

# INSTITUTIONS & IDEAS

## Some Millennial Reflections on the State of Canadian Labour History

Desmond Morton

AT INTERVALS, someone invites me to comment on the state of labour history. Once it was the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française; later it was Noah Meltz and Gérard Hébert, armed with a grant to describe the state of industrial relations research.<sup>1</sup> And last May it was Bryan Palmer, inviting prompt submission of twenty-five pages, if possible by the end of June. Bryan has been no great fan of the illustrated Canadian labour history Terry Copp and I produced in 1980 and which recently struggled into a fourth edition.<sup>2</sup> I was suitably flattered and beguiled. I admire the journal he, Greg Kealey and James Thwaites, Andrée Lévesque, and Jacques Rouillard and how many others have kept going. To contribute to *Labour/Le Travail (L/LT)* is an honour and a responsibility. Moreover, quick turn-arounds are my specialty. And so, to the dismay of my staff, I cut back on my current work and got busy.

<sup>1</sup>See Desmond Morton, "E.P. Thompson dans les arpens de neige: les historiens Canadiens-Anglais et la classe ouvrière," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, 37 (septembre 1983), and "Labour and Industrial Relations History in English-speaking Canada," in Gérard Hébert, Hem C. Jain, and Noah M. Meltz, *The State of the Art in Industrial Relations* (Kingston and Toronto 1988), 241-260 (also translated as *Histoire du travail et des relations industrielles au Canada* (Montréal 1988), 295-317, on which much of this article has been based.

<sup>2</sup>See Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992), 418, where the book is described, probably reasonably, as "of uneven quality."

Desmond Morton, "Some Millennial Reflections on the State of Canadian Labour History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 46 (Fall 2000), 11-36.

## 12 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

Admittedly, what I dropped is so remote from the interests and values of *L/LT* and its loyal guardians that they may well question Bryan's judgement. After seven years of academic administration and corporate fundraising at the University of Toronto's Mississauga campus, I became the major beneficiary of Charles R. Bronfman's \$10 million gift to McGill University to improve the Study of Canada in an old anglophone institution. Since mid-1994, I have earned my wages by trying to provide McGill and its community with rather more teaching, seminars and conferences about Canada than it might otherwise enjoy. My misspent youth with the NDP, under the roof of the United Packinghouse Workers, sometimes seems very far off.

Admittedly, in alternate years at McGill, I teach an upper-year course on industrial relations history. Back in the days of the late H.D. Woods, Jacob Finkelman, and Shirley Goldenberg, this was a field of some significance at McGill. Now the Faculty of Management treats it as a detour for those ill-fitted for business, while Arts spares industrial relations students the full rigours of Economics. Few of my students come from either program. Most encountered unions as they grew up in Ontario or British Columbia or had to join during a summer job. Some had parents who voted NDP; this year, one had been a Tory candidate in British Columbia in 1997. He proved to be more knowledgeable and more pro-union than most of his fellow students. I still do speaking stints for old friends in the Steelworkers, the Firefighters, and even the Public Service Alliance, but frankly, like David Bercuson and Terry Copp, I am better known these days for my historical and political advice to Canada's much-battered military.

So what do I now know about the state of labour history? Less than I should. I read what I can, much of it rationed out by the editorial board of *L/LT*. Should I, aware of my scholarly limits, phone Bryan and beg off? Then came the May issue of the *Literary Review of Canada*. There, in a Palmer review of Russell Jacoby's new book, I had my answer.<sup>3</sup> It might not be what he or Jacoby intended, but if I cared, I should write. Eric Hobsbawm's plea that we should be "concerned with changing the world as well as interpreting it" was not restricted to revolutionaries.<sup>4</sup> More than most intellectual fields, the study of the working class is *engagé*. Its goal is not winning a teaching job, tenure, or promotion; it aims to change consciousness and conduct. Jacoby's message, Palmer seemed to suggest, is that those of us who still believe that knowledge and ideas should have practical outcomes should quit hiding behind the academic bric-a-brac and risk getting our hands and reputations dirty.

<sup>3</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, "Pluralism Popped," *Literary Review of Canada*, 8 (May 2000), 9-12, a review of Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York 1999).

<sup>4</sup>E.J. Hobsbawm, "Labour History and Ideology," *Journal of Social History*, 7 (Summer 1974), 380, cited by G.S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History* (Toronto 1976), 12.

The changes I seek are not necessarily monolithic or even dramatic. I don't happen to share Palmer's (or Hobsbawm's or Jacoby's) enthusiasm for a revolutionary transformation of society. Georg Lukacs' commitment to "annihilate capitalism" seems premature, given the fate of his alternative. Small victories are better than massive defeat. Those who preferred the Common Sense Revolution to Bob Rae now have to live with Mike Harris and boil their drinking water. Espousing unreal objectives and ignoring awkward realities are among the ways intellectuals evade responsibility. During World War I, the government was largely indifferent to the slightly fey Anglo-Saxon radicals of the Socialist Party of Canada. The Social Democratic Party seemed much more dangerous — not just because it had more "foreigners" but because it was also politically more realistic. In 1945, Liberals found the Communist Party a useful tool to help eviscerate the CCF, a party that had appeared to be dangerously close to power.

\*\*\*

At McGill and, earlier, at the University of Toronto, I have been inclined to bill myself an "industrial relations historian," and I do so here, not because I scorn working-class history but because I have not been very successful in finding the evidence I need.<sup>5</sup> Instead it is a way of trying to be useful in a field which has changed working-class lives for the better and, in its current manifestation as "human relations," seems bent on changing most of those lives for the worse. History is also a reminder of both continuity and change. Transformations of skill, resources and technology are unprecedented only to those who are wilfully ignorant of history. Confronted by Mergenthaler's 1884 invention of the Linotype, typesetters could have fought the machine to their own collective extinction. By co-opting the machine and adapting the "art preservative" to its potential, an honourable but obsolete craft transformed itself and lasted another few generations until photo-offset technology was too much for it.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>I have been hunting for the voices of the working-class women who were wives or mothers of CEF soldiers in World War I and who depended on the paternalistic and often chilly benevolence of the Patriotic Fund. See Desmond Morton and Cheryl Smith, "Fuel for the Home Fires: The Patriotic Fund, 1914-1918," *The Beaver*, 75 (August-September 1995), 12-19; and Morton, "Entente Cordiale? La Section Montréalaise du Fonds patriotique canadien, 1914-1923: le Bénévolat de guerre à Montréal," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 53 (automne 1999).

<sup>6</sup>On printers, see Wayne Roberts, "The Last Artisans: Toronto Printers, 1876-1914," in Kealey and Warrian, *Essays*, 125-142; Desmond Morton, "The Mergenthaler Challenge: Typographers and the Response to Technological Change (unpublished paper, 1986) or, for a better documented and more modern experience, see Joel Novak, "Grain Terminal Automation: A Case Study in the Control of Control," *Labour/Le Travail (L/LT)*, 22 (Fall 1988), 163-180. For an apocalyptic but suggestive view of current industrial relations, see Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, "Towards Permanent Exceptionalism: Coercion and Consent in Canadian Industrial Relations," *L/LT*, 13 (Spring 1984), 133-157.

Of course, history also serves as John Donne's shroud: a reminder of the mortality of humanity, institutions, and conventional wisdom. The industrial relations system which Canadians accepted in the 1940s may conceivably have been an accident of circumstances, an "exception" whose time, by the 1990s, had already passed. Apparently not many labour historians were watching. Whatever we know or profess about "the nature of employment relations in an industrial society" must be based on past experience, accurately and systematically interpreted.<sup>7</sup> Even our prophecies about the labour market or technological change depend on projections from the past. History has much to offer that is directly relevant to the understanding of industrial relations, not to mention working-class politics and popular culture. Where else can we look to learn about the "actors" and the "environment."<sup>8</sup> Weary negotiators may wish that memories of past practices and remote grievances could be erased, but they would be the last to wish amnesia on themselves. Experience is our most painfully acquired human attribute, and history is its synonym.

Of course, workplace relations are not the whole of labour history or even, necessarily, its biggest end. Historians who directed their research at the working class — and their numbers grew substantially since the 1960s — have largely ignored the modern era of regulated collective bargaining.<sup>9</sup> "Fordism," the auto magnate's belief that high wages were sufficient compensation for autocratic management, had little appeal to academic radicals, whatever the attraction to workers.<sup>10</sup>

Fifteen years ago, I noted the absence of a comprehensive history of industrial relations in Canada. Unlike many of my concerns, this one is as good as new. Canadian business historians have seldom concerned themselves with the structure and functioning of corporate management as employer nor with its approach to

<sup>7</sup>Morley Gunderson and Allen Ponak, "The Canadian Industrial Relations System," in Gunderson and Ponak, *Union Management Relations in Canada* (Don Mills 1982), 2-3.

