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RESEARCH REPORT / NOTES DE RECHERCHE

Strikes, Worker Protest, and Union Growth in Canada and Australia, 1815-1900: A Comparative Analysis

Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner

Introduction

IN 1987 BRYAN PALMER published an overview of the available data on labour protest and union organization in Canada in the period to 1890[1] in this journal. A paper by Cruikshank and Kealey in the same issue examined strike data from 1891 through to 1950.[2] The purpose of this paper is to compare the pattern of worker protest and union formation in Canada and Australia in the 19th century. The paper will draw on the work of Palmer, Cruikshank, and Kealey as well as our own as yet incomplete

[1]Palmer's paper only formally claims to cover the period 1820-1890 but his analysis considers worker protest and union organization from the end of the 18th century. See Bryan D. Palmer, "Labour Protest and Organization in Nineteenth Century Canada, 1820-1890," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 61-83. Eugene Forsey compiled data on unions and strikes in his pioneering work on the Canadian labour movement. To our knowledge no similar data compilation has been undertaken on Australia prior to our own project. See Eugene A. Forsey, *The Canadian Labour Movement* (Ottawa 1974) and *Trade Unions in Canada 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982).

[2]Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 87-145.

Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner, "Strikes, Worker Protest and Union Growth in Canada and Australia, 1815-1900: A Comparative Analysis," *Labour/Le Travail*, 36 (Fall 1995), 175-208.

database on worker organization and action in Australia. A comparison of strikes, worker protest, and union growth in Canada and Australia offers some analytical opportunities given the apparent similarities between the two countries. These include their status as British colonies with similar political and legal structures, their small European immigrant and indigenous populations spread over a large landmass, and their similar economic structures, including an overriding dependence on primary exports. There are also a number of obvious differences which need to be recognized, notably the closer proximity of Canada, both to Europe and to the United States of America. Moreover, Australia had no large distinct ethnic enclave comparable to the French-speaking province of Québec. It is also worth exploring whether these differences had discernible effects on labour organization. In order to broaden the analysis the paper also makes some brief reference to historical studies of strikes and union growth undertaken in other countries.

Sample and Methodology

THE AUSTRALIAN DATA for this study is derived from a research database[3] which we have constructed on Australian trade unionism.[4] The database consists of a separate file for each organization or independent instance of collective worker action. Each file contains information on the location of the organization, occupation and industry, the dates of formation and collapse, objectives and governing structures, forms of agreement entered into, the names of leading officials and activists, membership (including gender), and a range of other matters. For each year that the organization existed there is an activity summary which includes information on matters such as marches, mass meetings, letters to the press, strikes, non-strike industrial disputes, deputations and petitioning of government authorities, as well as court action involving the union or its members.

In addition, there are subfiles attached to each main organizational file on strikes, non-strike industrial disputes, deputations, petitions and court actions. The strikes and disputes subfiles record the number of workers and workplaces in-

[3]Unlike an archival or bibliographic database which lists the location of and/or allows access to full or partial text reproductions of historical documents, our database contains information and data which may be directly used in answering research questions. Originally based on a DOS database package (Microsoft Foxbase) the database has recently been converted to a windows application (Foxpro). For a fuller description of the nature of this database see Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History: The Development of a Database on Australian Trade Unions 1825-1900," *Labour History*, 66 (May 1994).

[4]In addition to the union database (Australian Trade Union Database or ATUD), a separate database has been constructed on union peak councils and political organizations of workers (Peak and Political Organisation Database or PPOD). Data entry is at an earlier stage than is the case with ATUD and, in any case, Palmer makes few references to such organization in his paper on Canada. For a brief discussion of PPOD see Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History", 97-8.

volved, the issues, the duration of the conflict, and the outcome. The subfiles on deputations and petitions deal with attempts by private sector workers (such as cab-drivers) to gain a change in legislation which would affect their employment conditions or the attempt by public sector employees directly to renegotiate their conditions of employment with their employer. In the latter case petitioning and deputations represented a form of industrial action while in the former they represented a resort to the political sphere. These subfiles record the authority approached, the issue, and the outcome. The court action subfile covers instances where workers or employers resorted to the legal process in the course of a struggle over employment conditions. This subfile records the court where the trial took place, the number of workers involved, who was charged (and with what), arguments used by the defence, and the outcomes.

As just noted, the database records both collective industrial conflict involving strike action or a lockout (simply labelled as strikes for our purposes in this paper) and those industrial disputes involving some form of action other than a strike such as the tabling of a collective demand, mass meetings and processions, riots, the imposition of a ban, adverse publicity, or some other form of collective action (which has been labelled as a non-strike industrial dispute). Most examinations of data on industrial conflict are restricted to strikes. This paper will seek to show how the inclusion of non-strike disputes, along with other measures of worker activity such as petitioning and deputations, contributes to a better understanding of patterns of industrial conflict both at the aggregate level and in terms of particular occupational groups.

The major source of information used to create the database was contemporary newspaper reports (as well as advertisements, published letters, etc.) which provide the most extensive if not the most detailed information on union activity. Other sources used include government records (such as the correspondence files dealing with union registration, legislation or prosecution of workers), union and employer records, personal diaries, theses, and both contemporary and more recent secondary literature. Obviously this information is not always capable of filling every data box or comment space in the database. Further, given the fuzziness of historical data a series of conventions have been followed in recording information in the database such as the designation of a particular date as only an approximation.[5] Each file contains a record of the sources used so that these can be checked. It appears that the sources used for the database are similar to those used by Palmer for his study.

The sample used in this paper consists of 1775 organizations formed between 1816 and 1900. The strike, dispute, petition, deputation, and court proceedings data cited in this paper relate to every such incident reported for these 1775 organizations. This sample of 1775 represented all organizations entered into the database at the time of writing. It amounts to about one third of the total number of

[5] *Ibid*, 93-4.

organizations which our research has uncovered for the period 1815-1900. Included in this are both short-lived and informal organizations (such as spontaneous strikes by non-unionised workers) of which our sample includes 615 instances as well as 1160 formal unions. Formal unions have been identified on the basis of an attempt to bring some institutional structure or character to the organization. At its crudest level this may have represented the establishment of a committee to represent a group of workers. Far more common is the adoption of a title for the organization (society, union, institution, etc.), office-bearers (president, secretary, etc.) and written rules which indicate a clear attempt to move beyond a informal collectivity. Informal organization includes any reported instance of collective activity by workers in relation to their terms and conditions of employment. This activity includes spontaneous strikes, riots, or even the presentation of a petition. The key distinction for this category is that there is no evidence of formal organizational structures such as those noted above.

By including informal organization we feel our database provides a more representative picture of the diversity and dynamics of collective worker activity than one more in keeping with the Webb's definition with its emphasis on institutional permanency.[6] Our study indicates a broader impulse for collective action amongst workers and a far greater level of volatility among unions than the Webb's definition and approach would suggest.[7] Such a finding not only indicates a need to reassess understandings of trade unionism but also indicates how new data sources can offer ways of bridging the old labour history/new labour history divide.

The sample contains a substantial number of unions from all states apart from New South Wales.[8] Although this is the largest and oldest colony, we do not believe the sample is highly skewed or unrepresentative. There are three reasons for this judgement. First, the database contains a significant number (over 500) of unions from Victoria. Although not settled until 1838 (this still predates the first significant wave of union growth in Australia), Victoria grew rapidly and actually eclipsed New South Wales in terms of population and economic activity for much of the second half of the 19th century. Second, there is a bias towards early unions in the Tasmanian sample (colonised soon after New South Wales), which offsets the understatement of pre 1838 unions that might otherwise have arisen.[9] Third, checks of source files suggest there is no significant difference in terms of occupational

[6]Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London 1907), 1.

[7]See Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History."

[8]The sample consists of virtually all known unions for the colonies of Western Australia (317) and Queensland (740). The sample for Victoria (over 500 unions) represents about 40 per cent of a total population for this colony. The sample for Tasmania consisted of about 50 unions, South Australia about 90 unions, and New South Wales about 40 unions (mainly early bodies).

[9]This observation has been verified by an assessment of pre 1850 unions in New South Wales which are yet to be entered into the database.

coverage (the primary organizing base for unions in the Australian colonies) between New South Wales and the other Australian colonies taken as a whole. Any residual bias is likely to be a slight understatement of union organization prior to 1880 — something that would strengthen rather than weaken some of the distinctions drawn between the Canadian and Australian experience. Apart from this we feel the sample is sufficiently representative for purposes of discussing overall patterns.

In order to facilitate comparison we have followed the approach of Palmer, including his periodisation and occupational categories, as closely as possible. We have also followed the broad structural configuration of his paper, adding where possible, data for the period 1891-1900. At the same time, reference is made to a number of special features of our database which provide additional information on the evolution of both unions and forms of industrial action as well as highlighting the limitations of historical studies restricted to strike data.

Riots and Early Forms of Worker Protest

IN HIS ARTICLE Palmer does not confine his attention to strikes and unions but also examines riots and other early forms of worker protest within Canada.[10] He identifies over 400 riots in the period up to 1855 involving canallers, railway, ship and other labourers, seamen, soldiers, raftsmen, and mechanics. Palmer argues that the riots were sparked by a complex mixture of ethnocultural (rivalry between French and Irish raftsmen), political, and socio- economic factors such as low wages.[11] Riots were most common amongst those engaged in major construction activities such as railway building, in seasonal occupations such as canal work, and amongst the disaffected, property-less, and transient populations congregated in urban centres such as ports.[12] Palmer argues that as capital and labour consolidated, less ambiguous forms of industrial protest such as strikes replaced riots.

