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An "Entirely Different" Kind of Union
The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986

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Résumé de l'article

Dans cet article, j'examine le Syndicat canadien des employés de service, de bureau et de détail (SORWUC), un syndicat socialiste-féministe indépendant qui organisait des travailleurs dans les industries non syndiquées au Canada dans les années 1970 et 1980. Je regarde le rôle du sorwuc dans l'histoire du travail canadien en général, et ses efforts pour organiser les travailleurs dans le secteur des services en particulier. Ma thèse centrale est que le syndicalisme socialiste-féministe du sorwuc et son engagement d'organiser les travailleurs non syndiqués a positionné le syndicat comme radicalement différent du mouvement syndical traditionnel. Cette différence a à la fois aidé et gêné le syndicat. Plus précisément, les expériences du sorwuc d'organiser les travailleurs au pub Bimini et au restaurant Muckamuck en Colombie-Britannique démontrent que, bien que sa structure et ses stratégies alternatives ont aidé les efforts d'organisation et de grève, ces facteurs ont fait peu de différence dans les relations du syndicat avec les commissions des relations de travail et les tribunaux : dans les deux cas, l'action ou l'inaction de l'Etat en fin de compte a déterminé le résultat. Bien que le sorwuc n'existe plus, il reste un exemple historique important de la façon dont les travailleurs au Canada ont été et peuvent être organisés. Le sorwuc offre donc d'importantes leçons sur l'organisation de travail de service, d'autres formes de syndicalisation, et le rôle important de l'Etat dans les relations de travail dans la période d'après-guerre.

ARTICLE

An "Entirely Different" Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986

Julia Smith

Introduction

In 1976, a Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) officer remarked that the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC) "is entirely different.... I think they see themselves differently too – as an instrument of social reform rather than a bread and butter union."[1] A closer examination of SORWUC's origins, establishment, and activities reveals how and why it differed from other unions, and demonstrates that the organization is an important example of an alternative approach to unionization. SORWUC's founders established the union in 1972 as an independent, grassroots, socialist-feminist labour union dedicated to organizing workers the Canadian labour movement had neglected or failed to organize. Over the course of the union's fourteen-year existence, SORWUC's unique structure and strategies helped its members achieve better wages and working conditions in a variety of unorganized workplaces, including banks, day-care centres, offices, pubs, and restaurants. By doing so, SORWUC proved that service, office, and retail workers could be organized. Thus, as unions attempt to meet the challenges of the service economy today, they might learn much from this "entirely different" kind of union.

Unfortunately, the very differences that helped SORWUC organize workers have also shaped how unions and scholars view it. In 1977, when Local 40

1. "Women Waving Red Flag of Unionism under Banks' Noses," *The Province*, 13 November 1976.

Julia Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986," *Labour/Le Travail,* 73 (Spring 2014), 23–65.

of the Hotel, Restaurant, Culinary Workers, and Bartenders' Union raided a SORWUC bargaining unit in the midst of a strike, its vice-president John Phillips argued that his union was not strike-breaking because SORWUC was a "women's liberation organization rather than a trade union."[2] Similarly, in 1986, a panel of CLRB officers reflecting upon SORWUC's initial application for certification to represent a unit of bank workers stated that "[SORWUC's] relatively brief history, as well as its origins, were puzzling to the Board.... A women's liberation movement that discovers a union vocation can only make one wonder."[3] By emphasizing SORWUC's feminist politics and downplaying its union activities, such comments highlight a fundamental problem with how the organization was perceived, a problem that continues to shape the union's place in Canadian labour historiography. Specifically, to date, historians have only briefly examined SORWUC within broader discussions of gender and the 1970s labour movement. As a result, the union's significance to the history of class mobilization and labour organizing in Canada remains unexplored.

To address this gap, in this article I examine SORWUC as a labour union: an organization of workers that used collective bargaining to improve its members' wages and working conditions. I argue that as an independent, grassroots, socialist-feminist union dedicated to organizing unorganized workers, SORWUC differed markedly from much of the Canadian labour movement, and that this difference both helped and hindered the union. Through an analysis of SORWUC's experiences organizing workers at Bimini pub and Muckamuck restaurant, I demonstrate that although the union's alternative structure and strategies aided its organizing and strike efforts, these factors made little difference in SORWUC's dealings with the state. In both cases, the action or inaction of the British Columbia Labour Relations Board (BCLRB) ultimately determined the outcome. Thus, in addition to highlighting an important example of women's labour activism, an analysis of SORWUC also provides important lessons about service worker organizing, alternative forms of unionization, and the powerful role of the state in labour relations in the postwar period.

Historiography and Theory

ALTHOUGH ACADEMIC HISTORIANS have yet to write an in-depth analysis of SORWUC, its members have produced several publications that discuss the history of the union and its organizing activities.[4] Several have also

2. "Inter-union Battle Shaping over Bimini," *The Province*, 26 November 1977.

3. Canada Labour Relations Board, "Syndicat des employés des Banques Nationales de Rimouski (CNTU), *applicant*, and National Bank of Canada, *employer*," *di* 58 (September 1986): 107.

4. The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1979); Helen Potrebenko, *Two Years on the*

SORWUC banner.
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contributed to edited volumes on women and work.[5] These works provide valuable first-hand accounts of the union's history and its efforts to organize service workers, as well as additional information on the motivations and aims of some of SORWUC's key members. Yet the publications written by SORWUC members do not connect the history of the union to the broader historiography of the Canadian labour movement. Therefore, they do little to further our understanding of the union's historical contributions to labour organizing. Historians who have discussed SORWUC usually cite the union as evidence for broader arguments about the ways in which women challenged the 1970s Canadian labour movement.[6] Thus, outside of brief mention in a few texts

Muckamuck Line (Vancouver: Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada, 1981); Janet Mary Nicol, "'Unions Aren't Native': The Muckamuck Restaurant Labour Dispute, Vancouver, BC (1978–1983)," *Labour/Le Travail* 40 (Fall 1997): 235–251.

5. Jean Rands, "Toward an Organization of Working Women," in Bonnie Campbell et al., eds., *Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972), 141–148; Jackie Ainsworth et al., "Getting Organized … in the Feminist Unions," in Maureen Fitzgerald et al., eds., *Still Ain't Satisfied! Canadian Feminism Today* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1982), 132–140.

6. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 1996), 145; Meg Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism

discussing the gender dynamics of the 1970s labour movement, SORWUC has disappeared from labour history.

Historians' decision to focus on the gendered aspect of SORWUC, if at all, reflects broader changes and debates in the writing of history in general and labour history in particular. The crux of the debate is whether class is a fundamental category of historical analysis.[7] On the one hand, some scholars, utilizing the Marxist definition of classes as "groups of people connected to one another, and made different from one another, by the ways they interact when producing goods and services," contend that class has been, and continues to be, the fundamental analytical category in studies of historical change.[8] In contrast, over the past three decades the majority of academics have turned away from the Marxist definition of class; many contemporary scholars instead subscribe to the view that "historically situated discursive forms of politics ('language') articulate 'experience.'"[9] Thus, critics of class analysis argue that historical events that lack clear demonstrations of narrow "class indicators" benefit more from analyses of gender, race or ethnicity than class.[10]

The debate over the relative importance of class analysis has been particularly heated in labour and working-class historiography, especially in writing that looks at women and gender. While Joan Scott's definition of gender as "knowledge about sexual difference," and her call for historians to develop gender as "a useful category of historical analysis" did much to advance the historical study of women and gender, her theories had serious implications for class analysis.[11] In place of the Marxist definition of class, Scott posited that class is "an identity historically and contextually created." Thus she ultimately

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and the Women's Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 71–72.

7. See Mark Leier, "W[h]ither Labour History: Regionalism, Class, and the Writing of History," *BC Studies* 111 (Autumn 1996): 61–75; Mark Leier, "Response to Professors Palmer, Strong-Boag, and McDonald," *BC Studies* 111 (Autumn 1996): 94.

8. Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 11. See also Tom Bottomore, "Class," in Tom Bottomore, ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1991), 84–87.

9. Patrick Joyce, "Introduction," in Patrick Joyce, ed., *Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 14. For a closer look at the debate over experience and language, see Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion Across the Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 363–387; Thomas C. Holt, "Experience and the Politics of Intellectual Inquiry," in *Questions of Evidence*, 388–396; and Joan W. Scott, "A Rejoinder to Thomas C. Holt," in *Questions of Evidence*, 397–400. For more on scholars' shift away from class analysis, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New "True" Socialism* (London: Verso, 1998); and Geoff Eley and Keith Neld, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

10. Joyce, "Introduction," 10.

11. Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2 and 31.

concluded that, rather than study class formation, struggle, and experience, historians should examine the discursive process through which class identity was constructed.[12] In response to these theoretical developments, a number of historians criticized academics' increasing incorporation of post-structuralist theories of language as politically conservative and inimical to the left's project of achieving radical social change.[13] In contrast, other historians saw gender history as the next step in broadening understandings of women's history.[14] Highlighting "the gendered character of the historical concepts used to study both men and women," they called for the construction of a "gendered labour history."[15] This new labour history would view gender "as a fundamental category of all historical analysis" and seek "to understand how gender operates, and the ways it has shaped and been shaped by economic institutions and relationships."[16] Building on these theoretical developments, in the early 1990s the number of publications examining gender and labour history increased significantly.[17] While some labour historians chose to incorporate

12. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 55–59.

13. For example, historian Bryan Palmer critiqued how gender analysis was being conducted as part of a broader academic shift away from historical materialism and toward a discourse-driven post-structuralism. Specifically, he expressed concern that post-structuralist theory – which much gender analysis draws from heavily – downplays class and class struggle as "essential components of lived experience," and instead views representation as the determining factor in historical change. Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), xiii–xiv. In the field of women's history, some historians expressed concern over the construction of women's history and gender history as distinct and antithetical methods of historical analysis. They feared that an emphasis on gender analysis would lead women's history to "be disdained or ... the feminist, political, and emancipatory edge to women's history [to] be dulled." Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Reassessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *left history* 3, no. 2 (1995): 113. See also Joan Sangster, "Reconsidering Dichotomies," *left history* 3, no. 2 (1995): 239–248; Judith M. Bennett, "Feminism and History," *Gender & History* 1, no. 3 (September 1989): 252–272; Joan Hoff, "Gender as a Postmodern Category of Paralysis," *Women's History Review* 3, no. 2 (June 1994): 149–168.

14. See, for example, Franca Iacovetta et al., "Introduction," in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), xi–xvii; Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," *Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (September 1995): 354–376; Karen Dubinsky and Lynne Marks, "Beyond Purity: A Response to Sangster," *left history* 3, no. 2 (1995): 205–220; Franca Iacovetta and Linda Kealey, "Women's History, Gender History, and Debating Dichotomies," *left history* 3, no. 2 (1995): 221–237.

15. Ava Baron, "Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future," in Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 19–20.

16. Baron, "Gender and Labor History," 19–20.

17. For an overview of works published in the early 1990s on the history of gender and labour in Canada, see Bettina Bradbury, "Women and the History of Their Work in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 159–178.

gender analysis into their work while remaining firmly rooted in historical materialism and its focus on class experience, many opted for a gender analysis grounded in post-structuralist theory and discourse analysis.[18] In addition, since that time, scholars have continued to theorize about the relationship between gender and class.[19]

In this article I address this debate directly. Specifically, in examining SORWUC as a socialist-feminist union – a working-class organization based on the principle that women could exercise power over their lives through collective control of their labour, and by utilizing collective bargaining and strikes to achieve social change – I explore how SORWUC is an important historical example of the ways in which gender and class intersect. Moreover, building on the theoretical contributions of Marxists and socialist feminists, I argue that ignoring the class dimension of SORWUC obscures a fundamental aspect of the union and its contributions to the history of labour organizing in Canada.[20] As Marxist scholar Ellen Meiksins Wood explains, scholars who

18. For an example of the former, see Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920–1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). For examples of the latter, see Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

19. See, for example, Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future," *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 127–165; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

20. Inspired by E.P. Thompson's revitalization of Marxist theory, in the mid-1970s several Canadian labour and working-class historians took up his call to reassert the relevance of class to the writing of history. In doing so, they created a new analytical framework through which to view the events of the past. Thus, these historians began to not only study a variety of historical actors, events, and relations that previous generations of Canadian labour historians had either omitted or overlooked but also to re-evaluate previous analyses of labour history and to reinterpret history of all kinds by putting the working class front and centre. See, for example, Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). Similarly, although many feminists moved away from socialist theories after their initial forays into Marxist thought in the 1970s, throughout the 1980s socialist feminists continued to theorize about the relationship between gender and class, and by the 1990s were arguing that capitalism and patriarchy have historically been intricately connected. See, for example, Heather Jon Maroney, "Feminism at Work," *New Left Review* 1, no. 141 (September/October 1983): 51–71; Jane Lewis, "The Debate on Sex and Class," *New Left Review* 1, no. 149 (January/February 1985): 108–120; Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 19 (Spring 1987): 23–43; Kathryn Harriss, "New Alliances: Socialist-Feminism in the Eighties," *Feminist Review* 31 (April 1989): 34–54; Linda Briskin, "Identity Politics and the Hierarchy of Oppression: A Comment," *Feminist Review* 35 (July 1990): 102–108. Over the last two decades, socialist feminists have produced many historical studies of women that consider gender but still emphasize the importance of class as a category of historical analysis. See, for example, Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press,

view class only as a category necessarily focus on difference, inequality, and hierarchy instead of relations between classes, and in doing so, remove important relations such as domination and exploitation.[21] Although historians must be sensitive to the ways in which various social divisions shape the inner life of labouring experience, a historical analysis that downplays the fundamental role of class and its conflictual relations obscures an important aspect of how and why people organize for social change.