<sup>8</sup>Alton Craig, "Model for the Analysis of Industrial Relations," in Hem Chand Jain, ed., *Canadian Labour and Industrial Relations: Public and Private Sectors* (Toronto 1974), 2-12.

<sup>9</sup>State of the art reviews of Canadian labour history flourished in the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Gregory S. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s," *L/LT*, 7 (Spring 1981), 67-94; D.J. Bercuson, "Through the Looking-Glass of Culture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing," *L/LT*, 7 (Spring 1981), 95-112; and "Recent Publications in Canadian Labour History," *History and Social Science Teacher*, 14 (Spring 1979); K.W. McNaught, "E.P. Thompson vs. Harold Logan: Writing About Labour and the Left in the 1970s," *Canadian Historical Review (CHR)*, 63 (June 1981), 141-168.

<sup>10</sup>See for example Charlotte A.B. Yates, *From Plant to Politics: The Autoworkers Union in Postwar Canada* (Philadelphia 1993). In the 1970s, of 47 articles in *L/LT* susceptible to periodization, only two dealt with the period after 1940. Of 113 articles published in the 1980s, there were 19 in the post-1940 period, many of them dealing with politics. (See Appendix A-1 and A-2).

negotiating with employees. Labour historians have been equally loath to poke through business records. Given the bilateral, adversarial assumptions of industrial relations, the one-sided approach is undoubtedly congenial, but each side loses the opportunity to know its adversary as other than a caricature.<sup>11</sup>

As an enthusiastic new deputy minister of labour, William Lyon Mackenzie King tried to persuade Adam Shortt of Queen's University to become the Canadian version of John R. Commons and create systematic industrial relations history. He failed.<sup>12</sup> For most of the ensuing half-century, Canadian labour and its fragile organizations were mysteries shared with students by departments of economics or political economy. A historical approach focused on the succession of frail and conflictual central labour bodies which had represented Canada's organized workers to the public. This approach, pioneered in 1928 by Professor Harold Logan of the University of Toronto, persisted through successive editions of his text.<sup>13</sup> Labour history was a family tree in which the TTA begat the CLU, the TTLC fostered the TLC, which ejected the ACCL, and so on to merciful sleep.

Though Mackenzie King failed to establish a "Wisconsin School" in Canada, his new Department of Labour provided the basis for the kind of scholarship he needed for his approach to labour peace: the collection and distribution of factual, statistical information. For all the limitations of its local correspondents, its statistical methods and its ideology, the *Labour Gazette* remains an indispensable chronicle of Canadian labour and industrial relations history from 1900 at least until its popularization in the 1960s. A succession of Labour Department librarians gathered every imaginable printed source relating to labour. When national and provincial archives would not give house room to John Moffatt's collection of Provincial Workmen's Association papers in 1926, Margaret Mackintosh eagerly took them in.<sup>14</sup> Her tidy, energetic mind encouraged her to share with Logan the lonely experience of being Canada's pioneering trade union historian.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Unlike Québec, where state *concertation* draws on deep strains of a shared nationalism, not even professed socialism interferes with an adversarial perspective. When Bob Rae shared his province's fiscal plight with Bob White, he got simple advice; "Why can't Ontario just do like the Reichmanns and declare bankruptcy, maybe pay 50 or 60 cents on the dollar?" See Bob Rae, *From Protest to Power: Personal Reflections on a Life in Politics* (Toronto 1996), 207. A rare example of a book-length case study was G.F. MacDowell, *The Brandon Packers' Strike: A Tragedy of Errors* (Toronto 1971).

<sup>12</sup>Jay Atherton, "The Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, 1900-1914," MA thesis, Carleton University 1972, 99.

<sup>13</sup>Harold Logan, *The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada* (Toronto 1928); and *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948).

<sup>14</sup>See Atherton, "Department of Labour," and Nancy Stunden, "Labour Records and Archives: The Struggle for a Heritage," *Archivaria*, 4 (Summer 1977), 73-91. See also Russell G. Hann and Gregory S. Kealey, "Documenting Working-Class History: North American Traditions and New Approaches" *Archivaria*, 4 (Summer 1997), 92-114.

<sup>15</sup>M. Mackintosh, *An Outline of Trade Union History in Great Britain, the United States and Canada* (Ottawa 1938), among other publications.

Like other people, unions and their members ultimately felt the need to record their ancestry and to gain the respectability which a genealogy allegedly confers. From James McArthur Conner, self-appointed historian and guardian of the records of the Toronto Trades and Labour Council, to Leslie Wismer, Jack Williams, and Morden Lazarus, veterans of the labour movement struggled to create history as they understood it: factual, uncritical.<sup>16</sup> In the more affluent and confident 1960s, unions and labour federations began commissioning histories, from Paul Phillips's discreet account of the British Columbia Federation of Labor to Terry Copp's sponsored but more critical account of the International Union of Electrical Workers in Canada. Union mergers and fold-ins, and the growth of public sector unions, expanded the market for institutional history.<sup>17</sup>

No commissioned project was more ambitious or longer in gestation than the Canadian Labour Congress's plan to celebrate the centennial of Canada's Confederation with a comprehensive history of Canadian labour, written by Eugene Forsey. The table officers of the CLC reckoned without the extraordinary perseverance and commitment to detail of their former research director, and they certainly underestimated the difficulties of their task. Forsey sent young researchers to scour the country for records, sometimes in vain. At Saint John and Moncton, Richard Rice arrived only days after valuable collections had been destroyed. From a mass of material assembled from damp basements and tinder-dry attics, from local public libraries and private homes, researchers provided Forsey with the means to do for

<sup>16</sup>For example, J.M. Conner, "Trade Unions in Toronto," in Jesse Middleton, ed., *The Municipality of Toronto: A History, Volume II* (Toronto 1923). Without exhausting the range one can cite: Morden Lazarus, *Years of Hard Labour* (Don Mills 1974), and *Up From the Ranks: Trade Union V.I.P.s. Past and Present* (Toronto 1977); Jack Williams, *The Story of Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1974); Leslie E. Wismer, *Proceedings of the Canadian Labour Union Congress* (Ottawa 1951); Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto 1974); and Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive, 1948-1952* (Toronto 1982).

<sup>17</sup>Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver 1967); J.T. Copp, *The I.U.E. in Canada* (Elora 1980). See also, for example, Warren Carragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto 1979); Elaine Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union* (Vancouver 1982). More recent examples now include public-sector unions: Wayne Roberts, *Don't Call Me Servant: Government Work and Unions in Ontario, 1911-1984* (North York 1994); Doug Smith, Jock Bates, Esiyllt Jones, *Lives in the Public Service: A History of the Manitoba Government Employees' Union* (Winnipeg 1993). In Quebec, Jacques Rouillard's work on the textile workers of Valleyfield led him to major work on the Confédération des syndicats nationaux and finally to a comprehensive provincial labour history. See Rouillard, *Les Syndicats Nationaux au Québec de 1900 - 1930* (Québec 1979); *Histoire de la CSN* (Montréal 1981); and *Histoire du syndicalisme au Québec: des origines à nos jours* (Montréal 1989). Fortunately the larger central body, the FTQ, and one of its most durable leaders, now have book-length studies: Louis Fournier, *Histoire de la FTQ, 1965-1992: La plus grande centrale syndicale au Québec* (Montréal 1994); Louis Laberge, *Le syndicalisme c'est ma vie* (Montréal 1992).

Canada what Commons had done for the United States and the Webbs for Great Britain 70 years before. Even in the lifespan of Forsey's work, publishers, readers, and historical fashion had changed. But by the time the book was published in 1982, it had survived three successive publishers and much painful editing.<sup>18</sup>

Institutional labour history can only be a foundation. As such, of course, it is indispensable. Even the historians most critical of Forsey's traditional approach were active in urging publication of his massive book.<sup>19</sup> Simply put, a later generation could not build securely without a foundation. Yet there was much that was sterile and a little that was absurd in the historians' preoccupation with the mergers and splits, quarrels and reconciliations, that shaped the complex family tree of Canadian unionism.

