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OTTAWA, CANADA
If, as Sir Wilfrid Laurier said, the twentieth century would be the century of Canada, by the end of the first decade of the new century it was already apparent that it would not be the century of the Canadian working man. The twentieth century ushered in the great Canadian boom. And boom conditions produced a boom psychology. Nothing could stop Canada. Incredible industrial expansion; two new transcontinental railways pushing across the West; seemingly unstoppable floods of capital and immigrants pouring into the country; these were the hallmark of the decade. Indeed, everyone seemed to be prospering. Everyone, that is, but the Canadian worker.

To him the twentieth century ushered in no new changes — or at least, no changes for the better. His conditions of work were still appalling, and his wages—though somewhat higher—could not keep up with spiralling living costs. Indeed, the influx of hundreds of thousands of hungry, penniless immigrants even made it difficult to hold a job. And what jobs? Stuffy, unventilated factories; sixty hours a week; back-breaking work; all for a dollar a day. These were the conditions of work for the men, women and children of Canada. And a dollar a day was considered excellent pay for the thousands of boys and girls, some not yet in their teens, who were forced to find jobs.

For most Canadian workers of the time unionism was a chimera. Trade unions had neither the power nor the resources, and worst of all, not even the will, to organize most of these workers. For the Canadian labour movement, the boom had created new and seemingly insurmountable challenges. Unions were weak, few in number, and in any case, were not recognized by most employers. Governments—provincial, municipal and federal alike—were so committed to economic expansion and to encouraging business, that they steadfastly refused to pass legislation to protect workers, fearing that such acts would merely frighten off industry. In addition, the federal government actively encouraged immigration, thus ensuring business a steady supply of low-wage, compliant labour. Indeed several companies had agents at work overseas, promoting immigration to Canada to prospective employees. In the face of this, the Trades and Labour Congress, the labour centre for Canadian workers, was helpless. The TLC and its affiliates concentrated their organizing efforts on skilled craftsmen, the least replaceable and most highly paid element of the labour force. The remainder of Canadian workers—the vast majority—they ignored.
For Canadian labour, 1902 was a major turning point. In that year it was determined that organized labour in Canada would not be Canadian, that it would, for the foreseeable future, be dominated by Americans. The decision of Sam Gompers, the feisty president of the American Federation of Labor to rid the TLC of all its nationalist and radical elements, and his success in achieving this aim, doomed Canadian unionism. What concerned Gompers was that some TLC leaders and unions seemed to be making approving sounds towards socialism, industrial unionism (the organization of workers by industry rather than by craft), and compulsory arbitration, all three of which were anathema to the AFL president, and the adoption by the labour movement of any one of which, he believed, would destroy the union movement he had worked so hard to build. Thus to protect American labour from these insidious Canadian influences, Gompers ordered all international union affiliates in Canada, at the 1902 TLC convention, to vote to strip the Congress of its national pretensions and to make it subordinate in every way to the AFL.

To most Canadian workers this fatal decision was irrelevant. So occupied were they in solving their own problems of finding and holding on to jobs, and of improving their working and economic conditions, that Gompers' ambitions were of little concern to them. Thus almost by default, with little opposition, their labour movement became a satellite of the AFL. As a result, Canadian labour was weakened immeasurably. Its unity was destroyed, its vitality sapped, and it was split almost irreparably between the conservative east and the more radical west which seemed to favour socialism and industrial unionism. In addition, the way was now paved for a separate union movement for French Canadians whose language and cultural differences from the rest of the North American labour movement were of no concern to Gompers.

Canadian labour was, following 1902, more divided than ever before. New labour centres were springing up to challenge the hegemony of the AFL-TLC. In Nova Scotia, the Provincial Workmen's Association was the dominant labour body. In Quebec, Catholic syndicates organized by local parish priests emerged all over the province in opposition to the secular, American-dominated TLC. In Ontario and in parts of Eastern Canada the national unions expelled from the TLC formed their own labour centre, the National Trades and Labour Congress (renamed the Canadian Federation of Labour in 1909) to challenge the American influence in the Canadian labour movement. And in the west, the radical Western Federation of Miners and, later, the even more militant Industrial Workers of the World, were organizing at a rapid pace and were bitterly
campaigning against TLC unions. Thus by 1910, Canadian labour was more regional than it was national.

Concerned almost exclusively with protecting itself from the onslaught of these new dual unions, the TLC adopted a totally defensive posture, undertaking little new organization and offering no solace to the hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers of the country. Yet, despite this inertia, and the massive anti-union campaign launched by business, capitalizing on the fantastic expansion of the Canadian labour force in the years before the onset of the Great War, TLC affiliates were still able to increase their membership from 13,000 in 1902 to 80,000 in 1914. Most of these new members, however, were recruited from the “elite” of Canadian labour—the skilled craftsmen who were easy to organize, whose jobs were relatively secure, and whose wages and conditions of work—though hardly felicitous—were still the envy of most Canadian workers who had to fend for themselves.

Nowhere were conditions worse for the Canadian worker than in Western Canada. There, before 1914, well over one million immigrants had arrived to do the work so necessary to fuel the great Canadian boom in mining, construction, transportation and farming. And there as well, the conventional craft union tactics which worked in Eastern Canada were largely useless. In the frontier environment of the West, employers tended to be more ruthless, workers more belligerent and governments more obstructive. Restraints and moderation—at least in labour relations—were totally lacking. New unions were destroyed as soon as they were organized by the new and fiercely individualistic employing class in Western Canada who were Social Darwinists to the core. Most of these men were of humble origin and had made their fortunes through their own efforts. They were contemptuous of those beneath them who found it necessary to act collectively to protect themselves. They would have nothing to do with unions and did everything in their power to destroy them—usually with the support of a provincial government anxious to make life easier for these champions of free enterprise. Both government and business regarded unions as impediments to prosperity. They were thus treated as illegal organizations and any means to do away with them was acceptable. Goon squads, blacklists, spies, strike-breakers, even the militia—all were used by these rapacious industrialists to break unions, strikes, and often the heads, arms and legs of those involved in them.

And there was little to protect the workers. Any type of legislation to assist the worker was usually defeated on the grounds that these laws would undoubtedly discourage business investment.
What federal labour legislation existed was limited to a few key industries such as the railways and coal mines. And in any case, the legislation was decidedly anti-union. Canadian law clearly put a higher priority on property rights than on personal rights, on the rights of employers to carry on their activities without government interference than on the rights of workers and unions to fight to protect themselves.

