

RESEARCH REPORT / NOTES DE RECHERCHE

‘Rewarding Your Enemies, Punishing Your Friends’: The Labour College Strike of 1983

John Bullen

Introduction by Don Wells

JOHN BULLEN'S HISTORY of the faculty strike he co-ordinated at the CLC's Labour College of Canada in 1983 is in part about a bewildering social stigma: the loathing many unionists have for academics. This odium is part of the reason why so much of the academic work on the labour movement has involved a one-sided solidarity. Fortunately, Bullen's work is not a history of such one-sidedness. In the end, it was the students — trade unionists from across Canada — who won the strike. They saw the strike for what it was — a strike for the right to organize — and they stood by what they knew was right. Many were threatened by the CLC and by their union leaders, but to my knowledge, no student gave in to these pressures.

This strike provides insights into another bewildering phenomenon: the sorry way unions often act as managers. One might think that those who have felt the injustice of management power would be more sensitive when exercising such power themselves. Yet if management at the CLC is an example of bad management, it is far from alone in the labour movement. A much different dynamic in collective bargaining should apply when union leaders bargain with unionists who work for them. Many union leaders, however, appear to adopt the same managerial stance that has for long, ironically perhaps in their own cases, created militant unionists. Too often, union leaders seem trapped in the same mentality that they themselves fought against when they first took part in labour struggles. The Labour

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College strike was but one chapter in an ongoing saga of unnecessarily conflictual labour-management relations at the College. Contract negotiations this past year came within a hair of a strike at the College.

Finally, this strike is about the deep, deep splits between blue- and white-collar workers and between full- and part-time workers. When former CLC President Dennis McDermott ridiculed the claims of part-timers and teachers to be unionists, he voiced the prejudices of many blue-collar (male) unionists. For McDermott to hold such a prejudice was itself no eccentricity; that he voiced it publicly was the only novelty. By its logic, many of the students at the Labour College would not be eligible to attend, and the hundreds of thousands of part-time and white-collar workers who pay dues to the CLC would not qualify for membership in their own unions.

Although he was frustrated and angry with the cynical hypocrisy of some union leaders and CLC staff, John Bullen maintained a steadfast allegiance to the principles of trade unionism during the strike and throughout the rest of his life. He always saw himself as a part of the labour movement, and he spent a large part of his life trying to build the kind of bridges that a democratic, socialist, grass-roots labour movement needs.

It would be gratifying if the problems this strike exposes could be solved by a change in leadership. The problems, however, lie much deeper than a change in leadership, and deeper even than a change in leadership structures, though both are needed. The roots lie deep in the cultures of class and the history of Canadian labour. Now more than ever, when labour is looking for alliances beyond its own organizations and its own cultures, these problems must be acknowledged as the first step toward their resolution.

It is fitting that the story of the Labour College strike be told in the pages of *Labour/Le Travail* and passed on to intellectuals and activists who will want to think about and to respond to its meaning. The history of this strike marks another of John's many contributions both to the Canadian labour movement and to labour history. John's sudden death last year has robbed us all of an outstanding trade unionist, teacher, and historian.

ON MONDAY, 13 JUNE 1983, the headline of *The Globe and Mail* celebrated the preceding weekend's coronation of Brian Mulroney as new leader of the Progressive Conservative party. Most trade-union activists probably scanned the accompanying story with half-hearted interest. Elsewhere on the front page, however, another article certainly would have caught their attention. This story reported that 58 unionist students at the Labour College of Canada were boycotting classes to protest the Board of Governors' refusal to recognize a union of their teachers. One week later, on 20 June, an alert reader would have found a tiny filler in the *Globe's* "Across Canada" column that carried news of the teachers' and students' victory. One might have gained the impression from the media that this mild, seven-days'

war had ended quietly with satisfaction on all sides. Beneath the surface, however, the 1983 Labour College Strike carries implications and reverberations far beyond a local dispute internal to the labour movement. All those concerned with the right to organize, shared decision-making, internal union democracy, and the building of progressive coalitions should find something of interest in this story.