For much of the 20th century, what little of Canadian labour history was published focused primarily on local unions and central labour bodies. Doris French's misleadingly titled biography of Daniel O'Donoghue was almost unique among authored monographs: its tiny size and production quality bespeak the publisher's nervous investment.<sup>20</sup>

From Mackintosh to Senator Forsey, organizational and ideological links with the United States provided labour history's unifying theme. If the uniquely North American institutions of the "international union" linked much of Canadian labour with the "pure and simpledom" of the American Federation of Labor, the stubborn survival of confessional, national and revolutionary unionism provided a welcome Canadian distinction.<sup>21</sup> Because those distinctions were also underlined in the rhetoric of union rivalry, underlying similarities were sometimes overlooked. Both its Catholic sponsors and its Trades and Labor Congress critics insisted on the peace-loving nature of the *Confédération des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada*: did anyone notice that the CTCC led some of the biggest strikes in Canada during the 1920s, thirty years before the Asbestos or the Dupuis Frères strikes made it one of several precursors of the Quiet Revolution?<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup>E.A. Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982). See Stunden, "Labour Records," 74-5.

<sup>19</sup>Among many acknowledgements, see G.S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), xiv.

<sup>20</sup>Doris French, *Faith, Sweat and Politics: The Early Union Years in Canada* (Toronto 1962).

<sup>21</sup>For example, Alan B. Latham, *The Catholic and National Labour Unions of Canada* (Toronto 1930). No such attention has yet been directed at the dominant labour organization, the Trades and Labor Congress. It would now be a labour of considerable difficulty to reconstruct much of its history. Latham is now largely superseded by the work of Jacques Rouillard (see footnote 17).

<sup>22</sup>Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire de la C.S.N.* (Montréal 1981); Jacques Rouillard, *Les Syndicats Nationaux au Québec de 1900 - 1930* (Québec 1979); Evelyn Dumas, *The Bitter Thirties in Quebec* (Montréal 1975).

However much labour conflict filled headlines and editorial columns, it seldom attracted academic attention. An exception was Stuart Jamieson, a British Columbia scholar whose short text on industrial relations in Canada, first published in 1957, illuminated the importance of history in shaping industrial conflict.<sup>23</sup> One of several valuable research contributions of the Woods Task Force to the understanding of the Canadian labour relations system emerged from its contract with Jamieson to study strike activity since 1900. *Times of Trouble* often supplanted Logan and also Charles Lipton's egregiously flawed *Trade Union Movement of Canada* as the textbook of choice in the labour history courses that blossomed in Canadian universities during the early 1970s.<sup>24</sup>

\*\*\*

Until the university explosion in the 1960s, Canadian history departments showed little interest in labour and the working class. John Irwin Cooper's article on Québec ship labourers and Clare Pentland's article on the Lachine strike of 1843 were lonely exceptions.<sup>25</sup> Radical thought by working men seems to have interested only a professor of English at the University of Toronto, Frank Watt.<sup>26</sup> Most Canadian intellectuals were preoccupied by nation-building; only a wry dig by F.R. Scott reminded his fellow poet, Ned Pratt, that labourers, not Sir John A. Macdonald or Sir Donald Smith, had driven every spike in the CPR but the last.<sup>27</sup> Donald Creighton treated working men much as his hero, Macdonald, did when he used the "navvies" as foils for a political trick on the Opposition during the Toronto printers' strike of 1872. Not until Forsy did a historian notice that the Macdonald government's Trade Unions Act was a practical nullity since no union bothered to register.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Stuart Jamieson, *Industrial Relations in Canada* (Toronto 1957), and later editions.

<sup>24</sup>Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966* (Ottawa 1968); Charles Lipton, *The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959* (Montréal 1959).

<sup>25</sup>John I. Cooper, "The Quebec Ship Labourers Benevolent Society," *CHR*, 30 (December 1949), 336-343; H.C. Pentland, "The Lachine Strike of 1843," *CHR*, 29 (September 1948), 255-277.

<sup>26</sup>F.W. Watt, "The National Policy, the Workingman and the Proletarian Idea in Victorian Canada," *CHR*, 41 (March 1959), 1-26; and "Literature of Protest," in Carl Klinck, *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto 1965), 457-473.

<sup>27</sup>F.R. Scott, "All the Spikes but the Last," *Selected Poems* (Toronto 1966), 64.

<sup>28</sup>D.G. Creighton, "George Brown, Sir John A. Macdonald and the Workingmen," *CHR*, 24 (December 1943), 362-375. See also Bernard Ostry, "Conservatives, Liberals and Labour in the 1870s," *CHR*, 41 (June 1960), 93-127. (I am indebted to the late Senator Forsy for pointing out the limits of the 1872 Trade Unions Act.) See Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Montreal 4th ed. 1999), 27.



Admittedly, when labour activity intersected with politics, as it did in 1872 and in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, historians would sometimes take note. The first serious study of the Winnipeg strike emerged as a by-product of a major interdisciplinary exploration of the roots of Social Credit in Alberta.<sup>29</sup> Fascination with the CCF and its founding president, J.S. Woodsworth, led Kenneth McNaught to a further look at the Winnipeg strike, as well as such varied topics as the “labour churches” and Vancouver’s militant dockside unions.<sup>30</sup> The CLC’s decision to help create the New Democratic Party coincided with a burst of university expansion. New scholars and old, with liberal or social-democratic sympathies, were attracted to the roots of labour radicalism, the failure of the CCF, and the evolution of a union commitment to partisan politics.<sup>31</sup> Most such students came from political science: Irving Abella was an exception — a historian who explored the considerable role of Communists in building CIO and CCL industrial unions in the 1940s, and their eventual defeat at the hands of CCFers allied to more conservative unionists.<sup>32</sup>

The dramatic growth of Canadian universities through the 1960s helped guarantee that the old staples of Canadian historiography, politics, religion, external policy, and biography, would not satisfy the flood of new graduate students. However exciting Creighton’s “Laurentian” perspective might be to unreflecting nationalists, it did not fit most Canadian realities beyond the English-speaking élites of Toronto and Montréal, and how many times could the same straw be threshed? Maurice Careless’s alternative thesis of “limited identities” of region, culture, and class came closer to fitting the familiar facts of the period; it also invited whole new ranges of research. Looking at the local and the specific was no longer seen as an implicit confession of limited talent or energy.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 1950). On the historiography of the strike, see Kenneth McNaught and D.J. Bercuson, *The Winnipeg Strike, 1919* (Toronto 1974), 99-123; and G.S. Kealey, “1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,” *L/LT*, 13 (Spring 1983), 11-44.

<sup>30</sup>Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959). Another political enthusiast, writing on the margins of labour and reform, was Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto 1971).

<sup>31</sup>See Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968); Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968); Leo Zakuta, *A Protest Movement Becalmed: A Study of Change in the CCF* (Toronto 1964); and, in some contrast, David Kwavnick, *Organized Labour and Pressure Group Politics: The Labour Congress, 1956-1968* (Montréal 1972). A CBC radio documentary series led to P.W. Fox’s “Early Socialism in Canada,” included in a book of essays, *The Political Process in Canada* (Toronto 1963), edited by the first leader of the Nova Scotia NDP, Professor James Aitchison.

<sup>32</sup>Published as: *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973).

<sup>33</sup>Gregory S. Kealey, “The Working Class in Recent Canadian Historical Writing,” *Acadiensis*, 7 (Spring 1978), 116-7; J.M.S. Careless, “Limited Identities in Canada,” *CHR*, 50

The result, claimed Carl Berger, was a "golden age" of Canadian history. Among those who turned in the 1960s to the history of labour, working people and related themes were Terry Copp, who used the pioneering work of Herbert Ames to study the working poor of Montréal in the early decades of the 20th century; Ross McCormack, who analyzed the prewar labour politics of Winnipeg and the West; and Donald Avery, whose *Dangerous Foreigners* finally gave a sympathetic account of "Sifton's sheepskins," the central European immigrants who had been the uncertain chorus of the radical movements of central and eastern Canada for the first third of the century.

Perhaps the ablest of the generation was David J. Bercuson, whose work on the Winnipeg General Strike provided a new model for industrial relations history in Canada.<sup>34</sup> Ignoring a rich and romantic mythology of 1919 and an even more durable effort to make the general strike serve its appointed role in Marxist historiography, Bercuson treated the strike as a Winnipeg event. He reconstructed personalities and circumstances with a harsh objectivity that might have given pleasure to the well-rounded ghost of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Bercuson's second book, on the One Big Union, was virtually a sequel. It underlined his earlier argument: the OBU may have been trapped between the fantasies of its leaders and the cold hostility of employers but, like any North American union, its challenge was to improve the material circumstances of its members and it failed.<sup>35</sup> It was a proposition that later radical unions, from the Workers' Unity League to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, could ignore at their peril.