Much of this early legislation reflected the ideas of the young Deputy Minister of Labour, Mackenzie King. The various pieces of legislation he helped frame, particularly the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA), put many restrictions on the rights of labour but none on management, which could still freely continue its union-breaking activities. In particular, the IDIA which remained on the statute books for the next two decades — until it was found to be unconstitutional — was a most devious piece of anti-labour legislation. It provided for a lengthy “cooling-off” period in strike and lock-out situations to allow governments to investigate the conflict. Invariably this period was used by management to import strike-breakers, so that many strikes were broken before they had even begun.

For Western labour, however, the major villain was the National Policy. Tariff protection, while of undoubted benefit to both labour and management in central Canada, was a disaster for the West. Not only did it raise prices, but western employers, desperate to undercut Ontario competition in order to survive, were forced to pay their workers lower wages. And perhaps more harmful, was the other facet of the National Policy, the encouragement of large-scale immigration. Without question immigration immeasurably weakened labour organization and undercut wages. As one western industrialist put it: “Immigration to this country is necessary to keep workers disciplined.” Workers would think twice about joining a union or going out on strike when they knew that there were hundreds of desperate, hungry men anxious for their jobs. Indeed so unpopular were immigrants—even British—that western unionists sent one of their Vancouver members to England to discourage immigrants from coming to Canada. Most distasteful for western labour, however, was Oriental immigration. Accustomed to an abysmally low standard of living, these Asians were willing to work for unbelievably low wages. They were unassimilated and impossible to organize. Their presence, either as strike-breakers, or as low-paid labour created unbearable racial tensions and made unionization impossible. Callous employers cruelly exploited these pitiable immigrants; and their fellow workers were not much better. In the words of a socialist newspaper they were “a horde of human-framed
vermin.” Yet despite labour’s vehement protests, the federal government refused to stem the flood of immigrants pouring into Canada, though it did limit the influx of Asians.

As a result of these conditions, the western worker was made keenly aware that he was going to be forcibly prevented from sharing in the fruits of the boom. Understandably, he rejected the outmoded conservative craft union policies of the TLC which could make no headway in the face of such a determinedly hostile government-employer alliance. In its stead new radical ideas took root. This radicalism included two basic tenets—a belief in industrial unionism and in independent working class politics—both anathema to the orthodox trade unionists in the East. Western workers felt that only large industrial unions could successfully withstand the power of the alignment confronting them. And only political action, they believed, could force governments to pass legislation to solve their problems.

For the first two decades of this century western workers were continuously at odds with their more conservative craft-conscious brothers in the East. And more to the point, there arose in the West, a class consciousness unmatched anywhere in the country, a consciousness which expressed itself in such militant unions as the Western Federation of Miners and the Industrial Workers of the World. So violently opposed were government and industry to these radical unions that in many areas of the West attempts to crush these unions resulted in a form of class warfare. Bloody battles between strikers and strike-breakers — and their police allies — occurred in Rossland, Prince Rupert, Ladysmith, Cumberland, and other British Columbia labour centres. Soon these radical ideas — and in some cases the radicals themselves — slipped over the B.C. border into other parts of Western Canada.

Quite obviously eastern labour was not entirely unaffected by this new radicalism. After all, immigrants were also pouring into Toronto, Montreal, and other cities in Ontario and Quebec and flooding an already surfeited labour force. To many of them radical ideas were part of the cultural baggage they had brought out of the industrial slums of Britain and the ghettos and pogroms of Eastern Europe. The situation they confronted in Canada only intensified their radicalism — dreadful working conditions in sweat shops or in unventilated, unsafe mines, appallingly low wages, and horrific housing. Poverty, want, disease and hunger seemed to have followed them over to the new world. It was little wonder that these men and women joined the fight for radical change and took the lead in organizing unions in the mines, factories and lumber camps of Ontario and Quebec. Finns, Jews, Ukrainians, and particularly the
English and the Scots played key roles in bringing organized labour into industries and occupations studiously ignored by the TLC.

Difficult as it is to imagine, these conditions worsened when the boom came to an abrupt end in 1912 and the pre-war depression set in. Unemployment skyrocketed, yet immigrants still were being dumped on Canadian shores in record numbers. Indeed at the height of the depression in 1914, more immigrants — 400,000 — came to Canada than in any other year in our history. For many, both immigrant and native-born alike, soup-kitchens and Salvation Army hostels provided the only life-giving solace. Relief and charitable organizations could not carry the burden of so many unemployed, hungry families. In some areas of the West, hungry men raided stores and restaurants for food to feed themselves and their families.

Thus when war broke out in 1914, organized labour in Canada was fully occupied with the depression. Fighting for jobs—or relief—for its members, was a far more important task than fighting Germans in Belgium. Union membership which reached a pre-war peak of approximately 175,000 in early 1913 dropped to under 140,000 in 1915. Strikes were rare, falling to their lowest level since the beginning of the century. It was only at the end of 1915 and through 1916 that the unemployment situation eased. Many of the unemployed enlisted; others found jobs in the new war plants. By the end of the war, union membership had soared to over 375,000, a figure not matched again until the next war came along.

Labour's reaction to the war was mixed. Although the TLC had adopted anti-war resolutions in 1912 and 1913, when hostilities began Congress leaders reluctantly supported Canadian participation. Western labour leaders, not surprisingly, did not. Their vitriolic denunciations, however, made little impact on their members whose support of the war was evidenced by their enlistment. Clearly some volunteered because they were hungry. As one disillusioned worker put it: "I might as well fight in Belgium for (my) food as fight for it in Winnipeg." Others joined because their employers gave them no choice. A notice one company put in its pay envelope to single men read: "Your King and Country need you — we don't." But most, especially the large number of British-born workers, joined out of a sense of patriotism.

For Canadian labour, war conditions were propitious. New war industries needed more manpower. With immigration at a standstill and hundreds of thousands of men in uniform, labour was at a premium. Large organizational drives were launched and thousands of new members enrolled in the ranks of organized labour. For the first time large numbers of women took over jobs in usually male
preserves. Yet despite these gains in numbers, labour gained little else during the war. Rising costs eroded whatever pay increases were achieved at the bargaining table. The cost of living shot up over 50% between 1915 and 1919; food alone went up nearly 75%. Thus, at the end of the war, the Canadian worker, though probably better paid and perhaps organized, was no better off than he had been during the depression years before the war.

