

## Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

L'intérêt historique que présente l'histoire maritime britannique aux 19e et 20e siècles justifie amplement l'attention systématique portée par les historiens à la collection de listes d'équipage des Archives historiques maritimes de l'université Memorial de Terre-Neuve. Le travail maritime était caractérisé par une série de pratiques d'embauché et par une dynamique interne qui mettent particulièrement notre attention. Les effets de la technologie basée sur la vapeur et l'acier, la capitalization accrue et les considérations gouvernementales, ainsi que l'émergence d'une identité collective des travailleurs s'unissent pour produire un phénomène ouvrier unique et important mis à la portée des historiens/nes par l'existence de cette série presque complète de statistiques démographiques et ouvrières. L'article discute plusieurs méthodologies pour étudier ce corpus. Une étude de cas montre la pertinence d'une méthode pour aborder la force de travail d'une grande entreprise pendant une courte période de temps.

# ARTICLES

## Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Labour Revolt:

### The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919

James R. Conley

ON 30 APRIL 1919, JOHN BRODIE, president of the small Vancouver local of the International Brotherhood of Clerks and Freight Handlers, described the “spirit of labour today” to the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations:

To speak personally, five years ago I have stood in Vancouver streets and existed on five cents a day, but tomorrow if I had to come to the same thing there would be nothing doing, because my foot would be through the first window I came to and I would take out my goods.

On May Day, C.C. Rouse of the Blacksmiths Union told the commissioners: “The working classes are beginning to realize more and more every day that they produce all wealth, and therefore, they should enjoy the absolute fruits of that production.” He went on to suggest a Soviet form of government.<sup>1</sup> Although neither was a prominent labour leader in Vancouver (major figures refused to testify before the Mathers Commission), Brodie’s militancy and Rouse’s radicalism were not isolated. Later in May, for example, 20 lumber workers marched into the Hanbury mill’s office in Vancouver, demanding to be shown the books so they could determine the company’s profits. They got what they wanted, and according to a Royal Northwest Mounted Police agent, “the action of these employees in Van-

<sup>1</sup>Canada, Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, *Minutes of Evidence (1919)* (hereafter, *Mathers Commission Evidence*), Vol. 1, 452-3, 574-6.

James R. Conley, “Frontier Labourers, Crafts in Crisis and the Western Labour Revolt: The Case of Vancouver, 1900-1919,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989), 9-37.

## 10 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

cover is indicative of the temper of the employees in every other industry."<sup>2</sup>

The events in Vancouver in early 1919 were part of a working-class revolt that convulsed the city, the province, and the country in 1918-19. It began in 1917 with opposition to conscription, escalated in 1918 with general strikes for political and economic objectives, and reached a climax in 1919 in the formation of the One Big Union (OBU), in the Winnipeg General Strike, and in strikes in sympathy with it.<sup>3</sup>

The literature on western Canadian workers has generally understood the 1918-19 labour revolt as a regional phenomenon, rooted in the frontier conditions of early twentieth-century western Canada.<sup>4</sup> In these 'frontier labourer' interpretations, the experiences and expectations of frontier resource workers are seen as the main source of the western labour revolt. Working-class radicalism<sup>5</sup> developed first in the immigrant working class of isolated mining, logging, and railway construction camps and towns, where expectations of social mobility were frustrated by a class-polarized frontier society ruled by aggressive, individualistic entrepreneurs. Building on experiences and ideologies from their homelands, working-class immigrants became supporters of the uncompromising socialism of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), the syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and other pre-war manifestations of western radicalism.<sup>6</sup> Less polarized conditions, and the predominance of conservative, well-organized craft workers slowed the development of radicalism in the cities.<sup>7</sup> Urban radicalism

<sup>2</sup>Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Department of Labour, Strike and Lockout Files, RG 27, Vol. 314, File 19(190C), Special Agent No. 11, 22 May 1919.

<sup>3</sup>On the western labour revolt, see M. Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968); D.J. Bercuson, "Western Labour Radicalism and the One Big Union: Myths and Realities," in S. Trofimenkoff, ed., *The Twenties in Western Canada* (Ottawa 1972), 32-49, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal 1974), "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier, 1897-1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 154-75, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978); A.R. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977); P. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1967).

<sup>4</sup>In addition to the sources already cited, see D. Morton and T. Copp, *Working People* (Ottawa 1980); D. Drache, "The Formation and Fragmentation of the Canadian Working Class: 1820-1920," *Studies in Political Economy*, 15 (1984), 43-89. Exceptions are A.R. McCormack, "The Western Working-Class Experience," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985), 115-26; A. Seager, "Workers, class, and industrial conflict in New Westminster, 1900-1930," in R. Warburton and D. Coburn, eds., *Workers, Capital, and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers* (Vancouver 1988), 117-40.

<sup>5</sup>"Radical" is a term frequently used in connection with western workers, but it is exceptionally difficult to pin down. Common to most uses are support for socialist objectives, whether reformist or revolutionary, and support for the mobilization and collective action of workers as a class. This will be the usage adopted here.

<sup>6</sup>For emphasis on disappointed expectations, see Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism," and *Fools and Wise Men*, 32, 44-5, 254-5. He also stresses immigrant ideological baggage (for example, *Fools and Wise Men*, 32-9), as does McCormack, in *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, and D. Avery, in *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto 1979).

<sup>7</sup>Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism," 171, *Fools and Wise Men*, 52; R.A.J. McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver, 1886-1914: Urbanism and Class in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, 69/70 (1986), 33-69.

nonetheless developed because of the influence of frontier labourers, because unskilled labourers in the cities faced much the same conditions as resource workers, and above all, because of the inflation, labour shortages, and state repression of labour in World War I.<sup>8</sup>

The image of 'western exceptionalism' at the heart of the frontier labourer interpretation rests on a comparison between radical western Canadian workers and conservative 'eastern' Canadian workers.<sup>9</sup> But social historians have recently shown that not all workers in central Canada and the Maritimes were as conservative as western radicals and most western labour historians have believed.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the late nineteenth century, changes in the organization of capitalist production, such as systematic management, mechanization, and specialization, threatened craft workers' skills, control over the workplace, and culture.<sup>11</sup> This "crisis of the craftsman" led craft workers into struggles over control of the workplace and labour market, and in some times and places led them to adopt more inclusive forms of working-class organization and strategy to replace a failing craft unionism, and to actively support labourist and socialist politics.<sup>12</sup> If not all central

<sup>8</sup>See Bercuson, "Organized Labour and the Imperial Munitions Board," *Relations Industrielles*, 28 (1973), 602-14, *Fools and Wise Men*, chapter 3; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 123-32.

<sup>9</sup>See N. Reilly, "Introduction to Papers from the Winnipeg General Strike Symposium, March 1983," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 7. This comparison was made at the time by westerners themselves. See G. Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt': The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 139-57.

<sup>10</sup>For example, see D. Frank and N. Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 85-113; N. Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," *Acadiensis*, 9 (1980), 56-77; I. McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes," *Acadiensis*, 13, 1 (1983), 3-46, *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax 1985); G.S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 11-44; C. Heron and G. de Zwaan, "Industrial Unionism in Eastern Ontario: Gananoque, 1918-21," *Ontario History*, 77 (1985), 159-82.

<sup>11</sup>See D. Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison 1975); B. Palmer, "Class, Conception and Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labor and the Working-Class Rebellion, 1903-22," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 7, 2 (1975), 31-49; D. Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology and Labor Struggle* (Cambridge 1979); D. Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge 1987); H. Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1974); C. Heron and R. Storey, "On the Job in Canada," in Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Montreal 1986), 3-46.

<sup>12</sup>There is general agreement on the importance of crafts' control struggles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See C. Heron and B. Palmer, "Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901-14," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 423-58; but cf. McKay, "Strikes," 18-9, for evidence that this was not the case in the Maritimes. There is considerable debate, however, concerning the relationship between the crafts and the rest of the working class. For arguments that stress the persistence of craft exclusivism and the ambivalence of craft struggles, see C. Heron "The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton's Metal Workers in the Early Twentieth Century," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 6 (1980), 7-48; I. McKay, "Capital and Labour in the Halifax Baking and Confectionery Industry During the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), 63-108; I.

## 12 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

Canadian craftsmen were exclusivist labour aristocrats, may the crafts not also have played a hitherto neglected role in the development of the labour revolt among urban workers in western Canada?<sup>13</sup>

A historical comparison of the experiences of workers in the Vancouver area between 1900 and 1919 can shed light on the claims of the frontier labourer and crisis of the craftsman interpretations of western Canadian labour history.<sup>14</sup> First, a structural comparison of frontier labourers, craftsmen, factory operatives, and settled urban workers shows how the different experiences of Vancouver workers affected their participation in the 1918-19 labour revolt. Frontier labourers and craftsmen in crisis were the social basis for the revolt, which grew out of their interests, solidarities, and experiences of collective action. Second, a temporal comparison between strike waves in 1900-1903, 1910-13, and 1917-19 reveals significant continuities between the 1917-19 strike wave and its predecessors, showing that the 1918-19 labour revolt growing out of it was neither unprece-

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McKay, "Class Struggle and Merchant Capital: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1900," in B. Palmer, ed., *The Character of Class Struggle: Essays in Canadian Working-Class History, 1850-1985* (Toronto 1986), 17-36; McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, 23, 51 (but cf. 55, 75, 78 for tendencies to more inclusive organization in the 1910s). For arguments stressing craft inclusivism and leadership of the working class as a whole, see G.S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 292-93; B. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979), esp. chapter 7; G.S. Kealey and B.D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Toronto 1987), 373.

<sup>13</sup>See G. Kealey, "H.C. Pentland and Working Class Studies," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3 (1979), 89. More is at stake in this debate than the interpretation of the western labour revolt, and the role of crafts in Canadian working-class history; important historiographical and ideological questions also divide proponents of frontier labourer and crisis of the craftsman interpretations. For the former, see 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," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 95-112; K. McNaught, "E.P. Thompson vs Harold Logan: Writing About Labour and the Left in the 1970s," *Canadian Historical Review*, 52 (1981), 141-68; D. Morton, "E.P. Thompson dan des Arpents de Neige: Les Historiens Canadiens-Anglais et la Classe Ouvriere," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amerique Francaise*, 37 (1983), 165-84; Drache, "Formation and Fragmentation." For the latter, see G.S. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 67-94; B. Palmer, "Listening to History Rather than Historians: Reflections on Working Class History," *Studies in Political Economy*, 20 (1986), 47-84.

<sup>14</sup>Neither interpretation has been buttressed by the systematic comparisons between western and eastern workers' experiences necessary to establish its claims. Bercuson's attempt, in "Labour Radicalism," is flawed by his underestimation of the extent of support for socialism in Nova Scotia mining communities. Cf. C. Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 13 (1984), 70; Frank and Reilly, "Socialist Movement in the Maritimes." A comparison within one city is justified by the frontier labourer interpretation's contrast between radical western Canadian workers, radical resource workers, and radical unskilled urban workers on the one hand, and conservative central and eastern Canadian workers, conservative urban workers in western Canada, and conservative urban craft workers on the other. Historians stressing the crisis of the craftsman have not drawn this kind of dichotomy, nor have they claimed that crafts were the only source of the labour revolt. For example, see B. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), chapter 4.

mented, nor solely the outcome of exceptional wartime conditions.<sup>15</sup> New forms and objectives of mobilization and collective action arose from previous experiences, and were realized in a conjuncture of exceptional threats and opportunities for the working class.