\*\*\*

By no means all of Bercuson's contemporaries accepted his analysis or his conclusions. In a 1979 retrospective on a decade of remarkable achievements by his generation of labour historians, Bryan Palmer distinguished between a "first generation" of scholars such as Bercuson, and a "second generation" to which he,

---

(March 1969), 1-10. Another influential article, if largely as a goad to his colleagues, was S.R. Mealing, "The Concept of Social Class in the Interpretation of Canadian History," *CHR*, 46, (September 1965), 201-216.

<sup>34</sup>J.T. Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto 1974); Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners": European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979); Ross McCormick, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto 1979); and D.J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations and the General Strike* (Montréal and Kingston 1974).

<sup>35</sup>D.J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978). For different views of Bercuson's work, see McNaught, "Thompson vs. Logan", 152-3, and Bryan Palmer, "Working-Class Canada: Recent Historical Writing," *Queen's Quarterly*, 86 (Winter 1979-80), 595-6.

Gregory Kealey, Craig Heron, Peter Warrian, Ian McKay and others belonged.<sup>36</sup> Behind those who were committed to "objective" evidence-based scholarship as their mentors understood it, came a larger wave who had gravitated to labour and working-class history by way of student activism, New Left Marxism, and the contemporary belief that the academy might well become the hotbed of the revolution. Their radicalism was reinforced by an academic job market which had easily absorbed their predecessors but which, by the early 1970s, had fewer tenure-stream posts to offer. Excluded from easy access to the professorate, the *Wissenschaften* of the "new" labour historians became, perforce, a *Gemeinschaft* struggling for positions as well as principles.<sup>37</sup> Talent, energy, organization, and solidarity might not deliver a revolution but it could produce one of the most homogeneous and influential groups in the disparate crowd of Canadian historians.

The field expanded dramatically. The first Canadian Historical Association *Register of Dissertations* reported nine theses in labour and working-class history, four at the doctoral level. By 1976, there were 89, 23 of them leading to a PhD.<sup>38</sup> In 1971, the Committee on Canadian Labour History was formed to launch first a regular *Bulletin* and then, in 1976, an increasingly self-confident and influential journal, *Labour/Le Travailleur*. Almost simultaneously, a Regroupement de Chercheurs en Histoire des Travailleurs québécois began its separate existence and launched its own publication, *Histoire des Travailleurs québécois*. Both committees sponsored a remarkable amount of work, surveying archives, collecting records, compiling impressive bibliographies and, above all, publishing articles, notes, research reports and reviews.<sup>39</sup> By the mid 1970s, no one could claim that

<sup>36</sup>Most clearly in Palmer, "Working Class Canada", 601-608. Bercuson's personal conclusions persuaded him that military history would be a more congenial area of research. Bercuson's recent work includes *True Patriot: The Life of Brooke Claxton, 1889-1960* (Toronto 1993), and *Blood on the Hills: The Canadian Army in Korea* (Montréal and Kingston 1999). Terry Copp took a similar direction, studying the Normandy Campaign in detail and writing (with W.J. McAndrew), *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montréal and Kingston 1990). The same could be said of me, though in fact I cheerfully detoured through the industrial relations field from the study of political-military relations as a way of gaining further insights on leadership and conflict.

<sup>37</sup>Morton, "Arpents de neige," 172-3 and n.25.

<sup>38</sup>See Appendix A. Based on the Canadian Historical Association, *Register of Dissertations*, (Michael Swift, ed.) 1 (1966), 9,(1976). Coding is by the author, beyond category of "Social History."

<sup>39</sup>Russell Hann, G.S. Kealey, Linda Kealey, and Peter Warrian, *Primary Sources in Canadian Working-Class History* (Kitchener 1972); G. Douglas Vaiscy, *The Labor Companion: A Bibliography of Canadian Labour History Based on Material Printed from 1950 to 1975* (Kitchener 1976) and in bibliographical articles in the Canadian Committee on Labour History's annual *Bulletin* and with Marcel Leduc, in *L/LT* 8-9 to 1982 (Autumn 1979). See also G.S. Kealey, "An Index to the Publications of the Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1972-1981," *L/LT*, 8-9 (Autumn-Spring 1981-2), 433-461. The academic

the history of Canadian working people and their organizations was stifled for lack of sources. Nor could there be any illusion of even-handed objectivity. Second generation labour history was vigorously committed to radical social and economic change. Other approaches were received politely, occasionally published in *Labour/Le Travail*, as the journal was soon renamed, and robustly denounced.<sup>40</sup>

"First generation" historians were, on the whole, respectfully treated by their younger critics but, from the first, the enterprise was managed by the newer generation. It was they who travelled abroad, to Warwick, Rochester, andinghamton, to meet their American and British mentors. They read the old and new world classics of working-class history by Herbert Gutman, Eugene Genovese, Raymond Williams, Eric Hobsbawm, and, above all, E.P. Thompson. They returned determined to transform the field from being merely "a category of political economy, a problem of industrial relations, a canon of saintly working-class leaders, a chronicle of union locals, or a chronology of militant strike actions."<sup>41</sup>

Not since Bishop Stubbs or Sir Frederick Maitland has a British historian had more influence on Canadian historical scholarship than Thompson. His "culturalist" approach to class angered other European Marxists but it opened up immense possibilities in North America.<sup>42</sup> Thompson had discovered a self-conscious working class in 18th century England: Kealey, Palmer, and the "new" school would find a Canadian working-class culture in Ontario a century later. Thanks to Clare Pentland, whose doctoral dissertation had located Canadian industrialization far earlier than Harold Innis and other Canadian economic historians, the 1880s could become the high point for both industrial change and class conflict.<sup>43</sup> In southern Ontario and Québec, newly smoking factory chimneys were growing behind the

---

publishing boom of the 1960-70 period directly assisted the expansion of labour and working-class history. Particularly noteworthy was the expansion of the University of Toronto Press's Social History reprint series. Among the titles brought back to circulation were Mackenzie King's *Industry and Humanity*, Herbert Ames's *The City Below the Hill* and *Canada Investigates Industrialism*, an abridged version of the report and testimony before the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, 1889, introduced by Greg Kealey.

<sup>40</sup>With the 13th issue, the unconscious bias in the French title was rectified and the name was changed. See *L/LT*, 13 (Spring, 1984), 5.

<sup>41</sup>Kealey and Warrian, "Introduction," *Essays*, 8. On influences, see Hann *et al.*, *Primary Sources*, 12 ff; Bryan D. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," *L/LT*, 1 (1976), 5-31.

<sup>42</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1963). On its significance, see Russell Hann and G.S. Kealey, "Documenting Working-Class History: North American Traditions and New Approaches," *Archivaria*, 4 (Summer 1977), 98; Kealey, "Labour and Working Class History," 80-8. For a retrospective assessment, see Royden Harrison, "The Last Ten Years in British Labour Historiography," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1980), 212-227.

<sup>43</sup>H.C. Pentland, *Capital and Labour in Canada, 1650-1860* (Toronto 1981).

tariff walls of Macdonald's National Policy. Tens of thousands of men and women found surplus on family farms, were seeking work amidst the heat, clangor, and menace of new machinery.

On both sides of the border, the 1880s was the decade of the Knights of Labor, the extraordinary working-class organization whose records Kealey had been able to study at Rochester. Skeptics have called it the "seek and ye shall find" principle, but Kealey had discovered in the documents evidence of a working class "in which divisions of ethnicity, skill, religion and even sex were recognized, debated and, for a few years in the 1880s at least, were overcome."<sup>44</sup> In neighbouring Hamilton, Palmer reported that skilled workers "in light of their workplace power and organizational strength, as well as their history of cultural involvement," served as "the cutting edge of the working-class movement as a whole."<sup>45</sup>

While the "second generation" condemned the "presentism" as much as the "liberal realism" of their more conventional colleagues, they were not inhibited from offering the example of the Knights of Labor to modern workers and their potential mentors. In a textbook widely promoted for university labour history courses, Bryan Palmer concluded: "Such a rich and varied movement culture of resistance and alternatives, premised on a wide-ranging solidarity, is precisely what is lacking in Canadian labour's response to the crisis of the 1980s."<sup>46</sup>

In the usual way of academic controversy, some of the Kealey-Palmer claims for their "new" history were challenged. While colleagues welcomed innovative research and a willingness to explore unfamiliar topics, ideology is not always an adequate substitute for evidence. Skilled workers in Hamilton, Bercuson argues, proved to be as exclusive, conservative, and indifferent to the fate of the unskilled as were other skilled workers across North America.<sup>47</sup> While the Knights of Labor certainly fostered a rhetoric of working-class solidarity, Stanley Ryerson argued, the Order was also devoutly committed to labour-employer harmony and industrial peace.<sup>48</sup> The Knights' ideals were not as big a problem as the difficulty of imbuing them in the thousands of recruits they acquired in 1885 and 1886, before the new members took strike action or were sacked by hostile employers. If, as Kealey insisted, Toronto's working class achieved unity across ethnic and sectarian barri-

<sup>44</sup>Kealey, "Labour and Working Class History," 89. On the Knights, see Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *"Dreaming of What Might Be": The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1902* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1982).