While real wages rose not at all during these years, business profits reached incredible heights. Industrialists were making a killing out of the war and there was nothing labour could do to right the balance. The Conservative government of Robert Borden not only refused to act on labour’s complaints, it also did nothing to control the scandalously high profits of its business supporters, which to the Canadian worker, at least, was the prime cause of the rapid rise in living costs. Unlike the governments of Britain, Australia and even the United States, the Borden administration rejected the concept of making labour a partner in the war effort or of even consulting it on issues vital to its interests. Thus when Borden introduced national registration in 1916 and conscription in 1917, labour’s reaction was violent. To militant unionists, conscription meant the destruction of all their objectives, ideals and achievements. Not only did they feel that the Borden government would soon legislate industrial conscription, but firmly believed that the working class had already borne the greatest burden of the war. Throughout the country labour-led demonstrations against conscription spiralled. Western labour leaders urged a nation-wide general strike. Eastern leaders, however, mollified somewhat by Borden’s appointment of one of their number, Gideon Robertson of the Telegraphers Union, to the Senate, and mindful of Sam Gompers’ fulsome support of both the war and conscription, easily defeated the call for a strike at the 1917 TLC convention. Embittered Westerners returned home to lick their wounds, and to plan their vengeance against both their government and their labour brethren in the East.

To defeat the former, western labour mounted a full-scale campaign in the 1917 election. Labour and socialist candidates were nominated to carry the anti-conscription banner throughout the West. Despite labour’s high hopes, its efforts were disastrous. Rank and file labour was not prepared to follow its leadership. Patriotism was clearly more compelling than class. Every single labour candidate was overrun by the Borden landslide, much to the surprise — and distress — of western radicals. To them the lesson was clear: constitutional means were ineffectual; only direct action could improve the condition of the working class. Thus throughout 1918 western labour was in an ugly, militant mood. When one of its leading radicals, Ginger Goodwin, was shot to death by police
while attempting to escape the draft, there were protest demonstrations throughout the West and a general strike in Vancouver. Indeed all over the West, thousands of workers went out on strike, feeling, with reason, that they, as a class, had suffered and sacrificed more than any other group in Canada. There was even a general strike of all civic employees in Winnipeg which shut down the city for ten days and was settled only when the city caved in to the strikers’ demands. This lesson was not lost on the labour movement.

Armistice in 1918 brought with it to most Canadians the hope that out of the misery and blood of Europe would arise a new world order. And surely the 60,000 Canadians who had died in the mud of Flanders had not sacrificed themselves in vain. Out of the ashes of war, most Canadians believed, would emerge a just society. Already the Russian Revolution of 1917 had a powerful—if different—effect on Canadians. To many workers, the triumph of the Soviets marked the beginning of the end of the exploitation of their class. The idea of workers rising to overthrow their oppressors stirred the hearts and minds of thousands of Canadian workers. Most Canadians however reacted in horror. To government officials, businessmen, farmers, and to the vast majority of the middle class — and to many workers as well — the Bolshevik victory was terrifying. Many of these men and women were already convinced that most Canadian labour radicals were Bolsheviks, violent revolutionaries intent on overthrowing Canadian society and setting up a Soviet state. And their pleas to save Canada from these “revolutionaries” fell on receptive ears. The Canadian government was already busy making plans to suppress native radicals.

In late 1918 the Borden administration made its move and declared fourteen organizations—including the IWW and various socialist parties illegal. In addition it arrested scores of known radicals, and planted agents at all Western labour meetings to report on “seditious” activity. Radical newspapers—including many labour ones—were closed down. But worst of all from labour’s point of view, strikes in many industries were declared unlawful and those advocating them could be conscripted and interned.

In its battle against these government actions western labour was alone. Earlier, at its convention in Quebec City, on sectional votes, the TLC had totally rejected all the militant policies of its outnumbered western delegates. Again the West had been humiliated; alienation and anger burned deeply within western labour leaders as they returned home. The TLC had made it clear that it would support the government’s actions against radical labour in the West. As a result western unionists decided to hold their own caucus to plan strategy.
Capitalizing on this splendid opportunity, a tiny group of energetic revolutionaries, members of the Socialist Party of Canada, who had, through their own abilities and efforts, achieved positions of power in the western labour movement, decided to create a new labour centre in the West. These men, R. J. Johns, Victor Midgely, W. A. Pritchard and R. B. Russell, organized the famous Western Labour Conference in March of 1919, in Calgary, attended by all the dissident elements of western labour. Controlled by radicals, the Conference not only passed resolutions extolling the virtues of the Bolsheviks in Russia and the Spartacists in Germany, but also called for a referendum to set up a new militant, industrial organization—the One Big Union. Though the conference did not officially launch the OBU since the referendum would not be complete for several months, its adoption of radical policies, including secession from the TLC and the creation of a new Marxist labour centre clearly reflected the frustrated, militant mood that permeated western labour in the aftermath of a bloody war which seemed to have brought in its wake nothing of benefit to the Canadian workingman.

Following the conference, the federal government was now fully convinced that revolution was at hand in the West. And worse, they believed that fueling the unrest in the West was the Bolshevik government of Russia. As if to add credence to this belief, many radicals themselves were publicly proclaiming that Canada was on the verge of revolution. Fiery speeches urging the establishment of a Soviet Canada simply steeled the government’s resolve to crush this obvious “conspiracy”. With the unofficial support of the Borden government, vigilante groups consisting largely of veterans attempted their own anti-radical campaign. Left-wing meetings were broken up, along with the heads, arms and legs of many of those in attendance. Riots broke out in Vancouver and Winnipeg where vigilante mobs hunted for and attacked suspected radicals. Because of the tacit approval of all levels of government, and probably of the vast majority of Canadians as well, these extra-legal veterans’ groups operated with total impunity. No one was charged or convicted, though the same could not be said of those they attacked. Though historians have unearthed nothing to prove that a revolutionary conspiracy existed—and in fact it is quite obvious that none ever did—government officials at the time were behaving on the assumption that one did. Only this can explain their behaviour during the chaotic months of May and June 1919.

Clearly, even the most reactionary members of the Borden administration were aware of the difficulties confronting the Canadian worker in 1919. Far from improving his lot, the aftermath of the war had brought nothing but increased hardship; inflation was taking
a terrible toll of his income; prices were rising much faster than wages. Scores of thousands of returned veterans were pouring into the labour force at the same time that jobs were becoming scarcer as war-time industries shut down. Just to survive on his wages was becoming an impossible burden for the Canadian worker.