Every summer, the Ottawa-based Labour College of Canada offers an eight-week, union-oriented study program to a select group of Canadian trade unionists affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The College rents classroom, office, and resident space from the University of Ottawa. The Board of Governors, the school's final decision-making body, consists of a dozen CLC-affiliated union officials and five representatives from each of two co-sponsoring institutions, the University of Montreal and McGill University. As the figures indicate, CLC members command a majority in Board voting, and the College is properly seen as a branch of the CLC's Educational Services. The Board reserves one place for the president of the Alumni Association, but otherwise seats very few graduates of the College. The Chairman of the Board was Dennis McDermott, then president of the CLC. Two full-time administrators, a registrar and an associate registrar, attend to the College's everyday affairs and advise the Board. Although the school is undeniably CLC initiative, it relies heavily on federal government funding.

From its founding in 1963, the Labour College annually hired instructors on an individual contract basis. The Board alone determined wages and working conditions, and offered no teacher a guarantee of return employment. Toward the end of the 1982 session, the 11 instructors, most of whom had taught at the College three or more years, unanimously decided to form a union.¹ Three main impulses motivated the teachers. First, the instructors sought unionization for the same reason any group of workers chooses to organize — to establish a systematic and orderly process by which they could influence the conditions of their employment and protect their interests. Secondly, they hoped that creating a formal channel of communication with the administration would provide them with some input into decisions affecting the quality of education at the College. Third, some teachers contended that the programme as a whole would benefit if they could present themselves to the students as fellow trade unionists, rather than along the lines of the traditionally hierarchical teacher-student relationship.

At the end of the final staff meeting for 1982, the teachers informed the administrators of their decision. The administrators took the news well. One official expressed his surprise that the teachers had not organized sooner. The other administrator reassured the instructors with the words: "We're all union people here." Given this friendly response, the teachers concluded that there would be no opposition to their move. This was their first mistaken judgement.

¹The instructors were John Bullen and Michael Piva (History), Jack De Boer and Don Wells (Sociology), Charlotte Yates and Joe Zurich (Political Science), Sid Ingberman and Ron Meng (Economics), and Jackie Huston, Pat McDermott and Larry Roine (Law).

In a letter dated 27 September 1982, John Bullen, President of the teachers' union, formally advised the registrar of the instructors' decision to unionize, but stressed that the teachers had never placed "monetary interest in teaching at the college higher than [their] commitment to labour education." This communication further stated: "the formation of an association does not stem from feelings of frustration or hostility among the instructors, but comes as a natural and logical development after three years of harmonious relations with the college. Our hope is that these relations continue, and that the association serve to encourage further cooperation and good will." The letter asked the Board to grant voluntary recognition to the teachers' union, a legally binding process in Ontario. Voluntary recognition, as opposed to certification, the letter continued, would "avoid the ill-will and delay that seems to follow inevitably upon certification proceedings." The instructors fully expected to receive a positive reply.

The first sign of trouble appeared when the administration failed to acknowledge the teachers' request. Instead, on 29 October, the associate registrar sent a letter to each instructor offering employment for 1983 at exactly the same wages and conditions as the previous two sessions. The teachers were pleased with the offer of return employment, but the letter's failure to make any mention of their request for recognition puzzled them. Those instructors who intended to return to the College replied by indicating their availability to teach while not committing themselves to the old wages and conditions until the Board of Governors addressed the issue of their unionization.

Following a second letter to the registrar from their union president, the instructors finally received word in early November that the Board would rule on the question at its next meeting. On 14 December 1982, the Board did exactly that. The following day, the president of the teachers' union received a notice by registered mail announcing the Board's decision to refuse voluntary recognition. The letter provided no reasons for the Board's action. Particularly disturbing about the ruling was the subsequent realization, that not one CLC representative had voted in favour of the teachers' union.

Officially, the Board later would justify its decision on the grounds that the teachers did not constitute a permanent work force. Because the instructors were drawn from other sectors as part-time workers under short-term contract, the Board reasoned, they were not entitled to the benefits of unionization.