<sup>45</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montréal 1979), xii. See also Craig Heron, "The Working Class in Hamilton, 1890-1913," PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, 1980.

<sup>46</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 297. For a denunciation of presentism, see page 1.

<sup>47</sup>David J. Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass of Culture," 97-9, 101.

<sup>48</sup>Stanley B. Ryerson, "A propos de *Les Syndicats nationaux...de Jacques Rouillard*," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 35 (décembre 1981), 401.

ers, it must have been for the briefest of moments in the city contemporaries sometimes called "the Belfast of North America."<sup>49</sup> Palmer's research into the "rich associational life" of Hamilton artisans was undoubtedly exhaustive, but it also revealed that many of the associations were shared with the city's middle class. Even the relatively proletarian volunteer fire brigades drew upward of a third of their members from the non-artisan classes.<sup>50</sup>

It is easier to *wish* to write labour history from "the bottom up" than to be able to do so. Working-class newspapers and songsheets, lodge reports, and union resolutions were written, then as now, by a somewhat atypical labour élite. Describing intellectuals as "brainworkers" did not make them part of the labouring classes.<sup>51</sup> Charles McKiernan, the proprietor of Joe Beef's Tavern in Montréal, brilliantly brought to life by Peter De Lottinville, was no more a common man than was Frank Smith, the Irish cattle drover who rose to ownership of the *Toronto Street Railway* and a seat in the Canadian Senate.<sup>52</sup>

Once the exaggerations, the ritual references to respected mentors, and the polemics are set aside, the "new" history bears a considerable reference to the old. "For all the citations of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams," wrote Christopher Armstrong of Palmer's *A Culture in Conflict*, "the bulk of Palmer's book is a solid examination of the experience of skilled workers in Hamilton in attempting to organize themselves to secure and protect their rights."<sup>53</sup> Whether these workers also formed a cutting edge or a rearguard is rather a matter of rhetoric or perspective than of fact. The late Kenneth McNaught, initially a sympathiser and supporter, concluded that the radicals had failed: "The cannonading from the left has served principally to achieve those goals which the captains of artillery most vigorously rejected at the beginning of the campaign." Instead of establishing fresh interpre-

<sup>49</sup>Bercuson, "Looking Glass," 102. The first edition of Kealey's book on Toronto workers featured a riot scene. The second edition was modified to show the inside of a workshop. For views of Toronto's sectarian experience, see G.S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class," in Kealey and Warrian, *Essays*, 13-34; Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizen's Candidate* (Toronto 1973), 77-82; Mark McGowan, *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montréal 1999).

<sup>50</sup>Bercuson, "Through the Looking Glass," 99. Palmer, *Culture in Conflict*, 46-9, does not confirm his criticism.

<sup>51</sup>Russell Hann, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E.E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson and the *Toronto News*, 1885-1887," in Kealey and Warrian, *Essays*, 35-57.

<sup>52</sup>Peter de Lottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working Class Culture and the Tavern", *L/LT*, 8-9 (Autumn-Spring 1981-2), 9-40. An earlier interpretation of working-class culture is Bryan Palmer's "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth Century North America," *L/LT*, 3 (1978), 5-62. On Smith, see Morton, *Howland*, 44; *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, XIII, 965-968.

<sup>53</sup>Christopher Armstrong's review, *Ontario History*, 72 (June 1981), 125.

tations of the role of the “left,” the “State” or the labour movement, concluded Ken McNaught:

... most of the recent writing strengthens older notions: the most effective workers’ response to the ever-tightening industrial discipline was unionization; that the slow evolution of effective unionization reflected differences of region, culture and industrial context; that while gross inequalities and exploitation produced the fears and goals of the workers, the forms and policies were determined by the leaders — a great many of whom became “collaborators”; that violence has been provoked and employed more often by the state than by the workers; that despite clear evidence of various perceptions of class membership and class conflict, the dominant expressions of such perceptions have been the non-revolutionary strike and efforts to influence government policy through pressuring the major parties and/or supporting a democratic socialist party.<sup>54</sup>

\*\*\*

McNaught could not, of course, inveigle his younger, more radical colleagues back to the conventional “liberal realism,” nor would they easily accept his “older notions.” Those who tire of intellectual disputation should accept the obverse of McNaught’s text: the “new” labour history delivered much of solid value. Its practitioners were better equipped than most for the other waves of change in the study of the past, most notably feminism, which emerged as an intellectual force in the late 1960s. Radical slogans, vehement denunciations, and role models like Thompson, Gutman, and Stanley Ryerson, who had been marginalized by their contemporaries, were necessary morale builders for young scholars embarking on a pioneering venture. The work was long, arduous, and uncharted; missionary zeal and solidarity were prerequisites. By their teaching and publications, Kealey, Palmer, Heron, Hann and others brought the focus of labour history back from superstructure, politics, and the exceptionalism of Western Canada to regions that had been largely neglected by their predecessors: Ontario and the Maritimes.<sup>55</sup> Québec, on the whole, was left to the enthusiastic efforts of the *Regroupement*.<sup>56</sup> Like most of their Québec counterparts, the “second generation” historians seem to have accepted Québec’s departure as virtually inevitable. The title of their journal

<sup>54</sup>McNaught, “Thompson vs Logan,” 167-8.

<sup>55</sup>Because Memorial University of Newfoundland could offer appointments to both Linda and Greg Kealey, St. John’s became home to *LJT* and to the group’s undoubted inspirational leader. By the early 1980s, an impressive flow of innovative labour history was evident. The 1980-1 issue of *Industrial Relations Research in Canada* reported Allen Seager’s “Alberta Coal Miners”; J.H. Tuck’s “Canadian Railway Workers and the Wartime Crisis, 1914-1921”; Ian McKay’s “Cumberland Coal Fields”; Ian Radforth’s “History of the Working Class in Ontario”; D.W. McGillivray’s “Independent Workers of Cape Breton”; and Joan Sangster’s “Women in Radical Politics and Labour”. The list is far from exhaustive. Canadians, of course, were about to elect their most pro-business government since 1930.

<sup>56</sup>See Hann *et al.*, *Primary Sources*, 13.

and an occasional article in French was sufficient reflection of both a transitional reality and of a major phenomenon in the Canadian labour scene.<sup>57</sup> By focussing heavily on the 19th century and, for a time on the Knights of Labor, the "second generation" risked being dismissed as antiquarians, but history's relevance is surely not limited to the day before yesterday.

Far from ignoring the issues, as opposed to the ideology, of industrial relations, the "new" historians and their journal have been significant contributors. From Wayne Roberts's 1975 essay on the Toronto printers to Alberta sociologist Graham Lowe's work on the feminization of the Canadian office, "second generation" history has heeded many of the concerns of industrial relations without the neutral style.<sup>58</sup> More than half the articles in the first dozen issues of *Labour/Le Travail* dealt with the familiar topics of organization, industrialization, labour conflict, and the processes of production.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the journal focussed some overdue attention on the nature of work itself. The influence of American mentors, David Montgomery and Harry Braverman, directed attention to the continuing workplace issues of technology, skill transformation, and informal job control, though with little of the optimism of conventional American business historians.<sup>60</sup> On occasion, as in a Palmer-Heron omnibus article on early 20th century labour conflict in Ontario, they have even reached out to include managerial approaches.<sup>61</sup> "Second generation" labour historians have been almost unique in Canada as a conscious, though highly dispersed, intellectual "collective," sharing ideas, enthusiasms, and any available job opportunities.

In return, much that was written about Canada's past since the 1970s has been influenced by issues and arguments that Kealey and his colleagues have raised and disseminated. A.A. den Otter's excellent business history of the Galts and western coal mining devotes notably more attention to both labour and technique than most such works of an earlier vintage would have allowed.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Margaret E.

<sup>57</sup>In 44 issues of *L/LT* published between 1976 and 1999, 23 of 220 articles were published in French, six of them in the last fifteen issues. As Palmer argues, this is certainly better than the *Canadian Historical Review*. As is true with the *CHR*, francophone scholars prefer to appear in the national and international francophone journals their colleagues normally read. (Letter, Bryan Palmer to author, 12 June 2000).

