Labour/Le Travailleur

Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging?: Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921-1928

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Volume 41, 1998

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt41art06

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Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

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

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Manley, J. (1998). Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging?: Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921-1928. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *41*, 147–180.

Résumé de l'article

JUSQU'ÀCE QUE le Parti Communiste du Canada (PCC) adopte la tactique de «classe contre classe» en 1928-1929, son activité syndicale s'est limitée presqu'exclusivement à une tactique d'infiltration («boring from within») des syndicats interna-tionaux affiliés à la Fédération Américaine du Travail (FAT) et au Congrès Canadien du Travail (CCT). Bien que le Parti ait joué un rôle dominant dans divers conflits industriels au cours des années 1920, sa tentative pour transformer les syndicats internationaux en organes de luttes de classe a subi un échec, en partie parce qu'il présumait un degré de combativité à la base de loin supérieur à ce qui existait en fait, et en partie en raison de la résistance des «travaillistes» Canadiens. Le PCC croyait que les syndicats devaient se «rénover»; une idée que les syndicats internationaux eux-mêmes ont rejetée. Cette opinion a été exprimée par le socialiste John W. Bruce, représentant de l'union des plombiers, lorsqu'il a posé la question:« Est-ce que le mouvement ouvrier international a besoin d'être sauvé?» La solution se trouvait, à son avis et de l'avis du mouvement travailliste en général, dans la réaffirmation du caractère progressiste du mouvement syndical et de ses méthodes non-révolutionnaires. L'incapacité du Parti à aller au-delà de cette complaisance— et le ressentiment croissant des travaillistes face aux efforts du Parti — l'aprédisposé à accepter la «Nouvelle Ligne» du Comintern en 1928.

Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging? Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921-1928

John Manley

Introduction

IN HIS IMPORTANT STUDY of the American Communist Party (CPUSA) and the labour movement, historian Bert Cochran pithily judged the 1920s a "decade of failure."[1] Canadian historians of divergent political perspectives have assessed the record of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in the 1920s in similarly bleak — but broadly accurate — terms, showing how it failed to lead Canada's workers in revolutionary struggle or even to convince them to unite in defence of their immediate economic interests, and ended the decade in decline, exiled from the union mainstream.[2] Why

[1]Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict That Shaped American Labor Unions* (Princeton, NJ 1977), ch. 2. See also Edward Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton, NJ 1994), 175-239.

[2]William Rodney attributes the CPC's lack of impact to the party's "Marxist ideology which, based as it is upon class relationships, proved to be an obsolete, ineffective tool." *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada 1919-1929* (Toronto 1968), v; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montréal 1981). Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975) and Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988) broadly share Rodney's perspective. In none of these works are Canadian workers conspicuously visible (nor, for that matter, are very many party members). For a partial corrective to their conventional top-down approach, see Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto 1900-1939* (Toronto 1992), especially chapters 2 and 8.

John Manley, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging? Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921-1928," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 147-80.

the CPC failed remains open to question. William Rodney's and Ian Angus' valuable histories of the CPC's first decade share a tendency to reduce a complex human process to a history of the party "line." Rodney considers that the CPC's subservience to Moscow and its commitment to an irrelevant politics of class struggle damned the entire bolshevik project. Angus, a Trotskyist, does not view the party line as an inherently bad thing; instead he distinguishes the Leninist years of 1921-24 from the baleful Stalinist years, when the "wrong" line guaranteed failure. This article argues that the party line was only one moment in a struggle between competing agencies, operating within and affected by a social and political context that did not favour change. Focusing on the CPC's bid to establish its ideological hegemony over "labourism" (the peculiar Canadian variant of what the third International [Comintern] termed "reformism"), I show how communist cadres "bored from within" the craft union movement and how labourists resisted them. I try to do justice to the labourist worldview, explain labourist hostility to the methods communists proposed as the keys to the necessary "renovation" of the Canadian labour movement, notably trade union "Amalgamation" and Canadian trade union "Autonomy," and thus show that communism did not simply fail — it was defeated. I also argue that, while the Comintern's erroneous general perspective of imminent revolutionary upheaval restricted the CPC's freedom of action, the party could have worked more flexibly and effectively within the constraints of Comintern discipline.

I

During the early 1930s communications between the Comintern and the fledgling CPC were infrequent, indirect and unsatisfactory.[3] The party nevertheless understood that bolshevism meant two things above all: working among the real mass organizations of the class and the united front tactic. The former was the key message of the communist bible, Lenin's *'Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, published in 1920 and available in Canada in an English translation from early 1921. Lenin's insistence that the revolutionary vanguard had a duty to operate from within the union mainstream rather than in their own "revolutionary" unions chimed well with the predispositions of the CPC's predominantly Ontario-based leadership, most of whom had remained inside the craft unions of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) during the One Big Union (OBU) breakaway of 1919-20.[4] The united front was the CPC's main tactical device. Formulated by Trotsky in the Comintern's theses of December 1921, against the background of a

[3]National Archives of Canada (NAC), Comintern Fonds (CF), Reel 43, Tim Buck to Dear Charlie [North American Comintern representative Charlie Scott/Charles Johnson/Carl Jensen], 29 September [1923]; Reel 44, Stewart Smith to A. Lozovsky, 21 May 1926.

[4]John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class during the Great Depression: The Workers' Unity League, 1930-1936," PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1984, 6-11.

period of temporary lull in the revolution, it called on communists to unite with the unions and other workers' organizations in specific, limited actions in defense of their members' immediate economic interests. While it envisaged alliances "from above," with reformist leaders, its main thrust was always to come "from below" (a fact that Trotsky rather obscured in his important early 1930s writings on the subject). With capitalism hovering on the abyss, Lenin and the Comintern argued, there was little need for communists to limit their ideological and organizational independence from reformism. Maximum pressure was to be maintained on the reformist "bureaucracy" at all times: every united front action was ultimately designed to establish the vanguard's right to lead the class and facilitate the "unmasking" of the reformist "bureaucracy." "Whenever our opponents reject proposals for joint struggle," the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI) stated, "the masses must be informed so that they can learn who the destroyers of the real united workers' front are. Whenever our opponents accept a proposal, we must aim gradually to intensify the struggle and raise it to a higher level."[5]

Whether before or after 1924, the united front was a blunt instrument. As Italian communist Antonio Gramsci remarked in 1923: "the tactic of the united front, laid down with considerable precision by the Russian comrades ... has *in no country* found the party or the men capable of concretizing it."[6] Gramsci implied no criticism of the tactic or the Russian comrades, but rather, in an early example of western deference to the bolsheviks, saw the fault lying with the various national parties. Yet Lenin, himself, in *'Left Wing' Communism* and in his last address to the Comintern in late 1922, criticized the tendency in the comintern to offer the lessons of the *Russian* experience as an international panacea, demanded more humility from the Russian comrades and insisted that marxism required from all its adherents concrete study of their specific national contexts.[7] The Comintern's early attempts to concretize its advice on the united front suggested an imperfect grasp of Canadian reality. In one 1923 directive, two of the issues it recommended for united front action were unexceptionable: protest against a ban on entry into Canada of leading American trade union militants, such as Kansas miners' leader Alex Howat, and nationalization of the coal mines. The third, however, which called on the party to instruct its Members of Parliament to demand the right to create "workers' militias" (it was provoked by the Canadian military's interven-

[5]V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works* (Moscow 1968), 512-85 (especially 512, 536-8, 564); "Appendix to the Theses on Comintern Tactics: Theses on the United Front," December 1921, in *Theses, Resolutions & Manifestoes of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London 1983), 184-203, 407; Leon Trotsky, "What Next?" (1932) in Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (Harmondsworth 1975), ch. 8.

[6]Antonio Gramsci, "What the Relations Should Be Between the PCI and the Comintern," in Quintin Hoare, ed., *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* (London 1978), 155 (original emphasis).

[7]John Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party* (London 1975), 92.

tions in 1922 and 1923 in Nova Scotia coal and steel strikes), misjudged labour's mood and overestimated the party's parliamentary authority.[8] During the Comintern's zig-zag to the right in 1925, its trade union arm, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), directed national CPs to develop united front action around the issue of international trade union unity. The CPC dutifully complied, but found that the issue had little popular resonance, even in party ranks.[9]

It was Lenin's more candidly leftist rhetoric that left the biggest impression on party members and reformists alike. One of Lenin's biographers has noted how his frankness — do anything, he insisted, use any "strategems, artifices and illegal methods ... evasions and subterfuges" to stay in contact with the masses; support the "labour lieutenants of capital" certainly, but in the same way that "the rope supports the hanged man" — "scandalized his Social Democratic opponents." It also, of course, gave them an ideal pretext for dismissing calls for unity. While it may have been reasonable for the Comintern and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) (each staffed from top to bottom with East European functionaries who had little feel for the culture and mentality of western labourism) to assert their right to speak on level terms with the Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), small Communist parties made themselves look foolish when they attempted to strike a similar posture.[10] Early CPC propaganda that asserted the party's "right to be recognized as the leader of the labour movement" and declared that the trade unions were "merely a means to an end, i.e. a weapon for the Social Revolution" was duly derided.[11] At the same time, it put labourism on guard. It was a particular misfortune for the Canadian party to emerge precisely when the bolsheviks were discussing the "militarization" of the Russian trade unions. Canadian labourists took a keen interest in such developments, and the proposed subordination of trade union independence to the needs of the new proletarian state handed them an invaluable source of anti-communist propaganda. "Another fist," one labour paper concluded, "but the same whip."[12]

[8]NAC, CF, Reel 4, File 16, ECCI to Workers' Party of Canada, undated [late 1923].

[9]University of Toronto (UT), Robert Kenny Collection (RKC), Box 2, Tim Buck, "Report of the Industrial Department," CPC, *Proceedings of the Fourth National Convention*, 11-13 September 1925, 7-8.

[10]Marcel Liebman, *Leninism Under Lenin* (London 1975), 400; Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow* (London 1971), 83.

[11]"Resolution of Policy on Labor Unions," *Worker*, 15 March 1922; "Fundamental Problems of the International Trade Union Movement," *Worker*, 15 April 1922; Maurice Spector, "The Fight Against the Bureaucracy," *Worker*, 15 March 1922; NAC, Toronto district Labour Council Minutes, "Report of TDLC Fraternal Representative, Richard H. Russell, on the Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Workers' Party of Canada," Toronto, 22-24 February 1923.