Unofficially, there were at least three additional explanations for the Board's behaviour. In the first place, the Board probably perceived the teachers' union as a potential threat to its administrative and financial control. Hence, it responded like any management group that believes it alone should hold final decision-making power. Second, many high-ranking unionists oppose the idea of unions within unions. They contend that inter-union squabbles can lead to embarrassing situations where one union applies a type of "moral blackmail" against another. Third, it was well known that Dennis McDermott and other veteran unionists have never viewed members of the academic community, with a few notable exceptions, as worthy

allies. On occasion, this suspicion has extended to other white-collar workers. This attitude could be termed the "Blue-Collar Club" syndrome. Real workers, McDermott and others seemed to be saying, learned their stuff in the heat and friction of the factory or mine, not in the comfort and safety of the office or classroom.

No principled trade unionist can swallow any of these three explanations. Even the Board's official position lacked credibility. Workers should not be excepted to relinquish their right to representation in any given employment situation because of the part-time nature of their work or their employment in other sectors. With a growing number of workers, including teachers, reduced to part-time employment due to lay-offs and cutbacks, and others seeking part-time jobs to cope with inflation, the CLC should be particularly sensitive to the needs of this group. One would also hope that the CLC as management would honour its own public commitments to shared decision-making and worker representation.

As for the problem of unions within unions, if the CLC and other large unions want their efforts to influence the industrial relations system to register any credibility with government, business, and the public, they must first demonstrate their willingness to apply the same principles to their own shops. The CLC would be better off to absorb the minor embarrassment of inter-union quarrels rather than face the humiliation of denying its own workers the very rights which it claims are fundamental to a free society. Furthermore, there is no assurance that without unions these workers would be guaranteed fair wages and decent working conditions. Interestingly, some left-wing activists also disapprove of unions within unions. This could be the one plane on which right-wing and left-wing unionists converge, albeit for totally different reasons. Some radical activists maintain that union workers should forego their right to organize because their first commitment is to their real bosses, the working class. If the CLC ran its own shop according to the principles and practices of authentic socialist democracy, this argument would hold some water. Unfortunately, this utopia has yet to materialize; until it does, workers employed by unions have no alternative but to go the traditional route of representation and protection — unionization and collective bargaining.

Finally, the old-line unionists' distrust of academics does nothing more than damage the potential for solidarity and progressive coalitions. The perception of academics as arm-chair tacticians stuck in their ivory towers is an out-dated idea that unfairly dismisses the wide network of progressive forces that permeate Canadian universities and colleges. Some members of the Board committed the classic error of judging the teachers by their assumed occupation, rather than by their commitment and contributions to principled causes. After all, as many right-wing reactionaries work on assembly lines as adorn faculty clubs. It is also highly ironic that the CLC should pat itself on the back for its efforts to make higher education accessible to a greater number of working-class children, and then turn around and disown those who took advantage of it. Moreover, academics and other white-collar professionals compose the fastest-growing sector of the labour force. If trade unionism in Canada is to survive as a mass movement, this group must be

brought into, not excluded from, the House of Labour. In light of all the available evidence, only one verdict is possible: by denying the teachers voluntary recognition, the CLC members of the Board violated the most fundamental principles of trade unionism and dishonoured themselves and the entire labour movement in the process.

Although the Board refused to recognize the teachers' union, it did commission two of its CLC members, along with the full-time administrators, to meet with the instructors' representatives to discuss the conditions of employment for the upcoming session. Three such meetings took place in January and February 1983. It was clear from the outset that the Board's delegates intended to run the meetings in typical employer-employee fashion, with no regard for innovation or cooperative decision-making. This was the adversarial system at its best — or worst. For their part, the teachers met between meetings, or conferred by telephone, and devised their strategy collectively and democratically. The CLC representatives agreed to re-submit the instructors' request for recognition to the Board, but this later appeared to be a conciliatory measure designed only to allow the talks to proceed — the Board subsequently confirmed its original decision and neglected to notify the teachers. This informal bargaining process, however, did lead to an agreement that represented a significant improvement over previous years' wages and benefits. The Labour College offered these terms to each teacher on an individual contract basis. Eight of the instructors accepted, three declined for reasons unrelated to the College, and three replacements were hired. Although the media had caught wind of the story by this time, neither the Labour College nor the teachers offered any statement, on or off the record, to the press.