To counter this trend, in this article I emphasize the class dimension of SORWUC while acknowledging the important role of gender. Knowing that unionization would secure better wages and working conditions for women, but frustrated by the Canadian labour movement's reluctance to organize workers in unorganized industries, a group of working women took matters into their own hands in 1972 and formed SORWUC: "a union whose main objective was to organize the unorganized."[22] Grounded in socialist-feminist principles, SORWUC's leadership remained conscious of the exploitative nature of capitalist class relations and, more importantly, was dedicated to organizing workers across such social divisions as race, gender, and skill. Throughout the union's existence, SORWUC organized employees of different gender and racial groups in a variety of unorganized workplaces, including banks, offices, bars, restaurants, day-care centres, and retail shops – the very people and industries that many traditional trade unions said could not be mobilized and drawn into the labour movement. Thus SORWUC's success, though limited, speaks to the potential of socialist-feminist unionism as a framework for organizing.[23]

1991); Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937–1979* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890–1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

21. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 93.

22. The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 10.

23. In this article I draw on a variety of primary and secondary source materials related to SORWUC and its history. Although I was in contact with several former SORWUC members, I ultimately decided not to conduct interviews. While oral history can provide invaluable information on individual historical actors' experiences of an event or organization, the purpose of my project was to examine how and why SORWUC differed from the Canadian labour movement, and how these differences shaped the union's efforts to organize service workers. Collecting and analyzing the oral histories of the people who comprised SORWUC and participated in the union's struggle to organize workers is a different, albeit equally important, project, but one that is beyond the scope of this article.

SORWUC's Formation and Early Organizing Activities

Sorwuc was a response to the successes and failures of the 1970s Canadian labour movement. In the years immediately after World War II, trade unions in Canada entered a period of growth and prosperity. In response to the wartime increase in union militancy, the federal government negotiated a "postwar settlement" between labour and capital.[24] In exchange for labour leaders' acceptance of significant legal restrictions on workers' ability to strike and control their working conditions, the government passed legislation to recognize collective bargaining, establishing labour relations boards and other mechanisms of regulating and codifying how workers and employers interacted in a system of "industrial pluralism."[25] Consequently, union membership increased substantially and many workers experienced an improved standard of living. As historian Craig Heron explains, "by the 1950s, it seemed that many Canadian workers had never had it so good."[26]

Unfortunately, the "peace and prosperity" experienced by the Canadian labour movement during the 1940s and 1950s was neither far-reaching nor long-lasting. Ideological battles led to bitter disputes and divisions within the labour movement, as labour leaders worked to purge "Communist" influences.[27] In addition, a male breadwinner ideology that defined men's labour as the primary source of family income continued to shape Canadians' ideas about work and gender, resulting in the creation of gendered labour legislation that failed to address the specific issues and needs of women workers. The labour gains made during the postwar period thus largely excluded women workers.[28] Finally, by the late 1960s, whatever class peace had been secured through the postwar settlement had largely ended. Fuelled by the barrage of American culture and increasing opposition to the US war in Vietnam, a growing sense of anti-Americanism and a correlating Canadian nationalism permeated

24. See Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001).

25. See Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms: From Consent to Coercion Revisited* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988); Aaron McCrorie, "PC 1003: Labour, Capital, and the State," in Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst, eds., *Labour Gains, Labour Pains: Fifty Years of PC 1003* (Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing, 1995), 15–38; Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

26. Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 85.

27. See Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

28. See Anne Forrest, "Securing the Male Breadwinner: A Feminist Interpretation of PC 1003," in *Labour Gains, Labour Pains*, 139–162; Ann Porter, *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945–1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Canadian society in the 1960s. In regards to labour, this new nationalism manifested itself in a rejection of the international unionism that had dominated the Canadian labour movement for much of the 20th century. At the same time, a new cohort of young union members challenged what they perceived to be a conservative and out-of-touch labour leadership. Together, these factors resulted in the further splintering of an already fragmented Canadian labour movement, as a number of Canadian unions broke away from their American counterparts, and workers rebelled against the state and labour leaders by engaging in a record number of wildcat strikes.[29]

The labour leadership facing these challenges also had to contend with new postwar labour legislation. While the new laws granted unions the right to organize and bargain collectively, they also limited workers' right to strike, and restricted the number and types of issues over which unions could exercise control.[30] While the legislation established frameworks for dealing with such important processes as union certification and grievance arbitration, it placed the responsibility for administration of these processes in the hands of the newly created federal and provincial labour relations boards. By doing so, the legislation "promoted a form of legalism in which workers' rights were regarded as flowing from the collective agreement and not from their role in the social relations of production."[31] As a result, during the 1950s and 1960s, many labour leaders moved away from direct action and labour activism and toward business unionism, focusing their efforts on a narrow range of issues, including union administration, collective bargaining, and grievances.[32] This

29. As historian Bryan Palmer explains, exact statistics on the number of wildcat strikes during this period are "open to dispute;" however, "what is undeniable is that such wildcat statistics, encompassing by 1965–6 anywhere from 20 to 50 per cent of all strikes, highlight an earth-shattering departure from the practices of the past." Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 223. Although demographic shifts and the nationalism of the time undoubtedly influenced the increase in the number of wildcat strikes and locals' decisions to split from international unions, other important factors included poor servicing and undemocratic practices. For more on nationalism within the labour movement during this period, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1992); Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). For more on youth rebellion and wildcat strikes, see Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 211–241. Though the ideological, nationalist, and intergenerational battles of this period made up part of the context in which SORWUC formed and was active, I found no evidence that these issues affected the union directly.

30. See Panitch and Swartz, *The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*; Fudge and Tucker, *Labour before the Law*; McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*; and Larry Haiven, "PC 1003 and the (Non)Right to Strike: A Sorry Legacy," in *Labour Gains, Labour Pains*, 215–235.

31. Fudge and Tucker, *Labour before the Law*, 279.

32. Alvin Finkel, "Trade Unions and the Welfare State in Canada, 1945–90," in *Labour Gains, Labour Pains*, 65. See also Errol Black and Jim Silver, *Building a Better World: An Introduction*

shift in union aims and activities led to a change in union leadership, as "a different kind of union leader from that of a militant organizer was needed to be effective in this system [of bureaucratic postwar labour relations]."[33]

Along with a change in leadership, the Canadian labour movement also experienced a change in membership. This was largely the result of the growth of the public sector and the increased labour force participation of such previously excluded groups as immigrants and women.[34] Although women had always comprised a significant part of the paid labour force, during the postwar period their numbers increased substantially. Between 1941 and 1971, the number of women working for wages jumped from 832,000 to over 3 million.[35] In 1941, women comprised approximately 19 per cent of the paid labour force; by 1971 this figure had nearly doubled.[36] During this time, more than half of employed women worked as typists, sales clerks, babysitters, maids, teachers, tailoresses, waitresses, nurses, telephone operators, and janitors.[37] Within these occupational categories women, most of whom had been excluded from the postwar settlement, often worked part-time, received low wages, and had little job security.[38]

Despite the significant increase in the number of women working for wages, women remained under-represented in unions. As historian Bryan Palmer explains, "the record of women and unions in the immediate pre-1975 years is … one of unmistakable advances and distressing continuities."[39] In the immediate postwar period, some unions attempted to organize in sectors with

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to Trade Unionism in Canada (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 111–112.

33. Fudge and Tucker, *Labour before the Law*, 304.

34. In the postwar period, Canada experienced a massive wave of immigration, with over 2 million immigrants arriving in Canada between 1946 and 1961. Although immigrants had always participated in the Canadian labour force, in the past many immigrants ended up working as independent farmers. In contrast, during the 1950s almost 90 per cent of new immigrants became wage workers, with over 70 per cent in the production, service, and recreation sectors. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 305–306.

35. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 325.

36. In 1971, women comprised 34.6 per cent of the paid labour force. Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women & Their Segregated Work* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1994), 16.

37. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 33. The language used to describe female occupations reflects the occupational classifications listed in the 1961 Census as well as the 1971 Occupation Classification Manual. For more information on occupational classifications, see Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 30.

38. For example, in 1971, 19.7 per cent of women worked part time compared to just 5 per cent of men. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 50–51. For a comprehensive statistical analysis of women's paid employment during this period, see Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 14–76.

39. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 333.

predominantly female workforces. In 1948, the Department Store Employees Union undertook a drive to organize workers employed by T. Eaton Company Limited in Toronto, a campaign that continued for four years and ultimately failed.[40] Such failures likely dampened the spirits of union organizers over the course of the late 1950s and 1960s. Although the rate of unionization among women workers increased between 1966 and 1976, this was largely the result of the unionization of public sector workers.[41] Indeed, aside from the organization of public sector workers, the Canadian labour movement's organizing efforts in the 1960s were limited and rarely included workers employed in predominantly female industries.[42] As in decades past, the Canadian labour movement's inability or unwillingness to organize in these sectors was justified in a variety of ways, including the part-time nature of the jobs in question, the high employee turnover rates, and the small size of the potential bargaining units.[43] Whatever the causes, the unionization rate of women workers continued to lag behind that of their male counterparts. By the early 1970s, 43 per cent of male workers belonged to unions compared to just 27 per cent of women workers.[44]

SORWUC formed within this context of challenge and change in the early 1970s, a product of the labour movement and a strong Women's Liberation Movement. A "second wave" women's movement emerged in the 1960s, due in part to female activists' experiences in the student organizations of the New Left.[45] As female activists became increasingly aware of the gender inequality

40. See Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store 1948 to 1952* (Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982).

41. For more information on the unionization of public sector workers in Canada during this period, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 320–325; Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 94–98; Morton, *Working People*, 255–269.

42. Between 1955 and 1965, the percentage of unionized workers in Canada dropped from 33.7 per cent to 29.7 per cent. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 301–302.

43. Although historians have pointed out that historically, male unionists' ideas about women and work were more complicated than is sometimes assumed, for the most part, male members of the Canadian labour movement often used the view of women's labour as unskilled, temporary, or part time to argue that women should not or could not be organized. For further discussion of the historical bias men had against organizing women, see Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 3 (1978): 109–130; Ruth Frager, "No Proper Deal: Women Workers and the Canadian Labour Movement, 1870–1940," in Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, eds., *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement* (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1983), 44–64; Gillian Creese, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944–1994* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act."

44. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 332.

45. Critics of the wave metaphor point out that analyzing feminist activism in terms of waves inaccurately constructs the periods in between as "troughs," when in reality women continued to agitate and organize for change during these years. See Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 17.

that permeated much of the New Left, they began to question women's role within both the movement and society. When their male counterparts reacted with hostility and derision, some of these women decided to form independent women's groups or caucuses. Although many of the initial groups formed on university campuses, many quickly moved off campus in an effort to reach more women.[46]

SORWUC was part of this process. In September 1968, women at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Burnaby, British Columbia formed the Women's Caucus.[47] Made up of students, staff, and faculty, according to one of its founding members, the caucus represented "a convergence of several interrelated groups of women who had become concerned with their place in the student political organizations, as well as in the world at large."[48] While the group was first active in university affairs, the growing political turmoil at SFU made it difficult to maintain their focus on women's issues.[49] In addition, many of the members wished to expand their focus to the broader community

46. By the late 1960s, the Women's Liberation Movement had become a significant force for social change focused on achieving economic and social equality. For example, on 16 February 1967, in response to feminist lobbying, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson instituted the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. The commission spent six months investigating issues and matters pertaining to the status of women, and eventually produced a 488-page report with 167 recommendations for improving the status of women in Canada. See Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa, ON, 1970). Throughout the 1970s, feminists worked together to take action on a number of issues, including reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. By the late 1980s, they had secured a number of important victories in the ongoing struggle to eradicate gender inequality in Canada, including the creation of women's centres on university campuses and in communities across the country; the establishment of Women's Studies as a legitimate academic field; the federal government's passage of Bill C-62 addressing affirmative action for women, visible minorities, and the disabled; and the Supreme Court ruling that struck down the federal abortion law as unconstitutional. For more information on the Women's Liberation Movement in Canada, see Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret MacPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nancy Adamson, "Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement," in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 252–280.

