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# Characterization of Canadian Strikes: Some Critical Comments Caractéristiques des grèves au Canada : Quelques commentaires critiques

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### Résumé de l'article

Avant d'expliquer un phénomène social, il est nécessaire de décrire ou d'examiner ce phénomène. Il y a au moins deux façons de caractériser les conflits industriels canadiens du milieu de la décennie 1960 et elles sont tout à fait contradictoires. La première façon est celle qui assume que certaines conclusions du Rapport Woods au sujet de ces grèves sont justes; l'autre rejette ces conclusions. L'objet de cette étude est de montrer comment ces deux caractéristiques posent de sérieux problèmes.

La caractérisation des grèves au Canada est considérée par D.A. Smith (1972, 1976) comme un stratagème généralisé des « syndicats d'affaires ». Pour Smith, les grèves sont des instruments pour assurer des augmentations de salaires « réalistes » aux syndiqués. Rinehart (1975, 1976, 1978), d'autre part, souligne que ce sont pas seulement les enjeux économiques qui conduisent aux conflits industriels. Tout aussi importants sont les problèmes généraux découlant de l'aliénation en milieu de travail. Rinehart prétend que l'inquiétude des travailleurs relativement à l'organisation de la production a tendance à être camouflée par les dirigeants syndicaux qui privilégient les enjeux économiques. Mais, en dépit de la priorité des dirigeants syndicaux accordée aux questions économiques, l'effet de l'aliénation au travail ressort à peine partiellement voilé des statistiques canadiennes sur les grèves.

Selon un article de Crispo et Arthurs (1968), les auteurs du rapport Woods firent valoir que les conflits industriels au Canada, pendant la décennie 1960, manifestaient un militantisme marqué. Par exemple, ils se référaient au rejet des conventions collectives par les syndiqués de la base, au mépris de la loi et de l'ordre et à une prédominance des grèves sauvages. Rinehart utilise ces conclusions du rapport Woods comme une preuve à l'appui de sa caractérisation générale des grèves au Canada. Smith tente de réfuter ces conclusions.

Smith démontre que les variations dans le temps dans les conflits industriels au Canada peuvent s'expliquer en particulier par les variations dans les taux de chômage et les changements dans les taux des salaires réels. Ceci conclut-il, indique que nous pouvons comprendre ce qui est arrivé au milieu de la décennie 1960 comme étant une nette répercussion des conditions normales du marché du travail. En conséquence, point n'est besoin de l'expliquer par le militantisme syndical. Rinehart, d'autre part, voit dans la non-ratification des conventions collectives, les grèves sauvages et la violence auxquelles se réfère le rapport Woods, la preuve d'une insatisfaction généralisée du milieu de travail et de la direction syndicale dont on peut s'attendre à ce qu'elle génère des conditions de travail troublées.

La thèse de D.A. Smith n'apprécie pas adéquatement les points soulevés dans le rapport Woods. Il concentre l'attention sur la répartition des grèves dans le temps, alors que c'est leur contenu qui est en jeu. Pour réfuter l'explication du « militantisme », Smith devait démontrer que les prétentions du rapport Woods au sujet des rejets de conventions collectives, des grèves sauvages, etc. étaient fausses. Rinehart assume que les affirmations de Crispo et d'Arthurs au sujet des grèves sauvages, etc. qui furent retenues dans le rapport Woods, sont vraies. Mais, en fait, il n'y a pas de preuve absolue que des changements qualitatifs dans les conflits industriels au Canada se soient produits au milieu de la décennie 1960 comme le soutiennent Crispo et Arthurs. Et il y a quelques indices qui contredisent ces prétentions. La thèse de Rinehart affirme aussi que les grèves sauvages ont un caractère véritablement radical. Mais cela ne se vérifie pas clairement non plus.

En conclusion, on peut dire qu'il y a matière à scepticisme au sujet des caractérisations des grèves au Canada telles que présentées à la fois par Rinehart et Smith. Ce qui est le plus troublant relativement à la façon d'envisager les conflits industriels chez chacun de ces auteurs c'est, cependant, leur tendance à éviter de considérer des caractérisations qui pourraient être différentes des leurs.