[12]"Amsterdam Versus Moscow," *The Bulletin*, July 1921; "Russian Trade Unions Are Under Scourge of Communist Dictatorship," *Western Labor News*, 5 August 1921; "Communists Use Czarist Tactice," *B.C. Labor News*, 2 September 1921 (the quotation is from this source);

Some of the more experienced unionists in the Canadian party — Jack MacDonald, Bill Moriarty, Tim Buck — had few illusions about the CPC's true standing in the Canadian movement and, knowing that there would be little likelihood of forming any kind of united front when craft union officials and the leaders of the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) were hostile, favoured, as Buck put it, "step at a time" policies and a more tactful approach towards the "bureaucracy." Other comrades, however, their pre-bolshevik sectarianism legitimized by Comintern hubris, vilified labour leaders like TLC president Tom Moore at every opportunity; the fact that some of the worst offenders were often ex-members of the OBU added to labourism's sense of provocation.[13] The party rarely stopped to consider whether it could build labour unity while holding openly to an instrumental view of trade unionism as a stepping-stone to workers' power. Nor did it waste time in identifying the militant minority with whom it proposed to unite: its allies were to be the "rank and file"; its adversaries, capitalism and the labour bureaucracy. It characterized "officialdom" as a layer of full-time officials who rejected the revolutionary essence of labour unionism, stood apart materially and ideologically from ordinary members, and enjoyed a bourgeois style and standard of life that depended on the permanence of capitalism and their ability to build consent for such pernicious notions as labour's responsibility to the "community," the "public" and the "nation." As they nudged and diverted the rank and file away from class struggle into apathy, indifference and collaboration, they somehow managed to pose as "saviours of the working class" while betraying it with impunity. They had to be induced to engage in united action on "questions of vital importance to the working class," action that would "renovate" the trade unions, reverse their decline and make them "fighting" organizations. When they took a reactionary stand, their treachery would be unmasked. This, however, could only be done in struggle: "mere denunciation or negative opposition to [them] would be worse than useless."[14]

The assumption that it would be relatively easy to flush out the bureaucracy stemmed from an anachronistic conception of the labour movement. By the time the party was formed, the labour revolt had subsided, leaving union officials and

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"More Light From Russia," *Canadian Congress Journal*, August 1922; Gordon Cascaden, *Shall Unionism Die? Report on 'Red' Trade Union International Congress held in Moscow, Russia* (Windsor 1922), 77-87.

[13]"Toronto Reds Disgrace Labor Movement," Toronto *Labor Leader*, 24 March 1922; "Going Up," *Worker*, 1 November 1922; comments on Jack Kavanagh and Joe Knight, *The Bulletin*, March 1923; William Beeching and Phyllis Clarke, eds., *Yours in the Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto 1977), 116-8.

[14]"The Canadian Trades Congress — The Coming Convention," *Workers' World*, 17 August 1921; Spector, "The Fight Against the Bureaucracy"; UT, RKC, Box 1, "Program, constitution, and Resolutions of the Workers' Party of Canada, Toronto, 1922" and WPC, "Educational Program, 1923."

their ideology of labourism firmly back in control of a declining labour movement. Many real craft unionists were relieved at the return to business-as-usual and the departure of thousands of new members who had flocked into the unions between 1916 and 1920, people who, as one United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners' official put it, were mere "handymen ... more skilled with a pinch bar than with anything else."[15] (Figure 1) Most of the union die-hards clinging on to membership

Figure 1

Canadian Membership in the Carpenters', Machinists, and Printers' Unions, 1914-1924

	UBCJ	IAM	ITU	
1914	7,720	4,654	4,807	[17,181]
1916	5,000	7,108	4,647	[16,755]
1920	16,670	14,123	5,397	[36,190]
1924	7,650	8,793	4,240	[20,683]

Source: *Annual Reports on Labour Organization in Canada* (Ottawa 1914-25)

in the hard times of the early 1920s more closely resembled the canny, "opportunist" labour aristocracy of Lenin's *Imperialism* than the class-conscious ingenues of *'Left-Wing' Communism*. The sectional consciousness of this rank and file was shaped less by bureaucratic skulduggery than by a pragmatic reading of prevailing circumstances. In many industries the deflationary recession of 1920 lasted into mid-decade, and the resumption of mass immigration in 1923 ensured that the national labour market remained favourable to capital even in the general post-1925 recovery. Between 1920 and 1924 capital's onslaught on labour's wartime gains drove the unions out of mass production industry and cost TLC affiliates 50,000 members, approximately one-third of the entire international union membership. Unemployment and the blacklist, moreover, bore particularly heavily on militants, forcing many out of their home districts and sometimes out of the country. By 1921 workers were already showing "an indisposition ... to use the strike weapon." Over the decade the strike level fell to one-third that of the 1910s.[16]

[15]F[red] H[awse], "The Situation As I See It," *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, November 1925.

[16]V.I. Lenin, "Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism," (1916) in *Selected Works* (Moscow 1977), 169-262, especially 244-46 (where Lenin describes all skilled trade unionists as corrupted labour aristocrats); Kenneth Lines, *British and Canadian Immigration to the United States since 1920* (San Francisco 1978), 58, 114; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto 1987), 247; James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario 1914-1925* (Toronto 1991), 207-14; Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Canadian Strike Statistics, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*,

While agreeing that Canadian labourist ideology was "never tightly defined," even "vague," historians have managed to identify the key components that constituted it as the "speech community" of craft unionism: a strict demarcation of the political and economic spheres of labour action; class inflected "producerism"; support for parliamentarism; the extension of the democratic franchise to skilled workers; the election of labour representatives; gradualist reformism in which the state could play a limited role; class cooperation; an instrumental approach to strike action, and respect for meritocracy.[17] This mixture of values and beliefs simultaneously defined who was and who was not "of" the labour movement and circumscribed the boundaries of what labour should and could aspire to at a time when, as David Montgomery has observed, union leaders felt it was time for activists to "abandon the dreams" of workers' power and were willing to use "autocratic control of their own organizations" to ensure that their "Fabian" tactic of placating friendly employers and the state would not be sullied by internal dissent.[18] They modified a traditional distrust for socialist doctrine by welcoming Social Democrats into their freemasonry, as allies against the "party of a new type," whose dedication to permanent class struggle and the removal of the border between the political and the economic marked it out as their "other." Their hostility — particularly marked in the west — was fixed from the moment they heard of the formation of local branches of the Workers' Party (WPC). "The last time this same gang 'captured' the Trade Union movement," the journal of the Vancouver and New Westminster Trades and Labour Council (VNWTLC) observed, "they succeeded in crippling almost every trade union in the city, dissolved the BC Federation of Labor, formed another Trades and Labor Council and lost to Labor its $250,000 Labor Temple." Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) delegates scoffed at the new WPC branch's offer of a united front — to prepare May Day celebrations — and applauded one of their number who slated communists for

(*L/LT*) 20 (Fall 1987), 85-145; J.D. McNiven, "Report of the Deputy Minister of Labour," *British Columbia Sessional Papers* (Victoria 1921).

[17]Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *L/LT*, 13 (Spring 1988), 45-76; Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 8-9; Mark Leier, *Red Flags and Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto 1995), 80-1, 92-4, 98-100. For the concept of a "speech community," see Leonora Auslander, "Perceptions of Beauty and the Problem of Consciousness: Parisian Furniture Makers," in Lenard R. Berlanstein, ed., *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana 1993), 149-81. The primary purpose of a speech community, Auslander argues, was to achieve coherence through consensus on what could and could not be discussed or mentioned by "community" members, a process that worked largely by the exclusion of controversy. Her observation that this "relatively unified discourse ... transcended the differences between crafts and constructed alliances in the increasingly fragmented and adversarial left" (161) fits 1920s Canadian labourism almost as well as it fits the late-19th century Paris furniture trades.

[18]David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The workplace, the state, and American labour activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge 1989), 409-10.

"spending their days and nights in slamming the International Movement as backward and its leaders as reactionary" and advised them to say less and do more to prove their right to a hearing.[19]

The CPC's strategy hinged on whether it could unite the forces of dissent. Already, however, through its brusque treatment of marxists such as Robert Russell and Bill Pritchard, who needed to be convinced of the virtues of bolshevism and the need to abandon the OBU dream, the party had lost the allegiance of an unknown number of union militants.[20] Moreover, the organizational expression of unity from below — William Z. Foster's Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) — did not help the cause. Foster and Buck, who doubled as CPC industrial director and secretary of the TUEL's Canadian section, had quite different conceptions of how it should operate. Buck's was rather inclusive. "Imagine," he proposed, "a group of active spirits, in every local lodge, sinking all their political differences in their trade union activities, working to only one end, the consolidation of the movement as a whole and their own union in particular, [with] all the local groups in a town or city connected, all the groups in certain industries connected, then a central office supported by voluntary donations, sales of literature, etc. ... [but] no initiation, no dues." The TUEL, he insisted, was designed not "to disrupt, but to build ... not to control, but to guide." Labourists who might well have fancied renovating their particular locals on this basis would certainly have reconsidered once they encountered Foster's vision. In his hands, the "active spirits" became an elite, a "*minute* minority of clear-sighted, enthusiastic militants," who would provide "the great organized mass of sluggish workers ... [with] brain and backbone ... inspiration and guidance ... [and] do the bulk of [their] thinking, working and fighting," construct "rudimentary class consciousness" and demonstrate that the "only solution of the labor struggle is the abolition of capitalism." Friends and critics alike must have wondered where the TUEL stopped and the party began. Without a separate identity, the TUEL failed to attract significant non-party support and effectively collapsed in 1925-26.[21]

[19]"The Workers (?) Party," *B.C. Labor News*, 10 February 1922; "Winnipeg Trades Council Turns Down Workers' Party," Toronto *Labor Leader*, 31 March 1922; "Constructive Criticism and the Labour Movement," *B.C. Federationist*, 23 June 1922. For the sake of convenience, I have used the names Workers' Party and Communist Party interchangeably.
[20]Peter Campbell, "'Making Socialists': Bill Pritchard, the Socialist Party of Canada, and the Third International," *L/LT*, 30 (Fall 1992), 45-63; Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Papers, interview with Robert Russell, 5.
[21]Tim Buck, "Renovation of the Canadian Trade Union Movement," *Worker*, 1 June 1922; "Principles and Program of the Trade Union Educational League," *Labor Herald* (Chicago), March 1922; NAC, Communist Party of Canada Papers (CPC), Vol. 10, Folder 10-4, Tim Buck, Report of Conference of Eastern Sub-Division of Canadian Section of Trade Union Educational League, 4-5 August 1923. Foster envisaged the TUEL as a national propaganda organization rather than as an organizer of a multiplicity of local struggles. See Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 187.

Buck's use of the expression "renovation" to describe the TUEL's primary purpose suggested that he was aware of a need to join with labourism's progressive discourse: the TUEL was out to restore, to build up, to be constructive. It soon became clear, however, that renovation meant more than applying a fresh lick of paint. The TUEL program demanded that participants commit themselves to the transformation of craft unions into mass industrial unions by means of amalgamation, recognize the permanent reality of "class war" and the impossibility of "social peace" without the destruction of the "wages system" and support the affiliation of all North American unions to the RILU. The party did try to make action around workers' immediate economic or workplace concerns the starting point of local TUEL activity, but with so little workplace struggle to relate to, it proceeded directly to national propaganda campaigns around amalgamation and, from late 1923, Canadian trade union autonomy. While these policies appeared to it as sensible, indeed inevitable — so much so that they were presented to prospective followers as non-negotiable demands that were to be met *now* — they appeared to most labourists to strike at common sense and craft identity. Neither slogan had the capacity to mobilize the masses.[22]

The rejection of amalgamation was especially disappointing, since this well-established current in the British and British-Canadian labour movements had gained many Canadian adherents during and immediately after the Great War. "All" it proposed, Jack MacDonald had pointed out in 1920, was that in industries where a multiplicity of unions obstructed unity of action — construction, garments, metal working, railways — craft unions should voluntarily amalgamate into single industrial unions. Moreover, in the industry at which the TUEL's propaganda campaign was originally targeted, wartime momentum was sustained in 1921 by the publication and huge early success of Foster's industrial unionist pamphlet *The Railroaders' Next Step*. After Foster addressed a mass meeting of metal workers (shopmen) in the Winnipeg railway repair shops early in 1922, the movement, Buck claimed, "spread like wildfire ... from coast to coast." Several leading Canadian