Available evidence indicates little equivalent activity among workers in the Australian colonies during the same period. There are a number of possible explanations for this difference. The early development of capitalism took a somewhat different path in Australia. Convicts constituted the bulk of the labour force in the period 1788 to 1830 and were still a significant element up until the 1850s in at least some colonies. Convicts were used on the sort of civil construction work where riots were most common in Canada. Convicts engaged in various forms of protest, sometimes riots but usually more covert acts ranging from go-slows to arson.[13] Unlike free workers, convicts were dispersed specifically to reduce the

[10]Palmer, "Labour Protest," 61-83.
[11]*Ibid.*, 62-5.
[12]*Ibid.*, 64-6.
[13]See Alan Atkinson, "Four Patterns of Convict Protest," *Labour History*, 37 (November 1979), 28-51. Arson or incendiarism was especially popular amongst both free and convict rural workers in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s. Drawing on a long tradition of similar activity

prospects of massed rebellion and any rioting brought a swift and severe response from colonial authorities. Australia had no canal system and major railway construction did not commence until after 1850. In short, prior to the mid-1850s Australia lacked the congregations of free seasonal or transient workers to engage in rioting. Our database does contain evidence of some riots amongst shearers and rural workers in the 1840s and 1850s.[14] There is also evidence of rioting by navvies employed on various Victorian railways lines in the late 1850s and at Helidon in Queensland in 1866. These transient workers shared some of the characteristics of their rioting counterparts in Canada. The activity is in no way comparable to that reported by Palmer, however, either in extent or in terms of the number of workers involved. By far the most significant instances of rioting by workers in Australia during the 19th century were predominantly worker against worker anti Chinese riots on various gold fields in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s.[15]

Strike Activity

Strike Levels and Strike Waves

IN HIS ARTICLE Palmer documents the growth of strike activity in Canada between 1815 and 1890. In the years 1891 to 1900 Cruikshank and Kealey[16] identify 511 strikes, indicating a continuation of the growth in the absolute level of strike activity (a growth sustained over the first two decades of the 20th century). We have reproduced these figures in Table 1 along with figures for Australia derived from our database. It appears that the incidence of strike activity was comparatively higher in Australia than Canada, especially in the period 1880-1890, once account is taken of differences in workforce population and the fact that our sample only represents about one third of the total number of strikes, given our sample size. On the other hand, unlike Canada there is a decline in strike activity in years 1891-1900 in comparison to the previous decade. This decline probably represents a result of

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in England, this provided an anonymous and damaging form of retribution against employers. See Michael Quinlan and Margaret Gardner, "Researching Australian Industrial Relations in the Nineteenth Century," in Greg Patmore, ed., *History and Industrial Relations* (University of Sydney 1990), 75.

[14]For instance, in the early 1840s shearers and sheep washers on the Darling Downs attempted to march on Brisbane after being supplied with tea rations tainted with paint. In 1852 Chinese shepherds at Canning Downs Station rioted in protest at being paid less than European workers. See Henry Stuart Russell, *The Genesis of Queensland* (Sydney 1888), 390-1; and Jan Walker, *Jondaryan Station* (St Lucia 1988), 41.

[15]These involved sometimes large numbers of essentially self-employed workers. While many were directed at alleged unfair competition from Chinese miners some riots addressed other issues such as the administration of miners' rights. This was at the centre of the famous Eureka stockade struggle of 1854.

[16]Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," 134.

the weakening of unionism associated with major industrial defeats and depression in the early 1890s.

TABLE 1
Number of Strikes by Period -Australia and Canada, 1815-1900

Period	Canada	Australia
1815-1849	56	25
1850-1859	76	28
1860-1879	276	107
1880-1890	425	337
1891-1900	511	232

The last observation highlights the point that the overall growth of strike levels during the 19th century should not detract from recognition of the cyclical character of strike activity. Historical studies of strikes undertaken by Cronin[17] on Britain and Shorter and Tilly[18] on France have both indicated concentrated bursts of strike activity labelled as strike waves. Cruikshank and Kealey[19] argue that Palmer's work on the 19th century indicates that Canadian workers also struck in cyclical waves with intense bursts of strike activity in the early 1850s and 1870s and mid-1880s. As Graph 1 shows, Australian data also reveals similar waves of strike activity most particularly in 1890-1. Less pronounced waves seem to occur in the early 1870s, mid-1880s and 1896-7. We are confident, on the basis of data collected but not yet entered, that further data entry will reveal a number of earlier small strike waves (in 1840 and 1846). At least two Australian strike waves (that of the early 1870s and mid-1880s) coincide with similar waves of activity in Canada. While Canada did not experience a strike wave around 1890 there is evidence of a similarly timed wave in other countries such as Germany[20] and Britain.[21] As in other countries, the Australian strike waves also appear to coincide with shifts in the business cycle and mobilisations of workers.[22] A comparison of Graph 1 with

[17]James Cronin, *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain* (London 1979).

[18]Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (Cambridge 1974).

[19]Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," 86.

[20]Friedham Boll, "Changing forms of labor conflict: secular development or strike waves?" in Leopold Haimson and Charles Tilly, eds., *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge 1989), 47-71.

[21]James. E. Cronin, "Strikes and Power in Britain, 1870-1920" in Haimson and Tilly, eds., *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions*, 79-100.

[22]Interpreting such correlations remains problematic although we hope our study will eventually be able to contribute to this debate, in part because it is not restricted to strikes but also considers union formation and other forms of industrial action as well as the issues

Graph 3 (see below), which provides an indication of union organization (as measured by numbers of unions), seems to suggest that mobilization of workers preceded strike waves. We cannot say more about pre 1890 waves, however, until more data has been entered and analyzed (including figures relating to numbers of strikers and overall union membership).

Our database also includes industrial disputes which did not involve strikes such as bans. The incidence of these is concentrated like strikes and thereby tends to accentuate the waves just indicated (see Graph 1).[23] Whether this phenomenon applies to other countries is unclear as the studies of Canada, Britain, and France just mentioned are restricted to strikes.

Two additional points can be made in relation to the general pattern of strike activity. First, Palmer identifies a seasonal character in strike activity. Notably there appears to be a concentration of strike activity in the months of April, May and June although the effect appears to diminish over time. These months accounted for 45.6 per cent of strikes in the years 1815-1859, 40.6 per cent in the years 1860-1879 and 30.6 per cent in the years 1880-1890. Such a pattern could have reflected a stronger bargaining position amongst workers in the months immediately after winter — an effect which was of less importance as union organization consolidated. Our examination of Australian data by both month and corresponding quarter reveals no similar concentration of strike activity (an effect of Australia's milder winters and more oppressive summers?).

A second point worth raising is in relation to the size of strikes over the course of the 19th century. Comparable studies in other countries indicate that the average size of strikes (in terms of the number of workers involved) grew over the course of the 19th century (or at least for those years where we have data). With regard to this Palmer is unable to furnish figures for Canada although Cruikshank and Kealey do provide figures for the period 1891-1900. While our own database will yield such figures we would prefer to base this on a complete count rather than the present sample (given the large number of strikes where the number of workers involved is not recorded and cannot be deduced from other sources). However, one crude indication of the size of strikes is the number of individual establishments or workplaces involved.

Graph 2 indicates both the number of strikes and non-strike industrial disputes involving either only one establishment or more than one establishment. Although a more refined breakdown by number of establishments will be produced ultimately

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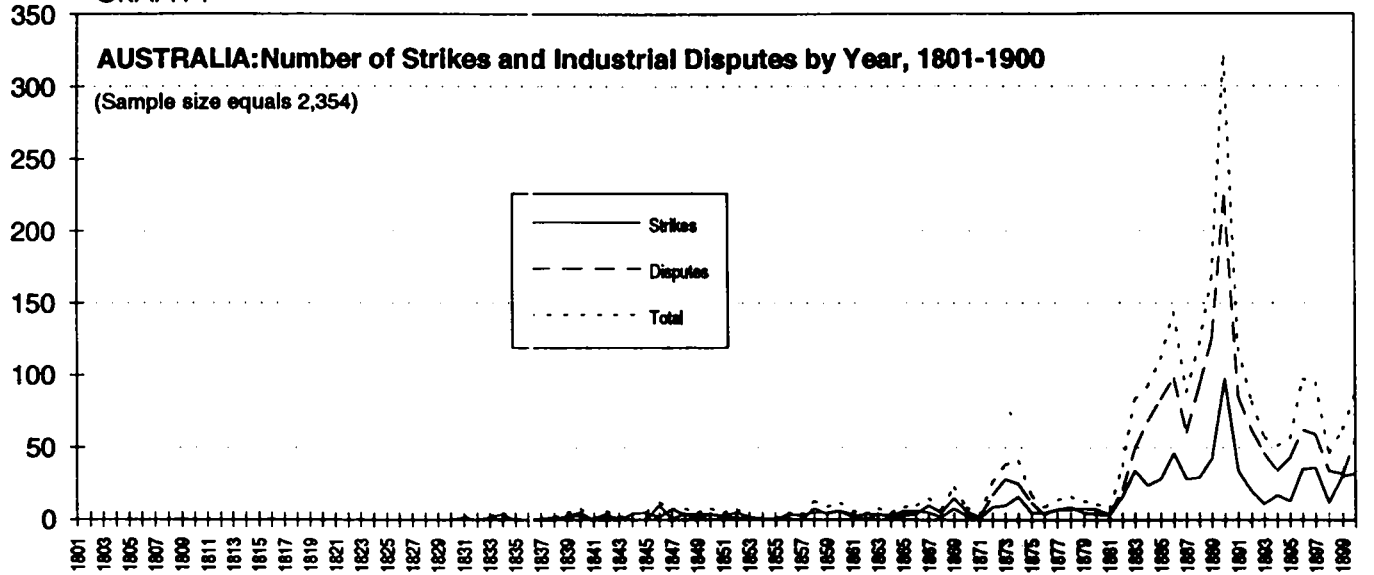
underpinning these. For a critique of theories of historical strike patterns see Roberto Franzosi, "One Hundred Years of Strike Statistics: Methodological and Theoretical Issues in Quantitative Strike Research," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 42, 3 (April 1989), 348-62.