# Characterizations of Canadian Strikes

## Some Critical Comments

**Michael R. Smith**

*This paper examines examples of two different intellectual traditions within which Canadian strikes are interpreted. The distinctiveness of the two traditions becomes most clear in reactions to a paper by Crispo and Arthurs (1968) on industrial conflict in the mid 1960's. Each tradition involves assumptions about the nature of industrial conflict. In neither of the examples discussed from the two traditions, however, is the adequacy of the assumptions really established. Despite the fact that these two traditions assert entirely contradictory characterizations of Canadian strikes, there appears to be no serious dialogue between the exponents of either position.*

Some conception of the nature of a social phenomenon is a prerequisite for any attempt to explain it. Often, however, social researchers operating within different intellectual traditions appear to be so strongly wedded to the particular characterization of the phenomenon which prevails within their chosen tradition that the process of research itself is seriously compromised. For while, in principle, scientific enquiry is supposed to involve sifting through alternative explanations by comparing the relative extent to which one or another explanation is consistent with available data, in fact, the process of social research all too often resembles a dialogue of the deaf. People write and do research which serves to reaffirm the characterization which is the orthodoxy of their preferred intellectual tradition without seriously engaging the problems raised within alternative traditions.

We can see this rather clearly in recent treatments of Canadian strikes, and especially clearly in reactions to some assertions made in the Report of the Task Force on Canadian Industrial Relations (the Woods Report). Those assertions were, in turn, based upon an article by Crispo and Arthurs (1968). The crux of the assertions in question was that Canadian workers in the mid 1960's were displaying a rather distinctive militancy which showed itself in a number of ways. In this short paper I outline and criticize two alternative and contradictory interpretations of industrial conflict in Canada in the mid and late 1960's: one of those interpretations proceeds on

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the assumption that the conclusion of the Woods Report with respect to symptoms of a distinctive militancy in the mid 1960's is correct and builds a particular characterization of Canadian strikes on the basis of that conclusions; the other offers an alternative characterization through a rejection of the militancy conclusions of the Woods Report. In what follows I will try to show that there are serious inadequacies in the characterization of Canadian strikes that serves as an empirical justification for each of these interpretations<sup>1</sup>.

## CONTRADICTORY CHARACTERIZATIONS

One conception of Canadian strikes sees them as a central stratagem of North American business unions (Smith, 1972, 1976). Business unions are led by people whose objective is to protect their job tenure and maximize their income. They accomplish this by delivering wage increases and improvements in fringe benefits to their members. Except perhaps at the level of rhetoric, they have little or no concern with the general conditions of that portion of the employed population which is not part of their membership (cf. Bell, 1962). From this point of view, a strike can be seen as an investment; one foregoes income for a little while in the anticipation that sacrifice will yield a reasonable rate of return in the long run. It is true that strikers themselves may, at the outset of a strike, have unreasonable expectations as to what income increase they can hope for. In Ashenfelter and Johnson's (1969) formulation - which Smith adopts - the union leadership uses the strike to disabuse its members. The longer the strike, the more 'reasonable' the membership becomes. The point remains, however, that "the union leadership--- maximizes its utility by acting in accord with the expectations of the rank and file" (Ashenfelter and Johnson, 1969: 39) and does this by ensuring that the returns on an investment in a strike are maximized. Those returns are likely to be maximized where the bargaining position of labour is strongest; that is, under conditions of full employment. Hence, it has been predicted and found that the propensity to strike is inversely related to the rate of unemployment (Ashenfelter and Johnson, 1969; Pencavel, 1970; Smith, 1972; Hibbs, 1976)<sup>2</sup>. This, then, is an explanation of temporal variations in strike propensities based upon a very calculative conception of strikes.

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1 This paper is part of a larger project on industrial conflict in postwar Canada. For an early statistical treatment which stresses the difficulties involved in constructing a theory of strikes in Canada, see Chartier (1952).

2 COUSINEAU and LACROIX (1976) using a different specification to Smith report a negative association between economic upswings and industrial conflict in Canada for the period 1967 to 1974. They infer that this indicates that the relationship between industrial conflict and the business cycle is "empirical" in the sense that it cannot be theoretically predicted. Their reasoning is that, while increasing union aggressiveness may tend to increase the level of industrial conflict during an upswing, the tendency of employers to give in will have a counter effect. For an attempt to theoretically specify the conditions that lie behind the positive association between the business cycle and industrial conflict that is more usually reported see Sapsford (1978).

For the purpose of this paper, the important thing to note here is that Smith both asserts this position as an adequate description of Canadian unions and rejects something that he calls a "Marxian theory of strikes" (in the 1972 paper) as well as a "militancy explanation" of the surge in strikes in Canada in the mid 1960's (in particular, in the 1976 paper). The latter kind of explanation is, of course, found in the paper by Crispo and Arthurs and reproduced in the Woods Report.