[22]By institutionalizing the Comintern's aspiration to trade union hegemony, the RILU weakened the possibility of forming united fronts "from above" with the International Federation of Trade Unions (the "Amsterdam International"). At various times between 1921-27 the Comintern tried to find a way to merge the RILU with the IFTU without losing face, but the emergence of the Class Against Class line in 1927-28 made it safe. See "Amsterdam Versus Moscow," *The Bulletin* , July 1921; J. Oudegeest (IFTU Secretary), "The Wreckers," *Justice*, 10, 17 March 1922; John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922-1935," *L/LT*, 30 (Fall 1992), 68-9, 72-3; "Theses on the Tactics in the Trade Union Movement," *International Press Correspondence*, 29 August 1924; "Tim Buck Reports on Industrial Activity," *Worker*, 15 March 1923. Although Norman Penner notes that Nova Scotia was one of the TUEL's areas of "principal strength," no TUEL section was formed inside UMWA District 26, probably because it would simply have duplicated the party. See Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 81; Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 83.

craft union officials, notably Robert McCutchan and Robert Hewitt, international vice presidents of the Boilermakers and Railway Carmen, praised the pamphlet and were willing to speak on its behalf from TUEL platforms, and it was serialized in the Winnipeg TLC's influential *Western Labor News*. On the basis of this early success, the party opened an office of the Fosterite National Committee for [the] Amalgamation of Railroad Workers in Montréal.[23]

While pockets of support for amalgamation undoubtedly existed, many shopmen found it hard to accept Foster's arguments that the day of the craftsman had gone and that the only way they could retain any semblance of workplace autonomy was to seek safety in numbers. Amalgamationist support declined after Samuel Gompers revealed in May 1922 that Foster had secretly joined the CPUSA the previous year and accused him of returning from the Third Comintern Congress with a large supply of Moscow gold.[24] Even the American shopmen's crushing defeat in the massive 1922 strike, in which the Running Trades Brotherhoods' strikebreaking proved crucial, failed to show Canadian shopmen that the alternatives were "Amalgamation or Annihilation."[25] Facing threatened wage cuts of their own and already weakened by internal disputes between younger and older workers over whether to deal with short-time working by work-sharing or lay-offs based on seniority, they drew from the American example the lesson that this was not the right time to strike, sought refuge in the law and found that (for once, McCutchan wryly noted) the Industrial Disputes Investigations Act (IDIA) could not be used "as a club" against them. The contrast with the United States, where the judiciary rediscovered its pre-war taste for the anti-labour injunction, may have strengthened labourist beliefs in the neutrality and permeability of the Canadian state. After

[23]Jack MacDonald, quoted in Toronto *Globe*, 20 August 1920; William Z. Foster, *The Railroaders' Next Step* (Chicago 1921) (serialized in *Western Labor News*, April to June 1921); R.C. McCutchan, "Closer Unity and Port Mann," *The Bulletin* (Winnipeg), March 1922; *B.C. Federationist*, 9 February 1923; Tim Buck, "Report of Canadian District," *Labor Herald*, September 1922; NAC, CPC, Vol. 10, folder 10-4, Buck, Report ... Eastern Sub-Division ... TUEL.

[24]"Workers' Party Notes," *The Citizen* (Halifax), 20 October 1922; Samuel Gompers, "Another Attempt at Soviet Dictatorship Unmasked," *American Federationist*, May 1922; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume 9; the T.U.E.L. to the End of the Gompers Era* (New York 1991), 134-7. Just over a year after serializing *The Railroaders' Next Step*, the *Western Labour News*, 4 August 1922, definitively outlawed the TUEL as "A Dual Movement."

[25]"Railroads in Control of Their Shops," *The Independent*, 14 October 1922; "History Repeats Itself (By a Former Locomotive Engineer)," *The Independent*, 28 October 1922; Paul Blanshard, "The Pennsylvania's War on Labor," *The Nation*, 25 July 1923; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement ... Vol. 9*, 174-83; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 185-7.

giving their officials a strike mandate, the shopmen were plainly relieved when a negotiated settlement delayed the cuts.[26]

While this drama was being played out, many shop craftsmen were looking backward, towards a reassertion of craft identity, rather than forward towards industrial unionism. Boilermakers and, in particular, machinists were grumbling about the limited multi-craft bargaining that already took place through the shop crafts Systems' Federations and the American Federation of Labor's Railway Employees' Department Division 4, which, they claimed, had lowered their status and earnings in relation to those of inferior unions like the Railway Carmen. The Canadian convention of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) in March 1923 rejected any further erosion of craft autonomy, called for the international office to consider withdrawing from Division 4 and declared that "machinists [should] be regarded ever and always as machinists." When Canadian IAM official James Somerville stated that "only the fanatical exponents of class struggle" thought that numbers could ever replace skill as the basis of union power, he was reflecting precisely what most of his members wanted to believe.[27]

Somerville was a key figure in the development that removed amalgamation from the realm of immediate possibility: Canadian National Railway's (CNR) installation of the "Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) System" of union-management cooperation into its repair shops. He, IAM president William Johnson, and Otto Beyer, the originator of the system, all spoke on its behalf at the Canadian shop crafts' convention in the spring of 1924. After hearing Buck ably present the amalgamationist case, delegates votes by a 3:1 ratio in favour of cooperation.[28] Far from being imposed on the rank and file, as the CPC alleged, the system could hardly have been installed more consensually. Every individual CNR shop was given the chance to vote and, beginning with Moncton, New Brunswick in late 1924, all voted in favour of the Plan; moving east to west, it was in national operation by the end of 1925. CNR's shopmen chose collaboration for the same reasons that they had chosen not to strike over wage cuts in 1922: with employment still to stabilize, they remained divided along generational lines, with older men calling for lay-offs based

[26]*Western Labor News*, 21 July 1922; "Industrial Disputes Act," *The Bulletin*, August 1922; *Labor Leader*, 11 August, 27 October, 3 November 1922; Stephen G. Peitchinis, *Labour-Management Relations in the Railway Industry* (Ottawa 1971), 120-22; Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 213; Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Baltimore 1966), 211-2.

[27]H.M. Bartholomew, "The Machinists in Convention," *Worker*, 2 April 1923; *Western Labor News*, 9 March 1923; James Somerville, "Economic Fallacies," *Machinist Bulletin*, December 1924.

[28]*Canadian Congress Journal*, March 1924; Tim Buck to the editor, *Canadian Congress Journal*, in *Worker*, 21 June 1924; John Roberts, *Canadian Railways' Cooperative Plan* (New York 1926); International Labour Organization, *Studies in Industrial Relations III* (Geneva 1935), 7-9; Montgomery, *House of Labor*, 422-4.

on the seniority principle against younger workmates' support for worksharing; Both groups were apprehensive about being forced to strike if CNR went ahead with plans to install the harsher workshop regime of the recently absorbed Grand Trunk Railway throughout the merged system. It mattered, also, that the system was perceived as a particular boon to them. The Plan was on offer nowhere else, and articles soon appeared in the machinists' paper favourably comparing the conditions and morale of the CNR shopmen to those of their less fortunate brothers on the privately-owned Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).[29] More broadly, by showing the possibility of sustaining a "shop system based on sound modern practice," the sort that would enable CNR to compete as if it were privately owned, the plan offered a chance to concretize several key labourist beliefs: labour-management cooperation; class harmony; the public benefits of public ownership of major utilities, and unions as vehicles of social progressivism.[30]

The party's response to these developments was predictable. Amalgamation had failed to take root, it argued, for one simple reason: a bureaucratic stab in the back. Edmonton communist and Brotherhood of Railway Carmen member Jack Lakeman charged that the rank and file would have supported amalgamation if leaders like Robert Hewitt had not sold out their principles to protect $4,000 a year salaries.[31] The party's disgust at the ease with which, it alleged, officials like Hewitt divested their amalgamationist beliefs led it to proscribe any further cooperation with "centrists," indeed anyone who did not accept the TUEL program. The B&O Plan showed that these officials, by nakedly offering CNR (and potentially other corporations) a secure supply of "cheap and efficient labour," had passed from deception to open treachery. Buck, in his 1925 pamphlet *Steps to Power*, tried to placate the shopmen by validating their craft culture, reassuring them that amalgamated unions would retain "vertical" sections in which "machinists, carpenters, engineers, etc. ... [could] crack jokes, chew about the job and discuss technical details and other problems" with fellow craftsmen. He then, however, spoiled the effect by acknowledging that union power would be wielded by a "horizontal" body representing all workers — among which craftsmen would necessarily form a minority, reiterating that amalgamation was only one of the necessary steps to workers' power and branding the entire bureaucracy as "lackeys of the capitalist

[29]Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Robert Russell Papers, file 11, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 435 Winnipeg, Minutes, 3 January 1921; "Stratford G.T.R. Shopmen Prefer Periodical Day Off," *Workers' World*, 17 August 1921; D.M. Le Bourdais, "Is Canada Solving the Railroad Riddle?" *The Nation*, 23 April 1924; *Machinist Bulletin*, August, October, December 1924; January, March, July, August 1925.
[30]*Machinist Bulletin*, August 1924.
[31]Jack Lakeman, "The Shopmen's Struggle and Some Fact We Should Face," *The Bulletin*, November 1922; Lakeman, "Who Is For Amalgamation?" *Worker*, 18 April 1923.

class," backward looking "slaves to precedent," with "no philosophy and no goal" other than to secure "soft government jobs."[32]

Centrists were not amused by the party's calumnies. Hewitt invited his critics to review his unions' recent convention proceedings, which, he pointed out, documented his consistent support for amalgamation and the rank and file's equally consistent opposition. For good measure, he lectured Lakeman on the realities of trade union leadership, pointing out that most rank and file workers were not politically class conscious, tended to change their views slowly and refused to be led by individuals who stood miles ahead of them issuing commands that seemed "too much like a holdup man saying 'your money or your life'." Hewitt remained convinced that amalgamation was inevitable, but, he pointed out (as had Robert McCutchan right at the start of the amalgamation campaign), it was not going to happen all at once, given that it affected so many unions.[33] Although the party's characterization of the B&O System began to be vindicated after about a year's experience, the party's early criticisms were easily dismissed as fanatical ranting. Moreover, in ignoring all the evidence of rank and file acceptance or consent, the party implied that rank and file workers were deluded, even stupid — a view some may have resented. During 1923 — before the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924 called for the world movement's first general left turn — the party proscribed further cooperation with "centrists" and entered into a state of "open warfare" with them. Buck reported to the Comintern that the driving-out of the "so-called progressives" (like Hewitt and McCutchan and others outside the railways, such as Toronto printer Jimmy Simpson) into the "camp of reaction" had been "productive of much good for us." But not, it seems, on the railroads, where, he admitted, most of the rank and file were keen on the prospects of steady, unionized employment and viewed with equanimity the prospect of a drive to blacklist TUEL sympathizers.[34] The general effect of abandoning the centrists seems to have been the destruction of a bridge to the rank and file.

Having realized that amalgamation was an ineffective mobilizing slogan, shortly before the 1923 Trades and Labour Congress convention in Vancouver the TUEL resurrected the pre-bolshevik slogan of Canadian Trade Union Autonomy, which had been rejected by the Second WPC convention in February 1923 and ignored by the TUEL at its Eastern Canadian conference as recently as August. Its mysterious resurrection was probably influenced by the AFL's mounting onslaught against the TUEL in the United States: the CPC may have wanted the TLC to spike

[32]"Tim Buck Reports on Industrial Activity," *Worker*, 15 March 1923; *The Left Wing*, 1 January 1925; Tim Buck, *Steps to Power* (Toronto 1925), 21, 48.