[23]For a graphical representation of the incidence of strikes and other forms of industrial disputes in 19th century Australia see Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History."

GRAPH 1


AUSTRALIA:Number of Strikes and Industrial Disputes by Year, 1801-1900
(Sample size equals 2,354)
Strikes
Disputes
Total
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
1801
1803
1805
1807
1809
1811
1813
1815
1817
1819
1821
1823
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1833
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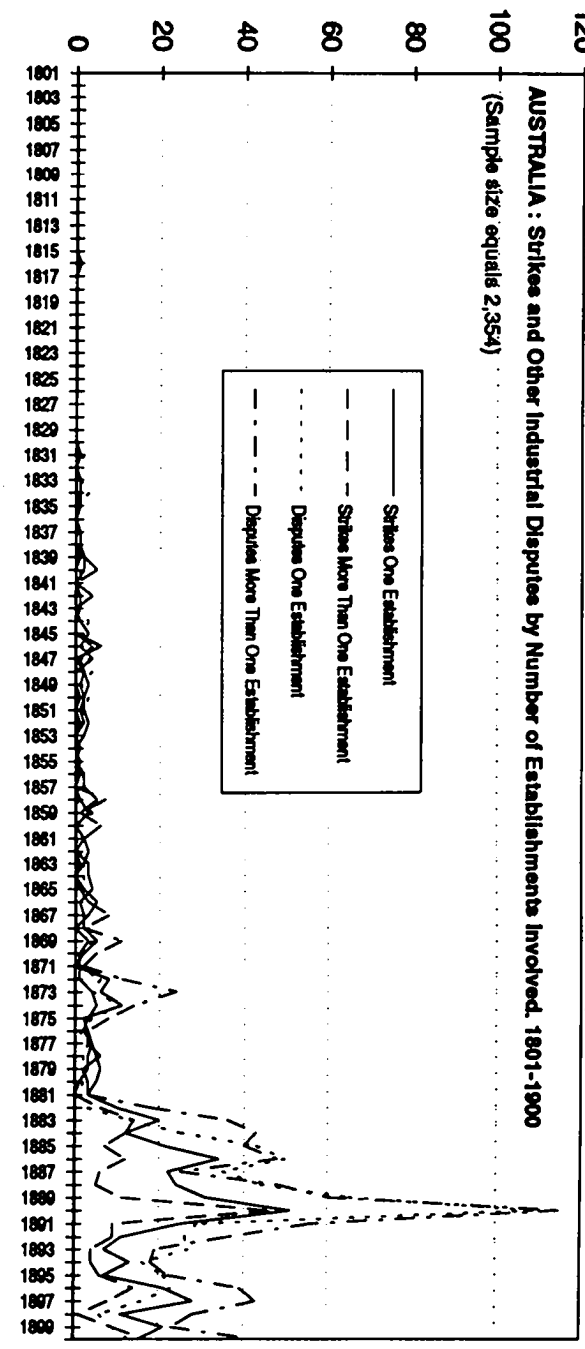
1899

GRAPH 2


AUSTRALIA : Strikes and Other Industrial Disputes by Number of Establishments Involved, 1801-1900
(Sample size equals 2,354)
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Strikes One Establishment
Strikes More Than One Establishment
Disputes One Establishment
Disputes More Than One Establishment
1801
1803
1805
1807
1809
1811
1813
1815
1817
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1821
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1829
1831
1833
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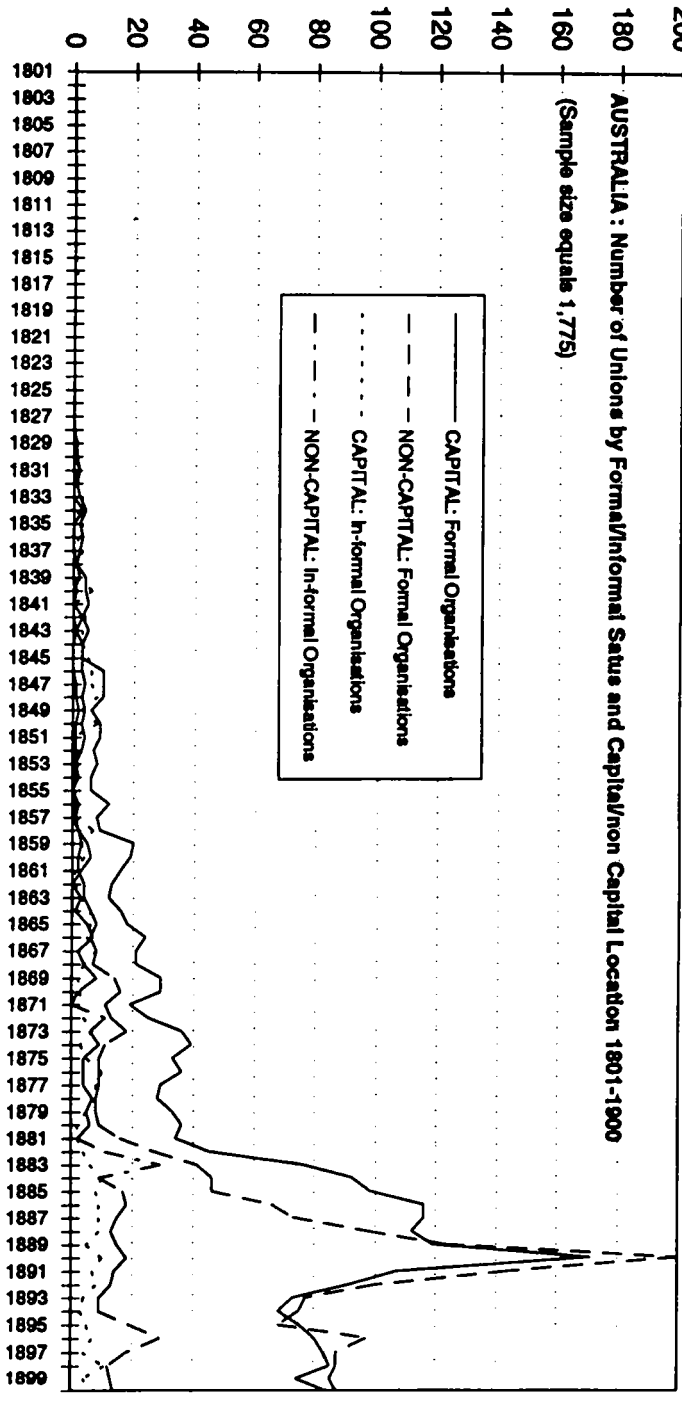
1897
1899

produced, Graph 2 is still able to show that multi-establishment strikes were relatively rare prior to the 1860s but grew in both absolute terms and as a proportion of all strikes thereafter. The relationship of multi-establishment strikes to the strike waves of the mid-1880s, 1889-91 and mid-1890s is by no means simple. Although the absolute number of multi-establishment strikes grew in all three strike waves, in that of 1886 and 1896 this growth in no way matched the growth of single establishment strikes. In the 1889-91 strike wave, on the other hand, the growth of multi-establishment strikes outstripped that of single establishment strikes and for the first time almost matched single establishment strikes in absolute numbers. When non-strike disputes are considered the pattern becomes more complex still. Graph 2 shows that, as with strikes, multi-establishment non-strike disputes became more prevalent in the second half of the 19th century. The take-off point was rather earlier and more pronounced, however, than was the case with strikes. In the 1873 and 1896 strike/dispute waves the number of multi-establishment disputes both grew faster and outstripped single establishment disputes in absolute terms. On the other hand, while multi-establishment disputes surged ahead of single establishment disputes in the early 1880s, they were overtaken by single establishment disputes in the 1886 strike/dispute wave. In the 1889-91 strike/dispute wave the growth and absolute level of multi and single establishment disputes virtually matched each other although single establishment disputes fell away more sharply and did not match multi-establishment disputes for the remainder of the century.

It is too early to draw more than tentative conclusions from the foregoing. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the growth of multi-establishment strikes and non-strike disputes reflected the consolidation of formal union organization (see Graph 3). The fact that the growth of multi-establishment non-strike disputes outstripped the growth of multi-establishment strikes in both relative and absolute terms (at least prior to 1890) is consistent with an interpretation that in a period of advance unions sought gains increasingly, via multi-establishment claims bolstered by single workplace strikes. Multi-establishment strikes were a less preferred option. The surge of multi-establishment strikes in 1890-91 reflected the changing fortunes of unions when they were thrown on to the defensive. This interpretation is consistent with the greater growth of single establishment strikes in 1896 when unions made their first attempts to retrieve lost ground. Our database contains information on union methods and outcomes (as yet not analyzed) to test this interpretation.

Strikes and Other Collective Activity by Occupation

IN HIS PAPER Palmer analyses strike activity by both region and occupation. Regional imbalances in our sample make it impossible to make any detailed comparison of strike activity by region. We are able to make comparisons, however, in terms of the occupation of strikers. In Tables 1, 2 and 3 we have sought


GRAPH 3
AUSTRALIA : Number of Unions by Formal/Informal Satus and Capital/non Capital Location 1801-1900
(Sample size equals 1,775)
CAPITAL: Formal Organisations
NON-CAPITAL: Formal Organisations
CAPITAL: In-formal Organisations
NON-CAPITAL: In-formal Organisations
200
180
160
140
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1801
1803
1805
1807
1809
1811
1813
1815
1817
1819
1821
1823
1825
1827
1829
1831
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1845
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1875
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1897
1899

to make meaningful comparisons by matching both the periodization and, as far as possible, the occupational categories used by Palmer.