<sup>58</sup>Roberts, "Last Artisans"; Graham Lowe, "Class, Jobs and Gender in the Canadian Office," *L/LT*, 10 (Autumn 1982), 11-38; and "The Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada, 1901-1931," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 5 (December 1980), 363-384.

<sup>59</sup>Thirty-three out of fifty-nine articles in *L/LT* issues 1-12 related to strikes, union formation, industrial relations legislation and practice. Of 115 articles published by the end of 1990, 59 related to industrial relations issues, though only 38 of 107 articles published during the 1990s. (Author's coding) See Appendix B.

<sup>60</sup>Palmer, *Working-Class Canada*, 601.

<sup>61</sup>Craig Heron and Bryan D. Palmer, "Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-1914," *CHR*, 58 (December 1977), 423-458.

<sup>62</sup>A.A. den Otter, *Civilizing the West: The Galts and the Development of Western Canada* (Edmonton 1982).



McCallum's study of Ganong's Chocolates, a small New Brunswick chocolate factory, was originally inspired by a desire to discover the impact of tariffs and government regulations on an actual business, but she rapidly incorporated the workforce as a factor. Hadn't one of the proprietors, ignoring family feelings, married a "dipper"?<sup>63</sup> Donald MacLeod's study of the technology of Nova Scotia gold and coal mining raised a conundrum of occupational safety that is still with us: did the miners' union's hard-won fight to appoint its own safety inspectors cost lives because officials chosen from the ranks of miners lacked comprehensive technical training?<sup>64</sup> A generation earlier, only a rare historian might have raised the question.<sup>65</sup>

The flood of research generated by Kealey, Palmer, Hann and their colleagues could enrich anyone with the wits to use it. The "new" history has jogged companionably with work inspired by older themes of labour history: union organization, nationalism, and politics. The left-nationalist tradition which had produced Lipton's *Trade Union Movement* renewed itself a generation later with Robert Laxer's *Canada's Unions*.<sup>66</sup> While overt nationalism was condemned by Hann and Kealey as "neo-Creightonism," the "new" historians welcomed Robert Babcock, an American historian who argued that the outcome of the 1902 TLC convention at Berlin was firmly guided by Sam Gompers and the American Federation of Labor.<sup>67</sup> *Gompers in Canada* was a beneficial example of what may be learned about Canada from American sources. Perhaps an equal interest in Canadian sources might have told Babcock that Canadian unionists believed that by deposing a Liberal MP as TLC president and a clutch of aging former Knights of Labor from the leadership of their organization, they were pursuing their own best interests.<sup>68</sup> Sally Zerker's history of the Toronto Typographical Union became

<sup>63</sup>Margaret McCallum, "Family, Factory and Community: A Social History of Ganong Brothers ... 1873-1946," PhD, University of Toronto, 1987; and her "Separate Spheres: The organization of Work in a Confectionery Factory: Ganong Brothers, St. Stephen, New Brunswick," *L/LT*, 24 (Fall 1989), 69-90.

<sup>64</sup>Donald E. MacLeod, "Colliers, Collier Safety, and Workplace Control: The Nova Scotian Experience, 1873 to 1910," *Historical Papers* (1983), 226-253. See also MacLeod's "Mining Men, Miners and Mining Reform: Changing the Technology of Nova Scotia Gold Miners and Colliers, 1858-1910," PhD thesis, University of Toronto 1981.

<sup>65</sup>The improved quality of even "unprofessional" labour history may also reflect the "new" generation. A fine example was Lynne Bowen's "*Boss Whistle*": *The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember* (Lantzville 1982).

<sup>66</sup>Robert Laxer, *Canada's Unions* (Toronto 1976).

<sup>67</sup>Robert Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: A Study of American Continentalism Before the First World War* (Toronto 1975). Even Senator Forsey praised Babcock although, as often, it was his own detailed research which helped fuel the Canadian refutation. See Forsey, *Trade Unions*, ch. XVII.

<sup>68</sup>Hann *et al.*, *Primary Sources*, 11.

another Creightonesque assault on the evils of international unionism and its alleged Canadian dupes.<sup>69</sup>

Not all Marx-inspired labour history passed through a "culturalist" prism. The issues that Harry Ferns and Bernard Ostry treated as an aspect of politics in their savage biography of the young Mackenzie King became central in William Baker's study of the 1906 Lethbridge miners' strike.<sup>70</sup> The legislative legacy of that strike, the Industrial Disputes Investigations Act, and its influential creator, became the core of one of the few books to qualify unequivocally as Canadian industrial relations history, Paul Craven's *An Impartial Umpire*.<sup>71</sup> Craven claimed ideological inspiration from my own mentor, the late Ralph Miliband, and his *State and Capitalist Society*; he also gave overdue recognition to the benefits unions, their members, and Canadian society gained from the IDI Act and from Mackenzie King. After all, as the author insists, "an industrial relations policy based on making the trains run on time makes a capitalist economy work better."<sup>72</sup>

For labour historians, perhaps even most historians, the neutrality of industrial relations is usually uncongenial. Human nature as well as the scholastic device of the thesis leads us to choose sides. For all its value in setting the legislative scene and in defining the Mackenzie King world view, even Craven's book does little to make employers or even workers fully dimensioned participants. Few Canadian business historians devote much space to labour relations: all are loyal to their side, even William Kilbourn's lively history of his father's firm, the Steel Company of Canada.<sup>73</sup> *A Living Profit*, Michael Bliss's study of entrepreneurial attitudes at the turn of the century, includes a fascinating chapter on labour — as yet another of the headaches that separated business men from a satisfying life. The hero of his biography of Sir Joseph Flavelle apparently paid as little attention to the labour problems of his businesses as he did to the immense male and female workforce of the Imperial Munitions Board of 1916-1918.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Sally F. Zerker, *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union, 1832-1972: A Case Study of Foreign Domination* (Toronto 1982).

<sup>70</sup>William Baker, "The Miners and the Mediator: The 1906 Lethbridge Strike and Mackenzie King," *L/LT*, 11 (Spring 1983), 89-117; H.S. Ferns and Bernard Ostry, *The Age of Mackenzie King: The Rise of the Leader* (Toronto 1975, original 1955).

<sup>71</sup>Paul Craven, *"An Impartial Umpire": Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911* (Toronto 1980).

<sup>72</sup>Craven, *"An Impartial Umpire,"* 307; Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London rev ed. 1972).

<sup>73</sup>William Kilbourn, *The Elements Combined: A History of the Steel Company of Canada* (Toronto 1960).

<sup>74</sup>J.M. Bliss, *A Living Profit: Studies in the Social History of Canadian Business, 1883-1911* (Toronto 1974), 74-94; Bliss, *A Canadian Millionaire: The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle, Bart., 1857-1939* (Toronto 1978). In Bliss's massive history of Canadian business, *Northern Enterprise, Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto 1987), brief references to labour or unions appear on only 15 of its 640 pages.

\*\*\*

Among historians, those who trespass too closely on their contemporary world may be accused of the sin of "presentism." This is less because of a decent jurisdictional concern for the rights of their fellow social scientists than because historians fear that the truth will be obscured by incomplete evidence and contemporary bias. Would Ferns and Ostry have savaged the memory of the young Mackenzie King so enthusiastically if trashing the dominant Canadian politician of their young lives was not a satisfying form of rebellion? What if they had shared Paul Craven's access to the King diaries? How far has the great dream of the Soviet Union as a workers' paradise survived post-1989 revelations — or how far does the equal and opposite myth of benevolent liberal capitalism survive the dreadful Yeltsin years in Russia?

Yet the present remains, both as a working environment and as a challenge, particularly for those who relate their scholarship to the issues and struggles of the present world. What is the point of history research that is largely out of touch with the contemporary reality of working-class life and crises? When British Columbia's Social Credit government assaulted the rights and expectations of working people, they merely conformed to left-wing rhetoric about right-wing regimes. Were left-wing warnings vindicated? "We are witnessing today the end of the era of free collective bargaining in Canada," proclaimed Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz. Coercion, they insisted would once again be the means by which State and capital would secure the workers' subordination. Who could mourn the death of a liberal myth? Bryan Palmer anticipated that established union leaders would, as in 1983, sell out their more militant comrades. And, well aware of labour's unpopularity and the rotten alternatives, they did.<sup>75</sup>

In the early 1990s, the counter-attack on workers' incomes and acquired rights resumed across much of Canada. Governments and private employers both responded to the challenges of shrinking revenues, global competition, and the worst recession since the 1930s. Hundreds of thousands of hitherto secure, well-paid and unionized public-sector and manufacturing jobs vanished. Re-employment, when it happened, came largely through minimum-wage service occupations or "McDonaldization." Unions which had fought wage restraint in the 1970s and "give-backs" in the early 1980s, checked with their bankers and their members and, this time, frequently offered concessions. All too often, they were whatever the employer chose to offer. Global corporations and their imitators could ignore local, even national, indignation.