[33]Robert Hewitt, "More Light on Amalgamation," *Western Labor News*, 27 October 1922 (also reprinted in *The Bulletin*, November 1922); Hewitt, "Amalgamation, How?" *The Bulletin*, March 1923.

[34]*Machinist Bulletin*, November, December 1926; NAC, CPC, Vol. 10, Folder 10-9, Report of the TUEL Canadian Section, September 1923 to January 1925; Tim Buck to A. Lozovsky, 27 April, 17 October 1925.

the AFL's guns before they could be trained on Canadian TUELers. It developed four main arguments for autonomy: Canadian workers were inherently more militant and politically conscious than their "backward" American counterparts; the obduracy of the "Grand Lodge Moguls across the line" was the main obstacle to a flowering of Canadian activism —specifically to amalgamation; the way ahead for Canadian labour lay through the TLC, which should assert its right to construct and direct trade union policy in Canada in the light of Canadian conditions; Canadian workers had a duty to forge the organizational weapons that would enable it to resist and defeat Canadian capitalism and the Canadian state.[35]

For the next four years Canadian delegates to the congresses and plenums of the Comintern and RILU had to defend trade union autonomy against persistent American objections before winning Moscow's final approval.[36] On home ground, however, all the autonomy campaign achieved was the encouragement of a number of small nationalist splits from the international unions. As delegates assembled for the Vancouver convention, Tom Moore used his access to the national press to warn that the real purpose of autonomy was to uproot Canadian labour traditions and replace them with such alien excrescences as the political strike.[37] Largely thanks to the presence of a sizeable contingent of British Columbia radicals (of every tendency), the TUEL's resolution gained just under one-third of the Congress vote, the best result autonomy ever achieved. Successive TLC conventions rejected autonomy by larger margins partly because of the TLC executive council's tight grip on proceedings and partly because the party's case was less than watertight. Robert Hewitt asked how the TUEL could reconcile withdrawal from the AFL with its advocacy of affiliation to the far more centralist and prescriptive RILU. Similarly, how would rank and file democracy be served by granting additional powers to the TLC executive council? Craft unionism's tradition of local autonomy, he argued, was more likely to protect the voice of the rank and file. Hewitt claimed that the parlous state of independent labour political action stemmed from working class

[35]Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 109; NAC, CPC, Vol. 10, Folder 10-4, Buck, Report ... Eastern Sub-Division ... TUEL; Edward B. Mittleman, "Basis for American Federation of Labor Opposition to Amalgamation and Politics at Portland," *Journal of Political Economy*, 32 (February-December 1924), 86-100; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 205-7; Montgomery, *House of Labor*, 433-4; NAC, Toronto District Labour Council Minutes, M. Ketcheson to P.M. Draper, 9 August 1923; UT, RKC, green scrapbook, TUEL (Canadian Section), "Autonomy for Canadian Unionism," undated leaflet; Tim Buck, "National Autonomy Our Next Step," *Worker*, 5 September 1923; NAC, CF, Reel 4, File 18, Workers' Party of Canada, Resolutions and Decisions, April 1924.

[36]Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 113-5; NAC, CPC, Vol. 8, Folder 8-15, Report of Discussions [on] Canadian trade union policy at the Executive Session of the RILU, undated [1926]; *Worker*, 26 March 1927 (for Foster's acknowledgement of the Canadian TUEL's independence).

[37]"Tom Moore Opposes Tim Buck's Motion," *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 21 August 1923.

apathy in Canada rather any action by the AFL.[38] Other objectors used their account books to document the material benefit of the international link. Scoffing at the TUEL's militant rhetoric, veteran labourist W.R. Trotter pointed out that between 1919 and 1928 his union, the ITU, had supported Canadian militancy by disbursing in strike pay three times the dues paid by Canadian members. Although the party argued that its proposals did not "necessarily" imply severing international union ties and certainly would not affect labour mobility, craft unionists had good reason not to risk exiling themselves from international exchequers.[39]

II

An inherent weakness in the party's trade union strategy was its dependence on the efforts of "a very small percentage of the membership" — probably no more than a couple of hundred activists; the only concentrations of party members in the international unions were in the Cape Breton and Alberta coal fields and the Toronto garment trades. By orientating more or less entirely on organized workers, the party was acknowledging the difficulty of actualizing the Leninist ideal of making each factory "a stronghold of the revolution."[40] Nevertheless, this choice not only left it unable to draw on the 90 per cent of its 4,500 members (at the 1923-25 peak) who were first or second generation European immigrants, but left the more than 90 per cent of the industrial workforce who were *not* organized entirely to their own devices (a shortcoming highlighted by Foster's factional rivals in the American party).[41] The predominantly non-English speaking membership could have been coaxed out of their ethnic language federations (such as the Finnish Organization of Canada and the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association) to begin "renovating" Canadian labour in the non-craft, open-shop sectors of the economy where they were clustered. On a few occasions before 1925 organizers dabbled in the northern Ontario metal mining and logging industries, but no attempt was made to penetrate southern Ontario's Fordist workplaces. As the 1930s proved, building union cells in the likes of Ford, Chrysler and the Steel Company of Canada

[38]Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Report of Proceedings of the 39th Annual Convention* (Vancouver 1923), 92-6; Robert Hewitt, "The Left Wing at the Convention," *The Bulletin*, October 1923.

[39]"Money Talks," *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, December 1924; Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Report of Proceedings of the 40th Annual Convention* (London 1924), 105; W.A. Trotter, "Personally Conducted Printers' Tour of Canada," *American Federationist*, February 1929; John W. Bruce, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging?" *Canadian Congress Journal*, July 1928.

[40]"The Communist International and the Red International of Trade Unions: The Struggle Against the Amsterdam (scab) Trade Union International," 12 July 1921, in *Theses, Resolutions & Manifestoes*, 260; NAC, CPC, Vol. 11, Folder 11-13, Workers' Party of Canada, Industrial Report, February 1923 to February 1924.

[41]Harvey A. Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport 1981), 9.

was extremely difficult, but no more so than pulling to the left British and British-Canadian craftsmen whose deepseated labourism was often virulently anti-communist. Recruiting trade unionists to the party, Buck admitted in 1924, "continues very slow."[42]

The low level of union struggle often made it necessary to orientate on forums where some activity was taking place: local Trades and Labour Councils and the TLC annual convention. Although the centre initially held work in such "delegate bodies" in low esteem and advised members not to be drawn away from work in their union locals, the temptation was impossible to resist, especially since the same rank and file demoralization that limited the possibilities of union struggles also helped the party acquire a disproportionately heavy labour council presence. At a time when few others were willing to become delegates, party members rarely needed to be asked twice, a characteristic that simultaneously evoked labourist respect and suspicion.[43] Not seeming to mind the fundamentally ersatz nature of its authority, the party gained additional council representation by forming locals of the International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Labourers' Union (IHCU) in several cities, including Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Windsor, Toronto and Halifax. On the positive side, this laudable attempt at "renovation" brought organization to workers who would otherwise have lacked any collective strength. The Saskatoon local "had needle trade workers, stenographers, every classification of industry we could recruit where they had no union of their own. Most of them, including some of [the] officers, wouldn't have known what a hod was if they fell over one."[44]

[42]Metropolitan Toronto Public Library, "Toronto Between the Wars," tape collection, interview with Bert Hunt; NAC, CF, Reel 4, File 20, Tim Buck, Report of CPC to Fifth Congress of the Communist International, 28 June 1924; NAC, CPC, Vol. 11, Folder 11-13, Workers' Party of Canada, Industrial Report, February 1923 to February 1924; UT, RKC, Box 1, William Moriarty, "Report of Executive Secretary to Second Annual Convention, Workers' Party of Canada," 2 February 1923; Box 2, CPC, *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention*, Toronto, 11-13 September 1925; *Proceedings of the Fifth National Convention*, Toronto, 17-20 June 1927 (especially reports of T. Hill and W. Bosowich on Finnish and Ukrainian members); NAC, CF, Reel 1, File 21, Comintern, Minutes of National Secretariat for America and Canada, 12 January 1927. In the 18 months following the February 1924 Third WPC Convention, a period encompassing the party's first "bolshevization" drive, membership fell from 4,500 to 3,150.

[43]"Boring from Within," Hamilton *Labor News*, 30 April 1925; "How Can Labor Win?" Vancouver *Labor Statesman*, 16 September 1927. During 1925 only 45 of a possible 168 seats on the Vancouver and New Westminster Trades and Labour Council were filled. See University of British Columbia Archives (UBCA), VNWTLC, Minutes, 18 August 1925.

[44]*Citizen*, 21 April, 1 September 1922, 15 May 1925; Canada, Department of Labour, *Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada 1925* (Ottawa 1926), 83; *Alberta Labor News*, 9 July 1927; *Canadian Labor Herald*, 31 July 1929; *Worker*, 29 October 1927, 27 July 1929; Hamilton *Labor News*, 28 November 1929; Tom McEwan, *The Forge Glows Red: From*

Diligent communist delegates ensured that TUEL resolutions were debated and passed. During 1925, for example, several labour councils endorsed the TUEL's *entire* slate of resolutions: amalgamation, autonomy, nationalization of the mining industry under workers' control and without compensation, a ban on the use of the military during strikes, abolition of military training in state schools, support for the unification of the RILU and IFTU, industrial credits for the USSR, and the introduction of British-style block voting as the basis of representation at the annual convention.[45] Although Buck boasted to the 1925 party convention that the TUEL program was supported by a majority of organized workers, in reality TUEL successes were largely rhetorical.[46] Passing resolutions imposed few practical demands on labour councils or the union rank and file, and proposals which would have involved local action, especially action which might have increased the left's fighting capacity, invariably failed. Following the Congress' lead, the Halifax and Vancouver councils refused to give their blessings to branches of the new party "front" group, the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL).[47] Even as leading Vancouver labourists claimed to be ready to give women workers every help in unionizing — they only had to ask — the VNWTLC was refusing to let a newly-formed women's Labour League (WLL) branch use its facilities.[48] During 1926 the Halifax Trades and Labour Council became so disunited that every building trades' union resigned rather than share a table with the "reds" clustered in the IHCU local.[49] The VNWTLC offered an important example of the left's failure to crack labourist reaction. While happy to support the party's protest to the British and Japanese consulates over the suppression of trade unionism in Shanghai, it drew the line at supporting CPC efforts to have BC's "oriental" workers treated as a legitimate part of the labour movement, withdrawing from the Canadian Labour Party (CLP) in

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Blacksmith to Revolutionary (Toronto 1974), 100-1; W.J.C. Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan: The TLC Years, 1905-1945," PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1972, 109; John Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers: The Struggle for Industrial Unionism in the Canadian Automobile Industry, 1925-1936," *L/LT*, 17 (Spring 1986), 113, 116; David Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1935," *L/LT*, 30 (Fall 1992), 40.

[45]UBCA, VNWTLC, *Minutes*, 7 July, 4 August 1925.

[46]UT, RKC, Box 2, Communist Party of Canada, *Proceedings of the Fourth National Convention*, "Report of the Industrial Department," 11-13 September 1925. Buck repeated this claim in Beeching and Clarke, eds., *Yours in the Struggle*, 119.

