Section 9.—Organized Labour in Canada

HISTORY OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN CANADA*

Canadian trade union history goes back a surprisingly long way. Nova Scotia had an Act against unions, and therefore presumably some unions, as early as 1816. Printers were organized in Quebec in 1827, and in Montreal and Hamilton in 1833. Shoemakers were organized in Montreal in 1827, carpenters in 1834, and stonecutters in 1844. The York printers were organized in 1832, and the Toronto Typographical Union has a continuous history from 1844. But brief life was the portion of most of these, and it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the first small foundations of the present Canadian union structure were laid.

Almost from the beginning, Canadian unionism was predominantly "international"; that is, most of its members belonged to unions with their headquarters and the bulk of their membership in another country. The first "outside" unions were British. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) established its first local in Canada in 1850, followed by three more in 1851. The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) in 1860 became the first permanent union in the building trades. The ASE was absorbed into the International Association of Machinists in 1920, and the ASCJ into the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in 1914, though some branches seceded in 1922 and resumed their status as locals of the British organization until 1925, when the latter formally withdrew. The much more important American unions began to come in 1861, with the Iron Moulders, followed by the Locomotive Engineers in 1864, the National Typographical Society (now the International Typographical Union) and the Cigar Makers in 1865, the Knights of St. Crispin (shoemakers) in 1867, and the Railway Conductors in 1868. The Coopers arrived in the late 1860's and the Locomotive Firemen in the early 1870's.

At the same time, however, a variety of purely Canadian local unions were springing up: shipwrights [at Victoria and Quebec (1862), Halifax (1863), Saint John and Quebec (1865)], bakers, tailors, bricklayers, stonecutters, wharf porters, longshoremen, and bookbinders.

Until 1871, the various unions had little to do with each other but in that year five craft unions formed the Toronto Trades Assembly. Two years later Ottawa had a flourishing Trades Council which, in 1873 and 1875 succeeded in electing a Labour member, D. J. O'Donoghue, to the Provincial Legislature. Hamilton had a Trades Council about the same time. All of these disappeared in the depression of the 1870's, but not without having laid the foundations of a national organization and won a resounding legislative victory.

In 1873, the Toronto Trades Assembly called a convention of unions in that city, attended by delegates from 31 locals of 14 unions, all in Ontario, though letters of approval came from typographical unions in Quebec and Montreal. This convention decided to set up a national central organization, the Canadian Labor Union, which met again in 1874, 1875, 1876 and 1877. But the depression was as fatal to the national organization as to the local Councils, and from 1878 to 1882 there was not even the shadow of a national trade union centre.

The legislative victory resulted from the Toronto Printers' strike of 1872, part of the nine-hours movement. Most of the master-printers, headed by George Brown of the *Globe*, were fiercely anti-union. They had all 24 members of the committee of the Typographical Union arrested on a charge of seditious conspiracy. Labour had confidently assumed that unions were legal but now discovered they were not. They had benefited from none of the British Acts freeing unions of their Common Law disabilities as conspiracies and combinations in restraint of trade. Legally, Canadian unions were still in the eighteenth century, the age before the Industrial Revolution. They promptly set to work to get Canadian legislation to match the British. Sir John A. Macdonald, delighted