3, vol. 646, file 96853, "List of Offices Affected by the 1918 Postal Strike." See also Anthony Thomson, " 'The Large and Generous View,' 108-36.

Victoria, and, significantly, by UMWA District 18. The terms of settlement included guarantees of non-discrimination against the strikers, the dismissal of all scab labour, and, amazingly, pay for the strikers for the period of the walkout.

But perhaps most alarming of all to the Canadian bourgeoisie in 1918 was the emergence of police unionism. In ten major Canadian cities TLC-affiliated police activists organized unions that year. In Ontario the provincial government set up a Royal Commission to consider the question of police unionism.[41] Only in Ottawa did civic officials quell the dissent by firing almost one-third of the force. In Toronto, Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Saint John, Montreal, and Quebec, serious struggles over the question of police unionism occurred, but trade union rights won out. In Toronto, for example, Police Magistrate Dennison remembered that during the 1886 street railway strike law and order prevailed only because "Our police force was able to keep them down." "If they had been in a union," he concluded, "I don't suppose they would have been able to do such good work."[42] Nevertheless, Toronto Police FLU #68 gained initial recognition after a successful strike to protest the firing of 11 union leaders. Meanwhile, in Montreal a common front of some 1500 firemen and policemen struck in December. They gained victory in the aftermath of a night of rioting in which volunteer strike breakers were beaten and fire stations were occupied by crowds supporting the strikers.[43] In Vancouver the threat of a general strike after the firing of four police union leaders led to an ignominious surrender by the Chief Constable. But it was in Saint John, New Brunswick, that the degree of labour solidarity with these efforts found its most profound expression. The firing of half the force for joining a union led to a city-wide campaign organized by the labour movement to recall the police commissioners guilty of the victimization of the police unionists. The success of the recall campaign resulted in a new election in which the anti-union commissioners were defeated. These 1918 public sector successes did much to set the terms for the 1919 struggles. The extent of working-class support for public sector workers stemmed from a combination of factors — a recognition of the generally blue-collar workers as labour, the strong World War I notions that the state was greatly indebted to the working class and should be a model employer, and finally the pervasiveness for all workers of the issues at stake in these strikes — the living wage and the recognition of the right to organize.

The brief story of the national postal strike suggests another theme which needs to be emphasized. By and large the 1917-1920, and especially 1919,

[41] Ontario, Royal Commission on Police Matters, *Report*, 1919.

[42] Jim Naylor, "Toronto, 1919," *Historical Papers* (1986), 33-55.

[43] G. Ewen, "La contestation à Montréal en 1919," *Histoire des travailleurs québécois. Bulletin RCHTQ*, 36 (1986), 37-62.

insurgency was a rank-and-file revolt. In many cases, as with the letter carriers, workers simply ignored their leaders. In some cases old leaders unsympathetic to the new militancy were unceremoniously dumped. For example, Arthur Puttee, a long-time Winnipeg labour leader, former lib-lab MP, and labour alderman, was removed from the editorship of *The Voice* in 1918 because of his refusal as alderman to support fully the striking civic workers. In many cities the left won control of TLCs which, of course, became the vehicle for orchestrating general and sympathetic strikes. Even where the left held control, however, leaders found themselves following rank-and-file actions in directions with which they were not always in total sympathy. This tension was especially evident among some of the Socialist Party of Canada leaders who felt the masses were not ready for actions the authorities increasingly deemed "revolutionary."

Much historical discussion of strikes, as David Montgomery has reminded us, has revolved around Eric Hobsbawm's notion of workers' "learning the rules of the game" and Michelle Perrot's idea about workers' fascination "with the possibilities of the strike."[44] By 1919 Canadian workers clearly had learned the new rules that accompanied monopoly capitalism and indeed they had come to recognize that such economic organization presented them with considerable possibilities for action. They exercised those options and found themselves facing a newly united front of capital and state, both of whom, like labour, saw the outcome of the struggles of 1919-1920 as setting the pattern for the post-war world. Despite labour's new solidarities and extraordinary militancy capital triumphed. For many Canadian historians this defeat for labour has led either to liberal criticism of a state over-response or a conservative dismissal of labour's struggle as a naive and utopian "children's crusade."[45] Even the often astute Clare Pentland missed the point badly when he attributed, albeit only partially, the failure to a generation "decimated by war, exhausted by struggle, and diluted by barely literate immigrants from Europe." His argument that the "gap in capacity between bosses and workers had widened again" contains hidden assumptions almost as questionable as the ethnic chauvinism of the previous quotation.[46] But, more important, was his further and main argument that the decline of western capital in the 1920s and 1930s decimated the possibilities of working-class advance. His point about the west applies even more to the Canadian east where a process of deindustrialization evident even before the

[44] Montgomery, "Nineteenth-Century Strikes;" for Hobsbawm, see his "Economic Fluctuations and Some Social Movements" and "Customs, Wages and Workload" in *Labouring Men* (London 1964); for Perrot, see her magisterial *Les ouvriers en grève: France 1871-1890.*

[45] D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 1950); David Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 188.