[47]"Are Delegates from Laborers Union Sitting Illegally?" *Citizen*, 14 August 1925; UBCA, VNWTLC, Minutes, 3 May 1926.

[48]'W', "Pin Money for the Female," *Labor Statesman*, 9 July 1926.

[49]*Halifax Herald, Evening Mail*, 13 February 1926; *Worker*, 6 March 1926; *Citizen*, 14 January 1927. They took this action after failing to persuade the IHCU to remove the Halifax local's charter. During the latter part of 1926 the Halifax TLC effectively ceased to function. Local party leader Hugh Pynn left for the United States, and in January 1927 the labourist old guard resume control of the council.

1928 when the BC provincial conference carried a communist resolution for "oriental enfranchisement."[50] The TLC itself deemed oriental workers "utterly unassimilable" and, by the end of the decade, was calling for their total repatriation.[51]

This same trend was even more apparent at the TLC's annual conventions, where the party's impact was more in keeping with its real influence in the movement (although communists suspected that a system of representation that gave every affiliated local the right to send a single delegate was open to executive patronage). While the executive council could rely on the support of a substantial "payroll" vote of AFL vice-presidents, international representatives and union business agents (and others who aspired to such positions), communists found that many delegates who talked a good fight before the convention left their militancy at home and became free-floating "representatives."[52] The executive council's right to appoint all convention committees resulted in effective stage-management and rigorous use of the constitution and rule-book. The platform manipulated left wing resolutions into acceptable shape to show that it was not reactionary, and lost often enough on minor issues to underline its commitment to democracy. International solidarity was always a safe outlet. When the resolution condemning Britain's "dirty work" against Shanghai's beleaguered trade unionists reached the 1925 convention, the resolutions' committee recommended "non-concurrence" but was upset by a wave of moral indignation from the floor, best represented by former vice president Bert Merson of the Toronto Street Railwaymen who insisted that "even if [the resolution] was called Communism ... it was right."[53] TUEL resolutions calling for special efforts to organize Asian and female workers fared less well. A proposal that the WLLs be used as transitional feeders for the craft unions carried a substantial degree of support in 1923 and 1924 but was crushed by a battery of more or less cynical pretexts: that the unions were already doing everything necessary and possible to organize women; that sexual separatism was wrong in principle, and that the TLC could not support the WLL since the AFL already recognized the National Women's Trade Union League for this purpose. More important than any of these, however, as one delegate finally admitted, was that

[50]Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary," 38; TLC, *Report of Proceedings 1923*, 82; "The Vancouver Convention," *Canadian Congress Journal*, October 1923; H.S.B., "Jubilee Labour Hall," *Labour Statesman*, 25 February 1927; Tom Saunders to editor (and editor's note), *Labor Statesman*, 16 March 1928; George Drayton, "Reactionaries in Vancouver T and L Council," *Worker*, 19 May 1928; UBCA, VNWTLC, Minutes, 1, 15 May, 5 June 1928.

[51]"Restricting Oriental Immigration," *Canadian Congress Journal*, February 1929.

[52]See comments on Toronto delegates Bert Merson and Mary McNab in *Worker*, 6 November 1926.

[53]Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Report of Proceedings of the 41st Annual Convention* (Ottawa 1925), 110, 142-44.

the WLLs formed "a wing of the Workers' Party" and could not conceivably be endorsed.[54]

Understandably frustrated, by the mid-1920s the party viewed the TLC convention as "labour's annual humiliation and betrayal." On every issue communists took a principled class line, standing for solidarity against the separations of gender and race, but every year their influence diminished. Party candidates for the TLC presidency (Jack Kavanagh in 1923; Tim Buck in 1924 and 1925) respectively scored 23 per cent, 22 per cent, and 14.5 per cent of the vote in two-man contests with Tom Moore, "labour's safety-valve." In these contests party delegates rarely followed their own advice about the uselessness of abstract denunciation of labour "fakerdom." By twinning pleas for unity with a sustained attempt to discredit "yellow" officials, they appeared cynical, offended "that sense of loyalty that one finds in the rank and file to 'their elected officers'," and turned TLC presidential votes into votes of confidence which had only one possible winner.[55] As can be seen in the election of the TLC's five leading executive positions (president, secretary-treasurer, first, second and third vice presidents), loyalty is possibly too weak a term to describe labourism's support of its leading "statesmen." (Figure 2) Forty-one of the 50 positions went to three unions: ITU (17), IAM (12), and UBCJ (12); Tom Moore (UBCJ) and Paddy Draper (ITU) were returned as president and secretary-treasurer throughout the decade, and between 1926 and 1929 they were joined by J.T. Foster and R.J. Tallon (both IAM) and Jimmy Simpson (ITU). This quintet of two Liberals (Moore, Foster), two social democrats (Simpson, Tallon) and a Tory (Draper) underlined the unity of labourism.

Figure 2
Election of Trades and Labour Congress Vice Presidents, 1920-1929

Convention	First VP	Second VP	Third VP
1920 (Windsor)	A. Martel (UBCJ)	H.J. Halford (J'men. Barbers)	A. McAndrew (M-O-Way Emps.)
1921 (Winnipeg)	Martel	Bert Merson (Street R'Waymen)	McAndrew
1922 (Montreal)	J.T. Foster (IAM)	Merson	McAndrew

[54]Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Report of Proceedings of the 39th Annual Convention* (Vancouver 1923), 131-2; *Report of Proceedings of the 40th Annual Convention* (London 1924), 110-2, 120.

[55]Hewitt, "The Left Wing"; "Reds Downed at Congress," *Citizen*, 11 September 1925; Province of Ontario Archives (AO), CPC Papers, 1A 0014, J.B. McLachlan to Tim Buck, 4 May 1925; Avakumovic, *The Communist Party*, 43; *Worker*, 12 September 1925, 17 September 1927.

Figure 2 continued

Convention	First VP	Second VP	Third VP
1923 (London)	Foster	R.P. Pettipiece (I.T.U.)	A.J. Crawford (VNWTLC)
1924 (London)	Foster	J. Simpson (I.T.U.)	Merson
1925 (Ottawa)	Foster	Simpson	Merson
1926 (Montreal)	Simpson	R.J. Tallon (I.A.M.)	Foster
1927 (Edmonton)	Simpson	Tallon	Foster
1928 (Toronto)	Simpson	Tallon	Foster
1929 (Saint John)	Simpson	Tallon	Foster

Source: TLC, *Reports of Proceedings of Annual Convention, 1920-1929.*

III

If communists were frustrated by their opponents' complacency, labourists were often infuriated by the party's intransigence and "ridiculous attitude of self-righteousness." At WPC meetings in Toronto "scenes, uproar and a disrupted meeting" ensured whenever anyone challenged the party's "rigid and immobile orthodoxy". It was rare, an Edmonton unionist added, for "a meeting of a central council of the Labour movement" to proceed without an intervention by "some Communist ... [who] holier than thou ... claims a monopoly on all the honesty, sincerity, and good sense in the labor movement, and questions the motives and actions of all who do not agree with his particular philosophy."[56] This did not sit well with rivals who considered the party to be comprised of infantile "sewer-pipe revolutionists," "clowns," and "millenial zealots," whose "wild actions and foreign ideas" could only lead to a "madman's upheaval" (verbal sectarianism was not a one-way street).[57] Labourists particularly resented the party's constant accusations of class collaboration and betrayal. Plumbers' official John W. Bruce claimed that communists were incapable of telling the difference between constructive negotiation and collaboration, while Bob Tallon responded to news of communist plans to build a

[56]UT, RKC, Box 33, Oliver Downey to A.E. Smith, 3 February 1924; "A Candid Friend Speaks," *Alberta Labor News*, 1 September 1927; TLC executive council statement, *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 22 August 1921.

[57]"Revolutionists Tell the Workers One Thing, Mean Another," *Canadian Labor World*, 4 October 1923; comments on Jack Kavanagh and Joe Knight, *The Bulletin*, March 1923; "Toronto Reds Disgrace Labor Movement," *Labor Leader*, 24 March 1922; "Communism Versus Capitalism," *Canadian Labor World*, 28 August 1925; "The Workers' (?) Party," *British Columbia Labor News*, 10 February 1922.

railway "minority movement" against the B&O System by calling on delegates to a forthcoming shopmen's convention to come with "constructive ideas." Any "child," he observed, could "indulge in a gesture — but a real constructive, statesmanlike conception of our organizations, the ... building up of clear, logical facts in support of our contentions, and a demonstration of intelligent citizenship will actually get us consideration."[58] Communists, the *Canadian Congress Journal* observed, too easily forgot that a "willingness to compromise in order to reach a common understanding must always be the foundation of united action."[59]

No less than those they decried, labour officials had a fair conceit of themselves. Prospective business agents, a mock job description indicated, needed a heroic range of skills and virtues to deal with an ever-demanding membership. "He" had to be capable of "creating jobs ... where there are none to be had," of defending members "discharged for a good cause and [of forcing] employers to maintain men in employment." He had to be ready with a personal loan whenever any member needed one and prepared to collect wages "which conscientious scruples forbid individuals to ask for themselves." He needed the predictive skills of a meteorologist, a wide knowledge of current affairs and the ability to show a member how to fix his car or "get the best results" from his radio. While visiting the sick and supporting from his own pocket "bazaars, raffles, picnics, dances and all other worthy causes," he had to maintain throughout "a pleasing disposition." Having risen to eminence on such a foundation, there was small wonder that many felt "the most reactionary leader in the labour movement is miles ahead of the rank and file."[60] Small wonder also, that the communist practice of undermining labourism's meritocrats showed why the WPC could not be considered "of" the labour movement.

Labourist officials were confident that they represented the views of the "average Labour man," who was simply not attracted by the party's call to class struggle. Many labourists viewed organizations like the Union Label League and the Asiatic Exclusion League as progressive and reformist, or at least useful in the struggle to influence the labour market in labour's favour. When the party rejected the former as collaborationist and the latter as an affront to class consciousness, it was accused of inviting workers fatalistically to fold their arms until conditions forced them to throw themselves "on the end of a bayonet."[61] Most labourists

[58]Bruce, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging?" *Canadian Congress Journal*, July 1928; "Communism Versus Capitalism," *Canadian Labor World*, 28 August 1925.

[59]"Unity," *Canadian Congress Journal*, November 1926.

[60]"Wanted — A Business Agent," *Labour Statesman*, 13 September 1929; "Winnipeg Trades Council Turns Down Workers' Party," *Labor leader*, 31 March 1922.