With the contracts signed, preparations began for the 1983 session. In March, during an annual pre-session workshop, the teachers unanimously decided to apply to the Ontario Labour Relations Board for formal certification. The instructors also detailed one member to investigate the possibility of future affiliation to an existing union. The Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Canadian Union of Labour Specialists, a small independent union of CLC regional and educational representatives, came up in this discussion.

On 1 May the 1983 session of the Labour College opened. In the first few weeks, several students expressed interest in the Board of Governors' ruling on the teachers' union. The instructors took no deliberate steps to plant information among the students, but they answered questions honestly and openly when approached. The students' initial reactions to the Board's behaviour, revealed later through a confidential survey, ranged from "confusion" to "total disbelief" to "anger." The students immediately sensed the hypocrisy of the Board's stand, but wisely expressed a cautious desire for more information before drawing any final conclusions. Some students admitted that they initially wondered if the College had concocted the entire drama to test their reactions. They soon tasted the reality of the situation.

On the morning of 8 June, the students took the situation in hand. During their break, they learned that the Board of Governors had moved beyond its original decision to refuse voluntary recognition, and was preparing a legal challenge to the teachers' certification bid. The students quickly conferred in the hallway, and decided that the time had come to confront management. By this time, emotions were heightened, and the students marched to the associate registrar's office singing traditional labour songs such as "Solidarity Forever" and "Which Side Are You On?," the latter of which immediately became the theme of the Class of '83. The students demanded to meet with the two full-time administrators, failing which they would take their protest directly to CLC headquarters. They then reconvened in the assembly hall. At 1:10 p.m., the normal dismissal time, the registrar and associate registrar appeared.

The administrators adopted the tactic of portraying themselves as true trade unionists and attacking the teachers for their insincerity and lack of commitment to union principles. One official downplayed the amount of work the instructors put into their classes, and labelled them "sixty-four hour trade unionists," referring to the actual number of hours they spent in the classroom. This last comment deeply cut some of the teachers. The administrators' heavy-handed attempt to exercise their authority, and their contemptuous treatment of the instructors, however, only toughened the students' stand. Labour College had suddenly become Labour College Incorporated. The administrators severely underestimated the bond of solidarity that had developed between the teachers and students during the first few weeks of classes. Given the close quarters and shared ideological plane of Labour College, this was a natural development. Students later recalled the "appalling and abusive" nature of the administrators' remarks, and criticized them for their "totalitarian grasp on the operation of the College at the expense of union principles." This meeting probably represents the turning point in the students' decision to take up the teachers' cause. The administrators, not the instructors, pushed the students to the breaking point.

Still, the students moved cautiously, aware of their responsibilities to the College and to their sponsoring locals, most of which had provided them with financial assistance. They returned to class the following day while their elected representatives met with Dennis McDermott at CLC headquarters. This meeting however, proved fruitless. McDermott's most notable contribution to the discussion was his description of the teachers as irrelevant academics who "study the underbellies of ants." Having exhausted the legitimate avenues of protest, the students met on the evening of 9 June to plan a boycott of classes.

The next morning, the students and a handful of teachers met in the assembly hall. A spokesperson for the instructors addressed the students to eliminate any misunderstandings or misleading information. The students then planned their strategy. The recreation committee became a strike committee, and support systems were set up in case some students lost their funding. The boycott applied immediately, but arrangements were made to carry on with regular classes in the

common rooms of the residence where the students were staying. The instructors complied with this strategy. In this way, the students and teachers took effective, visible action against the College while sacrificing not one minute of class time. Although this activity constituted a boycott, not a strike, the high degree of emotional confrontation involved in the event led to the consistent use, then and now, of the word 'strike.'