## I

## The Working Class in Vancouver

VANCOUVER'S DISTINCTIVE WORKING CLASS was formed by migration and the regional industrial structure.<sup>16</sup> Migration from eastern Canada, and immigration from the British Isles, Asia, and continental Europe swelled the population of Greater Vancouver from 29,797 in 1901 to 170,872 in 1921.<sup>17</sup> The economic base for this rapid growth lay in trade and finance, transportation, construction, and a small manufacturing sector built around the staple products of British Columbia's forests and fisheries.

The interests and solidarities of Vancouver workers were structured by social practices in labour markets, workplaces, consumption goods markets, and consumption that corresponded to differences of skill, gender, race, and ethnicity.<sup>18</sup> On this basis, the Vancouver working class can be divided into four categories: frontier labourers, craftsmen, factory operatives, and settled urban workers.

First, "frontier labourers" were mostly male workers who formed relatively homogeneous, unstratified communities isolated from other workers and the society at large.<sup>19</sup> In Vancouver, there were both 'migratory' and 'urban' frontier

<sup>15</sup>This was true of the Canadian labour revolt as a whole. See Kealey, "1919," and D. Cruikshank and G.S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (1987), 85-145.

<sup>16</sup>McDonald ("Working Class Vancouver," 36-45) has recently observed that the Vancouver working class was different from that of other Canadian cities in several respects: a relatively small proportion worked in manufacturing, women made up a relatively small proportion of the labour force, and substantial minority of Asian workers lived in Vancouver.

<sup>17</sup>Canada, 1921 Census, Vol. 1, Table 8. Greater Vancouver is taken to include South Vancouver, Point Grey and North Vancouver. These municipalities formed an economic unit (workers lived in Vancouver and worked in South Vancouver and North Vancouver, and vice versa), so it makes sense to consider them together. "Vancouver city" will be used to refer to Vancouver only (without the suburbs). On migration, see W.P. Ward, "Population Growth in Western Canada," in J.E. Foster, ed., *The Developing West* (Edmonton 1983), 163-72; McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver."

<sup>18</sup>The relationship between 'social reproduction cycles' and collective action is examined theoretically in J. Conley, "'More Theory, Less Fact?' Social Reproduction and Class Conflict in a Sociological Approach to Working-Class History," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13 (1988), 75-102. The working class is defined here as all persons dependent on the sale of labour power for a wage, that is, wage workers and their dependents.

<sup>19</sup>This formation draws on the 'isolated mass' hypothesis of C. Kerr and A. Siegel, in "The Inter-industry Propensity to Strike," in A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin, and A. Ross, eds., *Industrial Conflict* (New York 1954), 189-212. This closely resembles the conditions used to explain working-class radicalism in the frontier labourer literature, where isolated camp workers are contrasted with socially integrated city workers. See Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 52-4; McDonald, "Working Class Vancouver." For

## 14 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

labourers.<sup>20</sup> Migratory frontier labourers, such as loggers and coastal sailors, were seasonally employed in remote locations, but because their labour markets centered on Vancouver, they were transient members of its working class.<sup>21</sup> Long hours, dangerous work, fluctuating wages in an uncertain labour market, and living conditions the *B.C. Federationist* called "vile" gave them a sharp sense of class interest, while the isolated life, common patterns of labour market and geographic mobility, and the absence of racial division facilitated class solidarity.<sup>22</sup> Urban frontier labourers, such as waterfront workers, teamsters, construction labourers, and shipbuilding labourers, were unskilled or semi-skilled workers employed within Vancouver at outdoor, physically demanding jobs with unstable labour markets.<sup>23</sup> Although they shared long hours, temporary or casual employment, and low wages, differences of skill and ethnicity affected the interests and solidarity of urban frontier labourers.<sup>24</sup> On the waterfront, for example, the semi-skilled and autonomous longshoremen who worked in ships' holds were married, settled residents of Vancouver whose cooperative labour process and occupational pride (as "knights of the hook") gave them an interest in controlling the labour process, and a solidarity that "the floating population" of less skilled, more casually employed dock workers lacked.<sup>25</sup>

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perceptive critiques of Kerr and Siegel, see J. Cronin, *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain* (London 1979), and E. Shorter, and C. Tilly, *Strikes in France* (London 1974).

<sup>20</sup> Given the mobility of all common labourers, this distinction is between occupations rather than between persons. See A.R. McCormack, "Wobblies and Blanketstiffs: The Constituency of the IWW in Western Canada," in Cherwinski and Kealey, eds., *Lectures*, 101-14, and on the American experience, Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labour*, 58-9, 87-92.

<sup>21</sup> Although the strife-torn mining communities of the Nanaimo area were only a short distance across the Strait of Georgia, miners, who epitomize frontier labourers for historians such as Bercuson ("Labour Radicalism," 253-4, *Fools and Wise Men*, 55), were not even transient members of the Vancouver working class. On Nanaimo miners, see A.D. Orr, "The Western Federation of Miners and the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in 1903 with Special Reference to the Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike," M.A., University of British Columbia, 1968; Lynne Bowen, *Boss Whistle: The Coal Miners of Vancouver Island Remember* (Lantzville 1982).

<sup>22</sup> On loggers, see M.A. Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (1906; Toronto 1964); *Vancouver Daily Province*, 7 November 1903; *Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser*, 30 September 1909; *B.C. Federationist*, 26 October 1912, 17 January 1919. On sailors, see *Province*, 4 February 1910, 10, 11, 18 November 1910; *Labour Gazette*, 11 (1910), 652-3; *Western Wage Earner*, July 1910; *B.C. Federationist*, 23 January 1914, 5 April 1918.

<sup>23</sup> On teamsters, see *Province*, 5 February 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Before the war, construction labourers were divided between settled, "British" workers, and single male sojourners from Italy and eastern Europe. See *Province*, 29 January 1912; R.F. Harney, "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 11 (1979), 29-47.

<sup>25</sup> ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] Local 500 Pensioners, "Man Along the Shore!" *The Story of the Vancouver Waterfront, As Told by Longshoremen Themselves, 1860's-1975* (Vancouver 1975); J.S. Woodsworth, *On the Waterfront* (Ottawa [1928]); J.B. Foster, "Longshoring in Canada," in Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job*, 289-90; Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 96-100; *Vancouver Daily Sun*, 17 June 1912; *News-Advertiser*, 16 October 1912, 31 July 1917; *B.C. Federationist*, 16 March 1917. This was a fluid division, since longshoremen also worked on the docks when jobs were scarce. The effects of the labour market on frontier labourers' solidarity is a matter of debate: Ward has argued that transiency and mobility produced an individualistic

Second, "craft workers" were skilled artisans whose skill and workplace culture was the basis for autonomy or control on the job.<sup>26</sup> Depending on the extent to which their skills and job control were under attack, early twentieth-century crafts in Vancouver can be classified as either crafts in crisis or secure crafts.<sup>27</sup> Systematic management, job specialization, mechanization, and attacks on unions threatened "crafts in crisis" with deskilling, loss of job autonomy, and loss of control over the labour market. In the metal trades, machinists, boilermakers, and moulders faced specialization, or the substitution of less skilled specialists for all-round craftsmen.<sup>28</sup> In the building trades, mechanized production in sash and door factories deskilled carpenters, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to competition from low-wage "handymen, speed-ups, and piecework." An indication of deskilling was that the only test of skill for belonging to the carpenters' union was the ability to hold a job with a builder.<sup>29</sup> Factory woodworkers in the lumber

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independence, but as Knight has observed, this was also an independence of bosses. See W.P. Ward, "Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939," *BC Studies*, 45 (1980), 17-35; R. Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver 1978). In addition, shared experiences created the basis for solidarity; cf. I. Radforth, "Logging Pulpwood in Northern Ontario," in Heron and Storey, *On the Job*, 253-4. It appears the independence of frontier labourers could work either way: the important problem concerns the conditions under which workers would adopt individual or collective strategies.

<sup>26</sup>D. Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century," in *Workers' Control in America*; Palmer, *Culture in Conflict*, chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup>A third category is also present in the literature, consisting of "new crafts" recently created by technological changes, such as electrical workers and plumbers. (See Shorter and Tilly, *Strikes in France*, 217.) They still faced pressures of mechanization, specialization, and capitalist rationalization of production, but were more brash, aggressive, and unpredictable than the older crafts, because they lacked their traditions and culture. (See W. Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen: Politics and Trade Unionism Among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 92-121.) Although the latter may be important for the mobilization and collective action of new crafts, the fact they faced the same threats as other crafts justifies not treating them separately. In any case, sufficient data for comparative analysis were available only for plumbers and electrical workers.

<sup>28</sup>See *Labour Gazette*, 6 (1905), 651; 9 (1908), 155-60; British Columbia, Inspector of Factories *First Annual Report for the Year 1910* (Victoria 1911), 6. The introduction of semi-skilled helpers affected boilermakers in particular, so that by 1917, only a third of the union's membership in Vancouver was made up of skilled craftsmen. See E. Lees, "British Columbia Shipyard Workers' Organization 1916-1919: A Case Study of War Work and Industrial Unionism," paper presented to the Ninth North American Labor History Conference, Detroit, 1987. On the challenge to the metal trades in general, see Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production," *Fall of the House of Labor*, chapter 4; Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, chapter 5; Heron, "Crisis of the Craftsman;" Nelson, *Managers and Workers*, 96-7.

<sup>29</sup>*Province*, 5 June 1911. In one carpenter's words, "the tools of the skilled craftsmen have gradually been ... taken from them and placed in the factories until today the skilled craftsman of other days is becoming less and less necessary to the modern building." B.D. Grant, "The Evolution of the Modern Carpenter," *B.C. Federationist*, 3 August 1912. See also *B.C. Federationist*, 7 February 1913; Provincial Archives of British Columbia (PABC), GR 684, B.C. Provincial Labor Commission, Transcript of Proceedings, Vol. 4, 45; McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, ch. 1-2; B. Reckman, "Carpentry: The Craft and the Trade," in Andrew Zimbalist, ed., *Case Studies on the Labor Process* (New York 1979), 73-102; Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats, and Handymen." Although painters did not experience as much deskilling as carpenters, they also faced low-wage competition.



industry themselves struggled against mechanization's effects: deskilling, low wages, and factory hazards such as dust and unprotected machinery.<sup>30</sup> In consumer good manufacturing, bakers and tailors bore the double burden of crafts suffering from mechanization and rationalized factory production: deskilling in large, mechanized plants, and degradation of the craft by low pay, overwork, and unsanitary conditions in many small artisanal shops.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to crafts in crisis, "secure crafts" were sufficiently powerful to contain threats to their craft skills and controls. Printers threatened by the introduction of new technologies, such as linotype machines, were able to retain control over the workplace and labour market through their own efforts.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Vancouver cigarmakers kept their job and labour market control, and made common cause with employers to resist the threat of cheap imports. Despite the efforts of shipbuilders to increase production during the wartime shipbuilding boom, shipwrights and caulkers preserved craft controls in the workplace and labour market. For example, in 1918 caulkers maintained their craft monopoly by refusing to relax apprenticeship requirements.<sup>33</sup> In construction, bricklayers and masons were a well-paid, exclusivist craft despite competition from new building materials.<sup>34</sup>

The differences between crafts in crisis and secure crafts shaped their solidarities. Threatened crafts were less able than secure crafts to preserve the close associational ties and craft culture of their past, weakening exclusivist craft solidarity, but opening them to a broader working-class solidarity beyond the ranks of the skilled. Class solidarity did not have to overcome gender or racial differences, since craft workers in Vancouver were nearly all white males.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup>B.C. Labor Commission, Proceedings, Vol. 1, 72-6; Reckman, "Carpentry." They were paid less than outside carpenters.