47. "Women's Caucus," *The Peak*, 18 September 1968.

48. Marcy Toms quoted in Francis Jane Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969–1971," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1990, 56.

49. 1968 and 1969 were tumultuous years at SFU; several significant events occurred at the university during this time, including the occupation of the Board of Governors' room in November 1968 and the strike by students and faculty of the Politics, Sociology & Anthropology Department in Fall 1969. See Dionysios Rossi, "Mountaintop Mayhem: Simon Fraser University, 1965–1971," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2003; Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus: Making Simon Fraser University* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005); Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 288–289.

of non-university women.[50] In July 1969, the Women's Caucus moved to Vancouver and renamed itself the Vancouver Women's Caucus.

The change in location brought a change in membership and focus. As the number of non-university members increased, various interest groups developed within the caucus.[51] The Working Women's Workshop (WWW) was one such group. Formed in January 1970 as a discussion group for working women, the WWW was the socialist-feminist wing of the caucus. The group met twice each month to discuss issues faced by individual women in their workplaces, as well as issues affecting all working women. In addition, the WWW conducted leafleting campaigns aimed at office workers, and supported women workers' efforts to achieve justice in the workplace.[52] Supporting the struggles of working women to organize or negotiate fair contracts led some WWW members to become "interested in the trade unions and why they didn't do much for women."[53] Unionization appeared to be the best way for women workers to attain better wages and working conditions; however, the existing unions seemed neither interested in nor willing to organize unorganized industries with predominantly female employees. As a result, the WWW began to consider the possibility of forming a women's labour union.[54] Although this never came to pass, several of its members continued to champion the idea of creating a union for working women. When the Vancouver Women's Caucus disbanded the following year, these members formed a new organization dedicated to the establishment of an independent women's union – the Working Women's Association (WWA).[55]

50. Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart,'" 56.

51. While people often discuss the Women's Liberation Movement as one movement, it actually consisted of a number of different groups and organizations, sometimes working together and sometimes not. The main distinction between these individual groups and organizations was theoretical, with the majority of groups subscribing to liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, or Marxist feminism. For a brief overview of these theoretical differences, see Adamson, Briskin, and MacPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 61–71.

52. "Working Women Organize," *The Pedestal*, April 1970. *The Pedestal* began as the official publication of the Vancouver Women's Caucus; however, when the caucus disbanded in July 1971, it continued to exist as an independent publication. "The Old Crumbles … And So Did the New," *The Pedestal*, August/September 1971.

53. Honorée Newcombe, "Coming Up From Down Under: A Hopeful History of AUCE [Association of University and College Employees]," in *AUCE & TSSU* [Teaching Support Staff Union]*: Memoirs of a Feminist Union, 1972–1993* (Burnaby, BC: Teaching Support Staff Union Publishing, 1994), 4. This article originally appeared in SFU's student newspaper, *The Peak*, in the 1970s.

54. "A Proposal for Organizing: Working Women's Union," *The Pedestal*, July/August 1970; "Canadian Unions: A Debate," *The Pedestal*, December 1970.

55. "The Old Crumbles … And So Did the New," *The Pedestal*, August/September 1971; "Union," *The Pedestal*, October 1971. The WWA was formed at a conference held on 30 October

Over the next few years, the WWA was actively involved in issues regarding women and work in British Columbia; they conducted educational activities, provided strike support, and encouraged women's organizing efforts. Experiences of organizing drives in particular confirmed WWA members' belief that "the existing unions were not prepared to undertake the kind of fight that would be required to organize unorganized industries."[56] SORWUC member Heather MacNeil later summarized these experiences: "A number of women had frustrating experiences with existing unions, such as seeking help to organize a small restaurant and being told the unit was too small to bother, or a union sending in a male organizer with slick campaign material to tell the women how they should organize an office. We concluded that the traditional unions were either not able or not willing to organize women workers."[57] In short, WWA members realized that if working women were to be organized, they would have to do it themselves. Having learned about union organizing at a WWA seminar series earlier that year, in fall 1972 WWA members decided to "take the next step and form their own union."[58] On 22 October 1972, 25 women held a convention in Vancouver and formed SORWUC.[59]

At a time when the Canadian labour movement was either unable or unwilling to mount large organizing drives in unorganized industries, SORWUC's establishment as a union devoted to this purpose, combined with the union's socialist-feminist roots, meant it differed markedly in theory and practice from much of the mainstream labour movement. As a result of the constraining labour legislation enacted in the immediate postwar period, by the 1970s many union leaders had come to view "their main business as the narrow range of issues covered by collective bargaining (and not excluded by management rights clauses); these issues generally concerned wages and benefits. Larger political and social questions had little place in union affairs."[60] In contrast,

1971. "Working Women's Association," *The Pedestal*, December 1971.

56. The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 10.

57. "Small BC Union Busy Organizing Women Bank Workers," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 20 December 1977.

58. Helen Potrebenko, "Working for Women Working," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 6, UBCLRBSC.

59. The sources differ slightly on the exact date of and the number of people who attended SORWUC's founding convention. The two dates most often cited are 23 October and 24 October; however, the majority of sources also indicate that the convention was held on a Sunday, and Sunday's date would have been 22 October. As for the number of attendees, several sources state that there were 25 women in attendance, while others say 24. Given that the differences are relatively minor and bear little significance for this article, I settled on 24 women attending the founding convention held on 22 October 1972. Based on the sources I looked at, it appears that many of the women who attended SORWUC's founding convention were young women who came to SORWUC either through their involvement in the women's movement or a desire to organize their workplace.

60. Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 89.

SORWUC's founders saw unionization as fundamentally linked to larger political and social questions. The union's constitution stated that "within the community, the Union [SORWUC] will work for the establishment of political and social equality, for free parent-controlled child care centres, for community control of schools, for community health services, and against price and rent increases which erode the gains made through collective bargaining."[61] Similarly, a 1978 SORWUC draft proposal on child care stated: "As a union for working women SORWUC has a responsibility to use their policy on child care to encourage government, unions, employers and the public to accept their responsibility in this area. Vehicles such as publicity, lobbying, contract demands and collective agreements can be used to this end. SORWUC must attempt to bring to Unionism collective agreements which reflect the interrelationship of working and living conditions."[62] In short, for SORWUC, unions were a crucial tool in the struggle to effect political and social change.

SORWUC's theoretical differences with the Canadian labour movement translated into differences in practice as well. In contrast to the bureaucratic and predominantly male unions, SORWUC was an independent grassroots union committed to democracy and equality, and these principles played a key role in the structure of the union. To avoid the top-down organization prevalent in many of the big national unions following business unionism, and to foster democracy and member participation, SORWUC's founders structured the union so that, in theory, members would negotiate their own contracts and make all the decisions relating to their particular unit. To provide greater protection against the development of a union bureaucracy, SORWUC's executive officer positions were filled by election instead of appointment, and the majority were unpaid.[63] As a final precaution against bureaucratization, no paid officer could receive a salary greater than the highest wage in the bargaining units, and no person could hold a paid position for longer than one year. In lieu of a permanent paid staff, SORWUC relied on volunteer labour, mostly provided by members-at-large, or those who did not belong to an individual bargaining unit. Many of these members-at-large had previously belonged to bargaining units, were trying to organize their own workplace, or just wanted to work in the union office.[64] Thus, in contrast to many other Canadian unions

61. "Constitution of The Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (S.O.R.W.U.C.)," SORWUC fonds, Box 1, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

62. "To the Local 1 Conference," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

63. While the union initially had no paid positions, as the organizing gained momentum and the workload increased, it established a limited number of paid positions, including the office coordinator for Local 1, the 2nd vice-president of Local 1, and a number of organizers at the national and local level. However, the membership voted on any changes relating to union positions and pay, and paid positions were still elected by the membership, from the membership. The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 22–23.

64. "SORWUC Local 1 Newsletter (September 1981)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 2, UBCLRBSC.

staffed by paid officers, SORWUC was a grassroots organization largely run by active non-salaried members.

Another key principle in SORWUC was equality – equality in pay, between jobs, in union leadership roles, and in all aspects of work and society. Given SORWUC's commitment to organizing in industries with predominantly female workforces, the union paid particular attention to the issue of gender equality. This focus reflected a growing concern over gender inequality during this period in society in general and within the Canadian labour movement in particular. Although the number of women trade unionists increased dramatically during the 1960s, women remained underrepresented in leadership positions in the labour movement and continued to battle for the right to speak at union meetings and have their issues addressed fairly and fully in meetings and collective agreements. As a result of their efforts, in the 1970s and 1980s many unions established women's caucuses and passed resolutions that addressed issues relating to gender inequality, including wage inequality and harassment.[65] While the establishment of women's caucuses and the inclusion of clauses requiring equal pay for equal work were undoubtedly steps in the right direction, SORWUC took a much more radical approach to gender inequality, arguing that gender oppression is rooted in class inequality. As one SORWUC member wrote, "complete women's liberation and complete social equality can only become a reality when we put an end to our economic inferiority. The fight to end economic deprivation can be fought, to a large extent, through collective action, through unions."[66] For SORWUC, organizing workers was a fundamental part of the fight to end social inequality.

A third principle of SORWUC was union independence. SORWUC's founding members' decision to form a new union was based on their frustrating experiences dealing with various unions and organizations within the existing labour movement – thus it was established as an independent union, and remained so until it disbanded in 1986.[67] This meant SORWUC did not have formal relationships with any of the national, provincial, or municipal labour organizations such as the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the British Columbia Federation of Labour, or the Vancouver & District Labour Council.

65. For more information on women's organizing in unions, see Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott, eds., *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma*; Dennis A. Deslippe, *"Rights, Not Roses:" Unions and the Rise of Working-Class Feminism, 1945–80* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act"; and Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*. For more information on women and unions in British Columbia specifically, see Betty Griffin and Susan Lockhart, *Their Own History: Women's Contribution to the Labour Movement of British Columbia* (New Westminster, BC: United Fisherman & Allied Workers' Union/CAW Seniors Club, 2002), 151–200; Creese, *Contracting Masculinity*.

66. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (October 1980)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

67. Helen Potrebenko, "Working for Women Working," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 6, UBCLRBSC.

Still, unlike many other independent and radical unions, SORWUC maintained more or less friendly relations with unions and individuals within the labour movement. Several prominent Canadian trade unionists gave their time and expertise to help with the establishment of SORWUC, and the union often received donations from other unions to support its organizing efforts.[68] A similar relationship existed between SORWUC and the women's movement. Due to SORWUC's roots in the Vancouver Women's Caucus, the union always had strong ties to local feminist organizations. While SORWUC's relationship with these groups generally focused on issues relating to women and work, the union often collaborated with them on issues and events of importance to all women, including International Women's Day celebrations and efforts to achieve legislative reform.[69]

The structure of SORWUC clearly differed from that of many other unions; however, its organizing really set it apart. Although formed to organize all unorganized workers, SORWUC's socialist-feminist roots and the failure of the labour movement to organize women workers encouraged the union to focus its efforts on predominantly female industries, such as the service sector.[70] The service sector has historically had limited or non-existent levels of unionization. While many public sector workers unionized in the 1960s and 1970s, unions have been unable to gain much ground in the private service sector; in 1975, the rate of unionization in the entire private sector was just 26 per cent.[71] By 1989, the unionization rate in the three private sector industries of trade, finance, and business and personal services was 15 per cent or less.[72]

68. For example, at a 1972 WWA-sponsored seminar on unions, Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers (CAIMAW) member Jess Succamore spoke about setting up a union; Pulp and Paper Workers member Fred Mullin discussed the difficulties of obtaining certification from the BCLRB; and AUCE member Lori Whitehead shared her experience establishing a union at the University of British Columbia. "Unions," *The Pedestal*, October 1972. In regards to donations, SORWUC newsletters often listed recent donations received from other unions, including AUCE, CAIMAW, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees. For more information on union donations to SORWUC, see The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 25; and SORWUC newsletters, SORWUC fonds, Boxes 6 and 9, UBCLRBSC.

69. The SORWUC fonds contain many letters to and from various women's organizations, including Concerned Citizens for Choice on Abortion, The Alliance for the Safety of Prostitutes, and Vancouver Status of Women. See SORWUC fonds, Box 1, Files 2 to 6, UBCLRBSC.

