Labour/Le Travailleur

Notebook / Carnet

Andrew Parnaby

Volume 55, 2005

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt55nb01

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

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

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Parnaby, A. (2005). Notebook / Carnet. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *55*, 331–346.

NOTEBOOK / CARNET

Andrew Parnaby

THIS SECTION welcomes commentaries on any issue related to labour and the working class. Submissions should be about 1000 words in length and sent to: Andrew Parnaby, Notebook/Carnet, *Labour/Le Travail*, Faculty of Arts Publications, FM2005, Memorial University, St. John's, NL, A1C 5S7; e-mail: <parnabya@hotmail.com>

Representations of a Radical Historian

Brian T. Thorn

Deb Ellis and Denis Mueller, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*, 78 minutes, colour, (Brooklyn 2004).

THE WORK OF HISTORIAN HOWARD ZINN is no doubt familiar to many readers of *Labour/Le Travail*. A distinguished Americanist, retired from Boston University, Zinn has produced radical texts on various topics related to labour and the working class: the nature of Southern white racism, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the African-American civil rights movement, resistance to the war in Vietnam, dissent in democratic states, and the role of the historian in challenging the racist, elitist, and capitalist assumptions of everyday life in the US. His magisterial work, *A People's History of the United States*, in its numerous editions, has become a standard text for radicals of all stripes.[1]

[1]Zinn's works discussed in the film include *SNCC: The New Abolitionists (Boston 1964)*; *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (Boston 1967); *Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order* (New York 1968); *Declarations of Independence:*

With his country now engaged in an imperialist war, and given Zinn's involvement in civil rights and anti-war struggles, an examination of his life and work is timely. Thus, left-wing activists, historians, and academics of all types will benefit from the recent release of Deb Ellis and Denis Mueller's documentary on Howard Zinn's life, entitled, like his 1994 book, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train*. The title refers to the impossibility, and indeed the irresponsibility, of remaining "neutral" while wars, violence, poverty, and resistance are going on in society; when someone chooses to be "neutral," Zinn argues, they are actually supporting the dominant system. The documentary is well-organized and brilliantly written and produced. Coming out, as it does, during a period of neo-liberal ascendancy in advanced capitalist nations, this film should inspire radical activists and historians to seek out new ways of "speaking truth to power."

Both a partial biography of Zinn and an account of how he has used the study of history to present a radical viewpoint on American society, the film leads off with a quotation from *A People's History* delivered by Hollywood actor Matt Damon, who gives voice to Zinn's words at various points in the film: "my whole life has been premised on the fact that the world is topsy-turvy. The wrong people are out of power and the wrong people are in power." This sentiment holds the film together and provides a capsule version of Zinn's viewpoint. Born in a poor section of New York City, Zinn began his engagement with leftist ideas at an early age. Although his parents had virtually no books at home, the family, noting young Howard's interest in reading, redeemed ten cent coupons for Charles Dickens's works. Reading *Hard Times* and *A Tale of Two Cities* impressed upon Howard the importance of class as a key force in history and life.

The film goes on to detail Zinn's involvement in an early Communist Party protest in Times Square where a mounted police officer attacked him. Zinn noted that this was a "turning point in my political consciousness"; he realized that authority figures were not neutral. Zinn became a labour organizer in New York's shipyards, where workers were not allowed to join AFL craft unions. In 1941, just before heading off to Europe as an airman, Zinn met his wife Rosalyn through a friend in the shipyards. His wartime experiences — he recounts a situation near the end of the war where he had to bomb a French village in one of the first uses of napalm — convinced him of the futility of war in solving problems. Zinn's immediate post-war experiences as a graduate student working part-time in a warehouse to support his young family further convinced him of the importance of class.

A key point in the film concerns Zinn's experiences as a professor at Spelman College, a black school in Atlanta that was strongly conservative prior to the rise of

Cross-Examining American Ideology (New York 1990); *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times* (Boston 1994); *A People's History of the United States 1492-present*, Revised ed. (New York 1995); *The Zinn Reader* (New York 1997); *Emma: A Play in Two Acts about Emma Goldman, American Anarchist* (Cambridge, MA 2002).

the civil rights movement. As former students and civil rights leaders Marian Wright Edelman and Alice Walker recount, Zinn was one of the only white professors who supported student protesters. Spelman later fired Zinn for his efforts in this area. Other left-wing luminaries, notably Noam Chomsky, Staughton Lynd, Tom Hayden, and civil rights leaders Bob Moses and Clayborne Carsons, also appear in the film; their reminiscences of Zinn's activism lend credence to his status as a radical historian and street-level fighter for the cause of the poor and working class as well as ethnic and racial minorities. Zinn also played a key role in opposing the war in Vietnam and advocated for progressive students who spoke out against American militarism. The film recounts a hilarious anecdote in which Zinn is giving an anti-war speech at Boston University in front of the hall where, at precisely the same time, the university's Board of Trustees was voting on whether or not he would receive tenure!