<sup>31</sup>On bakers, see *Province*, 25 July 1906, 2 December 1910, 21 April 1911; University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections, Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, Minutes of Regular Meetings, 3 February 1910, 1 December 1910, 20 April 1911; B.C. Labor Commission, *Report* (Victoria 1914), 11; *B.C. Federationist*, 22 September 1916; cf. McKay, "Halifax Baking and Confectionery Industry." On tailors, see M. Steedman, "Skill and Gender in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940," in Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job*, 152-76.

<sup>32</sup>G. Bartley, *Outline History of Typographical Union No. 226, Vancouver B.C. 1887-1938* (Vancouver 1938); G.S. Kealey, "Work Control, the Labour Process, and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Printers," in Heron and Storey, eds., *On the Job*, 75-101; W. Roberts, "The Last Artisans: Toronto Printers, 1896-1914," in G. Kealey and P. Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, (Toronto 1976), 125-42.

<sup>33</sup>*Province*, 26, 27 March 1918; *Labour Gazette*, 18 (1918), 411; cf. McKay, "Class Struggle and Merchant Capital," 22.

<sup>34</sup>*Western Wage Earner*, September 1909, 7; Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats and Handymen," 103-14. The example of bricklayers shows that no craft was really secure (that is, all faced some threats), but the severity of the threats, and the ability of trades to contain them through their own resources distinguish crafts in crisis from secure crafts.

<sup>35</sup>Canada, 1911 Census, Vol. 6, Table VI. The only exception was tailoring, which included a significant number of women, and at least some Asians (judging from complaints about their competition). *Independent*, 2 June 1900; Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, *Report* (Ottawa 1902), 179-80; *Province*, 21 May 1909.

Third, "factory operatives" either performed repetitive tasks by hand or worked in mechanized production processes in factory-like settings, under close supervision of output and quality.<sup>36</sup> Lacking both skill and job autonomy, the interests of these fully proletarianized workers revolved around speed-ups, hours, and wages. In contrast to frontier labourers and craft workers, the solidarities of factory operatives in most industries were shaped by the presence of large numbers of women or Asians in subordinate positions.<sup>37</sup> The large workforce of saw and shingle mills was racially divided between skilled and semi-skilled whites (saw filers, millwrights, stationary engineers, and sawyers), and Asians slowly moving from unskilled labouring jobs into the ranks of semi-skilled operatives.<sup>38</sup> In the hot, humid, highly mechanized, and dangerous steam laundries, employers fought the competition of Chinese hand laundries through mechanization and the employment of large numbers of women at low wages for long hours.<sup>39</sup> In telephone exchanges, the labour process of young female operators was 'scientifically managed' and closely supervised.<sup>40</sup> Because of the high turnover of young women who left the labour force upon marriage, and the control of Asians by labour contractors and beliefs about their unassimilability, class solidarity was weak when many women or Asians were present in the ranks of factory operatives.<sup>41</sup>

Fourth and finally, the Vancouver working class contained workers who, unlike craft workers, were not skilled, unlike factory operatives, did not work in factories, unlike migratory frontier labourers, were city residents rather than

<sup>36</sup>For an excellent discussion of the conditions of factory operatives in the U.S., see Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, ch. 3.

<sup>37</sup>The main exception to the racial or gender division of factory operatives was in the Vancouver area's two packinghouses, where mostly white men of British descent were employed as semi-skilled "specialists trained to do a single operation expertly." Mathers Commission Evidence, Vol. 1, 320-2; D. Brody, *The Butcher Workmen: A Study in Unionization* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964), 39. Sugar refinery workers were a partial exception: most were men employed in manual labour, but women sewing and filling sugar sacks made up about 20 per cent of the 200-300 person labour force. *B.C. Federationist*, 27 April 1917; *News-Advertiser*, 28, 29 April 1917; Mathers Commission Evidence, Vol. 1, 525-8; The Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives: Vancouver 1886-1986* (Vancouver 1985), 59.

<sup>38</sup>Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, *Report*, 100, 103, 107-8, 112, 119, 122-3, 125-7, 128-32, 360-3; *Western Wage Earner*, August 1910, 15; British Columbia, Department of Labor, *Annual Report for 1918* (Victoria 1919), Statistics of Trade and Industries.

<sup>39</sup>B.C. Labor Commission, *Proceedings*, Vol. 1, 199-200, Vol. 4, 165, 180, 188; B.C. Minimum Wage Board, *Report for 1918* (Victoria 1919), 63-6, 71.

<sup>40</sup>*Province*, 29 June 1900; E. Bernard, *The Long Distance Feeling: A History of the Telecommunications Workers Union* (Vancouver 1982), 18-21, 39-44. In addition, most garment workers were women, who worked in small (25-50 workers) factories. B.C. Factory Inspector's Report, 1910, 16; *Industrial Progress and Commercial Record*, November 1914, 144; October 1915, 39-40; Mathers Commission Evidence, Vol. 1, 460-2.

<sup>41</sup>On women, see 1911 Census, Vol. 6, Table VI; G. Creese, "The Politics of Dependence: Women, Work and Unemployment in the Vancouver Labour Movement Before World War II," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 13 (1988), 121-42; Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 131-8. On Asians, see Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, *Report*, 130-1, 188-9, 363; K. Adachi, *The Enemy Who Never Was* (Toronto 1976), 17, 26-35; W.P. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal 1978), 15-8.

transient, and unlike urban frontier labourers, did not perform outdoor manual labour. Since, in frontier labourer interpretations, city workers are contrasted to frontier labourers, this residual category will be called "'settled' urban workers."<sup>42</sup> One type of 'settled' urban worker in Vancouver consisted of transportation workers employed by paternalistic, bureaucratic corporations. Motormen and conductors employed by the British Columbia Electric Railway (BCER) received profit-sharing and other benefits in the 1900s, and like other street railway workers, followed elaborate rules of operation.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, many of the unskilled and lowly paid freight handlers and clerks employed by the CPR were salaried permanent employees entitled to fringe benefits such as a company pension.<sup>44</sup> Corporate paternalism masked conflicting class interests when the companies were profitable and the workers acquiescent, but when profits were squeezed or workers were rebellious, it revealed a darker, patriarchal side that heightened antagonisms.<sup>45</sup> Racial, ethnic, and gender homogeneity ensured that those powerful obstacles to class solidarity and mobilization were absent.

A second type of 'settled' urban worker consisted of white collar and service workers, such as retail clerks, office employees, and restaurant workers. Working in small, scattered workplaces, and sharing in the status of the small employers to whose position they aspired, while being divided in status from other workers, the interests of white collar workers were generally not sharply distinguished from their employers', and their solidarities with each other and with the rest of the working class were meager. The temporary employment of large numbers of women also divided the workforce by gender.<sup>46</sup> Although there was less of a status division from blue collar workers, the class solidarity of cooks, waiters, and waitresses was hindered by their employment in numerous small restaurants, a high

<sup>42</sup>The inverted commas on "settled" are meant to indicate that these workers were settled only in contrast to the seasonal geographic mobility of migratory frontier labourers. The mobility of all workers in this period makes it difficult to consider any of them settled in an absolute sense.

<sup>43</sup>P. Roy, "The British Columbia Electric Railway and its Street Railway Employees: Paternalism in Labour Relations," *BC Studies*, 16 (1972-73), 3-24; E.P. Schmidt, *Industrial Relations in Urban Transportation* (Minneapolis 1937).

<sup>44</sup>On benefits received by salaried employees, see *Independent*, 8 March 1902; *Labour Gazette*, 3 (1902), 401, 552-4; 18 (1918), 27-8; Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia, 1903, *Minutes of Evidence* (Ottawa 1904), 547, 583-4, 612, 635-7, 712, 766-8; J.H. Tuck, "The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Western Canada, 1898-1905," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 11 (1983), 63-88.

<sup>45</sup>At the BCER, rapid growth of the workforce and a squeeze on company profits led to a crisis of paternalism, and growing grievances as wages fell, working conditions were attacked, and the union was challenged by the company. Roy, "Paternalism in Labour Relations." On the CPR, the attempt of freight handlers and clerks to unionize provoked a vicious company counterattack. Tuck, "United Brotherhood of Railway Employees."

<sup>46</sup>For comments indicating a status division between white and blue collar workers, see B.C. Labor Commission, Proceedings, Vol. 3, 292; *Province*, 26 July 1918. For size of workplaces and employment of women, see 1911 Census, Vol. 6, Table VI; 1921 Census, Vol. III, Table 40; B.C. Labor Commission, Proceedings, Vol. 4, 1-4, 94-143.

rate of turnover, and divisions between men and women, and whites and Asians.<sup>47</sup>

The interests and solidarities of frontier labourers, craft workers, factory operatives, and settled urban workers structured their mobilization and collective action, as revealed by their participation in the 1918-19 labour revolt.

## II

### The Western Labour Revolt in Vancouver, 1918-19

THE RADICALISM OF FRONTIER LABOURERS, craftsmen, factory operatives, and settled urban workers will be compared by examining five events of the 1918-19 labour revolt. A broad working-class mobilization for objectives linked to socialism or socialists was attempted in each, and enough data are available for a systematic comparison.

The first two events concerned conscription.<sup>48</sup> First, in January 1918, members of unions affiliated to the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council (VTLC) voted on holding a general strike to protest the imprisonment of fellow unionist Duncan Kerr for refusing to be conscripted. A majority of unions opposed the general strike but the idea persisted.<sup>49</sup> It was realized six months later, in a 24 hour general strike to protest a policeman's killing of Ginger Goodwin, a former miners' union leader and draft-evader. At least 5,600 workers joined the strike on 2-3 August 1918, and only two small unions expressed opposition.<sup>50</sup>

The third event of the labour revolt in Vancouver was the Vancouver General Strike, in sympathy with the one that had begun on 15 May in Winnipeg. In Vancouver, 3,305 workers and 22 unions voted in favour of striking, 2,499 workers and 15 unions against.<sup>51</sup> Beginning 3 June 1919, at least 10,000 workers from

<sup>47</sup>B.C. Labor Commission, Proceedings, Vol. 3, 205 ff.; 1911 Census, Vol. 6, Table VI; 1921 Census, Vol. III, Table 40; *Western Wage Earner*, April 1910, 5; *B.C. Federationist*, 21 May 1915; *Province*, 16 March 1916; Mathers Commission Evidence, Vol. 1, 386 ff.