70. In 1970s British Columbia, the majority of employed women worked in the service sector. John Douglas Belshaw and David J. Mitchell, "The Economy Since the Great War," in Hugh J. M. Johnston, ed., *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996), 318; Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 324.

71. Julie White, *Sisters & Solidarity: Women and Unions in Canada* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1993), 161.

72. White, *Sisters & Solidarity*, 163.

The reasons for the low levels of unionization are many, including the limited number of employees typically employed in service sector workplaces, the part-time and temporary nature of the work, employer opposition, and legislation not designed to aid the type of organizing required to unionize in the private sector.[73] Yet it was precisely because of the historically low levels of unionization in the service industry that SORWUC tried to organize these workers. Thus, following the establishment of SORWUC, members quickly began work on the union's fundamental goal of organizing the unorganized. In July 1973, SORWUC won its first certification at the Legal Services Commission, a small private legal office in Vancouver. The following year, SORWUC received certification to represent ten employees at Transition House, a shelter for female survivors of domestic abuse.[74] Buoyed by these initial victories, over the next two years SORWUC organized fourteen other bargaining units in offices, social service facilities, and day-care centres.

SORWUC achieved a number of important victories in regards to service worker organizing. A major obstacle to unionization in the service sector has been, and continues to be, the small number of employees in each workplace. While many unions were either unable or unwilling to organize small groups of employees, deeming the financial cost and amount of work involved too great for such a limited gain, SORWUC knew that organizing small bargaining units was an important part of achieving the union's goal of organizing all workers. In May 1975, SORWUC organized Canada's only single-person bargaining unit when they received certification at the Volunteer Grandparents Society, a non-profit organization that matches people of grand-parenting age with children without grandparents.[75] Helen Potrebenko, the sole employee at Volunteer Grandparents Society, initially applied for certification with six other unions; however, all six turned her down due to the small size of the potential bargaining unit.[76] Given the reluctance of other unions to tackle the important issue of organizing workplaces with small numbers of employees, SORWUC's work in this area positioned the union in stark contrast to much of the mainstream labour movement.

While SORWUC did a great deal of work in regards to organizing, the union received the most attention for its highly publicized drive to organize bank workers.[77] Prior to SORWUC's efforts, attempts to organize bank workers in

73. White, *Sisters & Solidarity*, 167–182.

74. "SORWUC Local 1 Newsletter (October 1977)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 2, UBCLRBSC.

75. "One-woman Bargaining Unit Seeks 'Unanimity' in Local," *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 May 1975. SORWUC held the certification at Volunteer Grandparents Society until July 1979, when the unionized employee quit and the new employee voted to decertify. "One-member Union Office Decertifies," *The Vancouver Sun*, 2 August 1979.

76. "One-woman Bargaining Unit Seeks 'Unanimity' in Local," *The Vancouver Sun*, 14 May 1975.

77. As SORWUC members have written their own detailed history of the struggle to organize

Canada had been limited, and rarely met with success.[78] Further, in 1959, the CLRB rejected an application for certification for a small bank branch in Kitimat, British Columbia, ruling that the individual branch was not an appropriate bargaining unit. For the next seventeen years, banks and unions often cited this ruling as evidence that bank workers could not unionize unless they did so as a nation-wide unit. Determined to organize all workers, including bank workers, in 1977 SORWUC successfully challenged the 1959 CLRB ruling when the union received certification to represent workers at a Vancouver branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. In response to SORWUC's application, the CLRB ruled that "the single branch location of the Commerce encompasses employees within a community of interest and is an appropriate bargaining unit."[79] The CLRB's decision on SORWUC's application ultimately paved the way for the union's 23 bank certifications obtained in 1977, as well as the establishment later that year of the CLC's drive to organize bank workers into the new CLC-sponsored Union of Banking Employees.[80]

By the late 1970s, SORWUC had grown immensely from its modest roots as the socialist-feminist wing of the Vancouver Women's Caucus. In 1978, the union held 41 certifications at a variety of workplaces, including a university student society and several banks, credit unions, day-care centres, retail stores, and restaurants – workplaces that the Canadian labour movement had

bank workers, here I offer only a brief overview of the bank drive. See The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*.

78. A notable exception was the successful drive to organize workers at the Montréal City and District Savings Bank in the 1960s. Originally certified in 1967, Local 434 of the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union/le Syndicat canadien des employées et employées professionnels et de bureau (COPE/SEPB) continues to represent approximately 2,000 workers at bank branches in the Montréal and Ottawa regions. "SEPB 434 – Les syndiquées de la Banque Laurentienne," *SEPB Québec*, http://www.sepb.qc.ca/modules/pages/index.php?id=148&langue=fr&menu=71&sousmenu=95#signet1/.

79. CLRB ruling as cited in The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 52.

80. Although the CLRB decision recognized the right of Canadian bank workers to organize on a branch-by-branch basis, the banks put up a powerful fight. Combined with a number of other adverse factors, including state intervention and labour movement politics, the 1970s drive to organize Canadian bank workers ultimately failed. For more information on bank workers' efforts to unionize, see Graham S. Lowe, *Bank Unionization in Canada: A Preliminary Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Centre for Industrial Relations, 1980); Allen Ponak and Larry F. Moore, "Canadian Bank Unionism: Perspectives and Issues," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 36, no. 1 (1981): 3–34; Elizabeth Beckett, *Unions and Bank Workers: Will the Twain Ever Meet?* (Ottawa, ON: Labour Canada, 1984); Rosemary Warskett, "Bank Worker Unionization and the Law," *Studies in Political Economy* 25 (1988): 41–73; Jane Suzanne Bailey, *"Organizing the Unorganized" Revisited: An Analysis of the Efficacy of Labour Legislation in Facilitating Collective Representation in the Canadian Banking Sector* (Kingston, ON: Queen's University, Industrial Relations Centre, 1991); Patricia Baker, "'I Know Now that You Can Change Things': Narratives of Canadian Bank Workers as Union Activists," in Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips, eds., *Ethnographic Feminisms: Essays in Anthropology* (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University Press, 1995), 157–176.

failed to organize or, in some cases, not even tried.[81] Many SORWUC members attributed this growth to the union's participatory and grassroots style, a fundamental aspect of the union that distinguished it from much of the mainstream labour movement. As one member of the SORWUC executive explained in 1978, "the women we talk to are interested primarily in two things about unions: will they have to go on strike and will they have to do what union officials tell them to do. If SORWUC was like most other unions and set the rules for members, we'd never convince them to join."[82]

Striking the Service Sector

Although Bimini was a pub and Muckamuck a restaurant, both types of establishments had historically low levels of unionization and a high concentration of poorly paid female employees. In 1971, women accounted for nearly 83 per cent of waiters, hostesses, and stewards.[83] In these positions, women earned only 66 per cent of the wage paid to their male counterparts.[84] SORWUC was committed to organizing in industries with predominantly female employees, and between 1972 and 1986, the union successfully organized workers at several British Columbia food and beverage establishments, including Bimini, Cat's Meow, Muckamuck, Jerry's Cove, and three outlets of Church's Chicken.[85]

Bimini was SORWUC's first certification in the food and beverage industry. Located in the Kitsilano neighbourhood of Vancouver, Bimini was typical of many other small bars and restaurants in the city. Privately owned by then-president of the British Columbia Pub Owners' Association Peter Uram, the establishment employed approximately twenty full-time and part-time workers, including bartenders, bar porters, doormen, and waitresses.[86] For

81. "A Heresy Whose Time Has Come: BC Working Women Unite," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 January 1978.

82. "Small BC Union Is Busy Organizing Women Bank Workers," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 20 December 1977.

83. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 36.

84. By 1980, this number had risen slightly, with women working as food and beverage service workers earning 69.4 per cent of the income of their male counterparts. Looking at all occupations, in 1970, women earned 59.5 per cent of men's income; in 1980, they earned 63.8 per cent. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, 43.

85. In 1982, SORWUC established a Restaurant Workers Organizing Committee; however, aside from a few newsletter announcements and leaflets targeting restaurant workers, I was unable to find any additional information about the activities of this committee. "SORWUC Local 1 Newsletter (October 1982)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

86. Since the 1970s, the gendered term "waitress" has been replaced by the gender-neutral term "server"; however, in order to remain consistent with the language used by the Bimini workers themselves, in this article I use "waitress."

the most part, jobs were divided along gender lines, with men working as bar staff and doormen, and women employed as waitresses. As in other industries, an unequal pay scale for male and female workers accompanied the gendered division of labour; when the workers contacted SORWUC, waitresses earned between $3.00 and $3.75 per hour, while bartenders received between $4.50 and $6.50 per hour.[87] The gendered pay scale at Bimini was consistent with the rest of the restaurant industry.[88] In addition to paltry and unequal wages, Bimini workers faced a number of other issues. They had no seniority rights, no medical or dental benefits, and no allowance for sick leave or leaves of absence. Workers also had no say in scheduling, and no protection from arbitrary changes in scheduling. As SORWUC president Jean Rands explained, in addition to being extremely inconvenient, "these changes in scheduling resulted in inability to work … for instance, an employee scheduled to work a shift when child care was unavailable."[89] Workers also complained about favouritism and harassment in the workplace; workers who were "in" with management would

87. The minimum wage in British Columbia in 1977 was $3.00 an hour. Several waitresses stated that Uram said he had to pay men a higher wage because "men won't take less." According to the waitresses, Uram further justified paying women less by claiming that, unlike bartenders, waitresses earned approximately $5.00 an hour in tips. Bimini waitresses complained that this figure was a gross overestimation of the tips they actually earned; waitress Lynn Pare Cyr stated that in a full eight-hour shift, she rarely received even so much as $15. In addition to overestimating the actual amount earned in tips, Bimini waitresses insisted that Uram's comments also ignored "kickbacks," a practice common in the restaurant industry even today where servers must pay out a percentage of their tips to other staff members. A 1977 newspaper article described kickbacks as a "common practice [in the restaurant industry]. It involves paying percentages of your tips to other staff such as the maître d', the hostess, the busboy, the cook, the barmen, etc. It often amounts to 10–20% to each one. Clearly, this is a subsidy to the employer, serving to keep those workers' wages down. Management also frequently demands a percentage as a 'guarantee' to keep the job. These insidious practices are extremely widespread. Because it is only illegal for the employer to deduct from an employee's wages directly, the employer can fiddle with the tips any way s/he pleases" (original emphasis). "The Unpaid Work of Waitressing," *Kinesis*, June 1977. For the quotes from Bimini servers, see "Bimini Strikers Fighting for Respect," *The Georgia Straight*, 27 October 1977; "Bartenders' Union Gives in to Bimini Workers," *The Province*, 30 November 1977. For more information on waitresses, wages, and tips, see Cobble, *Dishing It Out*; Greta Foff Paules, *Dishing It Out: Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

88. For more information on gender, wages, and the Canadian restaurant industry, see footnote 84. Although unionization does not necessarily result in the eradication of gender-based wage rates, it appears to ease the gap and at least provides workers with a mechanism (collective bargaining) with which to negotiate for more equal rates of pay. For more information on unions, gender, and equal pay, see White, *Sisters & Solidarity*; Rosemary Warskett, "Can a Disappearing Pie be Shared Equally? Unions, Women, and Wage 'Fairness,'" in *Women Challenging Unions*, 249–265; Margaret Hallock, "Unions and the Gender Wage Gap," in Dorothy Sue Cobble, ed., *Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1993), 27–42.

89. "SORWUK [*sic*] Head Contacting Bank Workers," *Kamloops Daily Standard*, 19 January 1978.

receive raises, while others spent months working for the same low wage.[90] Management even refused to comply with such basic legislated employment standards as statutory holiday pay.[91]

Fed up with the lousy working conditions, in 1976 some of the Bimini workers decided to unionize. After contacting several unions, they finally settled on SORWUC. While the small size of the potential bargaining unit likely meant that few unions expressed interest in organizing them, the Bimini workers made it clear that SORWUC's unique structure and approach was a major influence on their decision. Spokesperson for the striking Bimini workers Margot Holmes explained that SORWUC "prevents a bureaucracy from developing, and it's small and Canadian, so we didn't feel overwhelmed. And they let us do the organizing."[92] SORWUC received certification at Bimini from the BCLRB on 24 January 1977, and shortly thereafter began negotiating with Uram.