[61]"B.C. Federationist 'Yelps' Again," *B.C. Labor News*, 9 September 1921. The secret communist group around the *B.C. Federationist* (led by Jack Kavanagh, A.S. Wells and J.M. Clarke) was the main critic of the Asiatic Exclusion League, an alliance of veterans,

refused to accept that the era of conciliation and arbitration had gone or that they had more in common with unskilled foreigners than with decent employers, not all of whom were robbers "whose sole object in life is the exploitation of the working classes." In a capitalist state, James Somerville contended, labour had to "play the game" by recognizing capital's "claim of ownership and profit taking liberties." The way to change the rules of the game was via "constitutional methods ... conscientious use of the ballot-box" and a great deal more education in the skills of social citizenship — the methods, in short, of a British Labour Party, whose achievements the CPC so ignorantly disdained.[62]

Labourists of both left and right believed that communists' desire for a "short cut to the millenium" led them into disreputable practices, including a foolhardy attitude towards strike action. They, themselves, never surrendered the right to strike. Speaking on the only occasion in the 1920s when the AFL convention met in Canada, Samuel Gompers insisted that this right should be protected at all costs, while Tom Moore held that "even if mistakes are sometimes made and ... the struggles are futile," no right-thinking person could expect labour to submit to conditions that retarded "human progress."[63] The TLC became quite exercised when some national newspapers argued that its dispatch of a telegram of support to the British Trades Union Congress during the 1926 General Strike allied it with Trotsky and Zinoviev. The accusation was, of course, "willful and deliberate lying" — even the Prince of Wales, it pointed out, had supported the miners! Nevertheless, the "solidarity of labour" could not be a "thing of words alone, of quibble, platitude and humbug."[64] At the same time, since strikes always contained the possibility of defeat and "the disruption of the organization," they had to be used reluctantly, in moderation and for limited ends. Until the balance of forces turned in their favour, union members had to be prepared to roll with the punches and stay in the ring. In

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businessmen and the VNWTLC formed in August 1921. Kavanagh continued to revile the labour bureaucracy for its racism, claiming at the 1923 TLC convention that most Chinese and Japanese workers had a stronger sense of class consciousness than "many of the labour fakirs who continually attend this Congress." See Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver 1967), 88; Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary," 38; *TLC Proceedings*, 1923, 82.

[62]*The Bulletin*, April 1922; UT, RKC, Box 33, Oliver Downey to A.E. Smith, 3 February 1924; "Communist Publication Attacks Woodsworth," *Labor Statesman*, 11 November 1927; "Unfair Attack on British Labour Party," *Labour Statesman*, 2 March 1928; "Communism Versus Capitalism," *CLW*, 28 August 1925; Report of "at home" for veteran UBCJ official John Flett in *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, December 1924; F.H., "The Situation As I See It," *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, November 1925; Somerville, "Economic Fallacies."

[63]St. John *Union Worker*, July 1920; Tom Moore, "Labour — A Constructive Force," *Canadian Congress Journal*, October 1925.

[64]*Canadian Congress Journal*, June 1926. To be on the safe side, the Congress pointed out that even the Prince of Wales had supported the miners!

late 1925, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, rejuvenated by the economic upturn, initiated a southern Ontario organizing drive among skilled craftsmen and semi-skilled furniture factory workers, but warned at the outset that its priority was building the organization rather than winning wage rises. Thus, it was annoyed when Hanover furniture workers immediately plunged into a strike and incredulous when they demanded financial support when they had not even started to pay dues. The UBCJ duly abandoned them.[65]

On one of the few occasions when communists led an important union organizing drive, at the 3,800 worker Sydney, Nova Scotia, steel plant of the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco), the perils of excessive militancy were fully exposed.[66] For present purposes, the details of the defeated Sydney steelworkers' strike (28 June-2 August 1923) are less important than how labourism viewed the party's role in it. "Cape Breton Bolshevism" became an issue for the TLC as soon as it became aware of the party's involvement with the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers (AA). When the AA celebrated some minor successes in a departmental strike in February, the TLC appealed directly to Besco to join labour's "battle against Communism."[67] Four months later, when the AA called a plant-wide strike, labourists saw District 26's communist secretary-treasurer J.B. McLachlan defy an explicit order from UMWA international president John L. Lewis not to break its contract with Besco by calling a miners' sympathy strike. McLachlan not only pulled out the miners, but for good measure advised all Canadian workers that a political, general strike was the "one way only" they could show solidarity with the Cape Breton steelmen. When Lewis suspended the entire "red" executive of District 26 and ordered his trustee, Silby Barrett, to get the miners back to work, the sympathy strike petered out, and a few days later the steelworkers surrendered. Labourists displayed more sympathy for Lewis' defence of "constitutionalism and law and order" than for McLachlan, who was arrested on a charge of "seditious utterance." Addressing any "average unthinking worker" who may have been swayed by left wing criticisms of Lewis, Robert Hewitt asserted that the latter's "firm and fearless stand" in support of the "sanctity of contract" had saved the union from disaster. McLachlan, in contrast, for all that his rank and file followers considered him able and intelligent, lacked "the ordinary intelligence to distinguish between the working class as we have it, and the working class as we should like to have it." Hewitt sympathized with the steelworkers, but "the futility of the General Strike either as an aid to the strikers or as a means to compel the withdrawal of the troops" was obvious.[68] When McLachlan made an appeal to the

[65]*Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, November, December 1925, January 1926. This experience helped pave the way for the success of the Workers' Unity League in 1933.

[66]For the background to these events, see Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 73-81; Craig Heron, *Working in Steel* (Toronto 1988), 152-8.

[67]"Nova Scotia Steel Strike," *Canadian Congress Journal*, March 1923.

[68]Robert Hewitt, "The Nova Scotia Affair," *The Bulletin*, August 1923.

Vancouver TLC convention for a physical demonstration of support during his forthcoming trial, he was turned down with a firmness that won the approval of the bourgeois press.[69] When, however, he was convicted and sentenced to two years in Dorchester penitentiary, the TLC joined the clamour for an instant pardon.[70]

The party's role in Cape Breton offended the two labourist shibboleths of sanctity of contract and the obligation — the first for authentic unionists — to defend the organization. Through the 1920s the unions saw little alternative to settling for recognition on capital's terms. The B&O Plan was only one among a variety of methods used to achieve this goal: the weakest unions (Brewery, Boot and Shoe, Textile Workers) sponsored the Union Label; the stronger building trades pursued Joint Industrial Councils and state-sanctioned apprenticeship schemes; and the once militant needle trades' unions' increasingly eschewed shop floor democracy in favour of "impartial arbitration" (communists described Toronto's arbitrator, Dr. J.W. McMillan, as a "master class slave driver") and "standards of production" agreements negotiated between centralized Joint Boards and a diminishing number of manufacturers still prepared to use union labour.[71] Some of the suppler garment union ideologues argued that every dimension of what they called the "New Unionism" was a stride towards industrial democracy and the "weakening [of] the power of capital in our industry." Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union (ACWU) leader Sidney Hillman, however, stated the realities of the period to Canadian members who had questioned his sanctioning of piece-working: "the only tenable position [is] that whether or not piece-rates are preferable to a time-basis of pay, the union shop is preferable to a non-union shop, under all circumstances."[72]

[69]"Labor Vindicates Itself," *Montreal Daily Star*, 17 September 1923, reprinted in *Canadian Labour World*, 4 October 1923.

[70]"Moore Does Some Toadying," *Maritime Labor Herald*, 19 January 1924.

[71]For the Union Label, see "Voluntary Arbitration Contract," *Industrial Banner*, 17 September 1920; organizers' reports, Saskatoon, St. Catharines, Toronto and Valleyfield, *American Federationist, April 1921*; *B.C. Labor News*, 12 August 1921. On the building trades, see "Joint Industrial Councils and Responsibility," *People's Cause*, October 1927; "Report of the Deputy Minister of Labour," *Ontario Sessional Papers* (Toronto 1929), 13-4; "Apprenticeship in Ontario," *Labour Gazette*, October 1928. And on the garment trades, see John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Great Depression: The Workers' Unity League, 1930-1936," PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1984, 464-72; Mercedes Steedman, "The Promise: Communist Organizing in the Needle Trades, The Dressmakers' Campaign 1928-1937," *L/LT*, 34 (Fall 1994), 45-9; "Revolting Wages Set for Millinery Girls," *Young Worker*, November 1925.

[72]J.B.S. Hardman, "Class Collaboration and Generalizations," *The Advance*, 13 March 1925; Saul Yanofsky, "Some Thought Anent 'Trade Union Capitalism'," *Justice*, 3 April 1925; Matthew Josephson, *Sidney Hillman: Statesman of American Labor* (Garden City, NY 1952), 279; "Political Demagoguery and Industrial Radicalism," *The Advance*, 22 July 1927.

As Hillman's comment indicated, "defending the organization" sometimes meant forcing unpopular concessions on the membership. It could also mean eliminating those forces who refused to accept that concessions had to be made. Hillman proceeded to impose piece-working in union agreements in Montréal and Toronto over the resistance of the "left-wing" (social democratic garment workers constituted the "right wing"), who, running on a militant, rank and file platform that called for the complete eradication of piece-work, the negotiation of maximum standards of production and the restoration of the shop committee as the main locus of union power, had won control of both cities' Joint Boards in the winter of 1925-26.[73] The TUEL, however, found consolidating this successful united front from below much harder. In its two-year period of office, the left attempted to resurrect the "Amalgamated Spirit" by reducing full-timers' salaries to skilled shopfloor levels, cutting the number of business agents' positions and encouraging regular shop meetings; it also organized a number of single-shop strikes, usually to defend or obtain the 44-hour week. To mount city-wide strikes, however, it needed Hillman's backing. He responded to their appeals with the tactical acuity that made him the bureaucrats' bureaucrat. Concentrating union efforts on Montréal, he personally figure-headed a city-wide strike in July 1927 that ended in a contract covering 5,500 workers. Meanwhile, his international organizers resisted calls for similar action in Toronto and Hamilton and started to soften up the rank and file for the acceptance of piece-work. Responding to the challenge, the left called for total resistance, claiming that the new concession would set in motion a cycle of intensified work, increased productivity, job cuts and insecurity. Immediately before September's union elections, Hillman returned to Canada to support right-wing candidates and launch an all-out assault on the left. Having effectively made the election a vote of confidence in his stewardship, he left nothing to chance. Every well-known TUEL candidate was suspended; the conduct of elections in Montréal Local 209 and Toronto Local 211 was placed under the control of the international office, and Toronto's Italian Local 235 was disbanded. According to the *Worker*, the campaign was topped off with a mixture of threats and bribes. Left wing slates of virtual unknowns went down by huge margins in Montréal and much narrower ones in Toronto.[74]

[73]F.R. Scott and H.M. Cassidy, *Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry* (Toronto 1935), 5-6; "What the Left-Wingers in the Amalgamated are Fighting For," *Worker*, 11 April 1925; Mike Buhay, "In the Amalgamated, Montreal," *Worker*, 10 October 1925; A. Temkin, "The Fight to Cleanse the Toronto Amalgamated of Fakir Officials," *Worker*, 6 March, 10 April 1926; Buhay, "Awakening of Clothing Workers in Montreal," *The Left Wing*, March-April 1926.

[74]"Montreal Routs the Disruptionists," *Advance*, 15 September 1927; Sidney Hillman, "The Liquidation of Leftism in the Amalgamated," *Advance*, 28 October 1927; *Advance*, 2 December 1927; *Worker*, 29 October, 19 November, 10, 17 December 1927; Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 184-5.