In his examination Palmer also identifies the impact of industrialization and other changes in economic activity on the occupational groups involved in strikes over time. In Table 2, which covers the period 1815 to 1859, there are some obvious differences. In Canada strikes by railway labourers (22) and canal labourers (20) together constitute 31.7 per cent of all strikes in this period. Our corresponding figures for Australia are five strikes by railway labourers and only one strike by canal builders (in total representing 11.3 per cent of strikes in this period). As Way has indicated, canals and their construction played a significant role in the rise of industrial capitalism in North America between 1780 and 1860.[24] That these works should be a site for strike activity is therefore hardly surprising.

In the drier continent of Australia canal transport was never a major option and canal construction was virtually non-existent. At the same time, we strongly suspect some other differences may well diminish as more data is entered. Railway construction did not commence until the 1850s in Australia and data for several colonies has yet to be entered. The entry of more data on New South Wales will also significantly boost the number of strikes involving various groups of craftsmen including some, such as bakers and printers, for which our database presently records no strikes in this period. In short, our knowledge of data which remains to be entered would suggest that some of differences presently indicated by Table 2 are probably exaggerated. Further, even at this stage there are clear similarities between the two countries in the rank ordering of occupations in terms of their involvement in strikes.

What is perhaps most striking about Table 2 is that the overall breakdown of strikes between unskilled occupations and skilled occupations is almost identical for both countries at 53 per cent and 47 per cent for Canada and 52.8 per cent and 47.2 per cent for Australia. This similarity is not maintained during later periods. Table 3 indicates that in Canada for the years 1860-79 skilled workers were involved in 64.1 per cent of strikes with semi skilled and unskilled workers accounting for the remaining 35.9 per cent of strikes. That is, there were almost two strikes involving skilled workers for every strike involving non-craft workers. In Australia, this ratio is almost exactly reversed with semi skilled and unskilled workers accounting for 67.3 per cent of strikes and skilled workers 32.7 per cent. This difference may be exaggerated by a possible skew in our database which we have mentioned at several points. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the difference narrows but does not disappear in the next period (where a skew cannot be presumed). Table 4 indicates that in Canada skilled workers and semi/unskilled workers accounted for 57.2 per cent and 42.8 per cent of strikes respectively. Once

[24]Way found evidence of 103 riots and 57 strikes involving canallers between 1780 and 1860. See Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals 1780-1860* (Cambridge 1993).

again, the corresponding figures for Australia almost exactly reverse those of Canada (43.4 per cent for skilled workers and 56.5 per cent for unskilled workers). We do not have Canadian figures for the period 1891-1900. However, our database indicates that the gap had virtually closed with semi/unskilled workers accounting for 117 or almost exactly half of the 232 strikes we presently have recorded. If this ratio is sustained as further data is entered then it may well indicate that the weakening of Australian unions in the early to mid-1890s had a more pronounced effect on strike activity amongst unskilled workers than skilled workers.

TABLE 2
Occupation of Strikers, 1815-1859

	Canada		Australia	
Occupation	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Railway labourers	22	16.6	5	9.4
Canal labourers	20	15.1	1	1.9
Carpenters	10	7.6	7	13.2
Tailors	10	7.6	3	5.7
Shoemakers	8	6.1	4	7.5
Stonecutters	8	6.1	5	9.4
Seamen/sailors	6	4.5	5	9.4
Bakers	5	3.8	0	0.0
Miners	5	3.8	1	1.9
Printers	5	3.8	0	0.0
Miscellaneous Skilled	17	12.9	6	11.3
Miscellaneous Unskilled	16	12.1	16	30.2
Total Unskilled	70	53.0	28	52.8
Total Skilled	62	47.0	25	47.2

Overall, several things can be drawn from this. First, Canadian and Australian evidence indicates that strikes by non-skilled workers made up a significant proportion of total strikes throughout the 19th century. The prominence of strike activity amongst non-skilled workers prior to 1860 in Canada can be largely attributed to specific occupational groups namely canal and railway labourers. There appear to be no correspondingly important groups in Australia for this period. In later periods, however, shearers and associated pastoral labourers (such as station rouseabouts) account for significant levels of strike activity among non-skilled workers. According to our database shearers and rural labourers account for 16.8 per cent of all strikes in the years 1860-79 and 13.7 per cent in the years 1880-1890 (with an absolute number of strikes higher than any occupational group recorded

by Palmer for Canada). Like Palmer we would regard the occupational distribution of strike activity as, in part, reflecting the centrality of a particular industry — in this case wool production and export — to the economy and therefore capital/labour relations. The titanic industrial struggles of the early 1890s in Australia centred around workers either directly (shearers, station hands, and miners) or indirectly (carriers, wharf labourers, and seamen) engaged in key primary export industries.

TABLE 3
Occupations of Strikers, 1860-1879

	Canada		Australia	
a) Skilled Occupation	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Moulders	27	9.8	4	3.7
Stonecutters	26	9.4	2	1.9
Shoemakers	20	7.2	6	5.6
Cigarmakers	13	4.7	0	0.0
Printers	12	4.3	1	0.9
Bricklayers	11	4.0	3	2.8
Carpenters	11	4.0	2	1.9
Shipwrights, caulkers, riggers	9	3.3	1	0.9
Bakers	8	2.9	2	1.9
Coopers	6	2.2	0	0.0
Painters, plasterers	5	1.8	0	0.0
Glassworkers	4	1.4	1	0.9
Miscellaneous	25	9.0	14	13.6
Total	177	64.1	36	33.6
b) Semi Skilled & Unskilled Occupations				
Sailors/seamen	5	1.8	4	3.9
Miners	22	8.0	13	12.6
Labourers	17	6.2	5	4.7
Rail/canal labourers	13	4.7	18	16.8
Factory operatives	11	4.0	NA*	NA*
Ship labourers	13	4.7	6	5.6
Mill operatives	6	2.2	NA*	NA*
Miscellaneous	12	4.3	7	7.3
Shearers & rural labour	NA	NA*	18	16.8
Total	99	35.9	71	66.4

*NA = Not Available

In Canada the shift to a greater propensity to strike amongst skilled workers was related to the development of small scale manufacturing and the exploitation of favourable economic and production cycles by militant groups of craft workers.[25] The significance of large scale pastoral capitalism clearly differentiates Australia from Canada. Nevertheless, shearers and rural workers alone do not account for the apparently higher incidence of strike action amongst semi and unskilled workers in Australia. It may in part reflect a tighter labour market for unskilled labour given the relative remoteness of Australia from sources of European immigration. In short, unskilled labour in the Australian colonies was in a stronger bargaining position than their Canadian counterparts and thereby found it easier to resort to strikes in order to enforce their industrial demands.

A final observation to be made about the relative levels of strike activity among skilled and unskilled workers is that the pattern of strikes does not closely correspond to the pattern of formal union organization. The dominance of craft workers in early efforts to form unions (see Tables 6 and 7) does not translate into a similar dominance in terms of strike activity. This is especially true of Australia but also true for Canada. Further, our database presently indicates that a majority of strikes prior to 1860 (32 out of 54) were not linked to any formal union organization. Palmer suggests a similar situation for Canada. More remarkable is that strikes outside the auspices of trade unions continued to dominate in the period 1860 to 1879 (accounting for 68 or 63.5 per cent of all strikes) and that such strikes were a substantial proportion of total strikes even after trade union organization consolidated in the 1880s. Non-union strikes accounted for 22.5 per cent of all strikes in the period 1880-1890 and 35.8 per cent of all strikes occurring in the years 1891 to 1900. While comparable figures for Canada are not available the foregoing suggests a rather different and more complex relationship between union formation and growth and strike activity than found within conventional histories of the union movement in Australia or other countries for that matter.[26]

Despite differences in strike activity between skilled and non-skilled workers in Canada and Australia during the 19th century, there are also some similarities at a more specific occupational level. Tables 3 and 4 present progressively more elaborate occupational breakdowns based on Palmer's mapping of strike activity, the rise and decline of certain industries, technologies and areas of employment as well as the gradual dispersion of strike activity to increasing numbers of workers. Unlike the pre 1860 period there appears to be little similarity between the countries in terms of rank ordering of occupations by number of strikes. Nevertheless, in most instances the occupations selected by Palmer for Canada also appear appropriate in the Australian context. For the period 1880 to 1890 in particular (Table

[25]We are indebted to one of the anonymous referees for drawing our attention to this point.
[26]See for example J.T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia* (Melbourne 1921) and Ian Turner, *In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia 1788-1974* (Melbourne 1976). See also Webbs, *The History of Trade Unionism*.

4) there are some similarities in terms of percentage of total strikes which specific occupational groups account for in both countries (see moulders, bricklayers, bakers, other metal trades, miscellaneous crafts, labourers, wharf labourers, and road transport workers). As already noted, some of the notable differences (like miners and shearers) can be explained in terms of different patterns of economic activity between Canada and Australia. The extension of inter-occupational strike comparisons to other countries would also seem to offer the potential to develop and test explanations of strike activity.[27]

At the same time our database demonstrates the limitations of using strikes as a single indicator of industrial action or worker mobilisation either at the generic level or in relation to specific industries or occupations. Our database contains several other measures of organized worker activity, notably industrial disputes not involving strikes and worker petitioning of or deputations to political authorities. The database also records the use of court action in relation to industrial disputation. While we can draw no comparisons with Canada on these measures, brief reference to our findings thus far expand the points just made.