From the outset of negotiations, relations between management and the union were tense. Working conditions for pro-union employees deteriorated significantly, as they were suspended, fired, or harassed into quitting, while anti-union employees received raises and preferred schedules. In response to management's behaviour, SORWUC filed six charges of unfair labour practice with the BCLRB. In two cases, the board ruled in favour of SORWUC, forcing Uram to pay half of one employee's salary for the period she was suspended and to reinstate another.[93] Class antagonisms were reflected in the tough negotiations. The main issues for the Bimini workers were wages and control over working conditions. Union members also wanted seniority rights, clear grievance and discipline procedures, and shift schedules posted in advance.[94] Another point of contention between SORWUC members and management was the closed shop, a clause that would require every employee to join the union and pay dues. For unions, a closed shop is crucial to maintaining security, as it guarantees membership and provides steady income from dues. As SORWUC members explained, "the tactic of the employer has been to keep the staff divided with promises for some and discrimination against others. If we are to work as a team again, the union cannot be used to separate us."[95] Uram, however, firmly opposed the closed shop.[96] Indeed, after only a few rounds

90. "Bimini Workers Win Contract: SORWUC Victory!" *Kinesis*, January 1978.

91. "Bimini Strikers Fighting for Respect," *The Georgia Straight*, 27 October 1977.

92. "Small BC Union Is Busy Organizing Women Bank Workers," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 20 December 1977. This article attributes this quote to "Margaret Holmes;" however, in writing about the Bimini strike, several other newspaper articles cite "Margot Holmes." For consistency, I use the latter.

93. "Bimini Picketers 'Labor Landmark,'" *The Ubyssey*, 20 October 1977.

94. "Union Could Be Expelled," *The Vancouver Sun*, 29 November 1977.

95. "Bimini Strike," *Kinesis*, December 1977.

96. "Picket Cuts Pub Business in Half," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 October 1977; "Bimini Strike,"

SORWUC sign from the Bimini strike.
From the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada, Local 4 fonds, Box 15, File 21, UBCLRBSC. Reproduced with permission.

of negotiations, it became clear that Uram had no real interest in negotiating with the union. In October, after ten months of failed negotiations, the union held a strike vote; the results were thirteen to seven in favour of job action. At 9 a.m. on 20 October 1977, Bimini workers set up a picket line in front of their workplace, and in doing so, became the first pub workers to go on strike in the history of British Columbia.[97]

SORWUC's differences from the Canadian labour movement shaped many aspects of the strike, both positively and negatively. One of the most significant differences was support on the picket line from other SORWUC members and people from the broader community, including the local labour and women's movements; the Bimini strike lasted ten weeks, and during this time, the picket line not only stayed strong but also remained significantly larger than the bargaining unit's actual numbers. On the first day of the strike, fourteen pickets marched at Bimini's entrance and in the back alley; by evening there were thirty, including Bimini workers, SORWUC officials, and supporters.[98] The second night of the strike saw 85 pickets gathered in front of the pub.[99]

Kinesis, December 1977.

97. "Bimini Picketers 'Labor Landmark,'" *The Ubyssey*, 20 October 1977.

98. "Pub Workers Tote Placards Instead of Beer at Bimini," *The Vancouver Sun*, 21 October 1977.

99. "Bimini Strikers Fighting for Respect," *The Georgia Straight*, 27 October 1977.

As a workplace that employed only twenty people, seven of whom had crossed the picket line to continue working, such numbers indicated broad support for SORWUC from the community. This support continued into November, with one of the most significant actions taking place on 19 November when 180 SORWUC members and supporters took to the streets surrounding Bimini, voicing support for the striking pub workers.[100] The event included speeches by members of SORWUC and its sister union, the Association of University and College Employees.[101] Off the picket line, local artists Persimmon Blackbridge and Sima Elizabeth Shefrim made a quilt to commemorate the strike, while the University of British Columbia student newspaper ran sympathetic editorials, arguing that "the Bimini dispute should be of great interest to students and deserves our support."[102] The benefits of SORWUC's grassroots unionism and ties to the community were thus evident throughout the strike, as supporters consistently rallied around the striking Bimini workers. Indeed, it is unlikely the strike would have lasted ten weeks without support from the local community and other SORWUC members.[103]

If SORWUC's radical approach to unionization helped in the organization of the Bimini workers and the maintenance of a strong picket line, it hindered the union in other ways, as its feminist politics and independent status created several unique challenges. In late November, as the strike neared the one-month mark, Local 40 of the Hotel, Restaurant, Culinary Workers, and Bartenders' Union applied to the BCLRB for certification at Bimini, having lined up some Bimini workers who were not honouring SORWUC picket lines. In doing so, Local 40 was raiding SORWUC, and worse, doing so by agreeing to unionize scab labour in the midst of a strike. SORWUC's status as an

100. "Unionists' March Backs Pub Workers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 21 November 1977.

101. "Bimini Strike," *Kinesis*, December 1977. AUCE was another feminist union that formed shortly after SORWUC and represented university and college employees at several campuses across British Columbia. For more information on AUCE, see Newcombe, "Coming Up From Down Under." AUCE has since become TSSU.

102. "About the Bimini Quilt," *Kinesis*, January 1978; "Women Progress with Union," *The Ubyssey*, 21 October 1977.

103. Despite the outpouring of support from the public and the labour movement, not everyone stood in solidarity with SORWUC. Although business dropped significantly, the pub remained open throughout the strike, staffed by management, anti-union employees, and scabs. In addition, SORWUC suspected that the British Columbia Pub Owners' Association was financing Uram during the strike as part of the association's larger plan to keep unions out of British Columbia pubs. In an effort to draw customers to the pub, Uram distributed leaflets across Vancouver's west side, offering discounts and explaining his side of the strike. Although many patrons refused to cross the picket line, some did. The result was a tense picket line where management and their allies often harassed picketers. Through it all, SORWUC members and supporters continued to picket the pub. "'Vulgar' Gears Disrupt Bimini Pickets," *The Ubyssey*, 8 November 1977; "Pub Owners Finance Strikebreaker," *The Ubyssey*, 28 October 1977. I was unable to confirm or refute SORWUC's claim that the British Columbia Pub Owners' Association financed Uram.

independent union played a key role in Local 40's raid of the Bimini bargaining unit, allowing conservative, mainstream trade-union leaders to rationalize anti-union acts. Specifically, Local 40 representatives argued that because SORWUC was not an affiliate of the CLC, the union did not have the right to organize workers in the restaurant industry – an area Local 40 considered to be "their field" – and thus Local 40 did not have to respect SORWUC's certification or picket line.[104]

In justifying these actions by pointing to SORWUC's status as an unaffiliated union, Local 40 spokespeople referred to an issue that has long divided the labour movement – jurisdiction. To avoid dual unionism – "two unions fighting for membership in a single jurisdiction" – labour organizations such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations and the CLC have historically tried to divide industries up, assigning one member union to each industry.[105] However, because these organizations can only penalize affiliates, their ability to compel non-affiliate unions to comply with jurisdictional boundaries is limited. The result can range from unpleasant tension, with unions jockeying for control over industries and members, to disaster – as at Bimini where, in an effort to maintain jurisdictional control, one union undermined another's efforts to secure a collective agreement.

Local 40's actions drew an angry response from SORWUC members as well as many members of the British Columbia labour movement. SORWUC immediately condemned Local 40's actions, accusing the union of strike-breaking and signing up scabs.[106] In response to Local 40's claim that SORWUC was trespassing on its territory, spokesperson for the Bimini workers Margot Holmes replied, "they claim that [they] have had jurisdiction since 1900, which means that they've had 77 years to organize women. And where were they?"[107] For SORWUC, organizing workers mattered more than maintaining jurisdictional boundaries. Similarly, Jess Succamore, spokesperson for the Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical and Allied Workers – an independent, socialist Canadian union that at the time was facing its own issues with a large international union, the United Steelworkers of America, over the unionization of workers in the British Columbia mining industry – insisted that Local 40's action represented "one of the most vile acts in the trade union movement…. It amounts to [Local 40] saying that unless the workers are organized by an affiliated union, it is better for them to remain unorganized."[108] Jack

104. "Union Now Fights Union in Bimini Pub Strike," *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 November 1977; "Inter-union Battle Shaping Over Bimini," *The Province*, 26 November 1977.

105. Morton, *Working People*, 58.

106. "Inter-union Battle Shaping Over Bimini," *The Province*, 26 November 1977.

107. "Small BC Union Is Busy Organizing Women Bank Workers," *The Globe & Mail* (Toronto), 20 December 1977.

108. "Union Now Fights Union in Bimini Pub Strike," *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 November 1977.

Munro, regional president of the International Woodworkers of America – a largely male union that had traditionally been militant but had become quite conservative since the late 1940s – echoed Succamore's comments, stating, "the lowest form of humanity that exists is a scab, and how any so-called respectable trade union can go and even talk to them, never mind sign them up, is a complete and total disgrace…. They (Local 40) are acting as traitors to the trade union movement."[109]

SORWUC responded promptly to Local 40's raid. One of its first actions was to ask the British Columbia Federation of Labour to censure Local 40.[110] Although SORWUC was not an affiliate of the federation, Local 40 was, and affiliates who did not adhere to the federation's constitution risked suspension or expulsion. Specifically, the federation could consider Local 40's decision to raid SORWUC during a strike a violation of their provision that affiliates "take no part in any action that would assist an employer in a strike situation."[111] SORWUC also applied more direct pressure to Local 40 by demonstrating outside their head office in Burnaby. On 25 November, 45 SORWUC members and supporters picketed Local 40's offices in the pouring rain, chanting, "Don't raid. Organize."[112] SORWUC spokesperson Pat Barter told the media, "there are hundreds of thousands of unorganized people in Canada…. It's incredible that a trade union can be so jealous of its territory that it would jeopardize these employees' attempt to win living wages and decent working conditions."[113] Barter's concern that Local 40's actions would threaten the strike at Bimini proved correct when, shortly after news broke of Local 40's certification application, Uram demanded that SORWUC remove their Bimini picket line until the certification issue was resolved. SORWUC refused and the picket line remained.[114]

109. "Bimini Strike Sets 'Scabs' Talk: Union Effort a 'Disgrace,'" *The Province*, 28 November 1977. Local 40 of the Hotel, Restaurant, Culinary Workers, and Bartenders' Union has since become UNITE HERE! Local 40. The raid on Bimini was not the first time Local 40's ethics had come into question, nor would it be the last. For more information on corruption in Local 40 prior to the 1970s, see Jeremy Milloy, "Fast Food Alienation: Service Work and Unionism in British Columbia, 1968–1998," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2007. For more information on Local 40 since the 1970s, see "Voting Irregularities Alleged in Union Trial," *The Vancouver Sun*, 23 March 1987; "Hotel Union Back in Court Over Local's Elections," *The Vancouver Sun*, 9 December 1987; "Court Refuses Supervised Balloting," *The Vancouver Sun*, 4 February 1988; "Hotel Workers' Union Finances in a Mess," *The Vancouver Sun*, 7 March 2008; "San Francisco Labour Leader Sent to Help Troubled Vancouver Hotel Workers' Union," *The Vancouver Sun*, 12 July 2008.

110. The British Columbia Federation of Labour is a provincial labour body that represents workers through affiliated unions and is itself affiliated to the CLC.

111. "Union Could Be Expelled," *The Vancouver Sun*, 29 November 1977.

112. "Union Now Fights Union in Bimini Pub Strike," *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 November 1977.

113. "Union Now Fights Union in Bimini Pub Strike," *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 November 1977.

114. "Bimini Owner Wants Picket Line Removed," *The Province*, 29 November 1977.

Pressure and support for SORWUC quickly paid off. Just one week after submitting the certification application to the BCLRB, Local 40 withdrew it. The announcement came shortly after a meeting between Local 40 and federation officials. In a press conference, federation secretary-treasurer Len Guy stated that Local 40 "has agreed to remove all obstacles created in their attempt to organize what is their historic and established jurisdiction over bartending," and that "the Federation is pleased SORWUC can now get on with the business of fighting an anti-union employer to obtain a fair settlement for [Bimini] employees."[115] Although Local 40 vice-president Glen Morgan denied that the federation had threatened the local with expulsion, he did concede that the union faced "pressures. There just was no alternative. If there had [been] no picket line, it would have been alright. It was really a bad scene, and an error on our part to even apply for certification."[116] That the federation's support for SORWUC was not unconditional was evidenced by Guy's warning that "a union which has enjoyed historic jurisdiction over bartending will continue to fight to maintain that jurisdiction should further inroads be attempted in the future."[117] In short, had Local 40 not raided Bimini in the midst of a strike or had the raid not received so much media attention and support from other members of the labour movement, it is unlikely the federation would have taken SORWUC's side.