Today, Zinn continues his role as a radical historian and activist. The film shows him, in more recent days, speaking out against the current Iraq war and writing plays, notably *Emma: A Play in Two Acts*, which has expanded his audience by presenting his views in a different format. Not surprisingly, the documentary is favourable toward Zinn's critique of the Iraq war but presents it in measured tones. In this way, it stands out from the more didactic approach of works such as Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*. That said, the film is still a polemic, not a monograph. *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* presents only one side of these issues. It does not attempt, for example, to deal with arguments that conservative historians have made against Zinn.

Overall, the film is well written and edited, and the use of musical interludes, notably Billy Bragg's "There is Power in a Union," Woody Guthrie's "The Ludlow Massacre," and, during the closing credits, Eddie Vedder's "Down," enhances both its educational and emotional impact. It should inspire activists and historians who have become cynical about the possibilities of radical change. As Zinn himself has written, neutrality is impossible and irresponsible. These are truly words to live by and will become more important if the current international situation continues in the same vein.

System Failure: The Breakdown of the Post-War Settlement and the Politics of Labour in our Time

Bryan D. Palmer

IT IS DIFFICULT, in May 2004, to address a Canadian working-class and trade union audience and not begin with harsh words for what has recently happened in British Columbia. For the recent termination of the hospital workers' heroic struggle, which threatened a General Strike against the Campbell government's retrograde actions, is unacceptable. There was widespread support among west coast workers for militant action and a decisive stand, one that had been required and building for a number of years, but the labour bureaucracy, as is so repetitiously often the case, had no stomach for a fight. Union officials and the head of the BC Federation of Labour, who ended this battle in such an abrupt way and on terms that secured the working class so little when so much more could have been won, have dealt all of Canadian labour, including their own militant ranks, a severe blow, one all the more devastating because it comes from those who should be leading rather than capitulating.[1]

This of course is not the usual assessment in the academic milieu from which I come. Most academics speak loudly of class struggle in their writings, especially if they are about the past, but excuse trade union leaders almost anything, retreating into rationalizations of how the ranks of workers' organizations are divided, unprepared for confrontations with capital and the state, and reluctant to sacrifice for a better society. I adhere to other views, and ones that can be located in the history of Canadian class struggle. When W.A. Pritchard addressed the jury in a 1919-1920 state trial, in which he and others involved in the Winnipeg General Strike were charged with seditious conspiracy, he articulated a sense of possibility concerning

[1]Adapted from an educational and agitational address delivered to the Alberta Federation of Labour's Membership Forum, Calgary, 7 May 2004. It took place in the immediate aftermath of the truncation of the British Columbia hospital workers' struggle. Those in need of further scholarly references associated with this piece can consult Bryan D. Palmer, "What's Law Got To Do With It? Historical Considerations on Class Struggle, Boundaries of Constraint, and Capitalist Authority," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 41 (Summer/Fall 2003), 505-30; the recently republished, revised edition of Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From Wage Controls to Social Contract* (Toronto 1993), new edition, 2003; and Yonaton Reshelf and Sandra Rastin, *Unions in the Time of Revolution: Government Restructuring in Alberta and Ontario* (Toronto 2003).

the Canadian working class and its relation to international developments and concerns:

> Reason, wisdom, intelligence, forces of the minds and heart, whom I have always devoutly invoked, come to me, aid me, sustain my feeble voice, carry it, if that may be, to all peoples of the world and diffuse it everywhere where there are men of good will to hear the beneficent truth. A new order of things is born, the powers of evil die poisoned by their crime. The greedy and the cruel, the devourers of people, are bursting with an indigestion of blood. However sorely stricken by the sins of their blind or corrupt masters, mutilated, decimated, the proletarians remain erect; they will unite to form one universal proletariat and we shall see fulfilled the great Socialist prophecy: 'The Union of the workers will be the peace of the world.'

How critically important are these words today, 85 years later!