First, strikes provide only a very incomplete measure of the overall level of industrial action. Thus far our database records a total of 729 strikes between 1815 and 1900 but 1549 instances of other forms of collective industrial action by workers. Industrial disputes not involving strikes occur twice as often as strikes. The capacity to engage in collective action other than strikes (such as a ban or the making of a collective demand) is more clearly influenced by formal union organization than strikes. Like strikes, most of the non-strike disputes prior to 1860 (47 out of 59 or 79.7 per cent) occur outside formal union organization. However, from 1860 onwards the situation changes with non-strike disputes occurring outside formal union organization accounting for 32.7 per cent of the 165 non-strike disputes recorded in 1860-79, 8.5 per cent of the 822 disputes in the years 1880-90 and 12.7 per cent of 503 disputes in 1891-1900. This shift is less pronounced in relation to strikes. In 1860-79 63.5 per cent of strikes still occurred outside formal union organization while for 1880-90 and 1891-1900 the figures are 22.2 per cent and 35.8 per cent respectively. There is further evidence of the greater dependence of non-strike forms of industrial disputation on formal union organization. While the total number of non-strike disputes (59) roughly matches the number of strikes

[27] An occupational breakdown of British strikes for the years 1870-73 undertaken by Bevan reveals a number of similarities with regard to Canadian data cited (see Table 2) in terms of the proportion accounted for by specific occupational groups. There is less similarity with the Australian data both in relation to specific occupations and in terms of the overall proportion of strikes involving skilled as opposed to unskilled workers. Although Bevan's figures do not enable a precise breakdown by skill, the proportion of total strikes accounted for by skilled and unskilled workers appears far closer to Palmer's findings on Canada than our own data for Australia. Again, this may indicate that the level of strike activity amongst unskilled workers in Australia was atypical and the product of peculiar labour market and other factors. See Cronin, "Strikes and Power in Britain," 89-90.

TABLE 4
Occupations of Strikers, 1880-1890

	Canada		Australia	
a) Leading Skilled				
Moulders	38	8.9	29	8.6
Printers	23	5.4	9	2.7
Shoemakers	20	4.7	25	7.4
Bricklayers	14	3.3	8	2.4
Carpenters	12	2.8	4	1.2
Stonecutters	11	2.6	0	0.0
Cigarmakers	11	2.6	5	1.5
Bakers	10	2.4	8	2.4
Total	139		88	
b) Remaining Skilled by Sector				
Building Trades	34	8.0	6	1.8
Other Metal Trades	19	4.5	21	6.2
Clothing Trades	13	3.1	1	0.3
Railway Trades	7	1.6	2	0.6
Miscellaneous Crafts	31	7.3	28	8.3
Total Skilled	243	57.2	146	43.4
c) Semi Skilled & Unskilled				
Miners	15	3.5	25	7.4
Labourers	37	8.7	22	6.5
Seamen	NA*	NA*	28	8.3
Ship/Wharf Labourers	25	5.9	24	7.1
Mill Operatives	23	5.4	NA*	NA*
Railway-canal labourers	19	4.5	10	3.0
Carters/transport labourers	17	4.0	14	4.2
Miscellaneous unskilled	8	1.9	21	6.2
Telegraph Operatives	30	7.0	0	0.0
Clerks	3	0.7	0	0.0
Shearers & Rural Labour	NA*	NA*	47	13.7
Unknown	5	1.1	0	0.0
Total	182	42.8	191	56.5

*NA = Not Available

(53) in the years 1815-1859 the balance shifts in favour of non-strike disputes from 1860 and more especially after 1880. In 1860-79 our data set includes 107 strikes and 165 non strike disputes while the corresponding figures for the years 1880-90 are 337 and 822. Consistent with this interpretation, the weakening of formal union organization in the 1890s narrows the gap, although the number of disputes (503) was still over twice the number of strikes (232) for the period 1891-1900.

The foregoing indicates clearly that the consolidation of union organization after 1860 enabled workers increasingly to pursue their goals through means other than strikes. A good example of this is the increasing use of bans and secondary boycotts by Australian unions in the 1880s — a tactic that only became feasible once union organization and inter-union collaboration developed. This provides a further indication of the historical specificity of forms of industrial conflict. Just as Palmer notes, the riot gave way to the strike,[28] so increasing organization provided more opportunities for other forms of collective action.

Second, reliance on strike figures can lead to a distortion of our understanding of which occupational groups engaged in collective industrial action and when. While many groups of workers used both strike and non-strike methods of industrial action our database clearly shows that usage was not uniform across different occupational groups. For example, our database records that in the period 1860-1900 railway construction labourers (navvies) were almost twice as likely to strike as engage in some other form of industrial action. For railway workers employed in stations as guards and in workshops, use of non-strike methods outweighed strikes by a ratio of more than eight to one. For other groups the difference was even more pronounced. The database records six strikes amongst butchers and meatworkers in the years 1880 to 1900 but 66 non-strike disputes. Finally, for some groups reliance on strikes will give an entirely misleading picture of the historical evolution of collective industrial action. A case in point is shop assistants or retail workers. Our database presently reports no strike action by this group until the period 1880-90 when there were four strikes (with another two strikes the following decade). However, not only did these workers engage in considerable collective action during this period (47 disputes in 1880-90 and 42 disputes in 1891-1900), but collective action by them can be traced back to the 1840s and constituted 15.7 per cent of all non-strike disputes for the period 1860-79. Our database records no strikes among teachers but four non-strike disputes between 1870-9, seven between 1880-90, and 26 between 1891 and 1900. Similarly, while clerks are seen as late developers in terms of union organization and strikes there are instances of industrial action in the 1840s and a gradual increase of activity especially after 1891.

[28]As Cruikshank and Kealey note, the strike itself is not a static phenomenon historically. The size and shape of strikes have also undergone change as result of changes in union organization. Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," 123-4.

Collective industrial action was a far more widespread phenomenon in the 19th century than an examination of strikes would lead us to believe. While some groups used non-strike methods of action rather than striking, for other groups striking was either impossible due to labour market and organizational factors or extremely risky (as in the case of government employees). Reference to non-strike disputes also highlights the danger of confining international comparisons to strikes. For example, in Table 4 covering the period 1880-90 our database reports no strikes for stonecutters, telegraph operators, and clerks. This does not mean that there was no industrial action by these groups in the period. In all three cases our database does report other forms of collective action (one instance in the case of stonecutters and three instances each in the case of telegraphists and clerks).

In sum, comparing strikes to other forms of industrial action provides insights about worker organization which a complete reliance on strike statistics would omit, obscure, or even distort. This point is reinforced when reference is made to court activity and petitions and deputations to political authorities on the part of workers.

Our database records use of the courts both by and against organized groups of workers, their leaders, or activists (such as those arrested on picket-lines). The centrality of forms of regulation, and the role of the courts as a focal point for industrial struggle, has often been understated in conventional labour histories.[29] At present the database contains records of 413 such cases. Our database indicates a general increase in the absolute number of court cases over the course of the 19th century with 32 cases for the years 1815-59, 68 cases for 1860-79, 178 cases in 1880-90 with a fall to 135 cases between 1891 and 1900. Court action initiated by and against groups of workers is highly concentrated in terms of occupation. A small number of semi/unskilled occupations, namely shearers and rural labourers,

[29]Although our database records court cases associated with collective struggle there is a need to also examine the development of labour laws such master and servant statutes, the role of the courts and more individualised forms of worker resistance waged against these laws. See Paul Craven and Douglas Hay, "The Criminalisation of 'Free' Labour: Master and Servant in Comparative Perspective," unpublished paper, York University, October 1993; Douglas Hay and Paul Craven, "Master and Servant in England and Empire: A Comparative Study," *Labour/Le Travail*, 31 (Spring 1993), 175-84; C. Tomlins, *Law, Labor and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (Cambridge 1993); I. Anzoxornu, "The State, Law and the Development of Industrial Disputes Institutions in West Africa, 1874-1941," unpublished PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1993; Michael Quinlan, "'Pre-Arbitral' labour law in Australia and its implications for the introduction of compulsory arbitration," in S. Macintyre and R. Mitchell, eds., *Foundations of Arbitration: The Origins of State Compulsory Arbitration 1890-1914* (Melbourne 1989); Michael Quinlan, "Making Labour Laws Fit for the Colonies: The Introduction of Laws Regulating Whalers in Three Australian Colonies," *Labour History*, 52 (May 1992), 19-37; and Michael Quinlan, "Maritime Labour Law and Industrial Relations in the Colony of New South Wales 1810-1850," unpublished paper, 1994.

seamen, and miners account for a consistently significant level of all court action. Indeed, in combination, court action involving these groups accounts for 40.6 per cent of all court action in the years 1815-59, 54.4 per cent for the years 1860-79, 46.1 per cent in 1880-90, and 35.5 per cent in 1891 to 1900. If three categories of labourers (construction, rail, and wharf) are added, these figures leap well above 50 per cent except for the last period (that is 68.7 per cent, 77.9 per cent, 69.1 per cent, and 43.7 per cent respectively).

A partial explanation for this concentration of court action to particular categories of workers is that employers in these key industries relied on the Master and Servant Acts (or merchant seamen's statutes in the case of seamen) to discipline what were essentially transient and isolated workers.[30] There are concentrations of court action involving other occupations including some skilled trades such as boot and shoemakers (who account for 20 per cent of court action in 1891-1900), cabinetmakers, and furniture trades (7.4 per cent in the same period). These concentrations are period specific, however, and represent recourse to the courts by employers and state authorities to suppress picketing and the harassment of scabs during major industrial struggles. These court actions also generally relied on bodies of law other than the Master and Servant Acts. At the same time, the two patterns of concentrated court activity are not mutually exclusive. For example, a surge in court action involving shearers, wharf or ship labourers, and seamen in the early 1890s was a direct consequence of the great maritime and pastoral strikes.