The raid over, SORWUC members continued to picket Bimini in an effort to force management to settle. Their efforts finally paid off when, on 30 December 1977, SORWUC and management agreed to a contract addressing most matters, and to binding arbitration on the remaining issues.[118] On 13 January 1978, provincial mediator Ed Sims handed down the Bimini workers' first collective agreement, which included a modified union shop, two weeks' paid vacation, and a provision for up to two weeks of unpaid leave.[119] Wages, too, were substantially improved.[120] While the Bimini workers did not win all of their demands, they felt satisfied with their first contract. Spokesperson for the striking Bimini workers Margot Holmes explained, "any first contract is a victory.... And this is a very good first contract."[121] SORWUC members working

115. "Bartenders' Union 'Hurt Negotiations,'" *The Ubyssey*, 2 December 1977.

116. "Bartenders' Union Gives in to Bimini Strikers," *The Province*, 30 November 1977.

117. "Bartenders' Union 'Hurt Negotiations,'" *The Ubyssey*, 2 December 1977.

118. "SORWUC Wins Bimini Battle," *The Ubyssey*, 6 January 1978.

119. "SORWUC Wins Bimini Battle," *The Ubyssey*, 6 January 1978.

120. The head bartender's wage increased from $5.03 to $6.44 per hour, and permanent waitresses' wages rose from $3.75 to approximately $5.00 per hour. "SORWUK [*sic*] Head Contacting Bank Workers," *Kamloops Daily Standard*, 19 January 1978; "Bimini Workers Win Contract: SORWUC Victory!" *Kinesis*, January 1978.

121. "SORWUC Wins Bimini Battle," *The Ubyssey*, 6 January 1978.

at Bimini looked forward to dealing with the outstanding issues during the next round of negotiations.

Unfortunately, the next round of negotiations would never occur. While SORWUC's radical approach to unionization helped the union throughout the Bimini strike, its alternative structure and strategies could not counter the power of the state. In short, community support and a commitment to organizing did not protect the victories won by SORWUC members at Bimini from the decisions of the BCLRB. Only two months into the one-year collective agreement, the workers at Bimini submitted an application for decertification to the BCLRB.[122] SORWUC officials asked the BCLRB to wait and allow the collective agreement to run its course, insisting that "the vote doesn't reflect the workers' feelings because 'they haven't had time to mend the wounds' left by the strike."[123] The union further argued that the inclusion in the collective agreement of a modified union shop – a clause which required new employees to join the union and current union members to remain so, but allowed non-union employees working at Bimini before the strike to choose whether to join the union – meant that anti-union workers who scabbed during the strike continued to work alongside workers who had been on strike. SORWUC argued that "this contributed to a feeling of powerlessness on the part of the women who fought and won the strike."[124] A modified union shop also allowed management to hire more anti-union employees. Given that several pro-union employees had either quit or turned against the union, the absence of a union shop meant that by the time of the submission of the decertification application, the anti-union workers comprised more than the majority required for decertification.

Despite SORWUC's objections, the BCLRB scheduled a decertification vote for July, at which time Bimini workers voted twelve to six in favour of decertification. Upon receiving the results of the vote, SORWUC officials again expressed their frustration over the BCLRB's decision to allow the vote so soon after the bitter ten-week strike, and asked that the board uphold the bargaining unit in spite of the vote. SORWUC spokesperson Ailsa Rands explained, "it is incredible that the board would consider an application for decertification so soon after a long and bitter strike…. There has been no period of peace at Bimini…. The union and the union contract have never been accepted by this employer. The board's approach has encouraged the employer and anti-union employees

122. Under the 1973 Labour Code of British Columbia, employees could submit an application for decertification as early as ten months after the date of certification. BC Bill 11 — *Labour Code of British Columbia Act* as cited in *Canadian Labour Law Reports,* no. 522 (15 October 1973): 20.

123. "Bimini Pub Workers Vote to Drop Union," *The Province*, 18 July 1978.

124. "All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask about Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980. For more on the "modified union shop," see Jim Warren and Kathleen Carlisle, *On the Side of the People: A History of Labour in Saskatchewan* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2005), 301.

to keep up a constant campaign against the union rather than accepting the contract as an established fact."[125] As a final act of protest, SORWUC members and supporters demonstrated in front of the BCLRB offices on 21 September, but to no avail.[126] The BCLRB upheld the vote, and the pub was decertified. In allowing the decertification vote so soon after the strike's conclusion, the BCLRB thereby negated the victory of SORWUC members in their struggle for not only better wages and working conditions, but also for the basic right of pub workers to unionize. One union spokesperson summed up the situation:

> The union was growing at Bimini…. We expected that the division among the employees could be overcome during the life of the one-year agreement, and that the next test of the union's strength would come with negotiations for a second contract…. The Board did not allow us that period to rebuild and recover from the strike…. This decision will force unions to continue strikes until strikebreakers and scabs are fired…. It makes it more difficult to organize an already difficult industry, and can only lead to longer and more bitter strikes and less stability in collective bargaining relationships.[127]

In short, in the face of resistance by obstinate employers, and without the security of a closed shop or labour legislation that prevented the submission of a decertification application so soon after a strike, SORWUC's commitment to organizing the unorganized would likely result in short-lived victories at best.

While the loss of the Bimini certification was a bitter blow, SORWUC members learned much from the organizing drive, the strike, and the subsequent decertification. Thus, the strike was still significant on a number of levels. First, it encouraged Bimini workers to stand up for their rights and the rights of others. As SORWUC member and Bimini striker Margot Holmes explained, "many of us will volunteer to help SORWUC organize other pubs and restaurants. SORWUC encouraged us to take an active role in our lives, and taught us how. That made us more confident about standing up for our rights. And for other's rights."[128] Second, the strike inspired other restaurant workers to do the same. Shortly after the start of the strike, workers at another Vancouver pub located just down the road from Bimini, Jerry's Cove, joined SORWUC.[129] SORWUC held the certification at Jerry's Cove for several years, during which time the workers successfully negotiated multiple contracts. Finally, the strike taught union members valuable lessons about organizing in the service industry. In particular, they learned the significance of grassroots activism and

125. "Bimini Pub Decertification 'Outrage' to Service Union," *The Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1978.

126. "Decertified," *Kinesis*, October 1978.

127. "Bimini Pub Decertification 'Outrage' to Service Union," *The Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1978.

128. "Small BC Union is Busy Organizing Women Bank Workers," *The Globe & Mail*, 20 December 1977.

129. "Pub Workers Tote Placards Instead of Beer at Bimini," *The Vancouver Sun*, 21 October 1977.

community support in maintaining a strong picket line, the importance of a closed shop in securing the victories won by a successful strike, and the substantial power of the state in shaping workers' ability to unionize.[130] These lessons would influence SORWUC's strategy in its future attempts to organize service workers.

SORWUC members did not have to wait long for their next battle to begin. At the same time that union officials were fighting the decertification vote at Bimini, members were busy garnering support for another strike in the Vancouver service industry, this time at Muckamuck restaurant.[131] Opened in 1971 and named for a Chinook word meaning "to eat," Muckamuck was a First Nations-themed restaurant in Vancouver's trendy West End neighbourhood. "Patronized by well-heeled business executives and the Indian community alike," a local newspaper described the Muckamuck as a restaurant where "about 20 Indians prepare and serve such traditional Northwest Coast delicacies as seaweed, herring roe and soapberries as well as full-course seafood meals eaten from carved Haida feast bowls. Pebbles cover the floor and Indian art hangs from the candle-lit walls. The taped music alternates between Indian chants and country and western."[132] By 1978, the Muckamuck had become "known for the excellence of it's [*sic]* food, service and the old fashioned Native hospitality of it's [sic] all-Indian staff."[133]

Although differing in appearance and fare, Muckamuck shared many similarities with Bimini. Privately owned by Doug Chrismas, Teresa Bjornson, and Jane Erickson, the restaurant employed approximately twenty full-time and part-time workers as cooks, bussers, waiters, and waitresses.[134] Muckamuck workers thus had many of the same grievances as Bimini workers, including

130. "All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask About Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980.

131. I offer a brief analysis here of the Muckamuck strike in relation to SORWUC's efforts to organize service workers. For a more detailed analysis by a former SORWUC member that focuses on the issue of race, see Nicol, "'Unions Aren't Native.'"

132. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978. The first quote comes from "Restaurant Scene of Unrest," *The Indian Voice*, April 1978. As was typical at the time, many of the articles and people involved in the Muckamuck strike use the word "Indian" to describe the Indigenous peoples of Canada. When quoting someone or something directly, I have used the terminology employed by the source; however, in my own writing, I use the words "Indigenous" or "First Nations."

133. "Restaurant Scene of Unrest," *The Indian Voice*, April 1978.

134. Although Muckamuck originally had three principal shareholders, a newspaper report stated that Teresa Bjornson "sold her portion of shares in the restaurant early in the strike … because she was upset by the accusations of racism." Nicol, "'Unions Aren't Native,'" 250. While I was unable to find much information on Bjornson or Erickson, a quick Internet search of Doug Chrismas revealed that he frequently runs into trouble in the communities where he does business. For more information about Chrismas, see "The Ace is Wild: The Doug Chrismas Story," *LA Weekly*, 16 October 2003; "The Chrismas Connection: An Artist's Impression," *Kinesis*, August 1979. Note: Different sources use different spellings of Chrismas' surname. For consistency, I use the most common spelling: Chrismas.

low wages, harassment, no say in scheduling, short notice of scheduling changes, and a lack of job security. Wait staff earned the provincial minimum wage of $3.00 per hour, plus tips, with 30 per cent of their tips going to the cooks and host; cooks and bartenders earned between $3.50 and $4.50 per hour.[135] Compounding the low wages, Muckamuck management also took illegal deductions from employees' paycheques to cover the cost of uniforms, errors, and accidents – an action strictly forbidden by law.[136] Along with low wages and illegal deductions, there were also disputes over harassment and scheduling. Muckamuck workers claimed they faced "constant criticism and belittlement from management," and that management would often cancel shifts at the last minute or call employees up on their days off demanding they come in to work.[137]

Wanting to change their working conditions, several Muckamuck workers contacted SORWUC about unionizing the restaurant. As with the Bimini workers, the employees chose SORWUC for its unique structure and approach to unionization. They explained, "we chose to join SORWUC because it is an independent union located in Canada and its constitution guarantees us control over our own contract demands and our own bargaining unit."[138] On 23 February 1978, SORWUC submitted an application for certification at Muckamuck to the BCLRB with 18 out of a possible 21 employee signatures. The union received certification on 21 March, and shortly thereafter began negotiating with management.[139]

Relations between SORWUC and Muckamuck management were tense from the start. In the three months between certification and the onset of the strike, management fired several employees and allegedly harassed several others.[140] Workers also accused management of attempting to bribe employees by offering them pay raises and management positions if they promised to

135. "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

136. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978. Prior to the creation of the first comprehensive *Employment Standards Act* in 1980, a variety of legislative acts administered by three different boards governed labour relations in British Columbia. Administered by the Board of Industrial Relations, the *General Minimum Wage Order* covered issues pertaining to wages. Section 10 of the order stated, "No charge or deduction from wages of any employee shall be made by the employer for accidental damage to or breakage of any article belonging to or in the custody of the employer, or as a penalty for unsatisfactory work." James E. Dorsey, *Employee/Employer Rights in British Columbia* (Vancouver: International Self-Counsel Press, 1979), 30.

137. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978.

138. "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

139. "Muckamuck: What Is Happening Now?" *Kinesis*, May 1979.

140. "Unrest at Native Restaurant Continues," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978; "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

disassociate themselves from the union and its activities.[141] Believing management's behaviour to be a direct result of the employees' union activity, SORWUC filed five charges of unfair labour practice with the BCLRB.[142] While awaiting the BCLRB decisions, Muckamuck workers continued to press management to negotiate. The employees' demands included: "all people fired or forced to quit since the Union started to be rehired; wage increases for all staff; a fair discipline procedure and job security; a say in scheduling and no short notice of changes in hours; no deductions for uniforms; and a Union Shop (all staff to be union members so management can't try and divide us)."[143] Unfortunately, management opposed most of these, and their obstinate unwillingness to negotiate was further evidenced by their refusals to meet and late arrival and early departure from the few meetings with the union that they did agree to attend.[144]

Frustrated by the slow response of the BCLRB and management's unwillingness to meet, at the end of May the union decided to set up an information picket outside the restaurant. Hoping to pressure the Muckamuck owners to bargain in good faith, union members distributed leaflets to customers and passersby that explained some of the workers' grievances and outlined the situation to date.[145] Management responded by asking the BCLRB "for an order prohibiting union supporters from handing out leaflets to restaurant patrons" and by distributing its own leaflet. In response, SORWUC quickly filed three more complaints of unfair labour practice and refusal to bargain in good faith with the board.[146] Although SORWUC had waited two months to have their original charges of unfair labour practice heard by the BCLRB, within a week and a half of management filing the complaint over the information picket, the board called an "informal" hearing to address the matter. On 29 May, the BCLRB decided that the information picket was illegal, and ordered the union to cease and desist.[147] With negotiations at a standstill and the list of complaints to the BCLRB piling up on both sides, SORWUC members decided that the best way to deal with their grievances was to force management back to the bargaining table.[148] Given management's refusal to bargain to date, a strike

141. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978; "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

142. "Muckamuck Certified," *Kinesis*, April 1978.