[46] H. Clare Pentland, "The Western Canadian Labour Movement, 1897-1919," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3 (1979), 53-78.

war would quicken over the next two decades. Thus, while workers had begun during World War I to act on a vision of a national labour market with national wage rates, the regional realities of Canadian capitalist development in the inter-war years would rob them of the possibility of realizing such goals. Such labour aims would reemerge during World War II. The relative quiescence of Canadian labour between the wars, of course, to some degree parallels the experience of other western nations — what Yves Lequin has termed "the great silence."[47]

But "the great silence" should not blind us to the achievements and especially the possibilities of 1919. When Sir Robert Borden, the Canadian Prime Minister of the day, composed his *Memoirs*, almost 20 years later, he noted that "In some cities there was a deliberate attempt to overthrow the existing organization of the Government and to supersede it by crude, fantastic methods founded upon absurd conceptions of what had been accomplished in Russia. It became necessary in some communities to repress revolutionary methods with a stern hand and from this I did not shrink."[48] Borden's words should be read in the same way his government's actions must be understood; they reflect the fears of a militant working class in motion and represent the harsh and rational response of the bourgeois state.[49]

The Depression strike waves of 1934 and 1937 are the only one-year "waves" in this sixty-year period. Geographically these waves are notable for the increased eastern strike activity in the country. The Maritimes with 13 and 18 per cent of the strikes in 1934 and 1937 respectively and about 25 per cent of the strikers played a more prominent role than in any previous wave. (See Table 11.) Similarly Quebec with 17 and 15 per cent of the strikes and almost one-third of the strikers achieved its highest rate since the wave of 1899-1903. Ontario played about the same role as in previous waves, while the west fell to its lowest levels, perhaps for the reasons Pentland asserted.

Industrially both waves were dominated by manufacturing at 59 and 48 per cent of strikes and 55 and 64 per cent of strikers. Mining with 11 and 15 per cent of strikes and 28 and 24 per cent of strikers finished a distant second. More interestingly, service sector strikes rose to third place in each year with 9 and 14 per cent of strikes and 2 per cent of strikers. Construction and transportation strikes continued to play less prominent roles than they had earlier in the century.

In terms of strike issues in these depression years 1934 and 1937 are notable

[47] Yves Lequin, "Social Structures and Shared Beliefs: Four Worker Communities in the Second Industrialization," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 22 (1982), 1-17.
[48] Sir Robert Borden, *Memoirs* (Toronto 1938), II, 972.
[49] On state repression and the creation of a new security branch see Kealey, "1919" and "The State" and S.W. Horral, "The Royal Northwest Mounted Police and Labour Unrest in Western Canada, 1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (1980), 169-90.

for their high number of offensive strikes for changes in wages and conditions and especially for the very high number of recognition strikes. (See Table 4.) Equally notable was the increase in third party intervention to bring settlements, especially in 1937. (See Table 5.) This pattern, of course, would increase noticeably during World War II with the extension of the IDIA under wartime emergency measures legislation and with the advent of PC1003. Finally, as in earlier waves workers in 1934 and 1937 enjoyed considerable success with 63 and 66 per cent of combined strike victories or compromises.

Provincially Ontario and Quebec dominated in strikes and strikers in 1934 and 1937 owing to the prominence of the manufacturing sector. This was equally true with regards to intensity. Ontario accounted for eight of the 14 "violent" strikes in 1934 and 11 of 17 in 1937 while Quebec added three and five. Manufacturing was the site of eight in 1934 and 13 in 1937. Initially under Workers Unity League leadership and subsequently, after the move to the United Front, under CIO leadership, the drive to industrial unionism in the mass production industries was the major story of 1934 and 1937. In many ways these struggles were a reenactment in numerous industries of the aborted victories of the labour revolt of 1917 to 1920. Moreover, in manufacturing at least, 1934 was something of a dress rehearsal for the larger struggles of 1937. Thus, for example, 1934 and 1937 saw major struggles in the forests of Ontario and British Columbia as loggers again organized, this time under the banners of the Workers Unity League's Lumber Workers Industrial Union.[50] Over 2,300 Vancouver Island loggers struck for some four months in early 1934 and won a partial victory, although later that fall their Ontario comrades were defeated in major struggles in the Iroquois Falls and Sault Ste. Marie areas. Similarly in January 1937 some 2,300 Flanders, Ontario loggers fought and gained a partial victory. All three of these Ontario lumber strikes involved incidents of picket line violence.