To inform unionists across the country of the situation, and to pressure the Board, the students issued a press release. The statement termed Board actions a "direct contravention of the fundamental principle of the right to organize and bargain collectively." To support their case, the students cited the CLC constitution, including a passage that stated one purpose of the CLC was to spread unionization to new groups of workers. The students threatened to stage an informational picket at CLC headquarters if the Board did not soon rectify the situation. The "hypocrisy that exists must be cured," the statement declared.

Throughout the affair, the students conducted themselves in exemplary democratic fashion. Although some minority views emerged, the students arrived at a near-unanimity about all of their actions. Only one student, for example, opposed the press release, arguing that the dispute should remain internal. No student supported the administration position. Still, decisions were thrashed out thoroughly and emotions ran high. One perceptive student later pointed out that this particular group contained many individuals who normally dominated meetings. Even for activists, this presented an unusual and challenging situation. Although the students had essentially picked up the teachers' cause, the instructors exerted no control or influence over the students' decisions. The students ran their own show, for their own reasons.

Over the weekend of 11-12 June, the pot continued to boil. Some students received orders from their sponsoring locals to return to class or pack their bags and return home. The speed with which these ultimatums had issued revealed a knee-jerk reaction on the part of some locals to close ranks behind the Board at the expense of a thorough investigation of the facts. This external pressure threatened the students' solidarity, as some of them came to recognize the possibility of personal reprisals. For their part, the instructors informed the administrators of their intention to continue teaching in the common rooms for the duration of the boycott. The registrar responded by ordering the teachers back into the classrooms, students or no students, thus revealing that the administration's priority was to take control of the situation, even at the expense of the students' education.

By this time, the press had rediscovered an interest in the affair and sought out Dennis McDermott for comment. In his usual fashion, McDermott, with no regard for truth or integrity "shot from the lip." In interviews with *The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*, the CLC president called the students' allegations "crap". According to McDermott, the students had been "manipulated and mesmerized" by "a bunch of high-priced academics playing at being Joe and Jane Worker." McDermott claimed that it was "inappropriate" for the teachers to be treated as a

bargaining unit because they held tenured positions at other institutions and looked upon their duties at the Labour College as “extra-curricular” work, or, in more colourful language, “moonlighting”. The “cowardly” and “despicable” instructors, McDermott pronounced, were “engaging in elitism of the worst kind.” He ended the *Globe* interview by stating that the teachers could “join the Office and Professional Workers’ Union at any time... But you see that isn’t good enough for them. They want their own little clubby union.”

McDermott’s grasp of the situation, and especially his description of the teachers, missed the mark by a country kilometre. His accusation that the instructors had manipulated and mesmerized the students exposed how little he knew about the environment at the Labour College. Fifty-eight hard-core, experienced trade unionists, thrown together for an intense eight weeks of labour studies, are not easily led down the garden path. Like the two full-time administrators before him, McDermott revealed a complete ignorance of the extraordinary sense of solidarity and emotional attachment that the Labour College generates every year among the teachers and students. Despite his position as Chairman of the Board, the CLC president appeared to be profoundly out of touch with the actual operation and impact of the College.

McDermott also displayed little knowledge of the teachers, of whom he spoke so insultingly. Of the eleven instructors, only one held a tenured position at a university. Most worked as part-time teachers, researchers, or consultants for a variety of progressive causes. All of them had deep roots in political or community organizations and some had union experience from former occupations. At least half of the instructors, on occasion, had contributed their services free of charge to specific union projects. All of the teachers recognized the importance of labour education, and none of them treated his or her duties at the College as lightly as McDermott charged.