At no point in human history, perhaps, has one nation so dominated global politics and economy, and done so with such an arrogant and brutalizing power, raw in its willingness to beat those who do not jump to its dictates into submission. And, compared with the last century, it must be said that the trade unions, the labour movement, and the left, have almost never been weaker. A combination of international and domestic developments has everywhere in the capitalist west turned the terms of class trade against workers and their advocates and allies. This is a large process, and it commences with the truly tragic demise of the Soviet Union, where an unfortunately degenerating "socialism" finally imploded in 1989, leaving the US the world's sole superpower. Left-wing parties in the advanced capitalist nations either fell by the wayside in the 1970-2000 years or, as in the case of the New Democratic Party (NDP), so abandoned their commitment to socialism and workers that they are indistinguishable from entrenched liberal parties, where the mainstream has, indeed, become not unlike older political formations associated with conservatism. The misnamed neo-conservative and neo-liberal politics of this same period are nothing more than ravishing retreats into reaction, reviving crude projects of 19th-century greed and individualism associated with the harsh schools of original Malthusian political economy.

In Canada the 1970-2004 years have been bleak indeed for workers, for trade unionists, and for the left. People work more hours for less real dollars, the influence of organized labour is waning, union densities (an expression of the percentage of the workforce organized) have been falling, and governments have declared war on the working class, a war that is being won, not with bombs and bullets, but with a decreasing share of workers in the national economy. Let us look backward and see what has happened, starting with the political economy of class relations in the years 1945-2004.

1) *The Making of the Post-War Settlement*

For 100 years prior to the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Canadian labour struggled for collective bargaining, the right to strike, and freedom of association entitlements. In spite of a Trades Union Act passed in 1872, a massive uprising of workers in the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, a General and Sympathetic strike wave in 1919, and intense mobilizations of the unemployed and the semi-skilled in the Fordist mass production sector in the 1930s, workers still lacked basic rights that many in our time take for granted. The victory was won for union recognition, check-off of union dues, and basic collective bargaining in the immediate aftermath of World War II, from 1945-1948.

This was a victory for workers, won by wrestling concessions long denied from capital and the state. But it was also largely won on capitalist terms. And a price was paid. The union check-off meant the old shopfloor and workplace solidarities, garnered as shop stewards and activists collected union dues and talked to union members, faded. Union recognition introduced the increasing expansion of contracts with employers, both in terms of influence and in terms of size, with management rights clauses defining what was not in the contract as the prerogative of the boss. Complicated grievance procedures, the significance of lawyers, who played more and more of a role in defining the nature of contract relations, and the rise of an expanding layer of labour officialdom, all made unionism more and more distant from its ranks. Signed collective agreements told the tale. Prior to 1940 the average collective agreement in even the largest of Canadian industries was no more than a dozen pages. By the late 1940s, such agreements totaled hundreds of pages, and today they look like multi-volume tomes on a library shelf, thousands of pages in length. Experts and professionals, distanced from the rank-and-file in so many ways, were seemingly needed to "interpret" and "understand" myriad "clauses" which could well mean much to workers.

Politically, too, this post-war settlement took place in a new and significantly changed climate. For the entire process of state legitimization unfolded as the politics of the labour movement were reordered during an intense period of anti-communism. In the Cold War climate of the late 1940s and 1950s, communists were driven from the unions and this proved a bloodletting in labour's ranks that consolidated a more conservative leadership and cemented in place old animosities and loyalty tests that would, over the next two generations, prove quite constraining.

On the surface what has been called the post-war settlement, in which labour became "partnered" with employers and governments in a system of recognized industrial relations that legalized collective bargaining and state-recognized certification of labour organizations, worked for Canadian trade unions. In a period of affluence, capital and the state were willing to concede wage gains and the right of organization in order to secure production. Few new sectors were actually being organized, and trade unionism seemed to have reached its natural limits. Ridding the

labour world of communists was a bonus for conservative union bureaucracies, many employers, and the state (which did what it could to break the back of the left in the labour movement by actually importing one gangster-type thug, Hal Banks, and installing him in the seafaring sector to break the communist-led union in the field). As the 1940s gave way to the 1950s and early 1960s labour seemed, in general, to have consolidated its place at a large bargaining table from which it could dine contentedly.

2) *The 1960s and Signs of Disruption*

Signs that the lid was about to blow off this stable state occurred in the 1960s, however, in three different ways. First, in the established unions a new layer of young workers revolted in 1965-66, leading almost 400 wildcat strikes against employers, the state, and their entrenched union officialdoms. These strikes were extremely violent, and signaled that a new layer of unionists were no longer caught up in the politics of anti-communism and loyalty to established trade union leaders whose hold over their memberships had been solidified in the post-1948 years. Disgruntled youth in the unions demanded new redress to new grievances, and the wage packet was secondary to issues of foremen riding roughshod over workers; union rights were of less concern, now that they were established, than rights to dignity, proper treatment, and the ending of health and safety threats, sexual harassment, and shop-floor favouritisms. Arson, clashes with police, attacks on company property, even ribald assaults on trade union officials, were not uncommon.