Mining struggles played an important role in both years but especially in 1937. In 1934, 1,300 Stellarton, N.S. coal miners struck for almost three months to prevent wage cuts and then went out again for almost two weeks in late July and early August to protect a union activist. Perhaps the most famous mining struggle of 1934, however, was the Flin Flon, Manitoba, metal mining strike led by the Mine Workers Union of Canada, an affiliate of the Communist Party's trade-union wing, the Workers Unity League. While the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company won a short-term victory after a two-month struggle involving nearly 1,100 miners, the CPC further strength-

[50] For events in B.C. see Myrtle Bergren, *Tough Timber* (Toronto 1966) and Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madiera Park, B.C. 1984).

ened its position as the militant, fighting arm of Canadian labour.[51] In 1937, however, numerous struggles in the Maritimes, including major struggles in Florence, Stellarton, and Springhill, Nova Scotia and in Minto, New Brunswick, made mining an even more pronounced factor in the strike wave. In Minto, where there had been almost continuous labour strife since 1919, a major struggle broke out in October 1937 and lasted into the New Year involving 1,200 members of the UMWA.[52] Third-party intervention in the form of an IDIA conciliation board proved ineffectual and the workers suffered a serious set-back. In 1937 Nova Scotia coal miners left the pits on some 30 occasions to back demands. These mining strikes played a large role in the east's new prominence in the national labour new prominence in the national labour scene.

In Central Canada, however, manufacturing dominated the strike scene. In 1934 the action was primarily in boot and shoe and in clothing and textiles which together accounted for 53 per cent of the manufacturing strikes and a remarkable 83 per cent of strikers. In the former, of 19 strikes, involving some 2300 workers, 15 were in Ontario, primarily in Toronto and most were struggles for union recognition. In the latter there were some 56 strikes involving about 19,000 workers. Most impressive were the massive strikes in the clothing industry where major struggles occurred in Toronto (2,000 workers in January and another 2,000 in July-August), and in Montreal (1,500 Millinery Workers in March, some 3,000 dressmakers in August-September, and 4,000 workers in the men's clothing industry in July-August). A number of these struggles too were led by a WUL affiliate, in this case the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers which battled with the ILGWU and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers for union control of the sector.[53] As was too often the case in the 1930s and 1940s, much energy was expended on internecine political struggle between communist and labourist union leaders.

[51] For a detailed analysis of this strike, see Robert S. Robson, "Strike in the Single Enterprise Community: Flin Flon, Manitoba - 1934," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 12 (1983), 63-86. The best study of the Workers Unity League by far is John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Great Depression: The Workers' Unity League, 1930-1936," Ph.D., Dalhousie, 1984. See also Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 273-88.

[52] Alleu Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick: A Study in Canadian Class Relations Between the Wars," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (1980), 81-132.

[53] Rose Pesotta, *Bread Upon the Waters* (New York 1941), 253-77, provides a first-person account by an ILGWU organizer. See also C. McLeod, "Women in Production: The Toronto Dressmakers' Strike of 1931" in J. Acton, et al., eds *Women at Work* (Toronto 1974), 309-29; Evelyn Dumas, *The Bitter Thirties in Quebec* (Montreal 1975), 43-69; and Irving Abella, ed., "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 184-213; perhaps most useful of all is Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class," 464-534. In addition see Terry Copp, "The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montreal, 1935-1945," *Relations industrielles*, 37 (1982), 843-75.