Lastly, McDermott’s disclosure that the teachers had always had the option of joining an existing union came as a complete surprise. This alternative had never come up in previous discussions between the instructors and representatives of the Board. In fact, the teachers previously had decided among themselves to investigate this option, but saw no sense in following through with it if the Board refused even to recognize them as a legitimate bargaining unit. Insiders at the CLC offer two possible explanations for McDermott’s comment. Some contend that McDermott was trying to save face for the CLC by creating the impression that the teachers had not pursued all possible options. Others suggest that he had finally noticed the writing on the wall and was preparing an escape route for the CLC.

Happily, many trade unionists across Canada recognized the injustice of the Board’s decision and the foolishness of McDermott’s remarks. The Halifax-Dartmouth and District Labour Council strongly protested the Board’s actions and sent the following message to the CLC president: “This blatant obstruction to the recognition of a bargaining agent as chosen by these workers is a disgrace to the labour movement and must be rectified immediately.” An Edmonton local for-

warded expressions of solidarity with the teachers and students and condemned McDermott for his public attack on the instructors: "Academics have in the past and will continue to make an important contribution to the labour movement's understanding of our history and the country's political and economic system. Academics who side with labour in our struggle should be encouraged rather than insulted."

Anti-union editorialists, of course, had a field day with the CLC's dilemma. The June 16th edition of *The Sudbury Star*, for example, ridiculed McDermott's common cause with other bosses in Canada. McDermott's behaviour conjured up images of Samuel Gompers, the crusty founder of the American Federation of Labor who had once directed business unionists to stick to the philosophy of "rewarding your friends and punishing your enemies." The only difference was that McDermott had somehow managed to reverse old Sam's advice.

In the midst of the media blitz, some progress was being made at the College. On the weekend of 11-12 June, a handful of students from the National Union of Provincial Government Employees discussed the problem with their national president, John Fryer, who also sat on the Board of Governors. Following this, Fryer met with the teachers and students on the evening of 12 June and offered his services as a mediator. Specifically, he offered to lobby Dennis McDermott and other Board members to approve voluntary recognition if the instructors agreed to join the Canadian Union of Labour Specialists (CULS). The atmosphere at the meeting was extremely tense, and tempers repeatedly flared. But in the absence of any other offer, the students and teachers agreed to return to class Monday morning while this option was pursued. The mediator's precise role and motivations remain shrouded in some mystery. Half of the respondents to a student survey praised him for his honest and timely efforts to settle the dispute. The others believed he had acted out of opportunism to enhance his own reputation and career. Some students suspected that McDermott had been in on the scheme all along, although Fryer denied this throughout the affair. Whatever the truth behind his role, Fryer held the key to resolving the dispute.

A few days later, the teachers' representatives were summoned to CLC headquarters to meet with Dennis McDermott and a few other CLC Board members. This turned out to be the most bizarre turn in the entire affair. McDermott directly offered the instructors recognition if they agreed to join CULS. The teachers found this proposition acceptable, but questioned McDermott's authority to make the offer since neither the Board of Governors nor CULS had held a general meeting to discuss and vote on the question. McDermott flatly replied that approval would be forthcoming from both bodies once it became known that this was the way he wanted the vote to go. McDermott's complete disregard for internal democracy affronted the teachers, but the other participants seemed to accept it as the normal state of affairs at CLC headquarters. With some apprehension, the teachers expressed their approval of the offer but announced that they would need to poll their members before submitting a final answer. This elicited mild amuse-

ment from the CLC officials. One of them derided the instructors for their attempt at democracy and suggested that they would be better off to follow the CLC's example and make decisions in the style of the "Soviet Politburo." Presumably, the speaker was joking, but under the circumstances laughter seemed inappropriate.

Shortly after this summit, the teachers unanimously accepted the offer, and Labour College '83 lived out its final few days in relative calm. Although many friendships had been strained in the heat of battle, the students, teachers, and administrators reached the end of the session in the spirit of solidarity that is the College hallmark. Eventually, CULS and the Board of Governors formally approved the plan, and arrangements were made to induct the instructors into CULS as a distinct unit. By autumn 1983, all the teachers had signed up and contract negotiations began. On 20 February 1984, with 100 per cent ratification, the teachers' bargaining committee and the Labour College signed a two-year contract. The new agreement contained a moderate wage increase, and for the first time the instructors could look forward to job security, seniority rights, and a proper grievance procedure. In fact, if the CLC could swallow its pride, the teachers could be used as perfect examples to persuade non-union workers of the value of organization. The 1984 College session, the first under the new pact, ran smoothly, with only a few minor quarrels over contract interpretation but no major grievances.