<sup>48</sup>Because opposition to conscription in western Canada was promoted mainly by socialists, it was radical in the sense used here. In Quebec, in contrast, it was promoted by nationalists, and therefore would not be considered radical in the same sense.

<sup>49</sup>Unions in transportation were the main supporters of the strike. *B.C. Federationist*, 7 December 1917; University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections, Vancouver Trades and Labor Council, Minutes of Executive Board Meetings, 17 January 1918; D. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver 1977), 36; Robin, *Radical Politics*, 151. General sympathetic strikes were also proposed in July 1918, first in support of striking street railway employees, and later in support of striking postal workers. VTLC Executive Minutes, 7 July 1918; *B.C. Federationist*, 1 August 1918; Steeves, *Winch*, 38.

<sup>50</sup>Support for the Goodwin General Strike was strongest in the metal trades, in the steel shipyards, on the waterfront, and among street railway employees. The two unions to oppose the strike were tailors and railway mail clerks. *Province*, 2, 3, 5 August 1918; *Sun*, 3, 4 August 1918; *B.C. Federationist*, 2, 9 August 1918; Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 39-41; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 72-4; Bernard, *Long Distance Feeling*, 54-5.

<sup>51</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 4 July 1919; *Sun*, 4 July 1919; D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 1950), 93. No breakdown of the vote by union is available, so it cannot be used in our comparison.

## 20 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

nearly every industry within a five mile radius of Vancouver stopped work.<sup>52</sup> Most stayed out until the general strike was called off on 3 July.<sup>53</sup>

The last two events of the labour revolt in Vancouver followed from the decision of delegates to the Western Labor Conference in Calgary in March 1919 to establish the One Big Union. In the period leading up to its founding convention in June, 47 unions with 16,570 members in the immediate Vancouver area (excluding New Westminster) voted 8,155 to 2,424 to affiliate with the OBU.<sup>54</sup> Although some OBU units were formed during the general strike, the work of organizing the new union did not begin in earnest until July. Voting to join the OBU was one thing; actually joining it in the aftermath of the general strike was another, so affiliation will be considered the final event of the labour revolt.<sup>55</sup>

To compare the participation of workers in the labour revolt, individual union locals were assigned score of 0 (little or no support), 1 (organization divided, or only some support), or 2 (full, majority support) for each event.<sup>56</sup> A standardized "radicalism index" ranging from 0 to 10 was computed by totalling a union's scores on each event, and dividing that by its total possible score, based on the number of events in which it could have participated (Table 1).<sup>57</sup> If a standardized score of five or more is considered radical, most frontier labourers and most crafts in crisis were radical, but no secure crafts, few factory operatives, and no settled urban

<sup>52</sup>Within the first three days, 37 union locals had gone out on strike, while another eleven were exempt from the strike call, and ten had not taken votes. A few days later, 41 locals were on strike. On 19 June 1919, the *Vancouver World* reported that 8,000 to 10,000 workers were on strike; the B.C. Department of Labor arrived at a figure of 9,731 strikers, on the basis of reports from 56 firms in Vancouver. Mass meetings of strikers regularly attracted 4,000 to 5,000 men and women. *Province*, 6, 11 June 1919; *Sun*, 6, 11 June 1919; *B.C. Federationist*, 6 June 1919, 13 June 1919; British Columbia Department of Labor, *Annual Report for 1919* (Victoria 1920), 75.

<sup>53</sup>After the Winnipeg strike ended on 26 June, mass meetings in Vancouver vowed to continue the strike as long as discrimination was practiced against any worker. But defections grew, and when telephone operators and electrical workers declared on 2 July that they could fight company discrimination on their own, the strike was ended. *Province*, 26, 27, 30 June 1919, 3, 4, 7 July 1919; *B.C. Federationist*, 27 June 1919, 1, 4 July 1919, 1; *Sun*, 27, 28 June 1919, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 July 1919.

<sup>54</sup>A vote was also taken on a proposed general strike for a six-hour day, with 4,286 in favour and 3,217 opposed. It was overshadowed by the OBU vote, and so has not been used as an indicator of support for the labour revolt. For the vote on each, by union, see UBC Library, Special Collections, OBU vertical file 213.

<sup>55</sup>The failure of the general strike, and pressure from the international unions, employers and the state led some unions (such as longshoremen, railway clerks and freight handlers, marine stewards, painters, and civic employees) to reverse their decisions to join the OBU; others (especially in the metal trades and shipbuilding) discovered that employers were suddenly willing to make closed shop agreements with the international unions they had formerly spurned, and members were forced to rejoin an international union in order to work; a few (including loggers, laundry workers, and teamsters) prospered within the OBU, or held their own in competition with international unions.

<sup>56</sup>For general strikes, '2' meant that a majority participated for the full length of the strike, give or take one or two days; '1' that a part of the union participated for the whole time, or all of it for part of the time; '0' that few or none of the members joined the strike. For referendum votes, '0' meant less than 45 per cent in favour, '1' meant 45-55 per cent in favour, and '2' meant more than 55 per cent in favour.

<sup>57</sup>If the workers were not organized, or if there was no information, the event was not counted in computing the score for that union.

TABLE 1  
Support for 1918-19 Labour Revolt in Vancouver

	GENERAL STRIKES			ONE BIG UNION		TOTAL	SCORE
	Kerr vote	Goodwin join	Van. join	vote	join	raw	standard
<b>FRONTIER LABOURERS</b>							
Loggers	/	/	/	2	2	4/4	10.0
Longshoremen	2	2	2	2	1	9/10	9.0
Sailors	/	/	2	2	1	5/6	8.3
Teamsters	2	0	1	2	2	7/10	7.0
Shipyards labourers	0	2	2	2	0	6/10	6.0
Construction labourers (1)	0	0	1	2	0	3/10	3.0
<b>FACTORY OPERATIVES</b>							
Saw and shingle mill	/	/	2	2	2	6/6	10.0
Packinghouse	1	/	2	2	1	6/8	7.5
Laundry workers	/	0	/	2	2	4/6	6.7
Garment	1	2	1	0	0	4/10	4.0
Telephone operators	/	/	2	0	0	2/6	3.3
Sugar refinery	/	/	1	/	0	1/4	2.5
Boot and shoe	0	2	0	0	0	2/10	2.0
<b>SETTLED URBAN WORKERS</b>							
Street railway employees	1	2	1	0	0	4/10	4.0
Civic firement	/	0	/	2	0	2/6	3.3
Retail clerks	0	0	/	2	0	2/8	2.5
Cooks, waiters & waitresses	0	0	/	1	1	2/8	2.5
Freight handlers & clerks	0	0	1	0	0	1/10	1.0
Office workers	/	/	0	/	0	0/4	0.0
City hall employees	/	0	0	0	0	0/8	0.0
Civic policemen	/	0	/	0	0	0/6	0.0
<b>CRAFTSMEN</b>							
<i>Crafts in Crisis</i>							
Contract shop machinists	1	2	2	2	2	9/10	9.0
Boilermakers	0	2	2	2	2	8/10	8.0
Factory woodworkers	0	/	2	2	2	6/8	7.5
Carpenters	0	/	2	2	1	5/8	6.3
Painters	0	/	2	2	1	5/8	6.3
Electrical linemen	0	1	2	2	1	6/10	6.0
Moulders	0	0	2	2	1	5/10	5.0
Bakers	0	0	0	0	0	0/10	0.0
Tailors	0	0	0	0	0	0/10	0.0
Railway shop machinists	0	/	0	0	0	0/8	0.8
<i>Secure Crafts</i>							
Cigarmakers	2	/	2	0	0	4/8	5.0
Plumbers	0	/	2	1	0	3/8	3.8
Shipwrights	0	1	2	0	0	3/10	3.0
Bricklayers	0	/	2	0	0	2/8	2.5
Printers	0	0	1	0	0	1/10	1.0
Railway running trades	/	0	0	0	0	0/8	0.0

Note: (1) Civic employees.

## 22 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

workers were radical.

Both frontier labourer and crisis of the craftsman interpretations point to the importance of workers' interests and solidarities in the development of radicalism, and both receive support from the data. Radicalism was strongest when the interests of workers in conflicts with employers went beyond wages and hours to involve their whole way of life. Frontier labourers confronted employers in the labour market over casual, unstable work, and low and irregular pay; in the workplace over safety and job control; and in consumption over the truck system, housing, and food. For crafts in crisis, a whole culture was at stake, as changes in the labour process challenged control over work and the labour market, and threatened the income that made possible a respectable standard of living. Radicalism was also strongest where class solidarity was unimpeded by racial and gender divisions. Frontier labourers and craftsmen were nearly all white males, while many groups of factory operatives and settled urban workers were divided between men and women, or whites and Asians.

The data also reveal the limitations of frontier labourer and crisis of the craftsman interpretations. Above all, the conservatism of craft workers postulated by the frontier labourer interpretation is clearly wrong, at least in the 1918-19 labour revolt.<sup>58</sup> The crafts in crisis interpretation is weakened by the existence of several threatened crafts (bakers, tailors, CPR machinists) which were not radical. These anomalies, and the radicalism of some factory operatives and not others, can be explained by workers' experiences of class conflict. Groups of workers which became radical shared four characteristics of mobilization and collective action in World War I: strengthened mobilization, militant strike action, employer repressiveness, and increased power.<sup>59</sup>

The five groups of frontier labourers which supported the labour revolt had similar histories of mobilization and collective action.<sup>60</sup> Because of their migratory, casual, or unskilled labour market, and employer hostility to their unions, all were weakly mobilized before World War I.<sup>61</sup> In the wartime labour

<sup>58</sup>The radicalism of frontier labourers does not contradict the crafts in crisis interpretation, since it was never claimed by its proponents that craft workers were the *only* source of working-class radicalism.

<sup>59</sup>Palmer ("Listening to History," 64,70) has suggested that western radicalism can be partially explained by the absence of a bureaucratized craft union leadership, because of the rapidity of western capitalist development. Although the influence of individual leaders may be important in understanding the positions of particular unions in the events of the labour revolt, the more 'structural' conditions emphasized here appear to explain many of the differences between unions. The broader question of the relative bureaucratization of western as opposed to central Canadian union locals cannot be addressed in a case study of one city.

<sup>60</sup>The one group which was not radical should perhaps not be classed with frontier labourers at all, since civic employees were the most settled of all construction labourers. After reluctantly joining the Vancouver General Strike, the 250 permanent employees became preoccupied with preservation of their seniority rights, hardly a demand of migratory workers. PAC, RG 27, Vol. 314, file 19(190); *Sun*, 1, 7, 12, 29 June 1919; *Province*, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 26, 30 June 1919.