In 1937 the manufacturing sector saw battles spread far beyond the clothing industry, which itself saw a massive April-May work stoppage of 5,000 Montreal women's clothing workers led to victory by the newly unified ILGWU.[54] Major textile struggles broke out in Ontario at Welland (765 workers for three months), Cornwall (1,700 in July-August and 1,600 in August-September), and in Quebec at Montreal (9,000 in August) and Louiseville (900 in September). Nevertheless clothing and textile and boot and shoe accounted for only 40 per cent of the manufacturing strikes and 35 per cent of the strikers down considerably from 1934. Among the new areas where organization spread were meatpacking in which major strikes were fought in Montreal, Edmonton, and Vancouver, rubber (Kitchener, 550 in March-April and 700 in September-November);[55] and furniture (1,500 in March throughout Western Ontario). Perhaps the most significant strike of 1937, however, was that by 4,200 Oshawa General Motors workers for three weeks in April. This struggle became a major battle between the emerging CIO forces, in this case led by the United Auto Workers, and the Hepburn government of Ontario which was desperate to barricade the border against the spread of industrial unionism, at least partially in a vain attempt to protect Northern Ontario mining magnates. Unfortunately for Hepburn, the industrial union bug was indigenous to Canadian workers and his vigorous attempts to defeat the UAW and the CIO proved futile.[56]

The World War II strike wave of 1941-1943 came closest to matching the prominence of the 1917-1920 labour revolt. Its 1,106 strikes and nearly 425,000 strikers represent slightly over 11 per cent and 16 per cent respectively of all Canadian strikes and strikers in the 60-year period. These figures exceed those of 1917-1920 for strikers but fall short in strikes. Rough annual averages for frequency and size suggest similar conclusions. The World War I wave's index numbers averages 130 for frequency, while the World War II wave averages are higher. Given the vast growth of the nation's labour force in the years between 1920 and 1940 it remains evident that the four-year long labour revolt of 1917-1920 must be seen as the major strike wave of the period to 1950.

The trends evident in the strike waves of the 1930s toward an increased prominence of the eastern provinces continued in World War II. The Maritimes increased their share of Canadian strikes during strike waves to its highest level with 24 per cent of strikes and 31 per cent of strikers. (See Table 11.) Meanwhile, Quebec did the same and raised its proportion of strikes to a century high 28 per cent with 31 per cent of strikers only slightly behind

[54] Pesotta, *Bread*, 253-77 and Dumas, *Bitter Thirties*, 43-69.

[55] For the struggles in rubber, see Terry Copp, ed., *Industrial Unionism in Kitchener, 1937-47* (Elora, Ont. 1976), esp. 1-29.

[56] Irving Abella, "Oshawa 1937" in his *On Strike* (Toronto 1974), 93-128, and Eric Havelock, "Forty-five Years Ago: The Oshawa Strike," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (1983), 119-24.

its high of 34 per cent in 1937. Growth in the Maritimes and Quebec was largely at Ontario's expense which fell to 31 per cent of strikes and 22 per cent of strikers, while the west stayed approximately at its Depression strike wave levels of 18 and 15 per cent, far lower, of course, than its role in the earlier waves. Industrially, manufacturing continued to dominate with 58 and 59 per cent, while mining contributed 21 per cent of strikes and 26 per cent of strikers. Construction, service, and transport trailed far behind.

Strikes appear to have been fought primarily for improvements in wages and conditions and recognition struggles declined when compared to the 1930s. (See Table 4.) Given the existence of the war, the rapid rise in third party settlements to its century high is not surprising. (See Table 5.) Indeed the struggles of 1941-1943 would force the state to implement its most interventionist labour relations policy in the century. PC1003 of 1944 and its later entrenchment in 1948 as the Industrial Relations and Labour Disputes Investigation Act brought an entirely new legal regime to bear in Canadian labour relations. Perhaps not coincidentally, the 1941-1943 strike wave witnessed not only the most third-party settlements but also an unusually large number of workers' losses for a strike wave. Employers actually won 30, 39, and 40 per cent of the struggles with clear workers' victories at 23, 22, and 34 per cent respectively. The combination of worker victories and compromises led to 61, 50, and 54 per cent in the three years. (See Table 6.) Nevertheless, the higher level of employer victories seems quite suggestive and is quite out of step with the pattern of the previous strike waves.

Indeed the strike wave of 1941-1943 was typified by a new pattern of quick, mass walkouts which under the pressure of war conditions often led to short, sharp workers' victories. If strikes did not finish quickly, workers' chances were much worse.[57] The strike wave consisted primarily of short, often effective mining strikes, especially in Nova Scotia, the continuation of efforts to organize the mass production industries, especially in Ontario and Quebec, and huge strikes in war production industries, especially shipbuilding. Manufacturing and mining dominated this strike wave more totally than in any of the previous five waves in percentage of strikes with 79 and its 85 per cent of strikers was second only to 1937's 88 per cent. (See Table 11.)