Second, this wildcat wave was followed by a surge of organization among public sector workers that would soon bring government clerks, postal workers, teachers, and health-care workers into the trade union movement, upping the percentage of workers organized in Canada to approximately 40 per cent for the first time in history. These new workers would sometimes be granted union rights, not by strikes and militancy, but by legislation that brought workers in these spheres into the trade union movement with the signing of a government decree. Many in the labour movement were suspicious of these "clerks," who seemed distanced from the traditions of the picket line and the strike, and whose ranks were often as not dominated by women. But from this sector would emerge some of the most militant of unionists of the 1970s, including the postal workers lead by Jean-Claude Parrot. And women, of course, would stimulate a range of new concerns in the workers' movement, soon articulated in women's caucuses and feminist organizing around International Women's Day.

The third wind of change blew out of Québec, where pivotal groups of increasingly radical workers, such as the Montréal Trades Council which nurtured Parrot, embraced new ideas of anti-imperialism and Québecois nationalism that braced old class grievances with fresh vocabularies of revolutionary possibility. In the early 1970s this Québec force would launch a quasi-revolutionary assault on capitalist authority in a 1971-1972 uprising of a Common Front of teachers, old guard Catho-

lic unions, and more secular labour organizations associated with the mainstream American Federation of Labor-affiliated bodies. Entire towns were taken over in the upheaval, which was only brought to its knees by jailings of workers' leaders, threats of massive fines against unions that continued to strike, and pressures ranging from injunctions and back-to-work legislation to denunciations in the mainstream press. One young female militant was killed in the street battles that punctuated this Common Front struggle.

3) *Stagflation and the End of the Era of Capitalist Affluence*

The Common Front struggles erupted at the end of a long economic boom, in which the relatively plush post-World War II affluence wound down. For the period from 1945-1970, the Canadian state basked in the seeming calm of what has come to be regarded as the highwater mark of a Fordist regime of accumulation. Premised on rising productivity of consumer goods, and paced by the auto sector with its high-wage jobs and assembly line production, this accumulative regime bankrolled the Canadian welfare system, and established universal programs of educational entitlements, health care, and social safety nets around unemployment and long term disability that were the envy of many in the advanced capitalist world. In the US, no such public provisioning happened, largely because the capitalist state was neither willing nor able to provide an economic solution to the fundamental dilemmas of a society living in the long shadow of chattel slavery. Race, in America, defined both poverty and the reserve army of labour, and it structured urban life and the world of work along lines of coloured segmentations. Unions, too often the preserve of whites, managed to secure the welfare, health, and other benefits that in Canada were extended to all. And unions in Canada benefitted by securing a social wage that did not have to directly fund hospital plans. This meant that Canadian unions in the mass production sector could produce goods at a wage level that was in fact less than that which US employers had to meet. The spillover from Fordism's immensely profitable 25 year run sated the combativity of Canadian and American workers somewhat, but also kept the appetite for wages and entitlements alive, including among blacks in the US, who were the most radical of workers and the most dynamic advocates of revolutionary change throughout the 1960s.

The glue that held the post-war settlement between capital and labour together was thus primarily economic, and it started to exhibit stresses in the 1960s. By 1975 the glue was gone and the settlement was falling apart. Ultimately, the demise was pushed by economic contraction. Inflation and unemployment had begun to rise throughout the 1960s within the Canadian domestic economy, and by the mid-1970s a series of international developments, including a quadrupling of oil prices induced by an escalating Middle East crisis, contributed to a fiscal crisis of the state in the US that soon spilled over into Canada. High oil prices may well benefit the state's cash grab in Alberta, but the vice grip of inflation took its toll there as elsewhere. Canada's manufacturing competitiveness soon stagnated and bottomed

out in 1976. With its major trading partner, the US, increasingly cash strapped, exports dwindled, and demand for Canadian resources shriveled. The state found itself in a fiscal crisis — its revenues drying up, demands on its declining tax intake as high as ever, and rising unemployment. Within five years a trade balance surplus of $3 billion had been turned into a deficit of $450 million. In the business sector, corporations howled that more and more of the national income was being diverted from profit and dividends to wages and welfare.