<sup>61</sup>Mobilization was impeded by the ability of employers to replace unskilled workers, and by the *transiency of the work and the workers*. Thus Phillips and Steeves argue that the successful organization

shortages, however, each experienced remobilization and rapid union growth, growing strike militancy against hostile employers, and increasing power as a result of that militancy.<sup>62</sup>

Longshoremen, who were the main basis for the revolt among urban frontier labourers,<sup>63</sup> exemplified the history of remobilization, militancy, and power. After a union organized in 1900 was smashed in 1904, longshoremen were militant, but weak because employers were able to defeat strikes with imported strikebreakers. Improvements in wages and in regularization of the casual labour market won when a union local was reestablished in 1912 were soon reversed by an employer offensive during the pre-war depression, and the resulting increase in strike activity continued into the wartime boom.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the stage was set for the leading role of waterfront workers in the labour revolt when dock workers were organized in 1917, raising union membership from "some 500" in 1916 to 1200 in 1917.<sup>65</sup> Consistent with the frontier labourer interpretation, the less skilled and less settled dock workers were more militant and radical than the longshoremen.<sup>66</sup>

Other urban frontier labourers, such as shipyard labourers and teamsters, and migratory frontier labourers, such as loggers and coastal sailors, also experienced rapid mobilization and growing power, and joined and added momentum to a labour revolt that was already in progress in Vancouver. For example, repeated attempts to organize loggers were not successful until late 1918, when the new B.C. Loggers Union easily met its organizing target of "A Thousand Members a

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of loggers in 1918 was due to the changed production techniques (large units, year-round operation) that made work more stable. Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 77; Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 45.

<sup>62</sup>Power is indicated here by the success of strikes or the threat of strikes.

<sup>63</sup>In addition to the other indicators of radicalism, longshoremen had already engaged in two solidarity strikes in 1916, were strongly opposed to conscription in 1917, and in a rare political strike, walked out in March 1918 to protest the arrest of longshoremen by military police on the docks. *B.C. Federationist*, 1, 22 June 1917, 5, 19 October 1917, 15 March 1918; *Sun*, 10, 12 March 1918; *Province*, 11 March 1918. Nearly a thousand waterfront workers joined the Goodwin General Strike, and were a focus of returned soldier demonstrations against the strike. See Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 39-41; *Province*, 2, 3, 5 August 1918; *B.C. Federationist*, 9 August 1918. Finally, the election of waterfront workers like Jack Kavanagh and Ernest Winch to the VTLC presidency in 1918 and 1919 was one of the signs of its increasing radicalism.

<sup>64</sup>In 1915, two strikes on the docks lasted 56 days, and accounted for 16,000 striker days (one involved 500 strikers). Two strikes in 1916 were shorter and smaller (although one involved 225 strikers), but in 1917, two short, related strikes of 500 strikers each were largely successful. One strike each followed in 1918 and 1919, involving 300 and 400 strikers respectively. For details, see J.R. Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action in the Working Class of Vancouver, British Columbia, 1900-1919," Ph.D., Carleton University, 1986, 502-7.

<sup>65</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 20 July 1917, 7, 21 September 1917; ILWU, *Man Along the Shore*, 47.

<sup>66</sup>In a 1917 port-wide strike, for example, the dock workers pushed the longshoremen into a broader strike than they wanted, leading the latter to suggest that the 'radicals' be removed from the union. *World*, 31 July 1917; *News-Advertiser*, 31 July 1917. Several working-class leaders recalled the longshoremen being conservative until the dock workers auxiliary was formed. See University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections, McInnis Collection, Box 52, File 1 (E. Burns), file 16 (A. Tree), Box 55A, file 16 (H. Gutteridge).



Month.”<sup>67</sup> Strikes occurred throughout B.C. over wages, working and living conditions, and the refusal of employers to deal with the union.<sup>68</sup> In each case, radical frontier labourers experienced hostile relations with employers, remobilization, and growing power in the wartime boom.

Crafts in crisis were the other pillar of the labour revolt in Vancouver. Consistent with the craftsmen in crisis interpretation, all of the radical crafts were crafts in crisis, and no secure crafts were radical. Yet three crafts in crisis did not support the labour revolt, and were even less radical than most secure crafts. These differences can be explained by their histories of class conflict. For radical crafts in crisis, craft unionism had failed, and broader forms of mobilization were needed. In contrast, secure crafts coped with threats to their interests within craft unions, and like non-radical crafts in crisis, they lacked the experiences of remobilization, militancy, employer repression, and power that characterized radicals.

The experience of boilermakers, contract shop machinists, and moulders was typical of radical crafts in crisis, and as the largest and most important metal trades, they played leading roles in the labour revolt.<sup>69</sup> Metal trades unions had existed continuously in Vancouver from before 1900, but boilermakers and machinists were weakened after 1904 by an open shop offensive led by the largest contract shop, the Vancouver Engineering Works. The failure of a strike of machinists against contract shops in 1910-12 indicated their continuing weakness in the face of the hostility of large employers, which continued through the pre-war depression and into the wartime boom. During the wartime shipbuilding boom, however, contract shop machinists reorganized, and as it organized semi-skilled helpers, the boilermakers' union grew rapidly from 95 members in 1915 to 600 in 1917, 1200 in 1918, and 1600 in 1919.<sup>70</sup> Strike militancy led to victories in the shipyards in 1917-18, but the metal trades remained weak in contract shops, and the experience of growing power in shipyards was tempered by the persistent threat posed by the continuation of open shops there and in contract shops.<sup>71</sup> This combination of

<sup>67</sup>From about 500 members in December 1918, the union grew to 7,000 in June 1919. About 1,000 of those members were in Vancouver. *B.C. Federationist*, 18 April 1919, 9 May 1919, 13 June 1919, 18 July 1919.

<sup>68</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 11, 18 July 1919, 8 August 1919, 5 September 1919; *Pacific Coast Lumberman*, August 1919, 34; *The Camp Worker*, 26 April 1919 to 28 June 1919, *passim*. For the similar history of coastal sailors, see Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 510-4.

<sup>69</sup>In addition to the indicators of radicalism used in Table 1, each of these trades was prepared to strike in sympathy with street railway employees in July 1918, and the Metal Trades Council led the call for the Goodwin General Strike in August. VTLC Executive Minutes, 7 July 1918; *B.C. Federationist*, 2, 9 August 1918. In addition, as strong proponents of the OBU, boilermakers and contract shop machinists split from their internationals before the Vancouver General Strike, and formed an OBU until during it. *B.C. Federationist*, 28 March 1919, 11, 25 April 1919, 2, 9, 30 May 1919, 13, 20 June 1919; *Province*, 7, 11, 26 April 1919, 1, 28 May 1919.

<sup>70</sup>On boilermakers, see *B.C. Federationist*, 8 January 1915, 21 September 1917, 21 April 1918, 18 July 1919; on the small machinists' local, see *B.C. Federationist*, 23, 30 March 1917, 4, 11 May 1917, 1, 15 June 1917, 20 July 1917; City Archives of Vancouver, Add. Mss. 588, Metal Trades Council Minutes, 6 June 1917.

<sup>71</sup>See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 353-8, 383-99.

strength and weakness, of success in economic demands and failure to achieve union recognition, contributed to the development of radicalism. Other radical crafts in crisis, such as carpenters, painters,<sup>72</sup> and factory woodworkers,<sup>73</sup> had similar histories of remobilization after a period of weakness, hostile employers, and successful militancy.

In contrast to radical crafts in crisis, secure crafts found craft unionism adequate to the threats they faced. For example, throughout the 1900-1919 period printers and cigarmakers remained well organized and powerful, maintained closed shops and craft control in the workplace, and followed a union label strategy to fight outside competition in common with employers.<sup>74</sup> Solidarity with fellow-workers prevented them from being wholly outside the labour revolt,<sup>75</sup> but they were not militant, and saw no reasons to abandon a hitherto successful craft unionism.<sup>76</sup>

Histories of mobilization and collective action by non-radical crafts in crisis differed from both radical crafts in crisis and secure crafts. Railway machinists employed by the CPR illustrate the differences. Successful strikes by machinists and other shop crafts in western Canada against attacks on their union, craft work rules, and apprenticeship regulations in the early 1900s were followed by a critical defeat over the same issues in 1908. The weakened shop crafts subsequently reached an accommodation with the CPR, as there were no more strikes in the Vancouver shops, and the company refrained from further attacks on the union. Because they lacked a history of struggle against hostile employers, remobilization, increased militancy, and growing but threatened power in the wartime boom, the

<sup>72</sup>Painters and carpenters were the main supporters of the labour revolt in the building trades. Like the threatened metal trades, they had struggled bitterly with large employers over union recognition and control of the labour market, culminating in the defeated building trades general strike of 1911. After being further weakened by the collapse of the construction industry in the pre-war depression, they were able to rebuild their organizations in the shipbuilding boom, when they were the most militant of the building trades, and succeeded in reasserting some control over the labour market. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 586-614.

<sup>73</sup>Factory woodworkers repeated the history of the carpenters in exaggerated form. After unsuccessful attempts to unionize following the destruction of their first union in 1903, they were reorganized within the carpenters' union in 1917. They won a strike in August 1918, but found that employers reneged on part of the agreement in early 1919. Again, an experience of growing power which was under threat from hostile employers was crucial to the radicalism of crafts in crisis. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 248-54.

<sup>74</sup>Printers struck only once (in 1919) and (non-union) cigarmakers twice. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 435-42.

<sup>75</sup>For cigarmakers, see VTLC Executive Minutes, 17 January 1918, 7 July 1918; PAC, RG 27, Vol. 314, file 19(190); *Province*, 12, 19 June 1919; for printers, see UBC Library, Special Collections, Colleen Toppings Bourke Collection, "Interview with H. Neelands;" *B.C. Federationist*, 1 June 1917, 6 June 1919, *Province*, 15 August 1918, 13, 14, 18 June 1919; *Sun*, 4 June 1919; *World*, 4, 18 June 1919; *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 17 June 1919.

<sup>76</sup>Bricklayers, and shipwrights and caulkers were also able to maintain their craft skills on their own. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 404-5, 595, 605, 612.

CPR machinists were not radical.<sup>77</sup> Other non-radical crafts in crisis, such as bakers and tailors, were weakly mobilized against large, hostile employers, and consequently were neither militant nor powerful.<sup>78</sup>

The histories of factory operatives further demonstrate the importance of experiences of mobilization and collective action for radicalism. Of the seven groups of factory operatives, only saw and shingle mill workers, packinghouse workers, and laundry workers were radical.<sup>79</sup> The increasing mobilization, strike militancy, and growing power of these radical factory operatives contrasted with the poor mobilization, non-militancy, and lack of power of their non-radical counterparts. Packinghouse workers formed a rapidly growing union in 1917, quickly won a strike, and achieved their demands again in 1918.<sup>80</sup> Under slightly different conditions, laundry workers and saw and shingle mill workers also experienced increased mobilization, militancy, and power.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to these

<sup>77</sup>Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 336-44. In contrast to CPR machinists, the shop crafts at the CNR's Port Mann shops were strong supporters of the OBU. This was probably due to less regularized labour relations on the CNR, all of whose shops were hotbeds of radicalism. *Province*, 17 October 1919; Canada, Department of Labour, *Ninth Annual Report on Labour Organization for 1919* (Ottawa 1920), 37; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 164. The history of railway shop crafts badly needs further research. See Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 208-12, 245-7 for American examples. <sup>78</sup>Bakers, who won a strike against large bakeries in 1918, were more militant than tailors, but like CPR machinists, they reached an accommodation with the employers where their strength was based. In 1917, for example, they joined with the small bakeries in opposing an attempt by the large bakeries to impose a single standard weight on bread. *B.C. Federationist*, 22 September 1916, 9 March 1917, 13 April 1917, 3, 17 August 1917, 30 November 1917, 10 May 1918, 21 June 1918, 19 July 1918; PAC, RG 27, Vol. 307, file 18(39); *Province*, 17, 19 June 1918, 18 July 1918; *Sun*, 18, 20, 21 June 1918. Unionized tailors also relied on a conjunction of their interests and those of employers through the union label, and although the strategy was ineffective, they were not militant.