Finally, frustrated beyond endurance, Canadian workers rebelled. For most, the rebellion was symbolic, but for the workers of Winnipeg it was deadly earnest. On May 15, 1919, the working men and women of Winnipeg went out on strike shutting down Canada's third largest city for six weeks in the most complete general strike in North American history. Obviously these men and women did not see themselves as surrogates for workers across the country; nor did they believe they were the vanguard of a revolutionary struggle. Their aim was much simpler. They wanted recognition of their unions and right to bargain collectively about their wages and working conditions. Despite the heady atmosphere of social unrest and rebellion that permeated parts of Canada at the time, the Winnipeg strikers wanted nothing more revolutionary than a living wage.

The strike began with the walkout of workers in the metal and building trades over their employers' refusal to recognize their union. They appealed to the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council for support. Because of the success of the 1918 civil servant strike there was an immediate call for a general strike and in a referendum union members in Winnipeg voted overwhelmingly—over 11,000 in favour, only 524 opposed—for a general strike.

On May 15, the city of Winnipeg came to an abrupt standstill as some 35,000 workers—12,000 of whom were unorganized—left their jobs. The industrial and economic paralysis of the city was total. Factories, stores, restaurants and offices closed. Elevators stopped. Public transportation ceased as streetcars remained in their barns. Firemen left their posts. Newspapers did not publish. Bread and milk deliveries were cut off. The telephone, telegraph, and postal systems shut down. Even police voted to join the strike. This was a demonstration of labour solidarity unparalleled in Canadian history.

Winnipeg was polarized, split down the middle in one of the great class confrontations in North American history. On one side stood the strikers and their families, some 100,000 strong; on the other in almost equal numbers, the city establishment and its supporters, led by the Citizens, Committee of One Thousand made up of prominent businessmen, professionals, government officials, clergymen, and the like. To them the strike was an incipient
revolution, an attempt by Bolsheviks to create a soviet government in Winnipeg and then throughout Canada. This was a view shared by the federal government. In spite of the declared moderate objectives of the strikers, and their successful efforts to keep the strike peaceful and to resume the flow of essential goods and services, the Borden administration was convinced that the revolution being espoused and promoted by labour radicals in the West had finally come. This belief was substantiated, at least in the minds of government officials, by the large number of strikes and demonstrations in support of the workers of Winnipeg that took place in most industrial centres across the country. From Vancouver, British Columbia, to Sydney, Nova Scotia, in dozens of cities and towns throughout Canada, workers struck or marched in sympathy with their brothers and sisters in Winnipeg. Understandably unnerved by this massive display of unity, the Borden government pledged all its resources—military, financial and legislative—to crush this “rebellion”. Armoured cars, troops and machine gun units were quietly transferred to Winnipeg. Clearly, any method to break the strike would be acceptable.

Assured of government support the employers of Winnipeg categorically refused to negotiate with the strikers. Nor would they accept any compromise. The strike, they believed, would soon be crushed, the strikers suppressed, and unionism in Winnipeg, they hoped, destroyed. The federal government did not disappoint them. On June 6th, Parliament amended the Immigration Act to provide for the deportation of British-born immigrants. Not coincidentally the Committee which ran the strike consisted almost entirely of British-born immigrants. On June 10th, the House amended the Criminal Code broadening the definition of sedition. That completed, on June 17th, the Cabinet ordered the arrest of the strike leaders. Without the leadership of these men the strike collapsed. It only took the riot of “Bloody Saturday”, June 21st, in which police violently broke up a peaceful parade of strikers and veterans, injuring scores and killing two bystanders, for the strike to come to an ignominious conclusion. Humbled, their leaders incarcerated and threatened with deportation, opposed not only by a determined government but by their own leaders in their international unions and in the Trades and Labor Congress, the strikers admitted defeat and, on June 26, went back to work to conditions even worse than those existing before the Strike.

Unquestionably, for labour the strike was a disaster. Western labour had gambled everything on the strike, and at its conclusion was left with nothing. The idealism and energy that had fueled western radicalism for a generation was spent—quenched by the
apparently omnipotent alliance of business and government. Workers were disillusioned; their hopes crushed; their fears realized. Radicalism in the West was routed. Labour was prostrate, in no condition to face the terrible exigencies of the next two decades. It would take years for western labour to regain the spirit, influence and power it lost at Winnipeg.

Yet the strike was not a total failure. Politically, labour gained immeasurably. Capitalizing on their newly-found class solidarity, in the provincial election following the strike, Manitoba workers combined to elect eleven labour representatives to the Legislature. And consistently since then, in both provincial and federal elections, Winnipeg’s working-class areas have invariably elected labour-supported candidates. The most conspicuous of the latter was J. S. Woodsworth who not only played a key role in pushing through Parliament major social legislation for labour’s benefit but was one of the founders of the CCF.

Though not destroyed by the Strike, the One Big Union was fatally impaired. Although it did not even exist at the time of the strike and thus played no role in it, the OBU was the Strike’s ultimate victim. Much of the hostility of government and business towards the strikers was based on their fear of the OBU and what it might achieve. Their suppression of the strike was, they hoped, a suppression, as well, of the OBU. And indeed it was. Though the OBU did not hit its peak of activity and membership (about 50,000) until several months after the strike, it was nonetheless doomed by the sudden disappearance of radical fervour in the West concomitant with the collapse of the strike. Perhaps the OBU might not have achieved much in any case. Originally, it stood for syndicalism and against labour’s participation in politics, and both positions were, after the strike, increasingly suspect to western workers. To many OBU leaders, only industrial and not political action, strikes and not elections, and syndicalism and not parliamentary democracy, could solve the problems of the Western workingman. Rejected by most workers, attacked by government, ignored by employers who refused to negotiate with it, and undermined by the TLC and its international affiliates, the OBU died a painfully long—it lingered on, enfeebled, for another thirty years—unlamented death. It demise marked the ultimate death-blow to a labour radicalism which had existed in Western Canada since the turn of the century.
PART II

Following the exhilarating but agonizing experiences of 1919, labour seemed totally exhausted and incapable of further activity. In both the United States and Canada, the decade of the 1920s was a period of labour quiescence unmatched before or since. For the Canadian labour movement particularly, no decade was more dismal and disappointing. Organization was at a standstill; union membership plummeted throughout the twenties and early thirties as union after union collapsed before the onslaught of business-sponsored company unions and open shops. Strikes fell into disuse; only in the coal fields of Nova Scotia was there any militance. Indeed coal miners accounted for fully 50% of the strikes in this period. It wasn’t as if working conditions had suddenly improved during the twenties — they hadn’t. Nor were wages rising very rapidly — they weren’t. Conditions and wages were as bad as they had ever been. Indeed for some workers they were worse. But labour was paralyzed, its leadership divided, its idealism destroyed, and its vitality sapped. Torpidity and acrimony seemed the dismal hallmark of labour activity in this period. Though this was a decade of rapid economic development, the Canadian labour movement was unable to capitalize on these propitious circumstances. It simply could not cope with the new economic challenges of the period.