Contrast this with another recent treatment of strikes. For Rinehart (1975), strikes in Canada as elsewhere are, fundamentally, one of a number of weapons used in "the war at the workplace". More generally, they have their origins in the effects of the evolution of capitalism on working conditions. Work, it is argued, is alienating. Labour is treated as a commodity by employers so that work is organized in ways which maximize both the control of the employer over his labour force and the worker's productivity (cf. Stone, 1973). It is not normally organized in ways that guarantee some satisfaction to the individual worker. Consequently, survey data to the contrary notwithstanding<sup>3</sup>, work is inevitably experienced as oppressive by the overwhelming majority of workers. And, given the effect of capitalist competition on the rationalization of production organization, the extent and degree to which work is experienced as oppressive has increased and will continue to increase over time (cf. Braverman, 1974).

Following from this, strikes which may be organized around economic issues have their roots in a more complicated set of phenomena.

While many recent strikes have been ostensibly precipitated by inflation and rising living costs strikes are a complex phenomenon which do not readily lend themselves to simple causal analysis. Most strikes arise out of a multiplicity of issues, and as they progress the relative importance of these often shifts. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the underlying causes of many work stoppages reside *in the way in which the industrial system is structured*<sup>4</sup>.

This is not to say that wages are not of continuing importance to working people. Rather, the wage question is hopelessly and inextricably tied in with other issues of a non economic nature. (Rinehart, 1975: 70-71).

Given this kind of position it should not be surprising that Rinehart is much more favourably disposed towards Crispo and Arthurs as well as to the relevant passages in the Woods Report. Thus, Rinehart cites the following conclusion of the Woods Report (1968: 99) approvingly: "Workers who have long resented their terms and conditions of employment and management's authority over them now seem to be reacting to an ever more basic grievance. An increasing number of workers appear to perceive an issue in the idea of work as it is now structured".

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<sup>3</sup> In his 1978 paper, RINEHART is at pains to stress the weakness of survey research and his paper is addressed to the question of why workers appear relatively contented in survey research findings when they appear less contented in more qualitative research.

<sup>4</sup> The emphasis is mine.

The logical linkages in Rinehart's argument are not always as clear as one would like but he does seem to be arguing that, given the more generalized tensions in the work place that his model of industrial relations incorporates, the kinds of periodic escalation in the extent and intensity of industrial conflict reported by Jamieson (1968) are to be expected from time to time, including that escalation in industrial conflict that occurred in the mid 1960's. Moreover, and most importantly, given the tensions in the work place that are at the heart of Rinehart's characterization of Canadian strikes, one would not be surprised to see the more diffuse forms of conflict asserted by Crispo and Arthurs associated with a strike wave. Specifically, Rinehart refers to the following characteristics (borrowed from Crispo and Arthurs) of the mid 1960's strike wave.

First, there was an unprecedented tendency for rank and file workers to refuse to ratify agreements negotiated by union leaders and the company. These actions indicated not only that workers lacked faith in union leaders but also that the expectations, grievances, and militancy of ordinary workers were greater than those of union officials. A second feature of the mid - 1960 era was the willingness of the labour movement to defy "law and order"; court orders were ignored and injunctions were violated. Third, an inordinately high proportion of work stoppages were accompanied by violence and illegality, including property damage, personal injury and death, and arrests and convictions. Finally, an unusually high percentage of strikes were illegal; in 1966 about one-third of all work stoppages were of the illegal variety. (Rinehart, 1975: 69-70)

Elsewhere, Rinehart cites Flood's (1972) paper on wildcat strikes in the 1960's (1972) and the radicalism of Quebec unions, especially as displayed in the Common Front strike of 1972.

For both Smith and Rinehart, Canadian unions struggle relatively aggressively to increase their members' incomes. But they diverge in their model of the relationship between union leaders and their members and it is in these contrasting images of the relationship between union leaders and members that their contrasting characterizations of strikes are substantially rooted. Unions aggressively pursue wage increases, according to Smith, because their members want them to. For Rinehart, union leaders concentrate on income issues because that is the only viable course of action for them consistent with reasonably placid relations with the state (cf. Rinehart, 1976: 29, 1978: 10)<sup>5</sup>. It is not because the aggressive pursuit of higher income to the exclusion of job control issues accurately reflects the aspirations of workers. Thus, for Rinehart there is a vast reservoir of discontent generated by the experience of oppressive work to which unions in Canada, as in other capitalist societies, are structurally incapable of responding. In contrast to Smith who is asserting that his business union model of Cana-

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<sup>5</sup> "The strategies of organized labour are more adequately explained by reference to structural constraints which oblige unions (under threat of destruction) to ignore questions of authority and control" (Rinehart, 1978: 10).

dian strikes exhausts what is interesting in understanding Canadian industrial relations in the mid 1960's, for Rinehart, the additional characteristics of the mid 1960's strike wave asserted, above all, by Crispo and Arthurs, are centrally interesting because they are the surface effusions of the seething cauldron of discontent that lies below even apparently placid labour relations.