<sup>79</sup>The frontier labourer interpretation's expectation that unskilled urban workers would be radical (because their conditions equalled those of migrant resource workers) is thus not supported. Furthermore, the radicalism of saw and shingle mill workers, and packinghouse workers, was not entirely that of unskilled workers. Radicalized engineers and factory woodworkers organized the mill workers, led them into the OBU, and walked off the job in the Vancouver general strike, shutting down the saw and shingle mills. See *B.C. Federationist*, 25 April 1919, 9, 23 May 1919, 6 June 1919, 6 July 1919; PAC, RG 27, Vol. 314, file 19(190); *Sun*, 5, 6, 29 June 1919; *Province*, 4 July 1919; *Western Lumberman*, July 1919, 37. Packinghouse workers were semi-skilled workers, and maintained close ties with meat cutters in retail stores, who still possessed craft skills.

<sup>80</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 21, 28 September 1917, 19 October 1917, 2, 23, 30 November 1917, 8 March 1918, 3 May 1918; *Province*, 3, 9, 10, 15 November 1917; *Sun*, 12 November 1917; PAC, RG 27, Vol. 305, file 17(28).

<sup>81</sup>Beginning in 1902, laundry workers repeatedly failed to establish a union because of employer harassment and intimidation. They were finally successful in July 1918, and the union grew to 250 members in less than two months. In a bitter strike for union recognition lasting nearly four months, the union established a foothold at two laundries employing about one sixth of the strikers, but it was defeated at the others. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 661-5. In saw and shingle mills, union organization was weak and largely confined to skilled white workers until the war, when Chinese shingle mill workers and Japanese sawmill workers were organized. The former's growing militancy culminated in a successful province-wide strike in 1919. White mill workers were harder to organize, and even in 1919, when radical engineers and factory woodworkers joined forces to organize the mills, progress was slow. The shutdown of mills in the Vancouver General Strike was largely due

radicals, the small garment workers' local never established a secure hold in the industry, and adopted a non-militant, union label strategy.<sup>82</sup> Sugar refinery workers were more militant, but no more powerful than garment workers, and also failed to become radical.<sup>83</sup>

As the frontier labourer interpretation predicted, none of the settled urban workers were radical. Street railway employees came close, however, showing again the importance of experiences of mobilization and collective action. After their formerly paternalistic employer attacked the union, working conditions, and wages in the pre-war depression, street railway employees became militant, and showed their growing power against a hostile employer in successful strikes in 1917 and 1918. These experiences led them to join the general strikes in the 1918-19 labour revolt, but because an existing industrial union was the vehicle for their increasing power, they lacked the threatened crafts' experience of the failure of an existing form of mobilization, and failed to support the OBU.<sup>84</sup> Other settled urban workers either failed to become militant, despite increased mobilization and power in the wartime boom (cooks, waiters and waitresses),<sup>85</sup> or remained poorly organized, non-militant, and powerless (office workers, retail clerks, and civic employees).<sup>86</sup>

Comparison of the roles of frontier labourers, crafts in crisis, factory operatives, and settled urban workers in the 1918-19 labour revolt has shown that it built on experiences of mobilization and collective action. Both crafts in crisis and frontier labourers were the basis for the labour revolt, and interpretations that discount the role of urban craft workers in the labour revolt are mistaken, *unless* the radicalism of urban workers was due only to conditions during the Great War.<sup>87</sup>

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to these radical craft workers, and perhaps to the Asian workers (but information on the extent of their participation is sketchy and unreliable). See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 232-8, 241-2.

<sup>82</sup>VTLC Minutes, 30 May 1906, 6 June 1907, 20 May 1909; *Province*, 21 May 1909; *B.C. Federationist*, 6 January 1912, 3 April 1914, 19 January 1917; Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 456-7. In her otherwise excellent article, "Union Maids: Organized Women Workers in Vancouver, 1900-1915," (*BC Studies*, 41 (1979), 35-55), S. Rosenthal confuses the Amalgamated Garment Workers and Journeymen Tailors, which were separate unions enrolling different kinds of workers.

<sup>83</sup>Their first union was smashed in an unsuccessful 1917 strike, and although another was formed in 1918, it was never recognized by their obstinately anti-union employer, and the female fifth of the workforce was poorly organized. PAC, RG 27, Vol. 305, file 17(21); *Province*, 23, 26 April 1917, 24 July 1917; *B.C. Federationist*, 27 April 1917, 28 September 1917, 23, 30 August 1918, 6 September 1918; *News-Advertiser*, 6, 12 May 1917, 24 July 1917; *Sun*, 25 July 1917; Mathers Commission Evidence, Vol. 1, 525. Boot and shoe workers had a history like that of garment workers, telephone operators like that of sugar refinery workers. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 458-9 (on the former), 552-9, and Bernard, *Long Distance Feeling* (on the latter).

<sup>84</sup>Roy, "Paternalism in Labour Relations," and for a different interpretation, Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 538-51.

<sup>85</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 8 August 1917, 7, 28 September 1917, 7, 21 December 1917. Two small strikes were failures. Despite this, half of the union's members still supported the OBU. *B.C. Federationist*, 1 August 1919; VTLC Minutes, 21 August 1919, 2 October 1919.

<sup>86</sup>See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 655-61, 670-74.

<sup>87</sup>Such conditions are emphasized by Bercuson, for example, in "Labour Radicalism," 173-4.

Analysis of strike waves in the Vancouver area between 1900 and 1919 strongly suggests that this was not the case.

### III

#### Strike Waves in Vancouver

THREE PERIODS OF EXCEPTIONAL STRIKE ACTIVITY, in 1900-03, 1910-13, and 1917-19, accounted for 75 per cent of the strikes, 94 per cent of the strikers, and 91 per cent of the striker-days in the Vancouver area between 1900- and 1919 (Table 2).<sup>88</sup> Continuities between these strike waves show that the 1918-19 labour revolt was neither unprecedented, nor solely the outcome of exceptional wartime conditions. They also show that radicalism in Vancouver was not solely due to the influence of radical miners or other frontier labourers outside the city, but grew out of conflicts between workers and capitalists within Vancouver.

There were five continuities between the strike waves. Each strike wave: a) occurred in a booming local economy and tight labour market; b) was accompanied by a surge of working-class mobilization, often of unskilled workers; c) corresponded to growing working-class power; d) resulted in growing employer and state repressiveness that led to defeats, declining militancy, and demobilization; e) concluded with experimentation in new forms of organization and collective action.

First, strike waves happened in the midst of economic booms, when the labour market was tight.<sup>89</sup> The first strike wave occurred during the boom and labour shortages that followed the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. A minor recession in the fall of 1903 brought on labour surpluses that persisted until 1905, and returned after a short recovery in 1906-07 was ended by the international financial panic of 1907. The second strike wave occurred during the unprecedented construction and investment boom from 1909 to early 1913, when labour shortages again appeared despite a torrent of migration into the city. After the boom collapsed in 1913, unemployed workers flooded the city in 1914-15 while Vancouver workers enlisted

<sup>88</sup>Seventy-three strikes in 1900-03 accounted for 27 per cent of the total number of strikes in the 1900-19 period, 26 per cent of all strikers, and 30 per cent of all striker-days. Forty-four strikes in 1910-13 were 16 per cent of all strikes, 18 per cent of all strikers, and 23 per cent of all striker-days. Eight-six strikes in 1917-19 were 32 per cent of strikes, 50 per cent of strikers, and 38 per cent of striker-days for the 1900-19 period. Strike data were gathered for Greater Vancouver and New Westminster. They are available in machine-readable form at the Social Science Data Archive, Carleton University. For information sources, coding, etc., see Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," Appendix A.

<sup>89</sup>For the economic history of Vancouver in this period, see R.A.J. McDonald, "Business Leaders in Early Vancouver 1886-1914," Ph.D., University of British Columbia, 1977, and his "Victoria, Vancouver and the Evolution of British Columbia's Economic System, 1886-1914," in A.F.J. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (Regina 1981), 31-55; P. Roy, "Vancouver: 'The Mecca of Unemployed,' 1907-1929," in A.F.J. Artibise, *Ibid.*, 393-413; E. Bartlett, "Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Vancouver, 1901-1929," *BC Studies*, 51 (1981), 3-62. For press and other sources on the labour market, see Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 134-7.

TABLE 2  
 Strikes in the Vancouver Area, 1900-1919 (1)

Year	Strikes		Strikers		Striker-days (2)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1900	12	4.4	7920	11.0	217818	15.2
1901	10	3.7	3618	5.0	72718	5.1
1902	22	8.1	1274	1.8	7299	0.5
1903	29	10.7	6052	8.4	127841	8.9
1904	4	1.5	153	0.2	5653	0.4
1905	11	4.1	390	0.5	3350	0.2
1906	10	3.7	271	0.4	15929	1.1
1907	12	4.4	1387	1.9	39788	2.8
1908	3	1.1	461	0.6	25625	1.8
1909	9	3.3	448	0.2	6221	0.4
1910	9	3.3	1345	1.9	59450	4.2
1911	10	3.7	4538	6.3	225419	15.8
1912	16	5.9	790	1.1	30029	2.1
1913	9	3.3	6283	8.7	13152	0.9
1914	2	0.7	25	0.0	450	0.0
1915	6	2.2	611	0.8	30239	2.1
1916	10	3.7	352	0.5	7970	0.6
1917	30	11.1	6221	8.6	76650	5.4
1918	40	14.8	18287	25.3	140451	9.8
1919	16	5.9	11729	16.3	324554	22.7
Total	270	100.0	72155	100.0	1430696	100.0

Notes: (1) Greater Vancouver and New Westminster.

(2) Striker-days are the number of strikers at any given time multiplied by the number of days (not limited to working days) they were on strike. Since it has been computed from the strikers' point of view, this statistic produces estimates that are higher than those computed using Department of Labour data. See Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada," 129-30.

or migrated in search of work. Rising demand for ships and other war materials finally brought wartime prosperity to the Vancouver area in 1916, leading to new labour shortages and the third strike wave. When shipbuilding and other war industries wound down, and veterans arrived in the city, the boom ended, unemployment rose, and Vancouver slipped into the post-war depression.