The rise of mass production industries and new modes of production in such relatively new industries as electrical appliances, automobiles, chemicals and rubber, called for different and more aggressive methods of organization. A vast new industrial work force was calling for industrial organization. But to most craft-obsessed TLC affiliates, the very thought of organizing unskilled workers was anathema. Even though these new industries could not be accommodated within their existing craft structures, both the TLC and the AFL were unwilling to adopt different structures. They were select organizations, whose membership made up the elite of the labour movement; they wanted nothing else but to maintain their status and to be left alone.

The industrial work force in Canada had proliferated rapidly throughout the 1920s and was demanding to be organized. Yet, hidebound, TLC affiliates perversely clung to their craft mentality. They launched no organizing campaigns, hired few organizers, and spent little money. In a period of rapid economic expansion the TLC consciously chose retrenchment and consolidation. It succeeded in neither. By the early thirties it had lost much of its membership and was on the verge of bankruptcy. It was impotent, rudderless, and its very survival seemed in question.
To compound the TLC’s problems, new labour organizations has sprung up in the 1920s and early 1930s challenging its control of the Canadian union movement. The first of these — the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (CCCL) — appeared in 1921 in the province of Quebec. It was a confessional union dominated by the Catholic Church and was strongly nationalist. Because of its connection with the Church and its opposition to international unionism, the CCCL was able to attract a substantial number of Quebec workers whose unique cultural and linguistic needs had been neglected by the TLC.

In 1927, another labour centre — the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) — was founded by unions expelled from the TLC since 1902 for their advocacy of industrial unionism and their antagonism to international unionism. Its creation was largely the work of A. R. Mosher and his powerful Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. Though its initial membership of 46,000 would rapidly dwindle, the ACCL was to play an important role in the growth of industrial and national unionism in Canada.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the TLC in the 1920s and early 1930s came from the nascent Communist Party of Canada. Throughout this period the Party made a concentrated effort to gain control of the Canadian labour movement and bring its policies into line with those of the Soviet-dominated Red International of Labour Unions. The ultimate objective of the Communists was to use the union movement as an instrument to overthrow the capitalist system; their method, they proclaimed, was to “permeate the labour unions and to replace the present reactionary leadership by revolutionary leadership”. Their strategy was to integrate themselves into the TLC and the ACCL and, by “boring from within”, dominate both organizations. Their efforts came to nought. By 1930, most Communists had been expelled from these labour centres, their achievements almost nugatory.

New tactics were obviously called for. In 1930, on orders from the Communist International, the Party created its own labour centre, the Workers’ Unity League. It consisted of industrial unions in the mining, clothing, lumber and textile industries. Unlike both the TLC and the ACCL, the WUL was an aggressive, militant organization bent not only on organizing unorganized workers but the unemployed as well. It provided the leadership for most of the important labour struggles of this period including the bloody walkout by Estevan miners in which police killed three strikers, and the strike of furniture workers and chicken pluckers at Stratford, Ontario, which was put down only after the arrival of an army company equipped with machine guns and several armoured cars. By
1935, the WUL had a membership of over 40,000, the vast majority of whom were not Communists. In that same year, however, because of international developments — specifically the growing threat of Fascism in Europe — Communist strategy changed: a “united front” of all workers was now necessary. On orders from Moscow, the WUL was disbanded and many of its organizers and unions went back into the TLC.

For most Canadian workers the machinations of the Communist Party were of little concern; they were too occupied trying to survive the depression which struck in 1929. No period was more trying and filled with greater anguish for the Canadian workingman than the decade of the thirties. With the collapse of the Canadian economy thousands of men and women were thrown onto the streets, without jobs, without money, without savings, and, worst of all, without hope. By 1932, 1,800,000 Canadians were on welfare and more should have been had there been more relief money available. More than one-third of the labour force was unemployed. And even those lucky enough to hold jobs suffered. Many were earning less than a subsistence level. A government royal commission discovered some women who were being paid five cents an hour in the garment industry; others were earning seven dollars for a seventy-hour work week. Employers were able — and most were quite willing — to cut wages and increase hours without fear of strikes. Gains made by unions over the previous two decades disappeared in the face of these impossible economic conditions.

For the unemployed and the hungry there was little assistance — no social welfare, no unemployment insurance. Canada, like the rest of the world, was not prepared to deal with such a devastating depression. Families broke up as men were forced to leave their homes to look for jobs. They joined the vast army of “hoboes” travelling across the country on freight cars looking for work, for food, indeed for anything which would enable them to survive.

For the most part the Canadian Government was paralyzed by the depression. It did little to alleviate the suffering, and even less to solve the economic crisis or create new jobs. Finally in 1932, to accommodate the thousands of wandering unemployed single men, a system of relief camps was set up, mostly in isolated areas. During the next four years, these camps played host to well over 100,000 young Canadians. But they were hardly hospitable. The camps were run by the army under strict military discipline. The work was hard, the pay insulting — 20¢ a day — and each “inmate” was allowed a tobacco allowance of just over one cent a day. The food was appalling, bed-bugs and other biting insects plentiful, the stench from latrines overpowering and the loneliness and humiliation unbearable.
In 1935, hundreds of these alienated young men walked out of their camps in British Columbia protesting these intolerable conditions. They descended on Vancouver and after creating much turmoil there, under the leadership of the WUL they organized a "trek" by freight-car to Ottawa to complain directly to the government. By the time the trekkers reached Regina, they numbered over 2,000. Alarmed, the federal Government ordered the R.C.M.P. to stop the men, though it did allow their leaders to travel on to Ottawa. When this delegation returned to Regina after a fruitless but acrimonious session with Prime Minister R. B. Bennett, the R.C.M.P. was ordered to arrest the strike leaders. Predictably there were violent clashes. In this so-called "Regina Riot" on Dominion Day, 1935, one man was killed, hundreds injured and scores of strikers arrested. Much of downtown Regina was ruined, but the government triumphed. The march was broken up, and the young men headed back to the bush, but nothing was done to remedy the grievances which had brought them out of the camps. In the following year the problem was solved; the camps were shut down.