## LOGIC AND EVIDENCE

We have, then, two quite contradictory characterizations of Canadian strikes which seem to particularly diverge in their interpretation of the surge of strikes of the mid 1960s. The first question to be dealt with is, are there any grounds for deciding which of these characterizations is the more adequate? The second and subsidiary question is, how is it possible for two such contradictory interpretations to be held at the same time?

The first of these two questions largely turns on the evidence that Smith on the one hand and Rinehart on the other, offer in support of their particular interpretation. Smith's model is derived directly from Ashenfelter and Johnson (1969) whose characterization of unions comes from Ross (1948), one of a number of institutional labour economists writing along these lines in the post war period (e.g. Dunlop, 1949; Lester, 1958). In part, then, the basis for Smith's business union characterization of Canadian unions comes from the twenty-five year old observations of a group of American economists. The more important basis for Smith's characterization of strikes, however, comes from the statistical adequacy of the regression equations that his business union model leads him to construct. Strikes and man days lost are higher where unemployment is low for the periods analyzed by Smith<sup>6</sup>. Smith's contention is that "a Marxian theory of strikes suggests that unemployment creates unrest and basically political strikes so that unemployment and strikes would be positively related" (p. 669). The negative association between strikes and unemployment therefore is, for Smith, evidence of the inadequacy of a Marxist model and of the adequacy of the business union model.

Moreover, since the bulk of the total variance in industrial conflict over the post war period analysed by him can be accounted for by an Ashenfelter-Johnson model using unemployment rate, a distributed lag of growth in real wages, quarterly dummies and a trend term, Smith asserts that one does not need to resort to "militancy" to explain what happened in the mid 1960's (in the way that Crispo and Arthurs do). If there was a surge in the number of strikes and man days lost in the mid 1960's that is because that was a period of low unemployment and accelerating inflation.

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<sup>6</sup> SNYDER's (1977) results suggest that this may not be an entirely stable pattern as do my own results for Quebec (Smith, 1979).

We can set aside Smith's allusion to a Marxist theory of strikes since it is at best naive, more probably silly, and certainly undocumented. Neither is his rejection of a "social-political view" of strikes (1976: 140) entirely persuasive. Crispo and Arthurs were not attempting to explain annual or quarterly fluctuations in their 1968 paper<sup>7</sup>. They were attempting to show (not very successfully, as we will see shortly) that industrial conflict in the mid 1960's displayed a set of distinctive characteristics which suggested that one could not understand it as simply a bargaining process. More specifically, they were claiming above all that the *composition* of industrial disputes had changed with more involving illegalities and rank and file discontent with union leadership. It is upon these compositional changes that Rinehart pounced to provide evidence in support of his more general characterization of Canadian strikes. Since it is the composition rather than the temporal distribution of strikes that is at issue, it should be clear that a negative temporal association between the rate of unemployment and industrial conflict is entirely compatible with the positions taken by Crispo and Arthurs<sup>8</sup> and by Rinehart. If, for example, workers wished to express their disgust at oppressive working conditions (because of their affluence and years of education) or the legal institutions for dealing with industrial disputes in this country, there is much to be said for doing so when their actions have the most force and when they are least personally threatening. It is surely possible for workers to be radical without being stupid.

In other words, Crispo and Arthurs presented a *characterization* (or, if one prefers, it, *description*) of Canadian strikes in the mid 1960's which is not falsifiable through showing that temporal fluctuations in industrial conflict can be fitted to a model based principally on economic variables. Such data, at least in the form presented by Smith, simply does not speak to the issues raised by Crispo and Arthurs and to the more general "social-political" characterization presented by Rinehart. This, I would argue is a nice illustration of one half of what I called a "dialogue of the deaf" at the beginning of this paper.

The assumptions behind the "narrow economic interest" model of strikes, then have by no means been demonstrated by the temporal associations that have been found with fluctuations in unemployment. What of the model that Rinehart offers, a model which stresses the evolving character of capitalism and its effect on work experiences? It is surely not enough to sketch out a range of objectively alienating conditions of modern work. What is at issue is the reaction of workers to those conditions. Rinehart's

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7 It is true that CRISPO and ARTHURS do refer to rising levels of time lost through strikes as one of their indicators of what is special about the 1960's. But that remains only one of a whole series of attributes of mid 1960's industrial conflict that they assert as distinctive.