Days lost due to strikes, a measure of union militancy, were already low in the late 1980s; they fell even lower in the new decade. 'What was the point,' workers

<sup>75</sup>Panitch and Swartz, "Towards Permanent Exceptionalism," 133. See also Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms* (Toronto 1985). See also Bryan D. Palmer, "The Rise and Fall of British Columbia's Solidarity," in Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *Essays in Canadian Working-Class History: The Character of Class Struggle* (Toronto 1986), 176-200.

### 30 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

lamented? And what was the use of political alternatives when NDP governments, in power in three provinces including Ontario, seemed as resistant to workers' demands as their pro-business rivals?<sup>76</sup>

Did labour historians have pertinent answers for working people adrift in the worst economic storm in their lifetime? Was a romanticized recollection of working-class history or Wobbly heroism relevant to workers whose jobs had apparently departed to a Mexican border town? Threatened with desperate financial choices, anxious to avoid massive public-sector layoffs, Bob Rae offered Ontario union leaders a new version of the historic deal TLC and CCL leaders had accepted in 1944: an enhanced collective bargaining role in return for income constraints. They promptly turned him down, largely unaware of the history he had described and, frankly, less worried by layoffs than by the precedent of broken contracts.<sup>77</sup> Had the avoidance of "presentism" become escapism? Were collective agreements more important than the lives affected by layoff? How many (or how few) labour historians had given any attention to the advent of Canada's first durable industrial relations regime?<sup>78</sup>

Second generation labour historians deserve enormous credit for creating an impressive body of historical material on 19th- and early 20th-century working-class history. Is that enough? No one would have expected conventional, purportedly value-free historians to choose topics or analysis to promote social justice. As self-conscious role-players in the labour struggle, the "new" historian must share some responsibility for their choice of agenda. Of 96 articles in the first nineteen issues of *Labour/Le Travail* that could be categorized by period, only 22 touched on the forty-year period between 1940 and 1980.<sup>79</sup> Many of these refought battles

<sup>76</sup>Morton, *Working People*, 336-353. See also Jamie Swift, *Wheel of Fortune: Work and Life in the Age of Falling Expectations* (Toronto 1995).

<sup>77</sup>When Bob Rae introduced his Social Contract in his Sefton Lecture at the University of Toronto's Woodsworth College, his analogy was historical: the wartime trade-off of labour peace in return for enduring collective bargaining legislation. The speech brought a standing ovation and widespread incomprehension among the labour leaders in the front row. As another member of the audience observed to me, it was soon apparent that this history was not part of their baggage. See Rae, *From Protest to Power*, 206.

<sup>78</sup>The list is not long. Here are the leading sources: L.S. MacDowell, *I Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42* (Toronto 1983); "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War Two," *L/LT*, 3 (1978), 175-6; "The 1943 Steel Strike Against Wartime Wage Control", *L/LT*, 10 (1982), 65-85; also Jeremy Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada During World War II," *L/LT*, 15 (1985), 57-88. See also J.T. Copp, ed., *Industrial Unions in Kitchener, 1937-1947* (Elora 1976); and "The Experience of Industrial Unionism in Four Ontario Towns, 1937-1947," *Bulletin of Canadian Committee of Labour History*, 6 (Autumn 1978) 4-11.

<sup>79</sup>Based on a survey of articles in *L/LT* issues 1-19. Almost half the more modern articles appeared since 1984, an evident reorientation of interest. For an analysis of the magazine's content, from its origins in 1976 to the end of 1999, see Appendix A.

of the early Cold War or pursued similar traditional themes. Only a few used historical methods to enliven contemporary issues with relevant experience. J.A. Frank's comparative study of four violent and relatively recent Ontario strikes stood out for relevance.<sup>80</sup> So did articles on the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and on the effect of automation on the role of grain handlers.<sup>81</sup> Beyond the journal, William Kaplan's study of the seamen's unions and the Hal Banks interlude brought a lawyer's evaluation of conflicting evidence to a problem more often obscured by polemics.<sup>82</sup> Rosemary Speirs' unpublished thesis on the railway unions and technological change after 1945 is a rare but valuable example of work that badly needs doing, not for the sake of locomotive firemen but for all of us who face fundamental changes in the way we work.<sup>83</sup> And who doesn't?

One area in which "new" history was hospitable was its recognition of the re-emergence of women as a force in Canadian labour and in its history. The expansion and transformation of bargaining issues by women generated a rich flow of books and articles, much of it generated by women determined to set the record straight. Feminist labour historiography has been summarized by Bettina Bradbury and presented in a series of monographs and collected essays.<sup>84</sup> Women historians also took a lead in recognizing the reluctant evolution of the state in the face of the real and perceived needs of working women.<sup>85</sup>

The recent past presents labour historians with problems as well as opportunities. Since the 1950s, industrial relations specialists were forced to reckon with the

<sup>80</sup>J.A. Frank, "The 'Ingredients' in Violent Labour Conflict: Patterns in Four Case Studies," *L/LT*, 13 (1983), 87-112.

<sup>81</sup>Don Wells, "The Impact of the Postwar Compromise on Canada's Unions: The Formation of an Auto Worker Local in the 1950s," *L/LT*, 36 (1995), 147-174; See also Novek, "Grain Terminal Automation."

<sup>82</sup>William Kaplan, *Everything That Floats: Pat Sullivan, Hal Banks and the Seamen's Unions of Canada* (Toronto 1987).

<sup>83</sup>Rosemary Speirs, "Technological Change and the Railway Unions, 1945-72," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1974. See also Ian Radforth, "Pulpwood Logging Industry in Northern Ontario, 1950-1970," *Historical Papers* (1982), 71-102.

<sup>84</sup>Bettina Bradbury, "Women's History and Working-Class History," *L/LT*, 19 (1987), 23-44. See also Linda Briskin and Lynda Yantz, eds., *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement* (Toronto 1983). A pioneering book, evidence of the energy of the new movement, was Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, Bonnie Shepard, eds., *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto 1974).

<sup>85</sup>See, for example, Ruth Roach Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada, 1934-1940," *L/LT*, 25 (Spring 1990), 77-104; Ann Porter, "Women and Income Security in the Post-War Period: The Case of Unemployment Insurance, 1945-1962," *L/LT*, 31 (1993), 111-144; Joan Sangster, "Women Workers, Employment Policy and the State: The Establishment of the Ontario Women's Bureau, 1963-1970," *L/LT*, 36 (1995), 119-146; as well as James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto 1994).

phenomenon of government-employee unionism but historians seldom echoed their interest.<sup>86</sup> There is much that is old and familiar to historians in the struggle to organize both ill-paid service employers and the better-paid but vulnerable employees of the so-called knowledge industries, but there is much that is new too — and some things, such as payment in stock options, which will strike some of us as analogous to company scrip.

\*\*\*

Almost fifteen years ago, when I last reviewed the state of labour and industrial relations history, I reproduced the weary academic cliché that there was much more to be done. At the time, it occurred to me that historians who were fearful of “presentism” might feel safe in the 1920s, a decade of brilliant hopes and blighted achievements. There was also more to do in the 1930s than the Depression and Third Parties. Jim Struthers’ book on the roots of unemployment insurance filled only one of many gaps in the social and industrial relations landscape.<sup>87</sup> For example, the revival of manufacturing with a much higher degree of mechanization was a foretaste of the aftermath of the 1990s recession. In both situations, layoffs led employers to seek either cheaper labour or more capital-intensive production. By 2000, we can see both processes at work.

If reform was less generally despised by radical historians, its processes might be better understood and, therefore, defended or improved. Why did ideas rigidly defended in the dreary 1930s seemingly dissolve without argument after *Blitzkrieg* in 1940. And what was the process through which capitalism survived its apparent rout in the war years. In the 1990s, as in the 1930s, historical hindsight might have been helpful.

The major advances in labour and working-class history during the 1980s and 1990s have come through the expansion of women’s history. In an earlier article, I suggested that Ruth Pierson’s significant work on World War II needed to be pursued in both directions, before 1939 and from 1945. Pierson herself has helped meet that request.<sup>88</sup> In the 1990s alone, Joy Parr published her study of gender and work in Paris and Hanover, Ontario; Denyse Baillargeon explored the impact of

<sup>86</sup>The standard work is Jacob Finkelman and Shirley Goldenberg, *Collective Bargaining in the Public Service: The Federal Experience in Canada* (Montréal 1983), the first book-length analysis, though it lacks significant historical perspective. More valuable is Mark Thompson and Gene Swimmer, eds., *Conflict or Compromise: The Future of the Public Sector in Industrial Relations* (Montréal 1984), a collection of articles, many of them with an historical approach.