Organized labour was in shambles. In 1935 there were fewer union members — about 275,000 — in Canada than there had been at any time since the first world war. At just this time, however, a new labour organization was being created in the United States which would change the face of the Canadian labour movement. The CIO—the Committee for Industrial Organization—was formed by several AFL unions led by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. They rejected AFL policies and insisted on an aggressive organizational campaign amongst industrial workers. Within months they had unionized several million unorganized and largely unskilled workers; by 1937, sparked by victories in sit-down strikes in Akron and Flint, the CIO had a membership approaching four million.

In Canada, however, during this same period, the CIO accomplished little. In fact, it had no intentions of moving into Canada—at least not until it had completed the formidable tasks confronting it at home. But Canadian workers were impatient and restive. The worst of the depression was over and jobs were becoming less scarce. Captivated by the glamour, the excitement, and particularly by the success of the CIO, Canadian workers desperately begged it to come to Canada. On their own, without informing the CIO, scores of ex-WUL organizers began organizing CIO unions in Canada. Within months, the CIO had hundreds of new members and dozens of new unions it knew nothing about. Not one cent of CIO money, not one CIO organizer, not even one note of CIO encouragement had crossed the border to help in this campaign. Canadians were on their own.
The turning point for the CIO in Canada, which changed its rather limited organizing campaign into a passionate crusade, occurred at Oshawa, Ontario in April of 1937. There, 4,000 workers of the huge General Motors plants went out on strike and asked the CIO and its affiliate, the United Automobile Workers, for assistance. They received but one organizer and no money. Despite the CIO's lack of support, and despite the desperate efforts of the Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, who even raised his own police force (they were irreverently dubbed Hepburn's Hussars, and in Oshawa they were known as Sons of Mitch's), to crush the strike and keep the CIO out of Ontario, the strikers persevered and won a dramatic victory. Spurred on by this triumph the CIO began a vast organizational campaign largely in the industrial areas of Ontario, and within a year it had organized thousands of workers. A renewed sense of militance and idealism permeated Canadian labour for the first time since the end of the Winnipeg Strike.

For the workers of Canada, CIO was a magic name. Wherever they heard it they flocked; whoever used it, they trusted. Canadian workers obviously felt that the CIO magic would rub off on them, that what the CIO was achieving for its members in the United States, it would also achieve for its members in Canada. For the first time unions were appearing in industries which were traditionally thought to be unorganizable; there were now unions for steel-workers, automobile workers, electrical workers, rubber workers, packing-house workers, pulp and paper workers, lumber and sawmill workers, and mine and smelter workers. The CIO had clearly revolutionized Canadian labour; it had created a powerful, aggressive and most important, viable, industrial union movement. It had, in effect, organized not only the unorganized, but, as well, those thought to be unorganizable.

Angered by CIO activities, the AFL expelled all CIO unions from its ranks and ordered the TLC to do the same. Reluctantly, in September of 1939, the TLC followed suit. Two months later the CIO in Canada agreed to merge with the ACCL, and in 1940 they created the Canadian Congress of Labour. Though A. R. Mosher was elected president, the new Congress would be controlled by the CIO whose huge membership and financial potential greatly outweighed that of the ACCL. Thus by 1940 Canada had three major labour centres — the TLC which was totally dominated by its American unions, the CCL in which the domination, though present, was less obvious, and the CCCCL in Quebec in which the domination came not from the south, but from above — the Catholic Church.

The depression did not finally lift until the outbreak of war in 1939. Again, as in 1914, it required a world war to solve Canada's
economic problems. And again, as in the First World War, Canadian labour made its greatest advances during the war years, 1939 to 1945. For the Canadian worker it was a boom period. Jobs, which in the 1930s had all but disappeared, suddenly reemerged in large numbers. Instead of a shortage of jobs, there was now a shortage of labour. Naturally, the "lost generation" — the young single unemployed of the 1930s — were the first to enlist in the armed services. But everyone who wanted to could work.

Clearly these conditions were optimal for union growth, and as unions flourished so did their militance. Aside from the Communists, there was strong support within the labour movement for the war. But this was coupled with an equally strong feeling that this time labour's contributions would have to be recognized. The experience of World War I would not be repeated, or so labour leaders thought and so they were promised by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Predictably, King's assurances amounted to little. Between 1939 and 1943 the Canadian Government introduced a series of orders-in-council, which extended many of the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act to all "essential" industries, which set up a system of wage controls, and which created several War Labour Boards with the participation of labour. But labour's expectations were shattered. The various War Boards proved consistently anti-labour, and wage controls benefitted employers not employees. Worst of all, an order-in-council recognizing the right of employees to organize and to collective bargaining was ignored, with impunity, by employers. In Kirkland Lake, for example, in the winter of 1941-2, some 3,000 gold miners went out on strike for union recognition. Despite a unanimous government conciliation board recommendation that the strikers' position be accepted, the mine owners, supported by Premier Hepburn and his "Hussars", refused to negotiate. Mackenzie King declined to intervene, even though the mine owners were clearly violating government regulations. For twelve bitterly cold and lonely weeks, the miners trudged around the closed mines. Finally, they admitted defeat and returned to their jobs, that is, those who were not already fired for their union activity.

Labour was enraged at its treatment at the hands of the King administration and its business allies. Militance and violence increased. Strikes were occurring in every industry. Coal miners, steel workers, aircraft workers and munition plant employees all walked out, despite the strategic importance of their jobs. Indeed in 1943, there were more strikes than in any other year in Canadian history to that time; obviously the patriotism of the Canadian worker was being sorely tested. In almost all these strikes the issue was the same — union recognition. Finally, the federal government was forced
to act, and after a series of hearings in 1943, it introduced the landmark order-in-council, P.C. 1003. This order was modelled on the 1935 Wagner Act in the United States and it established government machinery to enforce collective bargaining and union recognition and to investigate and correct unfair labour practices. It gave unions the integral legal status that was denied them for so long, a status they needed to maintain their existence, and to conduct strikes and organizing campaigns. Indeed P.C. 1003 became the foundation of industrial relations in Canada in the post-war period as province after province adopted its provisions in their own labour legislation. For organized labour in Canada it was a significant milestone. The right to organize and to bargain with employers had finally been won — or so unions thought.