Thus was inaugurated Pierre Eliot Trudeau's Wage and Price Controls and a stringent Anti-Inflation Program that would be fought on the backs of the working class rather than through anything resembling a taxing of capital. The Canadian Labour Congress mounted a weak-kneed Day of Protest in 1976, but a one day General Strike, especially one as bureaucratically managed as this was, is inevitably a contradiction in terms. Trudeau and the federal Liberals, knowing their labour challengers would not lead a steadfast opposition, treated unions with contempt. Dave Barrett, heading a BC NDP government, didn't offer organized labour much more empathy, legislating 60,000 striking provincial woodsworkers back to their jobs in the Fall of 1975, claiming he could not allow a capital strike to bring his ruling apparatus down and cripple the capitalist state. Indeed social democrats in office in Saskatchewan and Manitoba were the most ardent advocates of wage controls and curbs on union demands, prefacing Bob Rae's 1990s Social Contract, an attack on the security of collectively bargained contracts that paved the way for Mike Harris's UnCommon Nonsense Revolution, and its relentless crusade against unions, especially those in the education sector.

Canada never emerged from the economic doldrums of the 1970s. It simply lurched from mini-crisis to mini-crisis, with economic stagnation and high rates of inflation characterizing the 1980s. Inflation would eventually be brought under control, but only at the expense of an acute slowdown in the manufacturing sector, an intensification of work relations, and the creation of the low-wage service economy in which union jobs and entitlements virtually disappeared from a material context governed by minimum wage employment and part-time work. Capital took a rest from production as investment plunged into the freewheeling speculative climate of real estate, the stock market, sport franchises, and other endeavors where glib tongues and fast deals open the door to the shadiest of capitalist practices, the overtly criminal tip of an iceberg of sleaze melting into the odd conviction for insider trading.

In this climate the state rescinded virtually the entirety of the post-war settlement. Public sector workers were routinely legislated back to work; court decisions eroded workers' rights of freedom of association; war had been declared on the working class. In British Columbia in 1983, an all-out right-wing assault on unions, women, native peoples, teachers, welfare recipients, and almost anyone else who wasn't in the highest of tax brackets, left the province reeling in an intensified class struggle that threatened an all out General Strike. In the end, the labour movement

leadership blinked badly, and Jack Munro, then head of the International Woodworkers of America, orchestrated a premature termination of the struggle that left Social Credit Premier Bill Bennett smiling on his Kelowna patio. Labour poet Tom Wayman pilloried the stern face of Jack Munro, the countenance of a sell out. The draconian revamping of class relations, and the gutting of any sense of labour entitlement, was evident in the aftermath of the 1986 Gainers' strike in Edmonton, a six month battle that culminated in the dismantling of the provincial Labour Relations Act that convinced 10,000 Canadian entrepreneurs that Alberta had the least pro-labour legal system in the country. Sections of the new Labour Relations Code made it more and more difficult to secure union certification and allowed the Lieutenant Governor to revoke labour charters if a union participated in a so-called illegal strike.

More and more workers across the country were prohibited from striking, among them nurses and other hospital workers. Between 1950-1970 the federal government legislated striking unions back to work six times; in the fifteen years between 1972-1987 that figure doubled to thirteen. But provincial states were the centre of such coercion, legislating workers to end strikes more than 50 times in the 1970-1987 years compared to a mere 10 times in the 2 decades since mid century. A raft of legislation curtailed trade union rights over the course of the 1980s: one study has identified over 60 federal, provincial, and territorial bills amending established labour organization entitlements and practices in the 1982-1987 years alone.

As the 1980s wound down, the results of these developments within the trade union movement were devastating. Union density in Alberta became the lowest in the country, and in 2000 it bottomed out at a meagre 21 per cent of the workforce organized; in Ontario it was little better, 27 per cent. Militant strike action took a nosedive, with the numbers of workers involved in strikes across Canada falling drastically from over 500,000 in 1975 to under 160,000 in 1985; days lost to strikes in the same period declined from almost 11 million to just over 3 million.

The post-war settlement was actually over in the 1970s. It worked for capital, the state, and some labour leaders for the better part of three decades. It is questionable if it ever worked for the working class as a whole. But once it was done, it was actually an impediment, for its residue left an ideological aftertaste in the mouth of the trade union movement that was sickeningly sweet in its promise of a return to old class relations of corporate containment. But there was no longer a commitment on the part of employers and governments. The old days, bad or good, were gone.