143. "Unrest at Native Restaurant Continues," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

144. "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

145. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978.

146. "Indian Cooks, Waiters Battle Restaurant's White Managers," *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 May 1978.

147. "Unrest at Native Restaurant Continues," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978.

148. "Muckamuck Workers Serve Strike Notice Against Owners," *The Vancouver Sun*, 29 May 1978.

SORWUC members picket the Muckamuck.
From Don Summerhayes. Reproduced with permission.

seemed the only solution. On 28 May, a majority of the workers voted to strike and on 1 June, the Muckamuck job action officially began.

The Muckamuck strike continued for over two years. Throughout the strike, SORWUC maintained an active picket line. As with the Bimini strike, given the small size of the bargaining unit (21 people) the maintenance of a strong picket line for over two years is impressive, and was largely dependent on support from other SORWUC members and a variety of labour and community groups. Many groups pledged their support early in the strike; one spokesperson noted, "the Vancouver Indian Centre, the Native Voice, the United Native Nations, the Native Courtworkers, the Native Brotherhood and Union of BC Indian Chiefs have all assured us of their support. The trade union movement and women's groups have also assured us of their support."[149] In addition to

149. "Muckamuck Workers on Strike," *Kinesis*, June 1978.

offering verbal and moral support, many of these groups also joined SORWUC members on the picket line. On the first day of the strike, "the pickets attracted the support of several native Indian groups. Five drummers from the Indian Centre Society used a large drum to pound out a beat 'representing the heartbeat of the people' and the pickets, some dressed in native costume, shuffled in step around them, carrying picket signs demanding talks."[150] A striking Muckamuck worker summed up the degree of support at the end of the strike's first week: "We've already gotten lots of support from other Native groups, from SORWUC, and the BC Federation of Labour."[151] Support from SORWUC members and community groups continued throughout the strike. On 12 August, two-and-a-half months into the strike, more than 150 people took part in a march in support of the striking Muckamuck workers.[152] The participants marched from the restaurant to co-owner Doug Chrismas' nearby art gallery, "distributing leaflets to passers-by, other restaurant employees, and singing union songs, chanting: 'What do we want? – A contract! When do we want it? – Now!'"[153] At the gallery, people rallied in support of the striking Muckamuck workers; then president of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs George Manuel spoke to the crowd, while SORWUC members sold raffle tickets to raise money for the strike fund.

In addition to support on the picket line and at the march, striking Muckamuck workers also received a great deal of financial support from several sources, some far from the traditional labour movement. Muckamuck employees raised almost $400 at a United Native Nations Convention and organized a benefit at a local hall.[154] Striking Muckamuck employees also benefitted from the generous financial donations of other SORWUC members, various community and labour groups, and the public.[155] By July 1980, as the Muckamuck strike passed the two-year mark, the union had raised $36,000 for strike pay.

150. "Drum Sounds on Warpath Picket," *The Province*, 2 June 1978.

151. "BC Indian Workers Fighting for Unionization," *The Forge*, 9 June 1978.

152. "Strikers Stage March," *The Vancouver Sun*, 15 August 1978; "The Muckamuck Walk," *Kinesis*, September 1978.

153. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (Summer 1978)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

154. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (Summer 1978)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

155. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (Summer 1978)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC. Support for the striking Muckamuck workers continued throughout the strike. Indeed, two years into the strike, *Kinesis* reported, "Native groups, including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, United Native Nations, and the Vancouver Indian Centre have given us their continued support over the past two years. Members of the West Coast AIM [American Indian Movement] have picketed with us and continue to support us. SORWUC has received financial support and constant encouragement from other unions. Members from other unions walk the picket line with us. Teamsters refuse to pick up Muckamuck garbage. Passersby often give us words of encouragement and donations to our strike fund." "Muckamuck: A Strike for Indian Self-Determination," *Kinesis*, July 1980.

This money was vital to replenishing a strike fund depleted by the Bimini strike. With it, SORWUC was able to provide strike pay for the entire strike.[156]

The outpouring of support from the community and other SORWUC members also helped to maintain morale and offset management's sustained efforts to break the strike and convince workers to get rid of the union. One of the most notable incidents occurred in the initial days of the strike, when Muckamuck co-owner Doug Chrismas brought controversial American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means to Vancouver to persuade the workers to end the strike and quit the union.[157] On 2 June, Means met with the workers and, rather than address the labour dispute directly, encouraged the workers to form a co-operative and run the restaurant themselves. According to striking Muckamuck workers, Means' discussion of the dispute was limited to warning management to "treat these people [Muckamuck employees] properly."[158] Although Means did not take sides originally, he later sided with scabbing Muckamuck workers in their attempts to apply for decertification. A telegram from Means displayed in the window of the restaurant read in part:

> To the Indian Brothers and Sisters on the staff greetings of solidarity. The Dakota American Indian Movement, AIM and the International Treaty Council are proud and honoured to join you in your struggle to determine your own destiny against the forces who attempt to manipulate and exploitate [*sic*] Indian peoples lives. Your fight against unionization is a beacon of inspiration for the Indian peoples struggle for liberation against all outside forces.[159]

SORWUC members criticized Means for not researching both sides of the dispute before sending the telegram; Means did not contact the striking workers or the union, nor did he consult with the local AIM chapters, a contravention of AIM policies. Indeed, had he done so, he would have learned that members of the West Coast AIM supported the striking Muckamuck employees, having walked the picket line and donated prizes to the strike fund raffles.[160]

156. In the initial months of the strike, all striking Muckamuck employees who picketed received $50 per week, and those with children received $75 per week. "More About the Muckamuck," *The Indian Voice*, June 1978. In December 1978, the union increased the amount of strike pay due to the length of the strike; however, I was unable to determine the amount to which it was increased. "Muckamuck: What Is Happening Now?" *Kinesis*, May 1979.

157. "Native Workers Strike Muckamuck Restaurant," *Pacific Tribune*, 9 June 1978. Another article stated that the owners actually paid Means' expenses to come to Vancouver "to have his portrait painted." "Rebuttal to 'Muckamuck Story Update,'" *The Indian Voice*, June 1980.

158. "All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask About Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980.

159. "Russell Means Supports Muckamuck Staff in Dispute," *The Indian Voice*, May 1980.

160. "Rebuttal to 'Muckamuck Story Update,'" *The Indian Voice*, June 1980; "All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask about Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980. Though the sources I looked at did not mention exactly why AIM and Means became involved in the Muckamuck dispute, their involvement is likely explained by their connections to the Red Power movement of the time. One of a number of new social movements formed in the postwar period, the Red

In addition to attempting to take advantage of striking workers' cultural and political allegiances, management also harassed strikers. Fired Muckamuck employee Sam Bob accused Muckamuck manager Carol Nowoselsky of getting him fired from his new job at the nearby Kontiki restaurant by telling his new employer about his involvement in SORWUC: "He [Bob's new boss] said I was a good worker and would have worked out fine but because of the union bit I was fired."[161] In response, SORWUC members set up a picket outside the Kontiki to protest Bob's firing.[162]

Though SORWUC's differences from much of the Canadian labour movement helped the union to organize the Muckamuck workers and maintain a solid picket line, as with the Bimini strike, it hindered the union in other ways. In addition, having learned valuable lessons at Bimini about securing the victories won by a strike – in particular, the importance of a closed shop and the power of labour legislation and labour relations boards – SORWUC's commitment to ensuring the same fate did not befall the Muckamuck workers shaped the union's strategy and tactics. First, having lost the certification at Bimini due to the inclusion of a modified union shop in the collective agreement, SORWUC members were adamant that a closed shop be included in the Muckamuck contract. As one union member wrote in a 1979 SORWUC newsletter, "in the restaurant industry, the Closed Shop is the only alternative if we want to hold on to our rights and benefits that we win through negotiations and/or strike action."[163] Given management's firm opposition to this clause, one wonders whether the strike would have continued as long as it did had SORWUC not been set on winning a closed shop. Indeed, a closed shop and the rehiring of all fired employees were the union's only two non-negotiable demands.[164] Unfortunately, when management and striking employees met with a private mediator on 26 July – the first meeting between the two groups since the start of the strike in June – management announced that they would not compromise on these two issues.[165] Still, SORWUC members believed that a strong picket line would eventually force management to concede.

Although being an independent union helped SORWUC in many ways, the lack of a substantial treasury certainly hindered it. Specifically, limited funds meant that the union could not provide striking Muckamuck workers with

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Power movement emerged in the 1960s when Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States began organizing in greater numbers and with greater force to demand more rights and resources. For more on the Red Power movement in Canada, see Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 367–411.

161. "Picket Up to Stay," *The Province*, 13 July 1978.

162. "Picket Up to Stay," *The Province*, 13 July 1978.

163. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (September 1979)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

164. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (Summer 1978)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

165. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (Summer 1978)," SORWUC fonds, Box 9, File 1, UBCLRBSC.

much strike pay. Although the union did manage to provide strike pay for the entire strike, workers could not make ends meet with the amount – between $50 and $100 a week – and so financial need forced many striking Muckamuck employees to seek temporary employment elsewhere. As the strike wore on, the number of Muckamuck workers actively walking the picket line decreased. In October 1978, as the strike passed the four-month mark, only eight of the original twenty striking employees still picketed regularly.[166] In July 1980, just four striking employees picketed regularly.[167] Still, union members pointed out that the "strike has gone on for over two years, picketing seven days a week (that's 35 hours/week to cover). It is unrealistic to expect to see a striker on each shift."[168] Further, SORWUC spokesperson Jean Rands maintained that despite their absence from the picket line, those Muckamuck employees who had found temporary work were "anxious to get back to the Muckamuck when a contract is signed."[169]

While the limited number of striking Muckamuck employees on the picket line did not detract from the strength of the line itself, it left SORWUC open to charges that they no longer represented the majority of Muckamuck employees, and ultimately set the stage for several applications for decertification by scabbing employees. In January 1979, strikebreaking employees submitted an application for decertification to the BCLRB, claiming that the union no longer represented a majority of the original employees.[170] In June, the board rejected the application, with BCLRB vice-chairman Ron Bone stating that "the board's investigations did not show that the majority of the original bargaining unit no longer supported the strike."[171] The strikebreakers appealed, but a second BCLRB panel upheld the decision two months later.[172] In total, strikebreaking employees at the Muckamuck submitted three applications for decertification during the strike. They submitted the final application in December 1979, and then asked for an adjournment before withdrawing the application in May 1980. In August 1980, SORWUC members reported that the BCLRB "has spent 14 of the 26 months considering scab applications for decertification."[173] In

166. "Cowboys Lasso Muckamuck," *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 October 1978.

167. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (July 1980)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 3, UBCLRBSC.

168. "S.O.R.W.U.C. News (July 1980)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 3, UBCLRBSC.

169. "Cowboys Lasso Muckamuck," *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 October 1978.

170. "Decertification Sought," *The Vancouver Express*, 2 February 1979. Of the original eighteen Muckamuck employees who joined SORWUC, six eventually quit the union and crossed the picket line to work. "A New Twist for Muckamuck," *The West Ender*, 25 October 1979; "Rebuttal to 'Muckamuck Story Update,'" *The Indian Voice*, June 1980.

171. "A New Twist for Muckamuck," *The West Ender*, 25 October 1979.

172. "A New Twist for Muckamuck," *The West Ender*, 25 October 1979.