Second, labour shortages in economic booms provided the opportunity for surges of working-class mobilization that coincided with increasing strike activity (Table 3). From 1900 to early 1903, 35 union locals were formed.<sup>90</sup> Craftsmen recovering from the 1890s depression reorganized, hitherto unorganized trades and helpers formed new unions, and frontier labourers, factory operatives, and settled urban workers were organized by the craft-dominated VTLC. Most of the increased strike activity in this period was by craft workers, and by unskilled and semi-skilled

<sup>90</sup>The wave of mobilization, like the economic boom, actually began in the late 1890s

TABLE 3  
Vancouver Union Locals and Membership

Union Locals in Vancouver, 1900-1919 (1)							
Year	No.	formed	dissolved	Year	No.	formed	dissolved
1900	—	7	—	1910	—	11	0
1901	—	8	—	1911	77	—	—
1902	42	10	—	1912	81	9	5
1903	—	10	2	1913	82	9	6
1904	51	1	6	1914	69	3	16
1905	—	1	4	1915	58	3	13
1906	—	4	0	1916	56	5	7
1907	55	6	0	1917	71	19	3
1908	—	5	1	1918	88	22	6
1909	—	5	5	1919	90	23	21

  

Union Membership, Vancouver, 1911-1919			
Year	Locals Reporting Membership	Total Membership	Members Per Local
1911	52	7277	140
1912	39	8011	205
1913	48	7538	157
1914	34	5165	152
1915	39	4557	117
1916	43	3788	88
1917	56	9704	173
1918	66	15585	236
1919	61	13312	218
(OBU) (2)	4	17894	4474

Sources: For number of union locals: *Labour Gazette*, 3 (1903) 1017-9, 4 (1904), 1275-7, 7 (1907), 1461-3; Canada, Department of Labour, *Reports on Labour Organization*, 1911-19.

For locals formed and dissolved: *Labour Gazette*, VTLC Minutes, *B.C. Federationist*. Because the sources differ, the results do not necessarily correspond with the total number of union locals in Vancouver.

For union membership: Canada, Dept. of Labour, *Reports on Labour Organization*, 1911-19.

Notes: (1) Union locals in North Vancouver and South Vancouver are included under Vancouver. District councils and similar federations of union locals are excluded from the table.

(2) Because of dual union memberships in 1919, membership figures for all unions are inflated.

frontier labourers whose vulnerability to replacement made any chance of success dependent on a tight labour market.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Craft workers accounted for 25 strikes involving 905 strikers and 15,437 striker-days, non-craft workers accounted for 39 strikes involving 17,893 strikers and 408,147 striker-days. The latter were mostly by frontier labourers, especially salmon fishermen (5 strikes, 16,418 strikers, 329,368 striker-

At the end of the 1900-03 boom, the pace of union growth slowed, and the number of dissolutions rose.<sup>92</sup> Working-class mobilization did not increase significantly until 1910, the second year of the 1909-12 boom. Crafts (especially the building trades) were again in the forefront of this more modest remobilization.<sup>93</sup> The pattern of remobilization was repeated in strikes, which were concentrated in the construction industry.<sup>94</sup>

Union growth continued in 1913, but in 1914-15 the full effects of the pre-war depression were revealed in the dissolution of 29 union locals. This decline was abruptly reversed in the wartime boom, when union membership exploded from less than 4,000 in 1916 to over 15,000 in 1918.<sup>95</sup> The growth of craft unions weakened by unemployment and employer attacks during the pre-war depression accounted for part of this expansion, but the most impressive development was the unionization of frontier labourers.<sup>96</sup> New unions were also formed by factory operatives.<sup>97</sup> The extent of remobilization resembled that in 1900-03, as the *B.C. Federationist* noted when it celebrated the organization of teamsters in 1917 as the revival of "the old 1903 spirit of B.C. unionism."<sup>98</sup> The same spirit was revealed in strikes, many of which involved joint action by craft and non-craft workers.<sup>99</sup>

Third, working-class power (indicated by the success rate of strikes) generally peaked during strike waves, which ended as that power declined (Table 4).<sup>100</sup> In 1900-03, the proportion of strikes ending wholly or partly in strikers' favour was over 70 per cent in 1900-01 and 1901-02, 44 per cent in 1902-03, and only 21 per

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days), and longshoremen (9 strikes, 261 strikers, 25,623 striker-days). An additional 5 strikes involving 96 strikers and 1,792 striker-days were by craft and non-craft workers acting together.

<sup>92</sup>With the exception of unions of craftsmen, and of street railway employees, most of the unions formed in the 1900-03 boom were weak, and did not outlast it.

<sup>93</sup>The Building Trades Council was re-established in 1909, and (led by the two carpenters' unions) existing locals grew, and new locals were established in hitherto unorganized building trades. Some crafts in other industries also reorganized, and a few groups of frontier labourers unionized, but little progress was made by factory operatives or settled urban workers.

<sup>94</sup>Construction (including both the building trades and heavy construction such as roads and sewers) accounted for nearly half of the strikes, four tenths of the strikers, and three quarters of the striker-days in this period. Frontier labourers appeared in several strikes, but factory operatives and settled urban workers were largely outside the strike wave.

<sup>95</sup>As in the 1909-12 boom, there was a one-year lag between the end of the depression and remobilization.

<sup>96</sup>Large and fast-growing new unions were formed of shipyard labourers, loggers and teamsters, and existing unions of longshoremen and sailors also expanded rapidly.

<sup>97</sup>Laundry workers, packinghouse workers, Asian saw and shingle mill workers, boot and shoe workers, and sugar refinery employees were organized.

<sup>98</sup>*B.C. Federationist*, 10 August 1917.

<sup>99</sup>Even when the general strikes of 1918-19 are removed from the analysis, strikes by both craft and non-craft workers (mostly in shipbuilding) made up 22 per cent of the strikes, 55 per cent of the strikers, and 45 per cent of the striker-days in 1917-19. For the entire 1900-1919 period (with the general strikes excluded), only 11 per cent of strikes, 28 per cent of strikers, and 30 per cent of striker-days involved both types of worker.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada," for similar findings on the relationship between success and strike waves.



TABLE 4  
Strike Outcomes, Vancouver Area, 1900-1919 (1)

Years (2)	In Strikers' Favour		Indefinite		In Employers' Favour	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1900-01	14	73.6	0	—	5	26.3
1901-02	19	70.3	1	3.7	7	25.9
1902-03	17	43.5	4	10.3	18	46.2
1903-04	5	20.8	4	16.7	15	62.5
1904-05	6	42.9	1	7.1	7	50.0
1905-06	11	58.0	0	—	8	42.1
1906-07	10	50.0	1	5.0	9	45.0
1907-08	5	35.7	2	14.3	7	50.0
1908-09	2	18.2	2	18.2	7	63.6
1909-10	7	43.8	1	6.3	8	50.0
1910-11	6	46.2	2	15.4	5	38.5
1911-12	9	50.0	2	11.1	7	38.9
1912-13	11	55.0	0	—	9	45.0
1913-14	4	50.0	0	—	4	50.0
1914-15	3	50.0	1	16.7	2	33.3
1915-16	8	61.5	1	7.7	4	30.8
1916-17	26	74.3	1	2.9	8	22.9
1917-18	39	59.1	7	10.6	20	30.3
1918-19	23	44.2	8	15.4	21	40.4
1900-19	118	51.5	20	8.7	91	39.7

Notes: (1) The outcomes of 41 strikes were not known.

(2) Two-year moving averages used to compensate for years with few strikes.

cent in 1903-04.<sup>101</sup> Although it did not reach the heights of its predecessor, in 1910-13 workers' power increased sharply. Success rates rose from 18 per cent in 1908-09 to about 45 per cent in 1909-10 and 1910-11, 50 per cent in 1911-12, and 55 per cent in 1912-13. They remained around that level until the 1917-19 strike wave,<sup>102</sup> when they rose to nearly 75 per cent in 1916-17, before falling back to 60 per cent as the wave crested in 1917-18, and then to only 44 per cent in 1918-19.

Fourth, employer and state hostility to working-class mobilization and strikes increased during strike waves. Attempts to repress workers' organizations, such as dismissing union militants or refusing to deal with a union, were indicators of employer hostility which were reflected in the objectives of strikes. Wages and hours were the most frequent strike objectives throughout the 1900-19 period,

<sup>101</sup>Two-year moving averages have been used to remove the effects of years with few strikes. The average success rate for the whole 1900-19 period was 52 per cent.

<sup>102</sup>This continuing rate of success seems to be explicable in terms of the declining number of strikes in the pre-war depression: only those workers strong enough to still have a good chance to win continued to strike.

followed by labour market control issues (mostly employment of union members).<sup>103</sup> But in third place, accounting for over a tenth of all objectives, were union security issues such as union recognition, or dismissal of a union member or other worker (usually for organizing activity). They appeared in strikes 39 times, concentrated in the first and last strike waves: 13 times in 1900-03, and 19 in 1917-19. Both were periods in which new groups of workers were mobilizing and being repressed by employers. In contrast, union security appeared as a strike objective only once in the 1910-13 strike wave, when crafts were remobilizing. Protection from labour market competition rather than union recognition was then at stake, as an open shop campaign that began in 1904 was the main source of contention (after wages), especially for the building trades.<sup>104</sup> Struggles over the open shop and union security show that employer hostility to union mobilization was a major source of strike waves.

Employer hostility was also indicated by repressive responses to strikes, such as refusing to negotiate, hiring strikebreakers, and dismissing and blacklisting strikers (Table 5). Repression was effective: growing employer repressiveness led to declining worker power. In the 1900-03 strike wave, strike success rates fell after employers increasingly stopped negotiating and took repressive measures instead. Employers negotiated in about half of the strikes from 1900-1902, less than a third in 1903, and only a quarter in 1904; during the same period, success rates fell from nearly three quarters to one fifth. In 1910-13, employers took advantage of the migration of workers to Vancouver to employ strikebreakers on a large scale, and negotiated in less than a third of strikes. As a result, strikes were successful less frequently than in the other two strike waves.<sup>105</sup> In 1917-19, the tight labour market ruled out the use of strikebreakers, so employers negotiated in half the strikes in 1916-17 and 1917-18. When labour surpluses returned in 1918, employers negotiated less often, and by hiring strikebreakers, won more strikes in 1918-19.

In addition to the repressive actions of employers, strikers sometimes faced repression by the state, usually in the form of active assistance to the employer by the police. State intervention was reported in only a fifth of Vancouver-area strikes, and while over half (30) involved conciliation attempts, nearly two fifths (21) were directly hostile to strikers. Growing state involvement in relations between capital and labour during the war meant that state intervention in strikes was highest in 1917-19.<sup>106</sup> State repression continued even after the war ended, in the form of

<sup>103</sup> As many as two objectives were counted for each strike. The total number of strike objectives was 338, distributed as follows: wages and hours 172 (50.9 per cent); labour market control 60 (17.8 per cent); union security 39 (11.5 per cent); solidarity with other strikers 34 (10.1 per cent); job control 21 (6.2 per cent); other 12 (3.6 per cent).

