

with other free trade unions, the principal farm organizations, the co-operative movement, the CCF and "other parties pledged to support the legislative programme" of the Congress, in order "to explore and develop co-ordination of action in the legislative and political field" Nothing much came of this until after the Dominion General Election of 1958, when the Congress invited the same groups to enter discussions looking to the formation of a new political party. The farm organizations and the co-operatives (mainly farmer) declined; the CCF accepted. In 1961, the CLC and the CCF, with a variety of sympathizers organized in "New Party Clubs", founded the New Democratic Party.

The Congress did not itself affiliate with the new party (although a number of its unions, with some 200,000 members, did). It remains an independent national trade union centre. The relationship is much the same as that between the British Trades Union Congress and the British Labour Party. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that the founding of the New Democratic Party represents the triumph of the British tradition of direct political action, brought to Canada by British working-class immigrants in their baggage, over the non-partisan AFL tradition. It is one of the marks of the independence of the Canadian labour movement from the American, with which it is otherwise, in so many ways, so closely associated.

The CLC is wholly independent of the AFL-CIO, which since 1956 has had no branches, no staff and no jurisdiction in Canada (although this does not apply fully to some of its Trade Departments). The Canadian sections of most international unions affiliated with the CLC enjoy complete autonomy. The CNTU and its unions are, of course, purely Canadian and almost entirely French-Canadian, and in the past few years have been engaged in a vigorous competition with the CLC and its affiliates in Quebec. Internationally, the CLC is a member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the CNTU of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU).

In the centennial year 1967, Canadian unions can look back on a record of impressive achievement. A century ago, they were at best barely legal, were few, small, weak and scattered, without even local let alone national central organization, hemmed in by all manner of restrictions, distrusted, despised or hated by most of those in authority, employers and governments alike. Their members worked long hours for meagre wages and under poor conditions. Even Factory Acts had yet to be passed and social security was undreamed of. Now, unions are fully legal, with collective bargaining (long fiercely resisted) legally compulsory. They are many, big and strong; they cover every province, almost every city and town; they have local, provincial and national federations which enable them to speak with one voice to governments. They are important social institutions, accepted even by those who like them least. They take an active and leading part in all manner of activities, whether governmental or private. They are consulted, listened to, represented on boards and commissions and committees of almost every kind. Their members generally work 40 hours a week or less, for wages that are among the highest in the world, and under reasonably good conditions. And it is largely union effort that has won, not only for union members but for hundreds of thousands of people never even eligible for membership, a substantial measure of social security in unemployment, illness, disability or other adversity. The fathers of Canadian unionism, most of them unknown and unsung, perhaps deserve as well of this generation as the Fathers of Confederation itself.

Union Membership

Union membership in Canada at the beginning of 1966 totalled 1,736,000, the highest on record. It amounted to 30.7 p.c. of the 5,658,000 non-agricultural paid workers in Canada as of January 1966, and 24.5 p.c. of the over-all labour force.