Aside from recording court action our database also includes petitions and deputations emanating from specific occupational groups of workers to various political authorities. This activity was basically of two types. First, calls for a change in government policy and law by groups of privately employed workers such as cab-drivers and various trades such as boilermakers, tanners, and curriers. These calls were invariably for highly specific changes (such as a increased tariff on imports) that would affect the job prospects and working conditions of that occupational group (more generalised agitation by workers, including worker political bodies and union peak councils, has been included in another database). Second, public sector workers such as teachers and railway employees used petitions and deputations to government authorities. Again they were seeking changes to their employment conditions but in this case they were dealing with their employer. In both instances this is a very specific form of political protest.[31]

[30]It has been argued elsewhere that employers of skilled tradesmen and other categories of workers tended to abandon use of the Master and Servant Acts as a instrument for discipline in the second half of the 19th century. See Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Australian Industrial Relations," 60-98.

[31]Deputations by groups of non-public sector employees to private employers have not been included here because the distinguishing feature of the action being recorded is its political character. On occasion private workers petitioned their employers but this activity is exceptional.

Our findings highlight that recourse to political action by unionized groups of workers occurred from the very earliest period. The database presently records a total of 604 petitions and deputations, 491 emanating from formal unions and 113 from informal bodies. There is also growing use of this practice with 31 petitions and deputations in the years 1815-1859, 72 between 1860 and 1879, 272 in 1880-90, and 229 in 1891-1900. The decline in the last period provides more evidence that the industrial defeats and depression of this period led to a general slump in collective action among workers (rather than a substitution effect), although absolute levels remained well above all periods prior to the mid-1880s.

These generalisations mask one longer term process of substituting the deputation for the petition. The petition was long accepted form of worker protest within Britain which was readily translated to the colonies. In the period prior to 1859 there were 28 petitions, with 33 in 1860-79, 95 in 1880-90, and 69 in 1891-1900. While there were only three deputations before 1860, the number of deputations exceeded petitions by 1860-79 (39 as opposed to 33). Thereafter, the gap widened with 177 deputations in 1880-90 and 160 in 1891-1900. The sluggish growth of petitions indicates a gradual abandonment of this method within the labour movement and a growing preference to use deputations instead. This shift undoubtedly occurred partly as a result of the strengthening of formal union organization, the rise of Members of Parliament regarded as allied with labour interests, and associated changes in the protocol of union/government relations. This interpretation is supported by the stronger association of petitioning with informal organization. Petitions from informally organized groups of workers constituted 30.2 per cent of all petitions for the years 1815-1900 and 17.9 per cent and 23.1 per cent for the periods 1880-90 and 1891-1900 respectively. Informal deputations only made up 13.5 per cent of all deputations recorded between 1815 and 1900, and 6.2 per cent and 13.7 per cent respectively for the periods 1880-1890 and 1891-1900.

Despite the stronger association of deputations with formal union organization, both methods appear to be associated with formal union organization far more than other forms of collective action already discussed. This is highlighted when we look at changing patterns of usage by occupation. Prior to 1859 skilled tradesmen (urging government action in relation to their job prospects) accounted for 57.6 per cent of all deputations and petitions. After 1859 the pattern begins to change to a more even mixture of trade and non-trade groups and after 1880 the trades only account for 43.3 per cent of all petitions and deputations. This shift occured not because craft unions abandoned these methods but rather because other groups rapidly escalated their use of them.

Between 1880 and 1900 a consistent pattern is to be found with nine occupations (road transport workers, shop assistants, railway workers, engine drivers, miners, teachers, boilermakers, furniture and leather trades workers) accounting for 58.1 per cent of all petitioning and deputations. Activity among road transport workers, which alone accounts for 18.3 per cent of all petitions and deputations in

this period, mainly consists of attempts to alter local council bye-laws by cab-drivers and carriers. Shop assistants (44 petitions/deputations or 7.2 per cent of the total) were invariably seeking early closing legislation. Engine drivers (33 or 5.5 per cent) and miners (31 or 5.1 per cent) mainly sought more stringent health and safety and competency-certification laws. The main exception were those engine drivers employed in the colonies' public railway system who were also pursuing better conditions (such as superannuation) from their employers. Likewise, petitions and deputations emanating from other railway workers (20 or 3.3 per cent) and public school teachers (31 or 5.1 per cent) were direct requests to their employers for changes to employment conditions. Petitioning and deputations from boilermakers (31 or 5.1 per cent), furniture (21 or 3.5 per cent) and leather trades (31 or 5.1 per cent) were largely concerned with tariffs, quotas, and government contract preference provisions which would restrict import competition and boost local employment. Such concerns extended beyond the trades to local manufacturing workers in general. Indeed, manufacturing workers account for over 30 per cent of all petitions and deputations in the period 1880-1900.

One thing to emerge from the foregoing is that resort to political protest was influenced by a number of factors. Shop assistants lacked the degree of organization necessary to negotiate directly shorter working hours. Attempted collaborative deals since the 1840s had repeatedly failed and legislation was seen as the only viable alternative. Similarly, government workers like teachers used such methods, both because they lacked the organization for other forms of industrial action and because of the vulnerability of such workers to a punitive response by the state. Even where the strike weapon was used, as in the case of railway engine drivers and other rail workers, however, petitioning and deputations remained important methods of protest and negotiation. For manufacturing employees the colonial state could and did have a decisive effect on job prospects (and there were significant differences in this response amongst the six Australian colonies). In this case political action was not a substitute for an inability to place direct industrial pressure on employers. Even industrially active groups like boilermakers saw the need to be equally active in the political sphere.

It appears that specific economic and political features of the Australian colonies, such as the centrality of the state in the economy and the tensions aroused by economic and political dependency on Britain, shaped not only the methods employed by workers but also the issues that were of central concern. Careful comparison with the use of petitioning and deputations in both Britain and other British colonies like Canada should clarify whether the pattern identified here is exceptional or whether it is typical of at least some other British colonies. Such comparisons may also indicate the historical implications of state or private ownership of particular industries on industrial relations. In Canada, unlike Australia, private companies played a significant role in the railways.

Strikes and Industrial Action by Issue

IN HIS STUDY Palmer sought to indicate the leading causes of strikes in Canada for part of the 19th century (that is 1815-1879). In Tables 5 and 6 we present his findings alongside those derived from our database for the same period. As might be expected wages are seen to be the biggest single cause of strikes for these years in both countries. Wages appear to remain a more significant issue in Australia in 1860-79 but this could be just an artefact of the larger number of multiple issue strikes reported in Australia.[32] For the years 1880-90 wages were an issue in 47.7 per cent of strikes while in 1891-1900 the figure rises to 75 per cent. Unfortunately we have no comparable figures for Canada.

TABLE 5
Causes of Strikes, 1815-1859

	Canada		Australia	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Wages	88	66.6	46	67.9
Authority	19	14.4	8	15.1
Hours of Work	10	7.6	7	13.2
Miscellaneous/Unknown	15	11.4	5	9.4
Total	132	100.0	66*	105.6*

*Strike totals for Australia exceed earlier counts of 53 and percentages exceed 100% due to multiple issues in some strikes which has led to double counting.

The proportion of strikes over authority (management, union recognition, working conditions, etc.) in Canada and Australia is similar for the period where we have comparable figures (see Tables 5 and 6). In both countries it appears that the consolidation of union organization was associated with an increasing number of strikes over authority . On the other hand, one clear difference is the relatively greater number of strikes in Australia over hours of work (principally claims for eight hours). Even though there are no strikes over hours before 1840 in Australia they still constitute 13.2 per cent of all strikes in the years 1815-1859 (as opposed 7.6 per cent in Canada). Table 6 indicates by 1860-79 the gap has considerably widened. It can be noted in passing that hours of work form an even higher proportion of non-strike industrial disputes in Australia than is the case with strikes.

[32]The larger number of multiple issue strikes may reflect a somewhat different basis of attributing causation in the two data sets and we are therefore cautious about making too much of this difference. Indeed, when the figures in Table 5 were recalculated presuming a multiple-causation roughly in line with Palmer's figures for Canada the proportion of total Australian strikes concerning wages is close to the Canadian percentage.

There is also a qualitative difference between the two countries. In Canada, until the 1870s demands for shorter hours hinged around claims for a nine hour working day. In Australia, apart from some rare exceptions (notably bakers prior to the 1880s and shop assistants), union claims were overwhelmingly for an eight-hour working day from the 1850s onwards. Australian stonemasons were the first workers in the world to secure an eight-hour working day in the 1850s and the eight-hours objective was a significant mobilizing issue for Australian unions throughout the remainder of the 19th century (for example, eight-hour day demonstrations formed the basis for peak organizations by unions).

If, as it appears, hours of work were a more critical issue in Australia than Canada then this raises some intriguing questions. In 1880-90 and 1891-1900 hours of work were an issue in 17.8 per cent and 17.6 per cent of strikes respectively. Again we have no comparable figures for Canada. Such figures might tell us whether part or all of the difference relates to periodization if it can be shown that Canadian unions pursued the hours issue more vigorously at another period. Again reliance on strike figures alone, however, might provide a misleading picture. As has been indicated elsewhere,[33] hours of work were an even more prominent issue in non-strike industrial disputes, including the period after 1880 for which reference only to strikes would suggest a decline in activity. That being said the renewed importance of wages in the period 1891-1900 by and large reflected a more defensive union movement desperately trying to repulse employer-initiated wage cuts. The years 1890-1 also witnessed major struggles of union recognition (in both strikes and non-strike disputes for these years). The last point indicates the potential problems of periodization where such critical events are lost by being averaged out over a longer time-span.

TABLE 6
Causes of Strikes, 1860-1879

	Canada		Australia	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Wages	131	47.5	66	61.2
Hours of Work	36	13.0	29	27.1
Authority	57	20.7	25	23.3
Miscellaneous/Unknown	60	21.7	14	13.1
Total	284*	102.9*	134*	124.7*

*Strike totals for Canada and Australia exceed earlier counts (276 and 107 respectively) and percentages exceed 100% due to multiple issues in some strikes which has resulted in double counting.

[33]Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History."