Even as they gritted their teeth against some of the compromises they were forced to endure, labourists felt able to view their circumstances in a broadly positive light. Experience had taught them to be philosophical about negative turns in the labour market, and the post-1925 upturn indicated that there was plenty of life left in Canadian capitalism. Those who had managed to stay regularly employed throughout the early 1920s recession, moreover, had enjoyed rising living standards; according to one report the only industries in which real wages fell were coal and metal mining.[75] Labourist discourse was replete with reference to civilization, progress, expansion, constructiveness, labour-capital cooperation — not collaboration — and the national interest. Their expectations of "fairness" from the state were being fulfilled by the appointment of "progressives," including token labourists like James Murdock and Peter Heenan, to the key government portfolios of immigration, railways and labour, and also by the inclusion of labour representatives in a proliferation of advisory institutions on the margins of the state, covering such issues as health, education, industrial safety and child welfare. By mid-decade every member of the TLC executive council sat on at least one such body, and Tom Moore served on no fewer than nine, most prestigiously the board of CNR, where his presence guaranteed that "the national, which includes the workers', interests will be fully protected."[76] Similarly, the appointment of veteran labour socialist Gustave Francq to the chairmanship of Québec's new provincial Minimum Wage Board was welcomed on the grounds that Francq's "fine sense of fairness" would ensure fair dealings for both labour and capital. All in all, labourists were convinced that the quality of Canadian democracy was improving, thanks in no small part to their promotion of "good citizenship, industrial stability and the good of the Canadian public as a whole."[77]

Such sentiments infuriated communists, who saw in them the class interests of the bureaucracy. Even more depressing, however, was the realization that this false consciousness had penetrated deeply into the working class. Maurice Spector bemoaned the thousands of workers who remained seduced by the "siren song" of the tariff, and Beckie Buhay was horrified when an Edmonton railway worker, supposedly a "good union man," informed her that "what 'we' need is population

[75]"Fifteen Important Manufacturing Industries in Canada, 1919-1925," *American Federationist*, February 1929.

[76]*Canadian Congress Journal*, October 1922; J.A.P. Haydon, "The Canadian Government," *Canadian Congress Journal*, October 1926; NAC, Trades and Labour Congress Executive Council, Minutes (microfilm), 18 October 1926, 7 January, 30 December 1928; Comment on Gus Francq, in *Canadian Labour World*, 28 August 1925.

[77]Tom Moore, quoted in *Canadian Congress Journal*, April 1928. In 1928 the AFL Executive Council defined what it meant by a "labour statesman"; "[a man] actively responsible for urgent problems of national welfare, alert to see where constructive principle can be applied, and competent to achieve practical results." Quoted in Carl Haessler, "The Respectable A.F. of L.," *The Nation*, 12 December 1928.

... 25 millions of people west of the Great Lakes to develop our undeveloped resources and land, to build up this country ... [into] the greatest yet." Behind his "labour imperialism," she argued, lay the mentality of the CPR.[78] Inspired by Moscow's first intimations of what would become known as the theory of "social fascism," after 1924 communists flayed the social democratic left with increasing vigour, rejecting its aim of "bringing good to all classes and all people" and claiming that when social democratic ideas were put into parliamentary practice, their effect was to support a capitalist state that was rotten to the core. Beneath a thin layer of socialist idealism, the party argued, there lurked in all social democratic politicians a horror of class war that blinded them to the reality of the class nature of the bourgeois state — even when the military were deployed "in aid of the civil power." Parliamentary culture nourished a petty bourgeois desire to climb "the golden stairs" to capitalist affluence.[79] The party's favourite forum for these arguments was the Canadian Labour Party. Beginning with Québec in 1925, this permanent united front from above fell apart in one provincial section after another.[80]

Communists' sense of superiority was strengthened — and the gap with labourism widened — by their willingness to give a fighting lead. One of the ironies of this "decade of failure" was that when workers *were* willing to struggle, communists were usually the first to join them in the trenches. The 1923 organizing drive at the Sydney steel plant may have ended in disaster, but there would have been little activity at all without the party. During that same year, communists were at the centre of an impressive united front in support of striking Edmonton-area coal miners.[81] Two years later, when the International Ladies Garment Workers'

[78]Maurice Spector, "Class Struggle in Canada 1925," *Worker*, 9 January 1926; Beckie Buhay, "So This Is Canada: Reflections of a Class-Conscious Worker Wandering from Coast to Coast," *Worker*, 26 March 1927.

[79]"Working Women's Section," *Worker*, 16 May 1925; "The United Front," *Worker*, 10 January 1925; NAC, CF, Reel 1, File 21, Tim Buck, Report on Communist Party of Canada (1926), in Comintern, National Secretariat for America and Canada, Minutes, 12 January 1927. Although a left-turn was announced at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, Norman Penner is wrong to conclude that the CPC moved into a consistent sectarian mode or that it did so solely in response to "the relentless drive of the Stalinist juggernaut" to the left. See Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 82. The CPC's hostility to social democratic "centrists" both pre-dated the 1924 left-turn and persisted during and after the 1925 right-turn; no sooner had *Zinoviev* promulgated the left turn in the Comintern in 1924, than Stalin out-manoeuvred him by shifting back to the right, supporting such united fronts "from above" as the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. For a sense of the complexity of Comintern politics in the mid-1920s, see Helmut Gruber, *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern* (Garden City, NY 1974).

[81]Alvin Finkel, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-1942," *L/LT*, 16 (Fall 1985), 76-7.

Union (ILGWU) rediscovered life in its Toronto locals, communists did much of the work of resurrection.[82] When Winnipeg's fur workers struck in 1926, the party quickly responded to their requests for an experienced organizer by sending James Blugerman (then under ACWA suspension) and Beckie Buhay to their assistance.[83] Between 1921 and 1925 communists sporadically attempted to organize the unemployed, and between 1922 and 1928 they made a disproportionate contribution to the organization of national and international strike solidarity.[84] Their sheer energy, however, and their willingness to endure the often severe personal costs of their politics, left them *more* detached from the experience of ordinary craft unionists. When and where communism was relatively popular, as, for example, in industrial Cape Breton between 1922 and 1925, the tendency of party members to construct a red world within the world of labour could be viewed by non-communist workers with a mixture of amusement, admiration and identification. When the economic situation deteriorated, however, and when at least some of that deterioration could be attributed to the party's misguided militancy, those sentiments could change quite suddenly; by 1927 the Cape Breton party and its red culture had utterly collapsed.[85] Nationally, as labourism's scepticism about the nature of the Soviet Union and the lives of Soviet workers percolated down through the working class, the party ceased to draw kudos from its unquestioning devotion to the first workers' state. American radical Scott Nearing discovered this when he toured western Canada in 1924.[86] On a tour of the Crow's Nest Pass mining districts two years later, Nearing made a point of asking audiences if there were any communists in the area. "The answers," he noted, "were always the same: 'Not if they get caught at it!'; 'Not a man who knows when he is well off!'; 'Find them if you can!'; 'Yes, in clink with Kid Burns!' Many ordinary workers were beginning to see communists as "freaks."[87]

Pressed hard by American union leaders, Canadian labourists were coming to the conclusion that the party was so destructive, so great a menace to the success of organized labour, that it had to be expelled: "They will stick till they break us,

[82]"The Resurrection in Canada," *Justice*, 30 January 1925; "The Strikes in Montreal and Toronto," *Justice*, 13 February 1925; "Minutes of Toronto C[ity] C[entral] C[ommittee] Meeting," *Worker*, 16 May 1925; "Crisis in the ILGWU," *W*, 1 August 1925.

[83]*Manitoba Free Press*, 28 September, 1, 2, 6, 7, 12 October 1926; Irving Abella, "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," *L/LT*, 2 (1977), 195-7.

[84]Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class," 149-51.

[85]Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 82-9, 93-4.

[86]Scott Nearing, "The Labour Situation in Western Canada," *Labour Monthly* (London), May 1925. In this article (for R. Palme Dutt's influential publication), Nearing offered a highly optimistic reading of the questioning attitude of the workers at his meetings.

[87]Scott Nearing, "The Crow's Nest Pass," *Labour Monthly*, February 1927; Beckie Buhay Ewan, "Women's Place in the Labour Movement," *Daily Clarion*, 22 August 1936. Buhay Ewan also observed that women communists were viewed as doubly freakish.

or we will have to stick till we drive them out."[88] The UBCJ had shown the way as early as 1923 when it declared Malcolm Bruce *persona non grata*.[89] In 1925 the Toronto Labor Temple closed its doors to party meetings, the Hamilton Trades and Labour Council imposed a ban on communist delegates and the Québec section of the CLP voted narrowly to reject the affiliation of any organization linked to the party; in 1926 the Jewish Workmen's Circle, which the previous year had seen communists anticipate the methods of "Class Against Class" by disrupting a tour it had sponsored by the exiled Russian menshevik leader Raphael Abramowitch, expelled its communist members; and in 1927 TLC vice president James Simpson, who had appeared alongside party members on British General Strike solidarity platforms the year before, underscored his personal break with the communist conception of labour unity by leading the hue and cry for the Toronto District Labour Council to ban communist delegates, on the grounds that they had exposed themselves as "union wreckers" by cooperating with the recently formed All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL).[90] This attempt failed, but Simpson continued to undermine the CPC in the Ontario Section of the CLP, which effectively split apart at its Easter 1927 convention in Hamilton. One labourist delegate summed up the contrast between the CLP's social democratic and communist wings: "the communists are [not] for Labor. They are for themselves. Some of the delegates there ... could hardly speak a word of English; They just sat in their seats with their mouths open and voted when they were told to. Every kind of foreigner you could imagine was there."[91] Prominent among the defectors from the CLP were Jewish social

[88]John Frey, "Disrupters Without Their Sheep's Clothing," *Labor News*, 30 March 1925; "Equal Rights," *Canadian Congress Journal*, August 1925; William L. Hutchison and Frank Duffy to officers and members, UBCJ, *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, February 1926; "Canadian Labour and Communists," *Times* (London), 30 November 1925; "Bolsheys Have No Place in Trade Unions," *Labor Leader*, 11 February 1927; "Communism versus Capitalism," *Canadian Labour World*, 28 August 1925; "'Reds' Downed at Congress," *Citizen*, 11 September 1925; 'Sane Labor' to the editor, *Citizen*, 30 November 1925; W [W.W. Lefeaux?], "Don't Break Away from the Canadian Labor Party," *Labor Statesman*, 23 September 1927; J. Dawson to the editor, *Labor Statesman*, 7 October 1927; "Report of UBCJ Ontario Provincial Convention," *Carpenters' Monthly Bulletin*, July-August 1928.

[89]NAC, TDLC, Minutes, 15 November 1923. Bruce provoked the UBCJ's ire by showing disrespect for Armistice Day in an article in the *Worker*.

[90]On the Abramowitch affair, see *Worker*, 14, 21 March 1925; NAC, Arthur Meighen Papers, Vol. 147, R.C.M.P., Weekly Summary #327, "Notes Recording Revolutionary Organizations and Agitators in Canada," July 1926; *Worker*, 19 November 1927; "Toronto Women's Labour League Moves Forward," *Woman Worker*, December 1927.