173. "SORWUC: All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask about Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980.

addition to submitting applications for decertification, strikebreaking employees also "issued press statements, appeared on television, and even set-up a counter picket-line for a week-end."[174] At the same time that strikebreaking employees were appealing the original BCLRB decision, management also submitted a complaint to the board, arguing that "the [certification] issue should be determined by the continuing participation in the strike by the original workers."[175] The board rejected management's submission, stating that "in every lengthy strike there will be employees who do not picket but remain interested and intend to return to their jobs when the dispute is settled."[176]

In rejecting the submissions of management and the strikebreakers, the BCLRB assisted SORWUC's efforts to organize restaurant workers. Yet while the BCLRB upheld SORWUC's certification at Muckamuck in light of management and strikebreaking employees' sustained efforts to attain decertification, it significantly impeded the union in other ways. Indeed, along with the police and the provincial courts, the BCLRB played a key role in determining the efficacy of the Muckamuck strike, especially as tensions on the picket line started to rise. In December, as the strike reached the six-month mark, local newspaper *The Georgia Straight* reported on the increasing number of conflicts occurring on the Muckamuck picket line:

> The strikers, members of the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), Local 1, have reported a number of petty and major incidents on the line. They include threats from a drunken crow-bar waving customer, a bucket of hot water being thrown at a striking waitress, and most recently, a picketer allegedly being thrown to the ground and nearly strangled by a strike-breaking employee. In this last incident, the union member, Margaret Siggurdsen, is being charged with assault for allegedly throwing a cup of cocoa at Louis McCook, a newly-hired restaurant employee who had taken a pair of gloves belonging to a picketer. Police claim they are keeping a constant eye on the restaurant as a result of frequent complaints from both sides.[177]

The courts and the police used such incidents to hinder the effectiveness of the picket line. The purpose of a picket line is to stop production to put economic pressure on management to negotiate a collective agreement, so the ability of a union to maintain a strong line is crucial. Although the Muckamuck strike was legal, on 1 June 1979 – the one-year anniversary of the start of the strike – Justice Patricia Proudfoot granted an injunction at management's request, temporarily banning all picketing at the Muckamuck, citing violence on the picket line as the basis of this decision.[178] SORWUC members quickly filed an appeal, and on 6 June the British Columbia Court of Appeal overturned the ban on picketing, but limited the number of pickets to six. Unsatisfied with

174. "It's Cowboys vs. Indians at Muckamuck Strike," *The Georgia Straight*, 8 December 1978.

175. "A New Twist for Muckamuck," *The West Ender*, 25 October 1979.

176. "A New Twist for Muckamuck," *The West Ender*, 25 October 1979.

177. "It's Cowboys vs. Indians at Muckamuck Strike," *The Georgia Straight*, 8 December 1978.

178. "Wading Through the Muckamuck Strike," *Kinesis*, July 1979.

the imposed limit on the number of pickets, on 18 June SORWUC filed another appeal, but Justice Proudfoot upheld the limit of six pickets "saying that unlimited pickets would damage tourist season business."[179]

In addition to the courts, the police also interfered with SORWUC's efforts to maintain a strong picket line. As violence on the picket line became common, the police arrested and charged individuals from both sides on several occasions. According to SORWUC, the police and the courts treated union members and supporters differently:

> In spite of a number of assault charges against scabs, only one was ever heard in court. There have been assault charges against four picketers; two more were found guilty and they were given no sentence.
>
> The police are either unresponsive to picketers' complaints, or downright abusive. This leads to a bizarre situation where there is no police protection for assaults against picketers, while if the picketer ever accidentally brushes against a scab, we are charged with assault.[180]

For example, on 2 November 1979, Judge Gordon Johnson found strikebreaker Peter Ronny Martin not guilty of assaulting an elderly strike supporter. Judge Johnson "ruled that Peter Ronny Martin, 23, took reasonable action when Aaron Schneider deliberately blocked his entry to the coastal Indian restaurant at 1724 Davie."[181] In contrast, when two SORWUC members attempted to lay assault charges against Muckamuck manager Sussy Selbst in February 1980, the justice of the peace told them "to return the following day. He said he didn't have the police reports yet."[182] When the picketers returned the next day, they were charged with assault and placed under arrest; they were released later that day on the condition that they not return to the picket line. Despite the protestations of their lawyer – "that this was an unreasonable decision and that the accused had had no opportunity for a hearing" – the judge upheld the picketing ban on the two members.[183] The blatant preferential treatment the courts gave to management and their supporters versus that they used for union members and supporters frustrated SORWUC members. "The courts have consistently colluded with management in this strike. This is a legal strike, yet they have taken away two people's right to picket. The courts and the police have never been interested in protecting picketers from assault and harassment; they have however, responded very quickly when there are any charges, no matter how petty and contrived, against union members."[184]

179. "Wading Through the Muckamuck Strike," *Kinesis*, July 1979.

180. "SORWUC: All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask about Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980.

181. "Muckamuck Worker Not Guilty," *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 November 1979.

182. "Violence on the Muckamuck Line, Picketers Arrested," *Kinesis*, March 1980.

183. "Violence on the Muckamuck Line, Picketers Arrested," *Kinesis*, March 1980.

184. "Violence on the Muckamuck Line, Picketers Arrested," *Kinesis*, March 1980.

With management unwilling to return to the bargaining table and the number of pickets limited, thereby depriving SORWUC of its best weapon – community support – in the fall of 1979, SORWUC reluctantly turned to the BCLRB for assistance. After their frustrating experience with the board prior to the onset of the Muckamuck strike, SORWUC members were hesitant to file another complaint with the board: "This [filing the complaint with the BCLRB] was done after much internal discussion in the Union. People who have experienced the Labour Relations Board are aware that like any other government bureaucracy, the Labour Relations Board has a dual view of the laws it is supposed to enforce – what is all right for management is not all right for workers. We ultimately decided to lay the complaint anyway." In October, the union asked the board to force management to return to the bargaining table, to stop strikebreaking staff from harassing picketers, and to cease their slander of the union. By January of the following year, the BCLRB had done nothing in regards to SORWUC's submission; strikebreaking employees had submitted a third application for decertification the previous month, and the board said that "that took precedence over any complaint." The board investigated the decertification application and set a hearing date for March, at which time the strikebreakers asked for and received an adjournment to May. In May, they withdrew their complaint.[185]

SORWUC members never did successfully negotiate a contract at the Muckamuck. Instead, the union actively picketed until the restaurant closed in November 1980. The BCLRB did not make a decision in regards to SORWUC's October 1979 submission until April 1981 – seventeen months after the original date of submission. At that time, the board ruled that Muckamuck management "violated the BC Labor Code by failing to negotiate in good faith with SORWUC for a first contract."[186] However, the board delayed ruling on compensation until after it could hear an application for certification of the Muckamuck employees by the Northwestern Hospitality Employees Association. In February 1983, three-and-a-half years after the original submission, the BCLRB issued its final ruling on the Muckamuck case, ordering restaurant owners Doug Chrismas and Jane Erickson to pay the union $10,000. Unfortunately, the 1983 decision was too little, too late, as Chrismas and Erickson had already closed the restaurant and left the country.[187]

185. "SORWUC: All the Questions You've Wanted to Ask about Muckamuck," *Kinesis*, August 1980.

186. "Muckamuck 'Failed to Bargain in Good Faith,'" *The Vancouver Sun*, 25 April 1981.

187. In the years immediately after Muckamuck closed, the property changed hands several times: first in 1984, when it became a small family-run grocery store, and again in 1985, when several Indigenous people, including some former Muckamuck strikers, opened a new restaurant, The Quillicum. I was unable to find any additional information on The Quillicum, other than a brief mention about it in the May 1985 Local 1 newsletter that SORWUC members were "in touch with the [former Muckamuck] strikers." In 1998, The Quillicum became Liliget Feast House & Catering, an Indigenous-owned and operated restaurant and catering company

In the final analysis, as with the Bimini strike, SORWUC's differences from the Canadian labour movement both helped and hindered the union in the Muckamuck strike. Furthermore, SORWUC's radical approach to unionization did not help in its dealings with the labour relations boards or the courts. Commitment and community support were not enough to organize restaurant workers; as with other labour disputes, the relative power of the state compared to the workers' movement ultimately determined the outcome of the situation at Muckamuck.

Yet, though the battles at Bimini and Muckamuck ended in defeat, both strikes are significant to the history of class mobilization and labour organizing. First, the strikes themselves are important historical events: the Bimini strike marked the first time workers struck a neighbourhood pub in British Columbia, and the Muckamuck strike remains one of the longest in the province's labour history. Second, the strikes highlight the issues faced by workers trying to organize in the service industry, and show what it will take to accomplish this task. Since SORWUC's efforts in the 1970s and 1980s, no union has fared better. Therefore SORWUC's experiences offer some important lessons for the contemporary labour movement. On the one hand, the strikes show the importance of alternative union structures and strategies, as well as community support, in winning members and maintaining strong picket lines. On the other hand, the strikes illustrate the limits of alternative strategies in winning long-term improvements for workers when the courts and labour relations boards refuse to enforce labour legislation or protect the right of workers to strike. Thus, though alternative union strategies are a crucial part of organizing workers, they are only part of the solution. SORWUC's experiences at Bimini and Muckamuck demonstrate that organizing the unorganized will also require workers and their allies to mount a substantial challenge to the state. For while legislative changes that address the specific needs of workers employed in the service industry – an industry characterized by small bargaining units, high employee turnover, and hostile anti-union employers – may provide some assistance in the short term, such small-scale reforms will do little to alter the tremendous power of the state in labour relations, a power enshrined in the bureaucratic apparatus spawned by the postwar labour settlement, a machinery of incorporation that continues to expand while union membership declines.

Conclusion

By the mid-1980s, SORWUC had become a shadow of its former self. Worn out by the lengthy strike at Muckamuck and lacking funds and volunteers, the

that remained open until 2007. I was unable to determine whether this last change in name accompanied a change in ownership. "SORWUC Local 1 Newsletter (February 1984)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 5, UBCLRBSC; "SORWUC Local 1 Newsletter (May 1985)," SORWUC fonds, Box 6, File 2, UBCLRBSC.

union disbanded in 1986. Yet although SORWUC no longer exists, the union remains an important part of Canadian labour history. First, as a union dedicated to organizing unorganized workers, SORWUC differed from much of the 1970s Canadian labour movement. Recognizing the need for working-class solidarity but critical of the gendered structure and practices of the existing labour movement and its failure to organize unorganized workers, SORWUC's founding members sought to solve this problem with the development of an independent, grassroots, socialist-feminist labour union that addressed the specific needs of women workers while working to organize all workers. Thus SORWUC is an important historical example of the ways in which class and gender intertwine.

Second, SORWUC's experiences organizing pub and restaurant workers demonstrate how the union's differences from the labour movement played out on the ground. Though the union's grassroots approach and community ties won it members and allowed it to maintain strong picket lines at Bimini and Muckamuck, its independence had a downside. Specifically, SORWUC's marginality meant that it could be raided by a rival union willing to scapegoat it as somehow outside the labour movement. Furthermore, without the established infrastructure and treasury of a larger, conventional union, SORWUC struggled to pay legal bills and strike pay. In short, SORWUC's alternative structure and approach to unionization both helped and hindered its cause and those workers it represented.

Finally, although SORWUC's radical approach to unionization was a crucial factor in its ability to organize workers, it was not enough to counter the powerful role of the state in labour relations. At Bimini, the BCLRB's controversial decision to allow a decertification vote only two months after the conclusion of a bitter ten-week strike cancelled SORWUC's certification, and with it the collective agreement for which the union had fought so hard. At Muckamuck, the BCLRB's repeated failure to deal with SORWUC's numerous charges of unfair labour practice in a timely manner, combined with the court's decision to restrict the number of pickets, limited the effectiveness of the union's strike. In both cases, the action or inaction of the state was crucial in countering the efficacy of SORWUC's radical approach to unionization and obstructing its efforts to organize service workers.

What are the implications and the larger significance of the history of SORWUC? First, SORWUC's efforts to develop an alternative form of unionization are but one example of class-based social justice movements of the 1970s and 1980s, part of a broader trend of labour activism that arose in response to the situation facing Canadian workers at the time. Second, while I have focused on the structure and activities of SORWUC, more research is needed to look at the powerful role labour legislation, labour relations boards, and the courts play in shaping workers' ability to unionize in the postwar period. As Karl Marx wrote, people "make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves,

but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past."[188] SORWUC's struggles with the courts and the federal and provincial labour relations boards demonstrate that workers who decide to unionize must contend with the frustrating system of labour relations constructed in the immediate postwar period and that continues to shape labour relations today.

Finally, SORWUC's experiences also hold important lessons for labour organizing in the 21st century. With a labour force increasingly comprised of workers from different ethnic, racial, and gender groupings and employed in industries that remain, for the most part, unorganized, the need for unions to organize in these industries and despite these potential divisions remains vitally important. As sociologist Gillian Creese writes in her study of race, class, and gender in another British Columbia labour union, "the development of alternative union strategies can be enhanced by considering how other union activists have begun to reconsider definitions of equality, solidarity, and union democracy in more inclusive ways."[189] By examining the structure and strategies of an "entirely different" kind of union, this article contributes to the process of historical reconsideration suggested by Creese. This is not to say that historical examples of alternative unions like SORWUC provide a perfect prescription for successful union organizing today. Rather, SORWUC's desire and ability to do things differently serve as an important reminder that workers can and must continue to use unions as powerful tools in their struggles to effect social and political change.

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188. Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louise Bonaparte," in David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 329.

189. Creese, *Contracting Masculinity*, 209.