The Labour College Strike left in its wake a number of issues worth examining. Of paramount significance is the role played by the students. Only the students can tell their own story, but some basic observations can be offered. Through their courageous and principled actions, the students accomplished in a few days what the teachers had failed to achieve on their own during the previous year. Most students found the final settlement satisfactory, but they continued to express their unhappiness with the way the CLC had handled the affair. Some students maintained that, irrespective of the settlement, the CLC had still violated a basic principle by choosing the teachers' union for them, even though the instructors had previously expressed an interest in CULS among themselves. Surveyed a year later, many students recalled the strike with bitterness. Some believe that their involvement in the affair hurt their chances for advancement within the labour movement. Many continued to lay the bulk of the blame at Dennis McDermott's door. "The House of Labour is in need of a new landlord," one angry student declared. Others took a philosophic approach and viewed the strike as both a reaffirmation of union principles and a symbol of the imperfections of the labour movement. "The body remains strong though its parts sometimes need mending," mused one student. Another asserted: "vindictiveness has no place in our future, but truth does."

At the centre of the controversy lay the basic question of the right to organize. By refusing to recognize a group of its own workers, the CLC set a dangerous precedent that anti-union forces across the country would be only too happy to follow by leveling similar arguments against their employees. The perils apparent in the CLC's attempt to play management point to one conclusion only: wherever, and for whatever length of time an employer-employee relationship exists, workers

have the right to form or join a union of their choice to represent and protect their interests. As the largest voice of working people in Canada, the CLC must take the lead in defending this principle in all situations, regardless of extenuating circumstances.

Also at issue is the CLC's failure to take a more democratic approach to internal decision-making and power-sharing. Since so much of the problem originated with the Board of Governors, it is reasonable to suggest that at least a partial solution lay in restructuring that body. The Board could function more effectively in the hands of democratically-elected administrators, along with representatives of the teachers, the alumni, and the current student body. In this way, decisions affecting the school's operation and future would be handled by those who possess the keenest knowledge of its functions and potential. Above all, the College's decision-making body must epitomize the cooperative principle. Since the early days of trade unionism in Canada, the progressive arm of the labour movement has opposed the concentration of power and called for the creation of cooperative bodies that would allow workers to represent and fulfill their own needs and desires. The CLC must rediscover this tradition and decentralize and democratize its internal agencies to allow more of its members to participate directly in decision-making. Only then can the labour movement take steps to extend this principle to society at large.

Lastly, the 1983 Labour College Strike exposes the tenuous nature of progressive coalitions and reveals the threat to solidarity that emerges when one arm of a social movement fails to recognize and respect the different traditions and practices of another. Interestingly, activists in British Columbia and other western provinces have also discovered recently the strengths and weaknesses of such coalitions. The labour movement has an historical right and duty to be in the forefront of social mobilization, but it holds no monopoly on principled causes. Community organizations, religious groups, and academics, among others, have all participated in workers' struggles. Experience has shown that a unity of progressive forces is the key to meaningful social change. In other words, if the union makes us strong, it must make us all strong, or it is of no use to us at all.

In its own unique fashion, the Labour College of Canada will probably continue to embody the best and the worst features of Canadian trade unionism. On one side, the College manifests authority and control through a power structure that suspiciously resembles the corporate system; on the other side, the College symbolizes an unswerving commitment to principle that holds the promise of a future society based on full equality and democratic participation. The students and teachers of Labour College '83 know which side they are on. It is now time for other trade unionists to stand up and be counted.

John Bullen taught labour history at the Labour College of Canada and was president of the Labour College of Canada Teachers' Union. He died last year in an automobile accident.