8 "While rank and file militancy and lawlessness have appeared of late in an unusually potent combination, some weight must be given to the view that our present difficulties may be simply part of the price of prosperity. Yet even to say this is to say something quite disturbing, for it suggests that a free society cannot maintain a period of sustained economic advance without engendering serious industrial unrest". (Crispo and Arthurs, 1968: 239).

view is that we could see symptoms of generally alienated labour, in the context of a trade union movement incapable of dealing with the sources of that alienation, in the features of the strike wave of the mid 1960's asserted by Crispo and Arthurs. As we saw above, he drew attention to rank and file contract rejections, wildcat strikes, violence and illegality in industrial disputes and the radicalism of Quebec unions. I am not at all convinced that the evidence for Rinehart's characterization is much more persuasive than the evidence for that of Smith. There are problems both at the level of the facts themselves and the interpretation of those facts.

Crispo and Arthurs' paper either directly or through the Woods Report is one of the principal sources for Rinehart's assertions. But, what is treated as "based upon fragmentary and impressionistic evidence" in Crispo and Arthurs' original paper (1968: 246) reappears as hard fact in Rinehart's restatement. There is, as a matter of fact, scarcely any evidence at all in Crispo and Arthurs' paper. Not one of their claims is documented with any kind of reasonably systematic data collection. Neither has subsequent research tended to support their assertions. The only evidence on rank and file contract rejections comes from the United States (Simkin, 1968). There are no adequate series on rank and file contract rejections in Canada. Their assertion with respect to increased turnover of union leaders in the 1960's appears to be entirely mistaken. Chaison and Rose (1977) have, in fact, shown that the rate of turnover of union leaders *fell* in Canada in the 1960's as compared to the 1950's<sup>9</sup>.

Crispo and Arthurs claimed that wildcat strikes were another symptom of the unusual turbulence of the industrial conflict of the mid 1960's and of rank and file restiveness in particular. Rinehart, presumably, on the basis of Crispo and Arthurs' paper has asserted the same thing<sup>10</sup>. The issue here, one would assume, is whether or not the *proportion* of strikes which were wildcats increased in this period. After all, if the propensity to strike in general tended to increase in the 1960's because the bargaining position of labour was stronger, one should not be surprised to see the number of wildcat strikes increase too. Flood's 1972 paper shows a fairly marked increase in the proportion of short strikes (he uses the number of strikes of less than 5 days as one index of wildcat strikes) from the mid 1950's to a plateau from 1960 to 1966. But that does not cover a long enough period to allow assessing whether or not the mid 1960's were distinctive<sup>11</sup>. More in-

9 It remains true that CHAISON and ROSE do not include data on the reasons for union leader turnover in their analysis. It is possible that the higher rate of turnover of union leaders in the 1950's has something to do with the age pyramid of the union leadership. In the 1950's union leaders may have left office voluntarily through retirement or death whilst in the 1960's, many of them were forced out of office. But still, it remains the case that what evidence there is does not support Crispo and Arthurs' claim.

10 In the context of a discussion of wildcat strikes RINEHART has asserted the following: "The major wave of strikes that hit Canada in the mid '60s was characterized by rank and file actions taken independently of the union hierarchy". (Rinehart, 1976: 32).

11 FLOOD's analysis deals with the period 1956 to 1969. He also presents data on the *number* of strikes during term for the same period. It is not at all clear why he presents the data on short strikes in a proportion form but does not do the same thing for strikes during term.



teresting is Clack's (1975) analysis of unpublished Department of Labour Data on the proportion of strikes taking place during the term of an agreement<sup>12</sup>. His results show an increasing proportion of strikes during term from about 1962 to a peak in 1966. But what is most striking about his results is that they show that the surge in the proportion of strikes during term in the early 1960's is to a level *substantially below* that achieved in the immediate post war period and even below the peak of the mid 1950's. In other words, while there may have been an increase in the proportion of wildcat strikes in the mid 1960's from the rather low level at the very end of the 1950's, that level was in no sense distinctive and cannot be used to demarcate the mid 1960's from the rest of the post war period<sup>13</sup>. In short, wildcat strikes were not proportionately distinctive in the mid 1960's.

There remain two sorts of evidence that might be seen as indicating some rather profound changes in Canadian industrial relations in the mid or late 1960's. The first is Jamieson's (1970) suggestive evidence on the incidence of violence in industrial conflict. Combining the number of strikes involving "violence, illegality and legal penalties" (Jamieson, 1970: 24) given by Jamieson with data on the total number of strikes in *Strikes and Lockouts*, one can calculate that 36% of all strikes involving violence, illegality and legal penalties between 1901 and 1970 occurred between 1957 and 1966 whereas only 23% of all strikes between 1901 and 1970 occurred between 1957 and 1966. Jamieson's data, then, suggest that violent and illegal strikes were overrepresented in this period. The problem here is that figures of this sort are sensitive not only to the willingness of workers to violate the law but also to both changes in the law and to changes in the enforcement policies. Without information on both the evolution of the law and of enforcement policies, the figures are extremely difficult to interpret.