In coal mining the struggles built through the wave with 47, 57, and 112 strikes in the three years. The 112 strikes of 1943 was the highest in the 60-year period. Nova Scotia dominated with numerous strikes in both the mainland and Cape Breton coal fields. Only in November 1943, when there was a UMWA District 18-wide shutdown involving almost 10,000 miners in B.C.

[57] One prime example was Kirkland Lake. See Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *"Remember Kirkland Lake": The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42* (Toronto 1983). This strike involved almost 3,000 workers for three months from 18 November 1941 - 12 February 1942.

and Alberta for two weeks, did the west figure prominently in coal strikes in these years.

Similarly, in auto and steel and in shipbuilding and aircraft, the struggles built to a peak in 1943. A three-week strike of 3,700 St. Catharines auto parts workers in 1941 was followed in 1942 by a Windsor strike of over 14,000 autoworkers fighting for equal pay for equal work. In 1943, some 15,000 Windsor autoworkers fought speed-ups. The final showdown in auto would come in 1945.[58] The pattern in steel showed like developments. Various strikes in steel fabrication in 1941 in Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal, and Trenton were followed by 1942 struggles in Trenton and Vancouver, but in 1943 an almost nation-wide strike in basic steel by nearly 13,000 steelworkers at Sydney, Trenton, and Sault Ste. Marie brought the industry to an abrupt halt.[59]

The pattern in shipbuilding and aircraft, relatively unstudied to date, looks almost identical. A brief aircraft strike in Toronto in 1942 was followed the next year by a Vancouver strike of almost 7,000 workers and by a massive Montreal walkout of over 21,000 workers for nearly two weeks. In shipbuilding strikes were huge and generally short as workers struck over control issues. These strikes were especially prominent in 1942 and 1943 and took place in virtually all Canadian shipyards in the east, on the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes, and on the west coast. The largest stoppages took place in Lauzon, Sorel and Montreal, Quebec, and in Vancouver. East coast strikes were smaller but no less frequent.[60]

Manufacturing's 58 per cent of strikes and 59 per cent of strikers was almost totally dominated by metals and shipbuilding with 51 per cent of strikes and 78 per cent of strikers. Clothing and textile added 17 per cent of strikes and 6 per cent of strikers. Outside of manufacturing and mining, the largest strikes occurred in 1943 in Montreal where 3,000 transit workers struck and where a series of strikes by civic workers foreshadowed much later developments elsewhere in the country.[61] Again, as in 1919, Montreal policemen and firemen organized as well.

The events of the strike wave of 1941-1943 led eventually, after much delay, to a new industrial relations system, which we have mentioned briefly earlier in this paper. The clear aim of the King Liberal government in labour

[58] David Moulton, "Ford Windsor 1945," in Abella, ed., *On Strike*, 129-61.

[59] See Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "The 1943 Steel Strike Against Wartime Wage Controls," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (1982), 65-85 and Craig Heron and Robert Storey, "Work and Struggle in the Canadian Steel Industry, 1900-1950," in their *On the Job*, 210-44.

[60] Douglas Cruikshank, "Dominion Wartime Labour Policy and the Politics of Unionism, 1939-1945: The Experience of the Canadian Congress of Labour's Eastern Canadian Shipyard Unions," M.A., Dalhousie, 1984. For first-hand accounts, see David Frank and Donald MacGillivray, eds., *George MacEachern: An Autobiography* (Sydney 1987), esp. ch.6 and Howard White, *A Hard Man to Beat* (Vancouver 1983).

[61] Dumas, *Bitter Thirties*, 78-100 and 101-27.

and in general social policy was to move to the left as quickly as possible in an attempt to maintain power in the post-war world and to prevent the massive upheaval of 1919. The key strikes of 1945-1946 at Hamilton Stelco, Ford Windsor, and in the British Columbia woods made 1946 the sixty-year leader in person days lost, but unlike 1919 it did not bring the country to the brink of political crisis.

III

LET US RETURN briefly to our aggregate data simply to suggest the possibilities of a more rigorous international comparison of working-class formation. As is often the case varying methods of presenting data limits us here to two rather simplistic comparisons but from each interesting contrasts appear.