Union Growth

Overall Union Numbers

THE LAST AREA in which we wish to make some comparisons between Canada and Australia is in relation to union growth. In both countries the sheer size of the country meant that unions emerged and grew on an independent regional basis for most of the 19th century. Drawing comparisons between the two countries is rather difficult, especially after 1850, because of the US influence on union organization in Canada and, to a lesser extent, the ethnic bifurcation of Canada (with separate English and French speaking provinces). In his study Palmer distinguishes four distinct bodies of Canadian unions namely local unions, local assemblies of the US Knights of Labor, local branches of international (US-based) unions, and lodges of the Provincial Workmen's Association.[34] In Australia, on the other hand, there are no similar divisions at least partly as a result of the its remoteness from both Britain and the USA.[35] Further, formal structural divisions capture only one aspect of splits within the union movement. Attention also needs to be given to the recruitment base and practices of unions. In the 19th century race or ethnic origin was also used as a basis for excluding some workers from membership of unions, but the nature and implications of this varied widely between different countries. In Canada, it has been suggested that racial exclusion was an important aspect of regional unionism.[36] In Australia, the overwhelming source of migrants was Britain and Ireland. The Irish became a dominant group within the working class and its industrial and political organizations. While there were instances of friction between unions and Italians and other groups employed in mining and the sugar industry the numbers of such workers was too small to provide any significant basis for an ethnic or racial exclusion.[37] Australian unions were deeply imbued with racist sentiment. In the 19th century this was mainly directed at the only significant groups of non-European migrants to enter the country namely the Chinese and, to a lesser extent, 60,000 Pacific Islanders hired (and often kidnapped) to work on sugar plantations. Our database indicates that the Pacific Islanders engaged in numerous independent strikes but local unions made no real attempt to organize

[34]Palmer, "Labour Protest," 76-83.

[35]Instances of international unionism in Australia were restricted to the metal and building trades where local branches of the UK Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) and Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) were established throughout the colonies. The ASE, if not the ASCJ, also established branches in Canada and the USA during the 19th century. In Australia branches of the ASE and ASCJ both faced competition from rival local unions.

[36]See for example, Allen Seager, "Workers, Class and Industrial Conflict in New Westminster, 1900-1930," in Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, eds., *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers* (Vancouver 1988), 117-40.

[37]Large scale arrivals of persons from countries outside the British Isles only became important feature of Australian immigration in the period after 1945.

the industry until the Pacific Islanders were removed at the turn of the century under the 'White Australia' policy. The Chinese were also removed under this policy. Prior to this their presence had aroused enormous hostility on the gold fields and when they were used in the maritime industry, the pastoral industry, and the furniture trade. They were excluded from unions and when, as in the furniture trade, they formed their own unions these were shunned by other unions. In sum, Australian unions practised racial exclusion but the implications of this for splits within the union movement were restricted by the small numbers of non Anglo Irish workers and the implementation of a racially based immigration policy in 1901.[38]

With the above cautionary notes in mind we can make a number of general observations. In Australia the first formal unions emerged in the second half of the 1820s while in Canada unions emerged somewhat earlier.[39] Table 7 provides a summary of the number of unions in existence by period. With regard to the divisions within the Canadian union movement referred to earlier, Palmer identifies 71 unions prior to 1859 (local unions only), 165 between 1860 and 1879 (of these 81 were international unions), and 759 in 1880-90 (220 of whom were local unions, 111 international unions, 393 local assemblies of the Knights of Labor, and 35 lodges of the Nova Scotia-based Provincial Workmen's Association).[40]

The pattern revealed in both countries is one of steady growth before a significant spurt of union organization in the 1880s. For the period 1891-1900 we have no figures for Canada but there may have been a divergence as was the case with strikes. In Australia this decade witnessed a decline in the overall number of unions as a result of major employer assaults on trade unions and depressed economic conditions. Graph 3 shows that after a dramatic growth in union numbers from the late 1880s there was an equally dramatic collapse in the early 1890s. The major victims of this culling were newly formed bodies of unskilled workers and smaller regional unions (see Graph 3).[41] From 1895 onwards union numbers are again on the rise (a growth sustained after the turn of the century).

Taking account of population differences and the fact that our sample only records about one third of Australian unions, these figures seem to indicate a significantly higher level of union organization in Australia than Canada. Such an interpretation is reinforced by available union membership figures for the two

[38]The attitude of unions to Aborigines, who were mainly employed in the pastoral industry, reflected the complexity of the racist response of Australian unions. For instance, at the height of its campaign against the Chinese in 1890 the Amalgamated Shearers Union praised the union potential of Aborigines and Maoris. For a fuller analysis of these points see M. Quinlan and C. Lever-Tracy, "From labour market exclusion to industrial solidarity: Australian trade union responses to Asian workers, 1830-1988," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 14, 2 (June 1990), 159-82.

[39]Palmer, "Labour Protest," 76.

[40]*Ibid.*, 77-80.

[41]Quinlan and Gardner, "Researching Industrial Relations History."

countries (in 1890 total union membership in Australia exceeded 150,000 — a figure not reached in Canada until 20 years later).[42]

TABLE 7
Total Number of Unions by Period: Canada and Australia, 1798-1900

Period	Canada	Australia
1798-1829	7	1
1830-1839	16	9
1840-1849	23	25
1850-1859	25	45
1860-1869	NA	88
1870-1879	165*	188
1880-1890	759	610
1891-1900	NA	502

NA = Not Available
*Figures apply for period 1860-1879 and 1870-1879

Again, we would caution that reference to formal organization only reveals part of the picture. Our database reveals that prior to 1839 informal organization constituted over 70 per cent of all worker organization in Australia. While the figure steadily declined, in 1880-90 and 1891-1900 informal bodies still made up 22.1 per cent and 25.9 per cent respectively of total worker organizations. The slight increase in the later period was probably a consequence of the impact of the depression on formal union organization.

In his examination of riots, strikes and union formation Palmer points to a strong regional dimension where such activity is concentrated within particular provinces (notably Ontario and Québec) and specific towns (such as Montréal, Toronto and Hamilton). At the same time, he identifies a progressive geographic spreading of industrial activity and union organization over the course of the century. In Australia, our present sample does not permit a detailed examination regional shifts. Nevertheless, what evidence we do have suggests a similar pattern with industrial action and unions being concentrated in particular colonies especially New South Wales and Victoria and their respective capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne.[43] As the century proceeded one of the smaller colonies, Tasmania, did not keep pace with union growth elsewhere and another, South Australia,

[42]*Ibid.* and James C. Docherty, *Historical Dictionary of Organised Labor* (New Jersey [forthcoming]).

[43]Apart from the sample, these include references or reports of union developments in other colonies in the files already entered and the secondary literature.

probably only held its position. On the other hand, unionism grew rapidly in the last two decades in the remaining colonies, Queensland and Western Australia.

As seems to have been the case in Canada, unionism was largely initiated in the colonial capitals (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart, Brisbane, and Perth) before spreading to other major towns (notably Newcastle, Townsville, Rockhampton, Maryborough, Ipswich, Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong, Fremantle, and Launceston) and then smaller centres. The only major exceptions to this were the formation of important unions of miners and pastoral workers in relatively small towns (such as Creswick and Kalgoorlie in relation to metalliferous miners and Bourke and Blackall in relation to shearers). Although our present sample does not allow us to fully map this growth, Graph 3 provides some measure of the spread of union organization by indicating those unions based in one of the six colonial capitals just referred to and those unions established outside the capitals. As can be seen from this, apart from a brief period in the mid 1830s growth of unions outside capital cities did not match their capital-based counterparts until the 1880s surge in formation. In the late 1880s there were more unions outside the capital cities than in them (this of course takes no account of differences in average membership) — a situation retained for the remainder of the 19th century despite the more severe decline in non-capital-based unions in the early 1890s.

Union Formation by Occupation

Palmer[44] provides two tables on union organization by occupation, one on local unions prior to 1859 and another on international unions between 1850 and 1879. Only the former can really be compared to the situation in Australia (see above) and we have done so in Table 8. Table 8 indicates considerable similarity between Canada and Australia in terms not only of the dominance of organization by the skilled trades in general but also in terms of the level of representation of specific craft groups. Overall, unions of tradesmen constituted over 80 per cent of all Australian unions formed before 1859, 67.3 per cent of those existing in the years 1860-79, 50.6 per cent in the years 1880-90, and 44.4 per cent in 1891-1900. This suggests that while skilled workers dominated union organization throughout most of the 19th century there was a growing level of union formation by other workers especially during the union growth spurt of the 1880s.[45] Although Palmer provides only figures for international unions between 1860 and 1879, and no figures after this point, his discussion on union growth seems to imply a pattern similar in many respects to that just described for Australia.

Our database enables us to provide a rather more detailed breakdown of the evolution of the Australian union movement in terms of occupations. It shows that

[44]Palmer, "Labour Protest," 77-8.

[45]The slight reversal of the declining importance of skilled workers for the period 1891-1900 in Australia is due to surge in union formation amongst engine drivers (see below) rather than an effect of the depression and industrial defeats which marked this period.

prior to 1880 a small number of trade groups accounted for the bulk of union organization notably metal, building, boot and clothing trades workers, and engine drivers. Prior to 1859 building trades workers accounted for 34.1 per cent of all unions, boot and clothing workers 10.1 per cent, and metal trades workers 10.1 per cent. In 1860-9 the figure for building trades workers was 25 per cent and for metal trades workers 15.9 per cent. In this period road and rail transport workers (nine unions or 10.2 per cent), retail workers (nine unions or 10.2 per cent) and workers (mostly tradesmen) in non-metal manufacturing (22 unions or 25 per cent) emerged as important groups. This pattern was generally sustained over the next decade. In 1870-9 there were 19 unions of building tradesmen (or 15.8 per cent of total unions), 23 unions of metal tradesmen (19.2 per cent), 18 unions of retail workers (15 per cent), four unions of road/rail transport workers (3.3 per cent), and 33 unions of non-metal manufacturing workers (27.5 per cent).