<sup>87</sup>James Struthers, *“No Fault of Their Own”: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto 1983).

<sup>88</sup>Ruth Roach Pierson, *“They’re Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986); Pierson, “Gender and Unemployment Insurance.”

the Depression on Montreal housewives, Suzanne Morton looked at life in a post-Explosion Halifax housing development, and Andrée Lévesque explored the social controls a conservative Catholic society devised for single women.<sup>89</sup> Ruth Frager looked at men, women, and work in Toronto's pre-1939 Jewish community; Franca Iacovetta broke old assumptions with her account of Toronto's Italian immigrant working class in the 1950s, and Joan Sangster brought a feminist and radical perspective to the lives of working women in small factory towns in Ontario in ways that at least one of them, my mother-in-law, found quite fascinating.<sup>90</sup> Closer to traditional industrial relations, Sylvie Murphy gave us a feminist view of a women's auxiliary in a local of the International Association of Machinists; Michele Martin brought together a major study of women's role in delivering telephone service; and Pamela Sugiman looked at gender politics in the Canadian district of the United Autoworkers.<sup>91</sup> And those are merely samples from a three-page summary of recent labour books and articles by women. In no journal have they been more densely represented than in *Labour/Le Travail*. If women have found an overdue voice in scholarly discourse as in real life, what about their children and adolescents? We know what adults thought of them but can we ever find their voices?<sup>92</sup>

In the 1980s, a few labour historians anticipated that the forty years after the war were exceptional and, from a radical standpoint, not even very valuable. The notion that the revolution would settle for allowing most workers a home, a car, a

<sup>89</sup>Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990); Dénys Baillargeon, *Ménagères au temps de la Crise* (Montréal 1991); Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto 1994); Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919-1939* (Toronto 1994).

<sup>90</sup>Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife, Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto 1992); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montréal 1992); Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The lives of Working Women in Small Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto 1995).

<sup>91</sup>Michele Martin, "Hello Central": *Gender, Technologies and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems* (Kingston and Montréal 1991); Sylvie Murray, *A la jonction du mouvement ouvrier et du mouvement des femmes: la ligue auxiliaire de l'Association des machinistes, Canada, 1903-1980* (Montréal 1990); Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979* (Toronto 1994).

<sup>92</sup>Joy Parr's *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada* (London and Montreal 1980) and Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus* (Toronto 1976) inevitably reflected the largely adult perspective of their evidence. Another contributor, cut off by his tragically early death was John Bullen. See his "Hidden Workers: Child Labour and the Family Economy in Late Nineteenth Century Urban Ontario," *L/LT*, 18 (1986), 163-188. See, more recently, Richard Marquardt, *Enter At Your Own Risk: Canadian Youth and the Labour Market* (Toronto 1998).

<sup>93</sup>See Appendix B.

cottage, free medical care, and old age security in return for eight hours of boring labour was hard to swallow. It would have looked good in the 19th century and it may fade fast in the 21st. And it may indeed have been exceptional. The stagnation of American labour organizations and their decline since the 1950s was delayed in Canada by legislation, declining general income levels since 1978, and the acceptance by both major Canadian parties of growing levels of public debt between 1974 and 1994. Historians may be content to leave economists, sociologists, and political scientists to wrestle with the conundra of the present and the future, taking comfort from the fact that none of them anticipated the collapse of most Communist regimes at the end of the 1980s or, for that matter, the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s.

Some historians bridle at being invited to anticipate futures. It is ironic that those who are professionally indoctrinated to look backward should have anything useful to say about where we are going. Yet few of us turn down the chance, partly because it may be our only opportunity to be heard, and chiefly because we believe that futures are not inevitable but chosen, and because those who write of workers, their families and their conditions, make conscious choices about the futures we seek. Experience is our most useful guide, and history is its analytical version.

“Second generation” historians of Canada’s working class and labour movement must expect a third generation that may live in a very different and rather less optimistic society than those of us who shared or even slightly pre-dated the so-called “Big Generation” of the 1960s. Proportionately, there will probably be fewer of them. Certainly the number of doctoral theses on industrial relations and working-class history is significantly smaller, while military history, a more conservative and usually less popular specialty in the “Peaceable Kingdom” has actually outpaced the field in the 1990s.<sup>93</sup> Having made their major contribution some decades ago, labour historians must wonder whether they will find successors as Canadian universities face the most substantial changing of the professorial guard since the 1960s.

\*\*\*

If we are both fortunate and deserving, the new “new” historians will inherit our virtues and our ideals and they will surpass our experience. They will speak to their age as we have spoken to ours. And they will see more clearly for being spared grand and illusory ideologies. We may not like them very much but we will do what our unloved mentors did to endure them and to make them better than they might otherwise be. Life will go on, but we know that it can be worse — or better.



### Appendix A

An Analysis of *Labour/Le Travail*, Issues 1-44, 1976-1999

#### 1. Principal Themes

Period	Ind. Rel.	Strikes	Unions	Working Lives	Gender	Ethnic Issues	Politics
1970s	11	6	1	11	2	2	7
1980s	17	10	10	22	12	5	17
1990s	18	7	18	12	26	3	21
	Politics	Class	Ideas	Historiography	Agriculture and Fisheries		
1970s	7	—	7	2	—		
1980s	17	10	6	10	5		
1990s	21	6	5	6	6		

#### 2. Periodization

	1800-1850	1850-1900	1900-1920	1920-1930	1930-1940	1940-1950	1950-1970	1970-1990	None
1970s	1	11	22	6	5	2	—	—	6
1980s	5	17	35	21	16	12	7	—	23
1990s	9	17	17	18	18	16	31	4	18

#### 3. Location

Period	British Columbia	West	Ontario	Quebec	Atlantic	Canada	United States
1970s	2	7	13	6	4	10	2
1980s	6	13	12	14	13	21	8
1990s	7	8	23	10	10	31	—

#### 4. Language

Issues	Articles in English	Articles in French	Total Articles
1-10	47	4	51
11-20	42	3	45
21-30	42	6	48
31-40	55	2	57
41-50	20	1	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>222</b>

Note: Articles and, in the early years, Critiques, have been counted. Articles treating more than one of the chosen themes or covering more than one period or location have been counted more than once.

### Appendix B

#### Topics of Graduate Theses in Progress, on Canadian Topics as Reported to The Canadian Historical Association

The CHA's Register of Dissertations began in 1966 under the editorship of Michael Swift, with the intention of including MA and PhD theses covering all aspects of Canada's past as well as history theses on other fields written by Canadians. Theses were categorized by era, by region, and by type, with cross-referencing to theses already categorized by region. My initial intention was to compare statistics for each ensuing decade. However, the Register grew much larger the second year as more universities reported. In 1986, as an economy measure, MA dissertations in progress were dropped but reinstated in 1987, though perhaps imperfectly. By 1996, the Register had grown substantially and categorization was by era and region. In all the years consulted, clerical errors were common, with theses mis-categorized, US topics included in Canadian categories, and titles sometimes repeated.

#### 1. PhDs and MAs in Progress as Reported in the Register of Dissertations

Year	Canadian History		Social History		Labour History		Military History	
	PhD	MA	PhD	MA	PhD	MA	PhD	MA
1966	149	167	3	2	4	5	3	11
1967	230	374	2	4	5	11	7	6
1976	468	604	33	38	23	66	13	20
1986	339	*	42	*	28	*	14	*
1987	429	455	80	71	29	38	14	17
1996	581	615	106	138	25	11	33	37
1998	548	558	92	78	19	18	34	28

#### 2. Labour and Military History Theses as a Percentage of Theses in Canadian History

Year		1966	1967	1976	1986	1987	1996	1998
Labour History	PhD	3.7	2.2	5.0	8.3	6.8	4.3	3.4
	MA	3.0	2.9	10.9	*	8.4	1.8	3.2
Military History	PhD	2.0	3.1	2.9	4.1	3.3	5.6	6.2
	MA	6.5	1.6	3.3	*	3.7	6.0	5.0

\* No report of MA theses in progress was made in 1986.

# In 1986, 18 of 28 doctoral theses were related to *Industrial Relations and its actors* and 10 related to working-class life.

In 1996, the balance was 12 for *industrial relations* and 13 for *working-class life*.

Source, *Register of Post-Graduate Dissertations in Progress in History and Related Subjects* 1 (1966), 1 (1967), 11 (1976), 20 (1986), 21 (1987), 30 (1996) and 32 (1998).