It has taken the labour movement more than two decades to adjust to this new turn, and for some in the trade unions, perhaps, they have yet to fully appreciate how much the terms of trade have changed in the class struggle. Too many potential victories, in which immense resources of class solidarity have been marshaled, have been snatched from the jaws of class war wins, the labour movement forced to swallow yet another defeat. In British Columbia in the Solidarity movement of 1983, among Ontario's teachers in 1997, in the anti-Tory struggles of Ontario's

Days of Action in the late 1990s, and in British Columbia's hospital worker-paced threatened General Strike of 2004, trade union officials talked talk as the ranks seethed. All-out confrontations that could well have set a new stage of class militancy and secured actual concessions were then terminated prematurely. Often this was done with a top-down arrogance as a layer of trade union officials, whose reputation was based on its capacity to bargain well, tossed in the towel under pressures from the state and other quarters. In every case labour bureaucracies seemed backed into the legal confinements of a post-war settlement that they failed to appreciate had been abandoned from above.

Capital and the state have the gloves off. There are no labour entitlements they feel bound to recognize and endorse. Class war is as brutal now as it was in the 1930s, and it will be won in the same way: whomever holds strongest and most resolute, stands the best chance. In this kind of a contest labour is always disadvantaged, for capital and the state have much in their corner while labour only has its solidarity, its collectivity, its numbers, and its productive power. But that is neither something to understate or to squander.

4) *The Spectre of Civil Disobedience*

In this context it is appropriate to make some commentary on civil disobedience and legalism. The post-war settlement outlawed civil disobedience. It ensconced legalism as the *sine quo non* of a respectable trade unionism that the state and capital saw not so much as an equal partner as a domesticated workhorse. But that workhorse had to be harnessed. Labour codes, labour legislation, and living within their parameters were such a harness and for the lead horses, the harnesses seemed to help. They certainly proved useful in getting the horse to where some wanted it to go. As long as the driver directed, and followed through, the "system" delivered tangible results: the work day had limits; the feed was good; the barn was kept in order. But while the harnesses remain, and indeed have tightened, they are no longer linked by capital and the state to reciprocities and responsibilities. The law as harness has become more and more confinement, and it delivers only tangential and partial compensations to those who agree to throw it over their heads.

In this sense an historical appreciation of law, civil disobedience, and trade union entitlements is very much in order. It must be noted that few trade union advances were registered prior to 1945 without laws being broken and workers demanding that the hardness of past law be jettisioned. In the early 19th century ALL unions could reasonably be considered conspiracies in constraint of trade under British law; in 1872 before the great Ontario printers' strikes and the prod to produce a Trade Union Act, labour organization was indeed likely to be regarded as criminal; in 1919 and the upheaval associated with the Winnipeg General Strike, Canadian labour's revolutionary advocates were held to trial on sedition and criminal conspiracy charges, while so-called alien workers among them were deported. Radicals on the eve of the Great Depression faced jailings and police routings, and

much of the agitation of the 1930s defied law; the very mobilization that culminated in Justice Ivan Rand's decision on check-off of union dues and the establishment of collective bargaining rights was a patently illegal encirclement of the Ford plant in Windsor by automobile workers and their cars, an encirclement that threatened to shut down the plant's power source and destroy significant amounts of company property. Even after the establishment of the post-war settlement, the critical mid-1960s wildcat wave, staunch trade union defiance of injunctions, Québec's quasi-revolutionary Common Front mobilizations, the rise of militancy in the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, which saw Parrot jailed in his refusal to comply with Trudeau's Anti-Inflation Program, and even teacher walkouts in the 1983 BC Solidarity mobilization or the 1997 teachers' Halloween Strikes — all were in defiance of law. Civil disobedience has a long and admirable history in trade union circles in Canada and it is arguable that the ONLY advances labour has registered over the last two centuries have come about precisely because some workers were willing to defy law in the interests of larger and greater collective goods. Our hats must go off, in this regard, to our brothers and sisters in British Columbia who have recently waged their heroic struggle against back-to-work legislation and the power of the state, aligning themselves with workers who are willing to engage in strike action that had been declared a crime.

5) *Globalization: An Intensification of Older Processes*

What, in this context, is the specific threat of globalization? In Alberta, before this term was in common use, Peter Pocklington utlized his capacity to open a meatpacking plant in California to send a threatening message to Gainers strikers. And that should make the essential point. Globalization is not all that new. It is perhaps more intense in our time than it has been in the past, but capital has been global since its birth, regardless of whether we date this in the late 15th century or in the 18th century.