During the 1880-90 growth surge there is a considerably diversification of union organization by occupation to include many semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Our database for this period includes 52 building trades unions (amounting to 8.5 per cent of total unions), 67 metal trades unions (11 per cent), 24 engine-driver unions (3.9 per cent), 72 road/rail transport unions (11.8 per cent), 147 non-metal manufacturing unions (24.1 per cent), 55 unions of construction, general and ship/wharf labourers (9 per cent), 26 miners' unions (4.3 per cent), 34 shop assistant unions (5.6 per cent), 11 teacher unions (1.8 per cent), 26 unions of cooks, waiters and domestic servants (4.3 per cent) and 43 miscellaneous (that is other) unskilled worker unions (7 per cent). In general this trend away from dependence on skilled workers is sustained in the period 1891-1900. There were 47 building trade unions (representing 9.4 per cent of all unions), 37 metal trades unions (7.4 per cent), 42 unions of engine drivers (8.4 per cent), 65 road/rail transport unions (12.9 per cent), 79 non-metal manufacturing unions (15.7 per cent), 35 construction, general and ship/wharf labourers unions (7 per cent), 36 shop assistant unions (7.2 per cent), 27 teacher unions (5.4 per cent), 17 unions of cooks, waiters and domestic servants (3.4 per cent), and 44 unions of miscellaneous unskilled workers (8.8 per cent).

Clearly counting union numbers provides a partial picture of the spread of union organization. Such numbers do not represent union membership figures and may vary according to the practices of different unions in setting up branches or establishing even independent unions on a workplace basis (as occurred to some extent amongst miners and engine drivers). Unions which established few branches or independent bodies are clearly under-represented and this is especially the case of shearers and rural labourers who constituted a significant proportion of total union membership in Australia by 1890. What we see is also an artefact of concentrating on formal union organization. Once informal organization is consid-

TABLE 8
Unions By Occupation, 1798-1859

	Canada*		Australia†	
Occupation	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Carpenters/Shipwrights	14	19.7	10	12.5
Shoemakers	7	9.9	4	5.0
Metalworkers	7	9.9	8	10.0
Printers	6	8.5	5	6.3
Tailors	6	8.5	4	5.0
Painters	4	5.6	1	1.3
Bakers	3	4.2	6	7.5
Stonecutters	3	4.2	7	8.8
Ship Labourers	2	2.8	0	0.0
Miscellaneous Mechanics	13	18.3	21‡	26.3
Miscellaneous Unskilled	6	8.5	14	17.5
Total	71		80	

*Refers only to local unions not international unions
†Refers to formal unions only
‡Includes bricklayers (four unions), leather trades (five unions), sawyers (four unions), cabinetmakers (three unions), coachmakers (two unions), brickmakers (one union), painters (one union), and plasterers (one union)

ered a rather different picture emerges. This picture is one where although there is organized activity by non skilled workers from quite early in the 19th century such activity is transformed into formal union organization rather more slowly than for skilled workers. As well as being important groups in terms of industrial activity from a fairly early stage, a small number of semi/unskilled occupational groups namely construction and wharf labourers, shearers and rural labourers, seamen, road transport workers, and miners dominated informal organization throughout the 19th century.[46] Together they accounted for well over half (56.7 per cent) of all informal organization. It is important to note that the consolidation of union organization among these groups did not lead to the demise of informal organization and activity (or at least not by the end of the 19th century). One apparent

[46]The figures for each group are seamen (9.2 per cent of all informal organization), shearers and rural labour (10.3 per cent), construction (including railways), and wharf labourers (13.3 per cent), miners (7.4 per cent), and road transport workers (7.7 per cent). Another important group were engine drivers who accounted for 13.3 per cent of informal activity mainly as a result of those engine drivers employed in mines.

explanation for this is the group-nature of tasks undertaken by these workers and the isolated nature of their working communities. It is also worth noting that although skilled workers may have more rapidly embraced formal organization there is evidence of continuing informal organization among these workers.[47] Informal activity amongst tradesmen constituted 50 per cent of all informal activity prior to 1839 but steadily declined thereafter. However, even in 1880-90 skilled workers still accounted for 38.5 per cent and in 1891-1900 the figure is 23.8 per cent. It is noteworthy that the decline continued despite the setback to formal union organization in the latter decade. This is consistent with our interpretation that most unions which collapsed in the 1890s were recently formed bodies of unskilled workers and small regional unions.

Taking account of all the qualifications just made, the figures on formal organization presented above capture important changes in union organization. What we have also shown is that union growth and consolidation is a rather more complex process than conventional union histories would lead us to believe. Once again we would also note that comparisons with Canada when information for this country become available may shed important light on union growth more generally.

Conclusion

OUR COMPARISON of worker protest and union formation in Canada and Australia during the 19th century revealed a number of things. First, there is clear evolution in forms of industrial protest over the course of the century. The riot which was the dominant form of industrial protest in Canada prior to 1850 progressively gave way to the strike. In Australia, the riot appears to have been of far less importance in this period, partly as result of Australia's far smaller population and later development, and partly because in most Australian colonies convicts undertook some of the construction tasks which were the focus of riots in Canada. In both countries the strike assumes a growing importance over the course of the century. There is a general increase in absolute strike numbers throughout the century apart from a fall in the last decade in Australia which appears to have been the result of depression and industrial defeats (with the upward trend resuming in the early 20th century). In keeping with the work of Shorter and Tilly, Cronin, and others, there is a significant clustering of strike activity in both countries into strike waves. These waves appear to be associated both with changes in the business cycle and periods of worker mobilization. In some instances the timing of specific waves corresponded in each country and in other cases (like the strike wave in Australia during 1889-91) there was a wave in one country but not the other. Our database also indicated that when non-strike forms of industrial conflict were included the

[47]This is hardly surprising given centuries old craft traditions. See for instance, E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London 1991) and R.A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The six centuries from craft fellowship to trade unionism* (London 1980).

clustering of industrial action into waves became even more pronounced. Development of similar databases in Canada or other countries would enable us to determine whether this is a general phenomenon. In terms of contrast we noted that, if the Canadian strike figures are not underestimated, then the projected incidence of strike activity in Australia based on our sample far exceeded that of Canada. Again, this raises intriguing possibilities for further research.

Turning to the incidence of strike activity by occupation we found similarities between Canada and Australia, especially in relation to particular categories of skilled workers. Further, some differences in terms of the importance of particular groups were readily explained in terms of the relative importance of particular modes of transport (such as the greater role of canals in Canada and road transport in Australia) and areas of economic activity (such as the significance of wool-based pastoral capitalism in Australia). Such differences, along with more general differences in the labour market of the two countries (such as geographic remoteness or access to immigrants) may help to explain why after 1859 the ratio of strike activity by semi/unskilled workers to strike activity by skilled workers was almost exactly reversed.

At the same time, our database does not only measure strike activity. By referring to other forms or indicators of collective action by workers, notably non-strike forms of disputation, court action, petitions, and deputations, it was argued that reference to strikes alone provides a rather distorted picture of the evolution of industrial conflict (both in general and by occupation). Our Australian data indicates that collective action was spread across a far wider array of occupations, and at earlier times, than reference to strike activity alone would indicate. Court action invoked by or against collective action was concentrated in a small band of occupations, indicating that the use of courts as a means of addressing industrial struggles was far more important in some industries (and for some workers) than others. Similarly, we were able to show that certain groups were much more prone to use petitions and deputations. Usage did not simply represent a substitute of political for industrial means. Rather, usage was sometimes related to industrial weakness, sometimes to the fact that the workers were government employees and sometimes related to the importance of government tariff or other regulatory policies. In another indication of the historical specificity of forms of collective action we noted the gradual abandonment of the petition and its replacement with the deputation.

Mirroring this complex pattern of industrial action, this paper has argued that there is an equally complex relationship between industrial action and formal union organization. Our comparison of union growth in Canada and Australia revealed many similarities including the dominance of skilled tradesmen in early union formation. This dominance of early formal organization, however, did not mean that these same groups accounted for most strikes. In both countries there is a growth in union numbers overall, with a marked surge of union formation in the

1880s. This growth and the 1880s surge are both linked to a progressive spreading of union organization to non-craft workers. As for strikes, projections from our sample would suggest that, despite its more belated start in comparison to Canada, unionism grew more rapidly in Australia.

Both our data and Bryan Palmer's on Canada indicate that informal activity was a precursor to formal organization for both tradesmen and non-trade groups of workers. Our data indicates that although non-trade groups did undertake collective action from an early period (prior to 1850) this was less rapidly translated into formal organization than was the case with tradesmen. At the same time, it would be wrong to see formal union organization as an immediate death-blow to informal activity. Some groups of workers, such as shearers and seamen, engaged in consistently high levels of informal activity even after effective unions covering them had been established. Further, skilled tradesmen still accounted for nearly one quarter of all informal activity even at the very end of the 19th century.

Overall, comparison of our data with that compiled by Palmer (and to a lesser extent Cruikshank and Kealey) on Canada indicate many similarities in terms of strike activity and union growth. Given the similarities between the countries in terms of reliance on primary commodities, their status as British colonies, population and land-mass, these similarities in terms of organized labour may not seem surprising. At the same time, our comparison uncovered a number of significant differences. For some of these differences, such as divisions within union organization in Canada, there are apparent explanations (in this case one factor being relative proximity to the USA). In other instances, such as the higher level of industrial activity and union organization in Australia there are no ready explanations as yet. More detailed international studies may, by investigating the similarities and differences just mentioned, provide a better understanding of the evolution of industrial conflict and union organization within industrial societies.

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