Canadian labour emerged from the war heady and full of confidence. It had achieved substantial breakthroughs in the areas of recognition, job security and working conditions. But with peace, management again flexed its muscles and attempted to limit labour’s wartime achievements. In particular it was determined to undermine labour’s key accomplishment — union security and recognition. Equally determined not to give up its hard-fought gains, labour girded itself for the inevitable confrontation.

Only days after the war ended, the battle was joined: the battleground, Windsor, Ontario; the combatants, the management and workers of the Ford plant. This historic ninety-nine-day strike, was for Canadian labour, perhaps the most significant of the post-1945 period. The struggle was both bitter and lengthy, but the triumph of the union was complete. After efforts by hundreds of police to break through the picket line were thwarted by strikers who blockaded all the streets in downtown Windsor surrounding the Ford plant with their cars (which they abandoned for several days, thus creating the worst traffic jam in Canadian history), the Ford Company agreed to arbitration. In his arbitration award, Justice Ivan Rand of the Supreme Court of Canada provided for a compulsory check-off of union dues for all employees in the bargaining unit, whether they were union members or not. This famous “Rand formula” has become a precedent for most large collective bargaining agreements since that time.

The Ford settlement put securely into the economic fabric of peacetime the gains and recognition that unions had achieved during the war. Moreover, the Ford victory served as a stimulus for other Canadian workers. 1946 was a record year for strikes in Canada, as union after union attempted to emulate the success of the Ford workers. Most succeeded. Strikes by steelworkers and electrical workers in Hamilton, lumber workers in British Columbia and
Northern Ontario, and textile workers in Quebec, were all long, bitter and hard-fought, but they all ended in total victory for the unions. Militant industrial unionism was triumphant almost everywhere in the country. Organized labour, it seemed, had at last achieved the secure economic and legal status it had fought for so fiercely since the beginning of the century.

Though the Second World War clearly had a great impact on labour in English-speaking Canada, its impact on Quebec was even more profound. It accelerated an urbanization and an industrialization that was already changing the face of the province. In the 1920s and thirties, the Quebec labour movement had been Church-dominated, conservative and seemingly intent only on maintaining close ties with both management and provincial governments. For the most part it did little for the French-Canadian working-man. There were, however, in this period, a series of bitter strikes throughout the province which indicated the depth of the hostility of Quebec workers towards management, government, and to some extent, towards their own leaders as well. This rank and file militance — a new phenomenon in Quebec — was a harbinger of developments in the province following the war.

In the immediate post-war period a new generation of labour leaders took control of the CCCL. They were concerned more with working conditions than with catechism, and were supported by a growing number of young clerics who were dragging a reluctant Church with them into the twentieth century. The CCCL was no longer simply concerned with accommodating business and government; it was now more concerned with improving the conditions of the Quebec worker.

The Asbestos Strike of 1949 was the culmination of these rapid changes. The five-month strike of some 2,000 workers at the Johns Manville plant in Asbestos, Quebec, and of other miners in the surrounding area, was the turning point in modern Quebec labour history, and according to some, the real beginning of the Quiet Revolution. For the first time leading figures in the Catholic Church stood up to the reactionary, violently anti-labour government of Premier Maurice Duplessis and came out in support of the strikers. Intellectuals across the province stood with the strikers; some — including a young Pierre Elliott Trudeau — even marched with them. Encouraged by the Quebec Government, which sent in hundreds of police, Johns Manville refused to negotiate with the union and began evicting strikers from their company-owned homes. It also began importing strikebreakers. Violence was soon rampant, and the police, brought in expressly to crush the strike, started arresting and beating
strike leaders. Nevertheless the union persisted. Eventually, under pressure from an increasingly uncomfortable Church, both sides agreed to negotiate and the strike ended.

For the union, the economic gains from the strike were modest, and compared to the psychological gains, insignificant. The CCCL emerged from Asbestos with the prestige, confidence and militance it had always lacked. It had taken on the most anti-union government in North America and had trounced it. Workers began flooding into the CCCL in record numbers; its membership was soon over 100,000. In 1960, by now a thoroughly revamped and revitalized organization, it adopted a new name, the Confederation of National Trade Unions, discarded the last of its clerical ties, and under the leadership of its new president, Jean Marchand, played a prominent role in the economic and political developments which changed the face of Quebec in the 1960s.

Throughout the 1940s and early fifties the conflict with management and governments at times took a back seat to the vitriolic battles within the labour movement itself over who would control organized labour in Canada. It was a struggle between the Communists and their opponents led by the CCF. In organizing industrial workers in Canada, no group played a more important role than the Communists. At one time they organized and dominated such significant unions as the United Auto Workers, the United Steel Workers, the United Electrical Workers, the International Woodworkers of America, the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, the Canadian Seamen’s Union, along with large textile, fishermen, and longshoremen unions. And though they never had sufficient strength to dominate either the CCL or the TLC, they were able to put their supporters in key positions and to vigorously oppose policies they disapproved. On the whole these men and women were energetic, zealous and dedicated unionists who provided first-rate leadership and organization to their followers. Yet their unbending loyalty to Communist policy destroyed their credibility with most Canadian unionists. Until Hitler’s invasion of Russia in 1941, the Communists vociferously opposed the war; suddenly, overnight, when the invasion of Russia began, they transformed themselves into super-patriots and fulsome supporters of the war. In 1945, in line with Party policy, they campaigned for the re-election of the Mackenzie King government, a government whose policies were hardly pro-labour. Yet, several months later, they were bitterly castigating King and his policies.

Though these rapid turnabouts kept the heads of many confused unionists spinning trying to follow the various tacks in the Party line, the Communists still retained a significant reservoir of support in both Congresses. But the support was waning rapidly in the face
of a relentless CCF offensive. Finally, taking advantage of the anti-communist hysteria of the post-war period, the CCL and the TLC expelled Communist-dominated unions from their ranks. If the Communists were to continue to condemn and vilify the leaders and policies of organized labour, they would now have to do so from the outside.

In some cases it was not enough simply to exorcise a Communist union; it had to be destroyed as well. With the approval of the Liberal Government a notorious ex-convict, Hal Banks, was brought to Canada in 1949 by the TLC to crush the Communist-dominated Canadian Seamen’s Union. As a government inquiry later revealed, Banks and his “goons” (there is no other word to describe them) instituted a reign of terror on the waterfront — beating and threatening opponents — apparently with tacit government approval, until the CSU was demolished. Communism would no longer be a problem on the Great Lakes.