The other piece of evidence that might suggest a real change in industrial relations during the 1960's is the character and form that the Quebec labour movement has come to display. There is no question that Quebec unions have come to display a quite remarkably radical character -especially in 1972 (cf. Ethier, Pottle and Reynolds, 1975) - but we have no real evidence that what has happened in Quebec represents the tip of an iceberg of worker radicalism in Canada. It is at least as likely that the events were highly specific to Quebec. Moreover, both the leadership of the CSN and of the CEQ appear to have been quite markedly out of step with their membership. The former experienced substantial membership losses after 1972 (Dupont and Tremblay, 1976) and the latter has recently had a good part of its leadership, including its president, voted out of office.

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<sup>12</sup> Strictly speaking, the distinctive characteristic of a wildcat strike is that it occurs without the sanction of the strikers' union. But divining the exact intentions of a union in that kind of situation is not at all easy. While strikes during the term of a contract *may* have union support, since they are generally illegal, they will *usually* not be supported by the union. Consequently, the number of strikes during the term of an agreement is a reasonable index of the number of wildcat strikes.

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that CLACK finds that to the extent that there is any overall trend in the proportion of strikes during term over the post war period, it is a downward trend!

In short, the distinctive compositional characteristics that are at the core of Rinehart's characterization of Canadian strikes are either difficult to establish or simply false. They certainly have not been established by Rinehart.

But the problem is more fundamental than that. The kind of "dialogue of the deaf" that I am describing is only possible where data are treated as unambiguously in favour of one position when, in fact, the evidence is entirely equivocal. For example, what if one *could* show that within the post war period, the mid 1960's increase in the number of wildcat strikes really was distinctive? Rinehart (1975: 72) claims that, "Wildcat strikes are a form of protest with clearcut radical dimensions". His reasoning is that, by definition, they involve stepping outside the institutional structure by which industrial disputes are regulated. That is, in principle they are affronts to union authority (and, for Rinehart, unions are buttresses of the status quo); they reflect workers aspirations in a direct manner, unmediated by a union bureaucracy; and, in Canada, they are generally in violation of labour law (cf. Woods and Ostry, 1972). All of those observations are, of course, generally correct. We do not know how many wildcat strikes have tacit union approval, but there is no reason to think that they are a majority. Generally speaking, it is probably reasonable to assume that wildcat strikes are both an affront to unions and to the law<sup>14</sup>.

Yet, if wildcat strikes are "radical" it is presumably because they either strive for or accomplish (or both) some real changes in the authority structure of the workplace. Thus, Rinehart (1975: 73) claims that: "Rarely do workers initiate wildcat strikes over wage issues". His view is that they are more likely to be concerned with the organization of work in the plant. A number of writers have argued that "whereas economic rewards in the capitalist enterprise can be *collective*, job creativity-control rewards are largely *distributive*" (Mann, 1973: 21) so that there is something intrinsically radical about striking against issues related to the organization of work in the plant rather than wages (Gorz, 1967; Giddens, 1973). The reasoning here is that claims over wages can be met out of productivity growth whereas claims with respect to the organization of work cannot be met except through a rearrangement of the authority structure of the capitalist enterprise. Hence, if wildcat strikes are not over money but rather over the organization of work and if challenging the organization of work is inherently radical, it follows that wildcat strikes are inherently radical too.

Now, for obvious reasons there is only a limited amount of information available on wildcat strikes, especially on wildcat strikes in Canada. The most detailed case study of a Canadian wildcat strike is that of Maxwell Flood (1968). Several aspects of that strike bear on the discussion here. The first is that it appears to have had its immediate cause in discontent with

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<sup>14</sup> Although even this needs qualifying, Crispo and Arthurs claim that "only in a tiny fraction of cases are criminal penalties actually invoked" (1968: 241). This seems quite probable and suggests that wildcat strikes are rather more "institutionalized" than is sometimes thought.

monetary clauses in a contract that the union involved had just negotiated. Secondly, Flood cites concern over wage *relativities* as a source of tension which facilitated the occurrence of the dispute. There had been a spectacular wage settlement in the news and, in addition, some contract work was being performed at the plant by workers with equivalent jobs to some of the regular workers in the plant - but at higher rates of pay. Thirdly, while Flood does claim that anxiety over technological change in the plant was another source of "tension", he has no method for demonstrating this. That would require, for instance, showing that, other things being equal, workers most threatened by technological change had been most likely to participate in the wildcat. He presents no data to that effect. In other words, the events in "Lake City" appear to be consistent with (and certainly not to contradict) an explanation of the strike in terms of a wage issue.