Table 12 compares the number of strikes and strikers in Britain, France, and Canada from 1891-1950. The magnitude of the struggles in Britain and France are, of course, far larger than in Canada but when expressed simply in percentages of strikes and strikers in the 60-year period significant patterns emerge. Strikes in Britain in the 1890s played a far more prominent role relative to the entire period than in Canada or France, while in the latter countries the 1901-1910 decade figured more prominently. Canada's World War I and immediate post-war experience, on the other hand, resembles British experience, although Canada's strike statistics relative to the entire period are the highest of the three nations, although Britain led in strikers. Canadian strikes in the 1920s resembled British proportions in number of strikes but fell behind in strikers, no doubt owing to the 1926 British General Strike. Both Canada and Britain trailed France in strike proportions. France, with the extra-ordinary experience of the Popular Front, led in the 1930s, trailed by Canada and Britain, while the British dominated in number of strikes in the 1940s while Canada led in strikers. Of course, we should remember again that we are only comparing patterns here not actual experiences. If we look at the real numbers in Table 12A we should note that while France had by far the most strikes of the three countries, Britain had the largest until the 1940s. We should also remember that the data sets are not perfectly comparable.

Table 13 presents evidence on Canadian/American comparisons over the period, 1891-1950. As can be readily seen, Canada trailed in frequency in every decade except the 1920s and in size in every decade except the 1900s. Canada's low figures in the 1890s for frequency in comparison to the U.S. match the similar contrast with Britain and France and emphasize, we think, the relative immaturity of the national Canadian working-class experience of the 1890s. In subsequent decades, however, that gap was closed and Canadian strike frequency never fell below two-thirds of the American. In size

Table 12A

Number of Strikes and Workers Involved in Great Britain, France, and Canada, 1891-1950[d]

	Great Britain[a]		France[b]		Canada	
	Strikes	Workers Involved (000)	Strikes	Workers Involved (000)	Strikes	Workers Involved (000)
1891-1900	7930	2476	4890	1020	511	78
1901-1910	4636	1484	10050	2112	1548	230
1911-1920	9187	9220	9891	3852	2349	521
1921-1930	5066	7256	9421	3130	989	261
1931-1940	6874	2525	22463[c]	4504[c]	1760	376
1941-1950	17276	4063	6908[c]	14069[c]	2537	1133

Table 12B

Percentage of Strikes and Workers Involved in Great Britain, France, and Canada 1891-1950[c]

	Great Britain[a]		France[b]		Canada	
	Strikes	Workers Involved	Strikes	Workers Involved	Strikes	Workers Involved
1891-1900	16	9	8	4	5	3
1901-1910	9	6	16	7	16	9
1911-1920	18	34	16	13	24	20
1921-1930	10	27	15	11	10	10
1931-1940	13	9	35[c]	16[c]	18	14
1941-1950	34	15	11[c]	49[c]	26	44

[a]Cronin, Industrial Conflict, 206-7, 209-11.

[b]Shorter and Tilly, Strikes in France, 360-3.

[c]The French statistical series is not strictly comparable for either decade owing to the World War II occupation experience.

[d]It should be noted that the operative definition of a "strike" used by these authors varies. In Britain small strikes were not counted which biases frequency down and size up.

Canadian strikes in the 1920s and 1930s ran about one-half of the American compared to four-fifths in the 1890s and about three-quarters in the 1910s and 1940s.

Table 13

Frequency and Size of Strikes, Canada and the United States, 1891-1950.[d]

	Frequency[a]		Size[b]	
	United States[c]	Canada	United States[c]	Canada
1891-1900	113	55	274	218
1901-1910	162	115	179	180
1911-1920	143	123	397	286
1921-1930	41	43	521	270
1931-1940	80	61	432	218
1941-1950	99	70	604	452

[a]Total number of strikes per 1,000,000 non-agricultural employees.

[b]Number of workers involved per strike.

[c]US data from Edwards, Strikes, 13.

[d]American data tends to eliminate small strikes thus biasing frequency down and size up.

The Canadian case, then, while showing broad similarities with the American (although we should add that those similarities have been breaking down since 1960), provides further support for the notion that questions of national "exceptionalism" are incorrectly posed.[62] Each national labour movement must be studied historically and understood in light of working-class experience, not held up against a reified model, which existed only in the minds of Second International theorists.

We would like to thank Robert Hong for additional research aid. For aid with graphs and figures, our thanks to Robert Hong and Susan Laskin. This project has been supported by funds from the Historical Atlas of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Institute for Social and Economic Research at Memorial University.

[62] Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds., *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton 1986), esp. 3-41, 397-455. See also Sean Wilenz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labour Movement," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 26 (1984), 1-24, and responses in 26 (1984), 25-36; 27 (1985), 35-8; and 28 (1985), 46-55.