<sup>104</sup> Labour market control was an objective 16 times in 1910-13, nine of these times in the building trades. It was also a frequent objective in 1900-03 (20 times), but not in 1917-19 (nine times).

<sup>105</sup> Also in contrast to the other two, employers became less repressive and the success rate grew over the course of the 1910-13 strike wave.

<sup>106</sup> In 1918, the state intervened in over a third of all strikes. Other forms of state involvement included the extension of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act to all war industries in 1918, Imperial

TABLE 5  
Employer Responses to Strikes, Vancouver Area, 1900-1919 (1)

Years (2)	Negotiation		Repression		Total N
	N	%	N	%	
1900-01	7	50.0	7	50.0	14
1901-02	10	52.6	9	47.4	19
1902-03	12	54.5	10	45.5	22
1903-04	7	29.2	17	70.8	24
1904-05	6	42.9	8	57.1	14
1905-06	8	50.0	8	50.0	16
1906-07	6	46.2	7	53.8	13
1907-08	3	33.3	6	66.7	9
1908-09	1	10.0	9	90.0	10
1909-10	2	14.3	12	85.7	14
1910-11	1	10.0	9	90.0	10
1911-12	4	25.0	12	75.0	16
1912-13	7	41.2	10	58.8	17
1913-14	3	50.0	3	50.0	6
1914-15	1	20.0	4	80.0	5
1915-16	3	25.0	9	75.0	12
1916-17	16	48.5	17	51.5	33
1917-18	26	48.1	28	51.9	54
1918-19	15	36.6	26	63.4	41
1900-19	72	38.1	117	61.9	189

Note: (1)Employer responses were not known in 81 strikes.

(2)Two-year moving averages used to compensate for years with few strikes.

ensorship, and the banning of radical 'enemy alien' organizations, meetings and publications. This gave a political dimension to economic militancy that was lacking in previous strike waves, and added to the economic threats workers were already facing as employer resistance to strikes grew and working-class power declined.<sup>107</sup>

Fifth and last, Vancouver workers experimented with broad forms of mobilization and socialist objectives of collective action near the end of each strike wave. In 1900-03, crafts in crisis led a movement away from exclusivist craft unionism, as metal craftsmen organized their helpers, and carpenters spearheaded the formation of a Building Trades Council. The craft-dominated VTLC showed increasing interest in industrial unionism, and 1903 it withdrew from the Trades and Labor Congress to join the radical, industrial American Labor Union.<sup>108</sup> A new form of

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Munitions Board control over munitions and shipbuilding work, and government responsibility for the cost of living, the housing crisis, and registration and conscription.

<sup>107</sup>See Kealey, "1919," 42; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, ch. 3; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, ch. 7 and 8; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, ch. 5.

<sup>108</sup>On the ALU in B.C., see McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 48-52. The activities

collective action appeared when the tactic of the sympathetic strike was tried on a large scale in 1903, in support of striking freight handlers and clerks belonging to the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees (UBRE).<sup>109</sup> The high socialist and labour vote in Vancouver in the 1903 provincial election indicated that Vancouver workers were favourable to new political goals.<sup>110</sup>

Again in 1910-13, Vancouver workers experimented with new forms of organization and action. Threatened crafts were prominent in attempts at craft amalgamation, and in the formation of metal and building trades councils.<sup>111</sup> The search for broader forms of organization was also expressed in the establishment of the B.C. Federation of Labor (BCFL) in 1911, and in a VTLC resolution for industrial unionism in 1912.<sup>112</sup> There was also new cooperation between the craft-dominated VTLC and the IWW, which organized mostly frontier labourers.<sup>113</sup> The sympathetic strike was further broadened in a 1911 building trades general strike in support of carpenters struggling against large open-shop contractors.<sup>114</sup> The general strike was now part of the repertoire of Vancouver workers' collective action, to be used when conditions were opportune.<sup>115</sup> Finally, Vancouver unionists supported the "Principles of Socialism" in a 1912 BCFL referendum.<sup>116</sup>

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of the craft unionists of the VTLC in the early 1900s contradict Bercuson's idea that conservative urban craft unionists were not interested in organizing unskilled workers ("Labour Radicalism," 151). See also McDonald ("Working Class Vancouver," 44), whose example of the failure of aristocratic railway brotherhoods (which held aloof from the entire labour movement in Vancouver) to support the UBRE strikers in 1903 only serves to highlight the support given the strikers by other craft unions.

<sup>109</sup>Tuck, "United Brotherhood of Railway Employees," 63-88.

<sup>110</sup>Ward, "Class and Race," 598, n. 12, and *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1905, 442-3: a quarter of the votes were for left candidates.

<sup>111</sup>Craft amalgamation actually began before the strike wave, with the federation of shop crafts at the CPR in 1908, and the reorganization of the Building Trades Council in 1909. The contract shop machinists' strike that began in 1910 led to the establishment of a Metal Trades Council in 1911, and to growing sentiment in the metal trades for industrial unionism. *Province*, 9 April 1908; *Western Wage Earner*, May 1909, 6; VTLC Minutes, 16 February 1911, 16 March 1911; City Archives of Vancouver, Add. Mss. 558, Metal Trades Council Minutes, 18 March 1911.

<sup>112</sup>See Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 49-50; VTLC Minutes, 15 August 1912.

<sup>113</sup>In 1912, the VTLC and Socialist Party of Canada cooperated in an IWW 'free speech fight' and later formed a brief, uncomfortable alliance in the Miners Liberation League. Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 55, 60; J. Scott, *Plunderbund and Proletariat* (Vancouver 1975), 41-51; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 106-7, 114. McCormack overemphasizes the role of the IWW in the tactic of the general strike, in the Miners Liberation League, and especially in the VTLC's call for industrial unionism (which was moved by the painters' delegate).

<sup>114</sup>For details, see Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 600-7. A general strike of all unions affiliated with the VTLC was originally proposed.

<sup>115</sup>On the concept of repertoires of collection action, see C. Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading 1978), 151-9. On the building trades general strike as the precursor of others, see Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 50. General strikes to support striking Vancouver Island miners were proposed several times in 1913-14, but rejected by the VTLC for tactical reasons. See VTLC Minutes, 4 September 1913, 8, 15 January 1914, 16 July 1914, 6 August 1914.

<sup>116</sup>VTLC Minutes, 21 March 1912, *B.C. Federationist*, 6 May 1912.

The experiments in organization and collective action of 1900-03 and 1910-13 were continued in the 1917-19 strike wave. The increasingly broad organization of craft workers culminated in a Metal Trades Council that organized unskilled workers, acted independently of international craft headquarters, and took steps toward industrial unionism as it struggled to obtain a blanket agreement from contract shops and shipyards.<sup>117</sup> The OBU was itself the culmination of tendencies to industrial organization, and the 1919 general strike was an extension of the more limited sympathetic strikes of the past.

The forms of organization and collective action that were adopted in Vancouver in 1917-19 were not entirely new, but built on experiences in the previous two strike waves. In the 1917-19 conjuncture of threats and opportunities, Vancouver workers used and extended forms of organization and action that had become part of their repertoire through trial and error in similar situations in the past. The new elements in 1917-19 were experimentation with strikes for political objectives, as a result of the expanded wartime role of the state, and the spread of unionization and militancy to hitherto weakly organized workers.<sup>118</sup>

### Conclusion

COMPARISON OF STRIKE WAVES and histories of class conflict of Vancouver workers between 1900 and 1919 has shown the importance of experiences of mobilization and collective action for understanding the 1918-19 labour revolt. In each strike wave, experiences of growing mobilization, rising militancy, increased power, and threats to that power led workers to adopt more radical forms of organization and objectives of collective action. The demonstration of continuities between the strike waves of 1900-03, 1910-13, and 1917-19 has shown that sources of radicalism lay within Vancouver; the labour revolt was not solely due to the influence of radical miners or exceptional wartime circumstances. It built on the

<sup>117</sup>On the formation and history of the MTC, see Lees, "British Columbia Shipyard Workers." The independent action of MTCs was common in this period. See D. Montgomery, "Immigrants, Industrial Unions, and Social Reconstruction in the United States, 1916-1923," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 105. The spirit of industrial unionism was also exhibited when striking metal tradesmen in 1917 demanded better conditions for unorganized helpers and labourers, and provided strike pay to those non-union workers. PAC, RG 27, Vol. 306, file 17(64), MTC Minutes, 11 July 1917 to 10 October 1917; *B.C. Federationist*, 20, 27 July 1917 to 31 August 1917; *Province*, 19 July 1917; *Sun*, 20 July 1917. The ambiguities of craft unionism noted by Heron were shown by the eruption of jurisdictional conflicts in 1918, however. See Conley, "Class Conflict and Collective Action," 388-90; Heron, "Crisis of the Craftsman."

<sup>118</sup>In addition to the well-known Goodwin General strike, and Vancouver General Strike, there was a strike by longshoremen in 1918 against the activities of military police on the docks, and general strikes against the imposition of conscription had previously been proposed. This enthusiasm for political strikes has often been labelled 'syndicalism', but the term confuses more than it clarifies. See Robin, *Radical Politics*, 150-2; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries*, 143-6, Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 82-3; for the best critical discussion of the issue, see L. Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 7 (1981), 53-8.

experiments in new organizational forms undertaken by crafts in crisis, which had to cooperate with each other and to organize less skilled workers in order to overcome the devaluation of skill as a resource for collective action, and to counter the open shop campaigns of organized employers trying to rationalize production at their expense. It also built on the industrial unionism and sympathetic actions of unskilled workers (especially frontier labourers), whose major resource was working-class solidarity, since they lacked skills to protect them from being replaced by strikebreakers. At the same time, this analysis shows that the experience of Vancouver workers was not unique, but was a local variation on a theme being played out elsewhere in Canada and internationally.<sup>119</sup>

The same conditions explained variations in support for the 1918-19 labour revolt within the Vancouver working class. Comparison of participation in the labour revolt has shown that strengthened mobilization, militant strike action, repressive employers, and growing but threatened power were conditions of radicalism in Vancouver in 1918-19. The same conditions appear to have been at work in other places at the same time, such as Amherst, Nova Scotia, where the experience of successful militancy, after a history of failed craft unionism distinguished supporters of the general strike from non-supporters.<sup>120</sup> The findings of this study of the labour revolt in Vancouver thus have a wider historical and sociological bearing in the study of class and class conflict. They show the need to go beyond the study of the structure of working-class interests and solidarities to the examination of historical experiences of mobilization and collective action in order to understand working-class responses to the contradictions and crises of capital accumulation.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Kealey, "1919." Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada;" Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*; J.E. Cronin, "Labor Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917-1920 in Europe," *Social Science History*, 4 (1980), 125-52.

<sup>120</sup>N. Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919," *Acadiensis*, 9 (1980), 56-77. Cf. S. Grossman, "The Radicalization of London Building Workers, 1890-1914" (Ph.D., University of Toronto 1976), who finds that radical groups of workers shared histories of militant struggle against repressive employers.

<sup>121</sup>See D. Baer, E. Grabb, and W.A. Johnston, "Class, Crisis, and Political Ideology in Canada: Recent Trends," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 24, 1 (1987), 1-22 for a similar argument.

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