Such evidence as there is for other countries does not clearly indicate that wildcat strikes are preponderantly over issues other than wages or are particularly radical for that matter. One country which is distinguished by a strong shop floor organization and a fairly large number of wildcat strikes is Britain (Royal Commission, 1968). This is especially true of the automobile industry for which, in addition, we are fortunate to have some excellent research reports available (Clack, 1967; Turner, Clack and Roberts, 1967). In the automobile firm studied by Clack, a series of "unofficial disputes" were overwhelmingly concerned with wages. Moreover, the source of discontent was the *wage relativities* between categories of workers. The discontent in the automobile plant studied by Clack had as its most tangible focus the *incomes received by other workers*. And it needs to be stressed that the striking workers did not attack the right of managers to introduce wage relativities; they pressed managers to adjust the relativities in existence<sup>15</sup>

I would not dream of generalizing the findings of Turner, Clack and Roberts or of Flood to all wildcat strikes in all countries. There is no doubt that *some* wildcat strikes are indeed profoundly radical in precisely the sense understood by Rinehart<sup>16</sup>. It is upon those that Rinehart, rather selectively, rests his case. But whether most, or even a substantial minority, are is much less clear. In short, even if in Canada the proportion of wildcat strikes had increased in the mid 1960's, there are no real grounds for concluding that necessarily reflected a bubbling through of discontents with the organization of work on the part of workers or of anything particularly radical.

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15 GALLIE's (1978) superb recent study of workers in British petroleum refineries finds precisely this kind of dissociation between criticism of management in conjunction with an acceptance of the legitimacy of management. The British workers that Gallie studied were critical of the way their managers did their jobs but simply wanted those managers to do a better job. They did not envision replacing the managers with some kind of participative structure.

16 The most well known study of a wildcat strike by a sociologist (Gouldner, 1954) does tend to fit Rinehart's interpretation. The author argued that although the actual issues focused on in the strike were monetary, the real reason for the strike lay in a number of changes in the organization of production. For further empirical evidence of this sort of thing along with an interesting theoretic discussion, see Herding (1972).

Rinehart, then, argues forcefully for a characterization of Canadian strikes as something more than a struggle over wages<sup>17</sup>. For him, competition leads to an ever more rationalized and ever more oppressive kind of production organization at the same time that the union movement is structurally incapable of dealing with that oppressiveness. Consequently, under appropriate conditions, workers will necessarily organize protests against production organizations themselves (wildcat strikes) and against the institutions of labour relations (the unions and the law). Rinehart found support for this characterization in the Woods Report. But to adopt Rinehart's position requires an unreasonably uncritical acceptance of a set of fundamentally untenable assertions made by Crispo and Arthurs. At the same time, Rinehart does not even trouble to refute Smith's alternative characterization of Canadian strikes<sup>18</sup> or, more generally, the work of institutional labour economists like Ross, Dunlop and Lester. They appear to be firmly assigned to an alternative and presumably misguided intellectual tradition.

On the other hand, Smith couples an alternative characterization of Canadian strikes with an attack upon Crispo and Arthurs by quite seriously misrepresenting the intentions of their paper. He presents it as an attempt to explain quarterly or annual fluctuations in industrial conflict in Canada when it is nothing of the sort. Crispo and Arthurs' paper attempted to show that the strikes of the mid 1960's in Canada suggested that industrial relations had *qualitatively* changed. In my view, Crispo and Arthurs in this respect need to be treated with very great scepticism indeed. But if one takes seriously the possibility of an alternative characterization it is necessary to confront the empirical issues raised by that characterization head on. Did the proportion of wildcat strikes increase? Was there an increased turnover in union leaders? Did the rank and file reject more contracts? Smith, whom one suspects had already made up his mind about the character of Canadian industrial relations before he examined his data, did not choose to do so. A set of regression equations which did not confront the issues raised by Crispo and Arthurs were simply a decorative adjunct to Smith's reaffirmation of the particular orthodoxy to which he subscribes<sup>19</sup>. We can see how effective doctrinal blinkers can be if we consider the context within which

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17 This is not, of course, to argue that he claims that strikes do not involve a concern with wages. It is simply to say that he argues that we cannot properly understand them without taking into account "other" dimensions.

18 SMITH's paper appeared in 1972, some three years before the publication of Rinehart's *Tyranny of Work*. And Rinehart does discuss FLOOD's paper which appeared in the same issue of *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*.