[91]"New Labor Party Out to Smash Communism," *Toronto Daily Star*, 15 April 1927; Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 262-3.

democrats, some of whom were almost certainly involved later that year in driving through Sidney Hillman's "liquidation of leftism" in the ACWU's Canadian locals.[92]

In comparison, however, with the American unions' "war to the knife," Canada's anti-communist purge was no more than a blip. Why did Canadian labour display such tolerance? One possibility is that Canadian labour leaders wanted to distinguish themselves from their American counterparts and so dispel the claim of the growing nationalist breakaway movement that they were lackeys of the AFL.[93] Another possibility is that there was real reluctance to drive out prominent individuals who were genuinely respected at the grass roots as good craftsmen and honest trade unionists. The home locals of Tim Buck, London shoeworker Albert Graves, and Jack Lakeman all offered sustained resistance to orders from their unions' international offices to expel them. When Jack MacDonald, the Toronto Patternmakers' perennial delegate to the TLC convention, was refused admission to the 1928 meeting, the pro-Tory *Labor Leader* testified to his integrity: "We don't like MacDonald's politics, and never did, and we give him credit for causing more trouble for the Labor movement than any other six men in Canada ... [but] he has been honest about it all, and everybody knew exactly where [he] stood all the time — he was a Communist and that was all there was to it. A fighter from the drop of a hat."[94] Another possibility is that labourists genuinely believed in pluralism: the best way to subdue communist influence, Tom Moore observed was not through coercion but by public education about the nature of communism and the removal "so far as is practical ... [of the] conditions which give the glaze of plausibility to their extremist claims." To some there seemed little reason to provoke unnecessary upheaval when the international unions were on the upswing and the WPC was in terminal decline.[95]

Craft union tolerance began to fray seriously in 1927, when the party openly welcomed the formation of the ACCL. Particularly provocative was the party's stance during a strike by the Toronto UBCJ, which had the dual purpose of winning an improved contract for wage increases and a closed shop. In normal circum-

[92]Hillman, "The Liquidation of Leftism"; *Advance*, 16 March 1928; "Drop Membership in Labor Party," *Toronto Mail and Empire*, 16 April 1927; NAC, CF, Reel 7, File 52A, Canadian Labour Party, Ontario Section, Minutes of the Eighth Annual Convention, 15-16 April 1927.

[93]Norman Reilly Raine, "Tom Moore: Safety Valve of Labour," *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 April 1925; Tom Moore, "The Canadian Labour Movement," *American Federationist*, February 1929.

[94]"Trades Congress Vindicates the Policy of the Labor Leader," *Labor Leader*, 14 September 1928.

[95]Raine, "Tom Moore"; J. Dawson to the editor, *Labor Statesman*, 7 October 1927. The Toronto social democratic weekly *Canada Forward*, 15 January 1927, adopted a gently mocking tone in announcing, in the style of the popular press' "society notes," Tim Buck's latest trip to the Soviet Union. Noting that a no-frills trip would cost around $800, while the deluxe version would leave little change from $1,000, the article hinted at a subtext of "Moscow Gold."

stances, the party would have wholeheartedly supported the action, but in this instance, the demand for a closed shop was aimed at wiping out the nationalist Amalgamated Carpenters of Canada (ACC), which just happened to contain some prominent party sympathizers. When the ACC refused to go quietly and sent its members into the strikers' jobs, the party tried to create another united front from below, calling on members of both unions to form Committees of Action and take control of the dispute out of their leaders' hands. Significantly, this was read by the UBCJ (and indeed, by all the city's international building trades' unions) as a positive stand in favour of dual-unionism.[96] Tolerance finally snapped early in 1928 when, after the party and ACCL united for an attempt to organize auto workers, the party refused to break the alliance despite the TLC's own, entirely unexpected incursion into the field of mass production unionism. At this juncture, IAM Local 235 bowed to pressure from headquarters and expelled Buck. A delighted Frank Morrison, the AFL's Canadian-born secretary-treasurer, who was in Canada to lead the TLC's auto campaign, claimed that Local 235's action reflected a labourist consensus that "a man cannot be a Communist and at the same time a union man, because Communists are constantly working to destroy the union."[97] The TLC now climbed aboard a growing anti-communist bandwagon. Moore explained that the TLC had rejected Jack MacDonald as a delegate to the 1928 convention because it wanted to leave the public in no doubt clear about its views on "dual unionism ... [and] communism."[98] By this time, in any case, the party was already coming to terms with the Comintern's "New Line" of "Class Against Class."

Conclusions

The labourist response to the communist challenge was understandable. Whatever else they were - backward-looking, sexist, racist, sectionalist, flagrantly dismissive of the needs of the huge mass of unorganized workers — leading labourists were not stupid. Having survived the OBU disruption, they were horrified when another group of hostiles, leading OBU militants among them, came along declaring that craft unionism was redundant and its leaders reactionary. This group, moreover, seemed to think that it could assert that it knew best what was in organized labour's interests, declare publicly that it intended to become the gravedigger of the bureaucracy and somehow induce "fakir" bureaucrats to take turns on the spade.

[96]On the carpenters' dispute, see Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class," 67-72.

[97]Morrison quoted in *Labor News*, 28 May 1928; Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers," 113-6. Lakeman's authority in his BRCA local can be gauged by the fact that the international office had to dissolve the local in order to winkle him out. See Robert Hewitt, "Charter of Edmonton Railway Carmen Revoked — New Union," *Labor Statesman*, 27 December 1929; Finkel, "Labour Party," 81-2.

[98]NAC, TLC Executive Council, Minutes, 8 September 1928; Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Report of Proceedings of the 44th Annual Convention* (Toronto 1928), 13-20.

Finding this prospect unattractive — for reasons both of self-interest and genuine belief that the CPC was a menace to trade unionism — the bureaucracy invigorated labourist ideology by disseminating deep into the ranks of craft unionism a powerful image of communists as power-hungry, dangerous, possibly unbalanced opportunists, with too little respect for labourist achievements and nothing truly constructive to offer. Quite clearly, "sane labour" could have no truck with such a bunch.[99]

What, then of the CPC? To state simply with the benefit of hindsight what it should have done in the 1920s would be deeply condescending to men and women who, before they became "bureaucratic sycophants of Stalin," knew the meaning and the price of commitment.[100] On the other hand, since they claimed that marxism gave them a permanently unequalled ability to face and penetrate reality, it seems justified to ask how well they used that advantage. The answer has to be: not very. Communists considered themselves intellectually and morally superior because they saw through and rejected the hierarchical fragmentation of the class by race, ethnicity and gender. Their problems were: how to articulate the need for class unity to the sort of sober evaluation of "the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the entire class (not only of its proletarian vanguard), and of all the working people (not only of their advanced elements)" which Lenin demanded; and how to reproach labourism without sanctimony.[101] They solved neither. Confronted time and again by evidence of non-revolutionary class consciousness, the party rarely let it affect their tactics. Rather, encouraged by Comintern prompting in 1924-25, it issued louder and more colourful — but less convincing —accusations of bureaucratic treachery, behind which lurked a dismissive judgment on the intelligence of ordinary workers. While it would have been asking too much for party activists to swallow all their contempt for the labour bureaucracy, they should have been willing to bite their tongues more often. They would certainly have stood a stronger chance of breaking down labourism's organizational and ideological authority had they followed their own advice and worked to expose concretely the bureaucracy's complacency, evasions and betrayals, rather than mitigate them through offensive invective.[102]

Although by mid-decade there were already clear signs that the party was stagnating, its leaders took on board the Comintern's bolshevization directive and ludicrously claimed that conditions were ripe for the CPC to become a "mass party"; Tim Buck marked his emergence as the favourite of the Stalinist "majority" in the CPSU and Comintern by calling for the CPC to double its membership in the space

[99]Bruce, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging?"

[100]Bryan Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers' Movement, 1927-1985* (St. John's 1988), 6.

[101]Lenin, *'Left Wing' Communism*, 545.

[102]Compare J.B. McLachlan's editorial, "Don't Let Tom Moore Take the Fight Out of Your Union," *Maritime Labor Herald*, 4 April 1925, with his letter to Buck, 4 May 1925.

of a few months. In the event, of course, bolshevization turned stagnation into collapse, as the party's hitherto overlooked immigrant members started to leave the party rather than accept its order to throw themselves immediately into a frenzied struggle to organize the unorganized.[103] One party member notably opposed the frantic, sloganeering atmosphere surrounding bolshevization. H.M. Bartholomew, whose physical dedication to the cause was beyond question, argued that what the party needed was not an overnight mass membership — which he doubted it could obtain, in any case —but cadres, men and women who could see through "frantic resolutions of an idealized character" and make "vital and direct contact between theory and practice." Action, he argued, had to be informed by theory, which itself had to be informed by concrete knowledge of the Canadian social formation (rather than by an exquisite knowledge of classic texts or the "situations" in France and Germany). Bartholomew agreed that it was essential to integrate "ethnic" members more effectively into the party's general industrial work, but he defended them against disdainful attacks on their educational and cultural activities, from which, he insisted, Anglo-Celtic comrades had much to learn. Far from altering the party's strategic approach, however, Bartholomew's iconoclasm came close to an admission that the party was not in a revolutionary situation and seems to have raised suspicions about his reliability. After 1925 he became embroiled in a number of obscure internal disputes before being "quietly let drop" from all public activity. Bartholomew may well have been an early, unwitting victim of Canadian Stalinism.[104]

Had Bartholomew's insights been developed, not only would the impact of bolshevization have been less catastrophic, but the CPC could have raised the theoretical level of its existing membership without any necessarily detrimental effect on the level of struggle. Indeed, that could have been positively affected by a modest intervention among unorganized workers in mass production industry: in the more difficult organizing context of the early 1930s, the experience of the

[103]Tim Buck, "Recruiting in the Red Month," *Worker*, 21 November 1925; NAC, CF, Reel 4, File 21, Jack Kavanagh cited in CPC, Central Executive Committee, Minutes, 7 December 1924. It is clear from party records that many leading party members viewed the bolshevization directive with alarm, although some also saw it as a way to break free from the party's tendency to drift.

[104]H.M. Bartholomew, letter to the editor, *Worker*, 29 August 1925; "Urges Systematic Party Education," *Worker*, 31 October 1925; NAC, CF, Reel 6, File 40, Political Committee, Minutes, 17 May 1926; Joint Meeting of Political Committee and Organizational Committee, Minutes, 30 October 1926; Multicultural History Society of Ontario, interview with Harry Binder; Stewart Smith, *Comrades and Komsomolskas* (Toronto 1993), 59. Officially, the party held that Bartholomew had been dropped because he was homosexual. Whatever his sexuality (Harry Binder, who attended Bartholomew's classes in marxism in Winnipeg in the late 1920s, saw no evidence one way or the other; Stewart Smith writes at some length about "Bart" without mentioning the issue), one suspects that his political independence was the more serious "deviation." Bartholomew committed suicide in 1931.

Workers' Unity League (WUL) demonstrated that less skilled workers, immigrant and British, could be organized.[105] There was no reason why this could not have been combined with the strategic objective of weaning away rank and file craft unionists from the bureaucracy. The CPC could not have permanently escaped the pernicious effects of Comintern factionalism and heresy-hunting after 1925 (though it avoided it longer than most) or avoided the Comintern-ordered break from the union mainstream that produced the WUL — the sort of "new and *artificial*" form of labour organization against which Lenin had inveighed in 1920. Nevertheless, it could have ended the 1920s in a healthier state and in a position, if not to exert leverage on labourism, certainly to justify resistance to the complete rupture with labourism demanded by the Comintern's new slogan of "Class Against Class." On the union front, the post-1928 New Line could have followed the relatively restrained British model rather than the markedly sectarian one adopted by both North American CPs.[106]

I wish to thank Labour/Le Travail*'s anonymous readers, whose suggestions I found very helpful. I would also like to thank James Naylor and Greg Kealey for comments on earlier versions.*

[105]John Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period': The Workers' Unity League, 1929-1935," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 5 (1994), 167-9.

[106]Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period'"; Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, ch. 3; Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO*, 17-25; Roger Keeran, "The Communist Influence on American Labor," in Michael E. Brown, *et al.*, *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York 1993), 163-97; James Green, "Working Class Militancy in the Depression," *Radical America*, 6 (November-December 1972), 1-35; Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-45* (Aldershot 1995), 31-82; Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester 1993), 63-81.