Despite, or more correctly, perhaps because of these battles, the CCL and the TLC were gradually moving closer together. Following the lead of the AFL and the CIO in 1956 the two Canadian labour centres merged into the Canadian Labour Congress. After years of separation and hostility, the Canadian trade union movement was once again united. But unity did not necessarily mean power. In two significant—and bloody—strikes immediately following the merger, in Murdochville, Quebec in 1957, and in Newfoundland in 1958, two of the CLC’s largest affiliates, the United Steel Workers, and the International Woodworkers, suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of determined employers supported by equally adamant and hostile provincial governments. Nevertheless, with a membership of over one million, the Canadian Labour Congress was now a dominant force in the economic and political life of the nation.

It was on the political scene, however, that the CLC first attempted to make its mark. In 1961 it joined with the CCF to found a new party for labour — the New Democratic Party. For labour to support its own party was seemingly a violation of one of the basic traditions of Canadian unionism. Though labour had always attempted to play a political role, the TLC ensured that the role would be minimal. Borrowing from the American experience of non-partisan political activity, the TLC, almost from its inception, followed the Gompers policy of neutral opportunism: “Reward your friends and punish your enemies.” A political party for labour, TLC leaders felt, would accomplish little else than split the labour movement. This attitude conflicted with the philosophy brought over by British unionists whose experience with direct participation in politics had proven beneficial for labour. These conflicting ideologies would be-
devil labour political action for years. The British model triumphed in Western Canada where unions allied themselves with various socialist parties. But the TLC saw itself as "the legislative mouthpiece of organized labour in Canada," and though many of its officials ran for office, the Congress supported no party. Occasionally, as in 1906 and 1917, the TLC made noises about founding a labour party, but these lapses quickly passed. And even when labour candidates won considerable support in the various provincial elections following the first war—indeed labour formed part of the coalition government of Ontario in 1919—the TLC policy did not change. Even the creation of the CCF in the 1930s did not deter the TLC leadership. Until the very end, that is until the merger in 1956, the TLC held out against endorsing any political party.

The CCL was less reluctant. Despite the opposition of its Communists, the Congress endorsed the CCF as the "political arm of labour" and urged its unions to affiliate with the party. It worked aggressively, campaigned actively and spent handsomely on behalf of the CCF. But by 1956 only a small number of unions had affiliated, and the CCF was not making much headway amongst working-class voters. In 1958 the CCF won only 8 seats in Parliament, and in the industrial heartland of Canada, Ontario, it was reduced to a pitiful three in the provincial legislature. Obviously, what was necessary was a new party and a new approach which would appeal to the Canadian worker. Overcoming the reluctance of its old-time TLC members, the CLC voted to join forces with the CCF and create a new party for labour. And though it has not been as successful as its founders had hoped, over the past decade the NDP has achieved some spectacular breakthroughs. Significantly, however, it has not yet broken through to the working men and women of Canada, the vast majority of whom still support the two old-line parties. Thus, though the NDP is officially the party of the Canadian labour movement (at least in English-speaking Canada), it is not yet the party of the Canadian worker.

By 1960 most of the major battles of organized labour in Canada had been fought and won—or so most labour leaders thought. But the working women of Canada were less sure. For them the trade union movement had achieved little. Though in the history of the Canadian working class, women play an important—indeed an integral—role, in the history of Canadian trade unionism their role is minimal. In the first sixty years of this century only a relatively small number of women workers were organized, and only a handful of these played any role at all in the union movement. Despite the fact that a major—and often overlooked—theme of our working class history has been the exploitation of the Canadian woman, organized
labour has, from the beginning, studiously ignored her problems. At the turn of the century most women workers were domestics. As the Canadian economy expanded however, and immigration increased, many women, particularly young immigrants, entered the labour force in the worst of all possible jobs—as wage-slaves in sweat shops or grimy factories. With the onset of the first world war, for the first time large numbers of married women joined the work force. During the war and in the years following it, the nature of women’s work became more clerical. In the years since then millions of Canadian women have taken up jobs in professions which have become their preserve—as secretaries, saleswomen, clerks, waitresses, office helpers, and nurses. All of these jobs were beyond the pale of organized labour. But even many of the hundreds of thousands of women working in the factories and industrial plants of the nation have also been by-passed by the trade union movement. Only in the last few years—in the last 1960s and 1970s—concomitant with the rise of the feminist movement, have trade unions begun to deal seriously with the needs and expectations of the country’s working women.

It would be misleading however to portray Canadian women as a totally docile work force. As early as 1907 women employees of the Bell Telephone Company in Toronto organized themselves and successfully carried on a strike to improve their miserable working conditions. And throughout the textile and garment industries women have often been more militant than their male counterparts and have participated in some of the most bitter strikes in Canadian history.

Nevertheless these demonstrations of the solidarity of women workers have been rare. Because of societal pressures and the pervasive influence of the domestic role most women found it difficult to identify with the working class. They were often seen by management, by fellow employees, and even by themselves, as temporary workers, holding down jobs until the inevitable calls of marriage and motherhood took them out of the work force. More than anything else, these attitudes have made women historically the most exploited of all Canadian workers, and the most difficult to organize.

On the whole, however, by 1960 the Canadian labour movement had finally secured the power, prestige and status it had sought so desperately over the past century. Yet, as the 1960s and early seventies made manifest, labour’s problems were by no means over. Though economically powerful and politically potent, it still did not have the ear of government, as the actions and policies of federal and provincial governments in these years made clear. And despite significant breakthroughs in this period in the organization of public service employees, labour made little headway in its attempts to unionize agricultural, immigrant and white-collar workers. In ad-
dition, new and extremely divisive conflicts broke out within the ranks of the labour movement concerning the role—and indeed, even the existence—of international unions in Canada. Again, as in 1902, labour found itself the battleground for the seemingly interminable battle between nationalists and continentalists. As well, in various parts of the country rank and file workers were beginning to rebel against a union leadership they considered too conservative, though elsewhere, particularly in Quebec, the leaders seemed considerably more militant than their members. Nevertheless, despite these internal tensions and the continued opposition of both industry and, to a lesser extent, government, Canadian labour can look back on its achievements since 1902 and face the future secure in the knowledge that it has overcome obstacles far worse than those facing it now.
SUGGESTED READINGS