In a sense the Canadian labour movement was born globalized. The first producers were native peoples who harvested furs for rapacious companies of European marauders, and these aboriginal hunters and traders were the low wage proletarians of Empire's imperialist conquests. Their product, the treated pelts of beaver, sea otter, marten, lynx, and other species, were bartered for blankets, booze, and baubles, but commanded premium prices in the capitals of Paris, London, and Amsterdam. Early craft workers and casual labourers in Canada made shoes for men and horses, often came from France or Britain, and were circumscribed by old world laws. The Irish, Asian, and Afro-Caribbean diasporas have figured decisively in Canadian class formation. Immigrant workers flooded the Canadian labour markets of the north and the west, and congregated in large factories in Montréal, Toronto, and Hamilton at the turn of the century. Their influx remade the Canadian working class in a post-World War II "exchange" of displaced peo-

ples. Canada's workers have always been structured in their choices and work options by global developments.

To the extent that technologies have changed and intensified capital's global reach, as well as creating new threats to national sovereignty and the world's ecology, globalization means something different in 2004 than it did in 1954. But this change has been a constant, and labour's experience in 1884 differed from what it would be in 1934. Past and present, Canadian workers have *always* faced a capital-driven *newness* threatening in what it eroded and what might come of it that could not be predicted. "All that is solid melts into air."

There are three essential lessons, I would suggest, that trade unionists must take from current globalization developments. First: the main enemy is always at home. The class struggle IS waged locally, however much it is situated globally, and in struggling to beat back the anti-working-class agenda of Canadian corporations and the state, Canadian workers create a strong workers' movement that is then able to intervene in international issues. But second: this does not mean that the labour movement can be parochial and provincial. It can not look, as it struggles at home, inward, and it can never content itself with purely local victories. The battles against specific employers and particular states must be seen, always, as part of larger struggles, never entirely won, and always expanding. Labour needs to be supporting all class struggles waged on all sides of international borders, as long as the struggle is directed against capital and its domination. More international links need to be forged, and more connections to non-labour anti-capitalist organizations and struggles need to be built and strengthened. And third: this relates, finally, to activists in the trade union movement and outside of the trade union movement coming together in common cause. This is now the Achilles Heel of Canadian labour. It is the central issue in assessing the politics of class struggle in our time.

6) *Labour's Political Crossroads*

Historically labour in Canada is at a crossroads, not dissimilar from that which workers in Canada and the US faced in the late 1930s. At that point an ossified craft unionism held sway, and the new mass production sector was largely unorganized: it contained the bulk of black and immigrant workers that needed to break out of their historical containments if the trade unions were ever to be a force for progressive social change. To his credit, John L. Lewis saw this necessity, and he charted the creation of the Congress of Industrial Organization, the CIO, which was the last great breakthrough in trade unionism in Canada and the US. Lewis was no radical, let alone a revolutionary. He had battled communists in his United Mine Workers of America throughout the 1920s, and his instincts were quite conservative. Yet he proved quite far seeing.

Today, unions need a far seeing leadership that will break through another wall. Today, the question is not so much organizing the unorganized, although that remains an issue in much of the service sector. Rather, I would argue that what the

trade union movement desperately requires is to reassert its movement character. It needs to see itself as something more than a dues collecting, wage bargaining, defensive structure. It needs to up the ante in the politics of its opposition. It fights, of course, an uphill battle, because its memberships are bombarded with the hegemonic message of contemporary capitalism. But through education, imaginative interventions in the cultural arena, tapping of considerable human potential, and bridge building with the left (which has its own problems of course), the unions can win new gains and cultivate and develop visions and a sense of possibility that has been lost in the small economisms that capital and the state want to keep the trade union movement absorbed within.

This means taking risks, defying past conventions and practices, engaging, perhaps, in acts of civil disobedience and supporting those who are fighting on the front lines, not only in labour's direct, transparent interests, but in a range of overt struggles. Sometimes this will mean differentiations within the trade union movement. Labour is not one congealed mass and there are elements that need to be challenged and indeed overcome in certain trade unions. Some union bureaucracies are too rigid in their thinking, too prone to inaction, and a brake on progressive politics. Rank-and-file caucuses in the unions that organize and present alternatives will push such leaderships left and present options for workers looking for new directions. Such left caucuses within particular sectors will inevitably link up with workers in other occupations and unions and develop common strategies, which may well lead them to alliances with non-trade union forces. For a left opposition to be reborn in Canada, it will require such challenges and coalitions, and much arm twisting in various directions.

In this process trade unionists have a tremendous, indeed leading, role to play. But they can play this role only by being more than trade unionists, by taking their place alongside poverty activists, the homeless, racial and ethnic minorities, progressive women, and many others. The old refrain of the Internationale, "We have been naught, we shall be all!" should ring again in a thousand halls across Canada, linking unionists and advocates of change in an oppositional culture of refusals and resistances. "An injury to one is the concern of all" should not be purely, simply, and narrowly understood as a guideline for striking labour. Rather, it should be the motivating push behind a new politics of international solidarity and left-wing consolidation.

And no one must say that this can not be done because it is a project too grandiose, too utopian, and out of touch with the union memberships. Workers can be won to such a politics, if they are brought to it through education, rational argument, and repeated demonstration that their leaders actually stand for principled positions. They will be brought to this position, as well, by the recalcitrance of organized capital and the servile states that serve its interests. Trade unions have been structured into a world they no longer know, the post-war settlement having been practically declared bankrupt at the same time as it is championed as the ongoing

answer. There is only one effective response the labour movement can muster in the face of our changed circumstances: a recognition of reality, followed by a willingness to act differently, to act as though *class power*, not legal power, is the answer for the working class. The trade unions, and workers across this country, can begin the process of creating a better world anew. But they must act, and act decisively and with a large vision of what can indeed be done.

For the most part this is not happening in Canadian unions, which have retreated in the face of the demise of the post-war settlement into their own increasingly smaller backyards. An organization such as the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), struggling in Toronto to fight deportations of immigrant workers, to call the state to action on poverty and homelessness, to fight rent evictions and police brutality, has been given a relatively cold shoulder by the trade union movement. Buzz Hargrove and the Canadian Auto Workers used to support OCAP, providing $12,000 annually. But they withdrew that in pique when an OCAP action resulted in a Tory minister's office furniture being dumped on a lawn. That was of course an impolite action, but workers in our past have often behaved impolitely when they have faced the ugliness of a social order that values profit so wildly far above people. Really, is that so upsetting!!! OCAP is now waging a campaign in Toronto to fight for the rights of hotel workers when their own union leadership appears to rest content in a rather cosy relationship with the employer. The result is that the Toronto Labour Council has almost shut down support for OCAP, which has become *persona non grata* in the labour movement. This is shameful. For no group has fought as consistently for the most downtrodden in our society as OCAP, and it has tried to always keep its connections to organized labour open and alive with solidarity. Too often, however, its willingness to fight resolutely has earned it the enmity, not only of capital and the state, but of elements of the NDP and trade union officialdom. It is difficult not to think that those labour leaders who are most opposed to OCAP remain trapped in the faiths and outmoded traditions of the post-war settlement, which is now a millstone round labour and the left's neck.

7) *History and Our Future*

In this sense we can look backward, not to the 1980s, but to the 1880s. That was a decade of immense change, as industrial capitalism ravaged age-old relations of antiquated master-man relations, to put new organizing imperatives on the working-class agenda: women, the unskilled, and peoples of colour; technological change with a voracious appetite for devouring old skills and creating new ones; the global reach of the world's rising and premier capitalist nation, the US. Our times are of course different than those times of the 1880s, but to those who lived at the end of the 19th century the newness of it all was staggering, as indeed the velocity of change in our globalization epoch often seems striking.

One of labour's advocates, one of Canada's first socialists, Philips Thompson, put forward a call to throw off old ideas that were straightjacketing workers in the 1880s:

> All the weight of tradition and precedent arising out of altogether different conditions than those which now confront us is thrown against Labor Reform. The battle will be more than half won when we emancipate ourselves from the thraldom to the ghosts and shadows of the past. Why should new questions be judged by old precedents? Why should we on this continent and in this bustling industrial age be ruled by the judicial interpretations, the legislative maxims, or the social and economic formulas originated by the idlers and parasites of society at a time when the world was supposed to have been created for the benefit of the rulers and the rich — and the people to have no rights whatever but that of sweating and fighting for their benefits? How strange that inherited traditions and ideas should have such a hold that men who are themselves workers, themselves sufferers from caste oppression, should be largely guided in their conduct by the public sentiment and code of principles inculcating respect for birth, money, position, vested rights, etc, created by the dead, and no doubt damned, old despots and sycophants of the middle ages.

Why, then, indeed, and why NOW? Canadian labour always has a lot to lose in the class struggle, but with the current system failure its adherence to the old post-war settlement perhaps means that the first thing it *should* lose are some of the long-standing CHAINS that bind it to those forces, capital and the state, for whom its subordination matters so greatly.

Teach Your Children Well

THE CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES at Simon Fraser University, in conjunction with the Vancouver Public Library, has created an annotated bibliography of fiction and non-fiction books about labour, strikes, and politics for young readers. The bibliography, which includes over 60 titles, including *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*, a "barnyard farce about animals who go on strike for better working conditions," is available on line at <www.sfu.ca/labour/Bibliography.pdf>.