19 TURNER (Jackson, Turner and Wilkinson, 1975: xii) puts the same point in a characteristically eloquent fashion. "Econometric techniques of analysis have great instrumental value, but one of their more ambiguous qualities is that they are also often a device to make restricted numerical data go a long way in terms of quasi-scientific prestige, or a methodology the aesthetic and technical appeal of which misleads its own practitioners as to its verificatory content". This is not to argue against the use of econometric techniques but rather, against their misuse.

Smith has been asserting that one could adequately characterize Canadian unions as business unions. To do so requires that he completely ignore the history of Quebec unions. The CTCC always did distinguish itself doctrinally from U.S. based international unions, at first in a more conservative form (cf. Saint-Pierre, 1975; Monière, 1977) and then after it had deconfessionalized and become the CSN in a more radical form (cf. Tremblay, 1972). And latterly, both the CEQ and the FTQ have also taken directions of which, for instance, George Meany would surely not approve (cf. Drache, 1972).

In short, neither Smith nor Rinehart persuasively demonstrates the superiority of their respective characterization of Canadian strikes. Both Smith and Rinehart make assumptions about the nature of strikes which are supported by nothing more than some crudely illustrative material.

This paper has had an entirely negative character. I do not assert an alternative to either of the characterizations of Canadian strikes that I have discussed. Nor do I come down on one side as opposed to the other. In my view, there is not nearly enough adequate empirical material to do so. My purpose here has been to draw attention to the fact that there are alternative and contradictory models of Canadian strikes which are cheerfully subscribed to by different kinds of scholar, each relatively oblivious to the work of the other<sup>20</sup> or of the other's intellectual tradition. But most importantly of all, discussions of the character of Canadian strikes suggest that those involved in the discussion have already made up their respective minds. Where "data"<sup>21</sup> fits an argument it is accepted uncritically by Rinehart. Where hypotheses are tested by Smith they do not properly distinguish between characterizations although Smith claims that they do<sup>22</sup>. Scholars are not superhuman and we are all most certainly prone to lapses of this sort. But unless a debate which focuses on critical and relevant data is more seriously engaged in by the proponents of alternative positions, there are no very real reasons for the general public to take the participants in the debate at all seriously.

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20 Thus, if Smith is at all familiar with any of the sociological research dealing with the attitudes of workers towards work, their employers and their unions, he gives no evidence of it. That is unfortunate since such research usually employs research methods which are more appropriate for sorting out those attitudes than the methods Smith uses. And, at least some of it provides elements of support for Smith's position. For example, Goldthorpe et al. (1968), although dealing with British data is relevant in several respects.

21 I am using the term "data" loosely here to include the assertions made in CRISPO and ARTHUR's paper.

22 Only, of course, with respect to Crispo and Arthurs' position. Smith does not confront the broader position taken by Rinehart.

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## Caractéristiques des grèves au Canada: quelques commentaires critiques

Avant d'expliquer un phénomène social, il est nécessaire de décrire ou d'examiner ce phénomène. Il y a au moins deux façons de caractériser les conflits industriels canadiens du milieu de la décennie 1960 et elles sont tout à fait contradictoires. La première façon est celle qui assume que certaines conclusions du Rapport Woods au sujet de ces grèves sont justes; l'autre rejette ces conclusions. L'objet de cette étude est de montrer comment ces deux caractéristiques posent de sérieux problèmes.

La caractérisation des grèves au Canada est considérée par D.A. Smith (1972, 1976) comme un stratagème généralisé des «syndicats d'affaires». Pour Smith, les grèves sont des instruments pour assurer des augmentations de salaires «réalistes» aux syndiqués. Rinehart (1975, 1976, 1978), d'autre part, souligne que ce sont pas seulement les enjeux économiques qui conduisent aux conflits industriels. Tout aussi importants sont les problèmes généraux découlant de l'aliénation en milieu de travail. Rinehart prétend que l'inquiétude des travailleurs relativement à l'organisation de la production a tendance à être camouflée par les dirigeants syndicaux qui privilégient les enjeux économiques. Mais, en dépit de la priorité des dirigeants syndicaux accordée aux questions économiques, l'effet de l'aliénation au travail ressort à peine partiellement voilé des statistiques canadiennes sur les grèves.

Selon un article de Crispo et Arthurs (1968), les auteurs du rapport Woods firent valoir que les conflits industriels au Canada, pendant la décennie 1960, manifestaient un militantisme marqué. Par exemple, ils se référaient au rejet des conventions collectives par les syndiqués de la base, au mépris de la loi et de l'ordre et à une prédominance des grèves sauvages. Rinehart utilise ces conclusions du rapport Woods comme une preuve à l'appui de sa caractérisation générale des grèves au Canada. Smith tente de réfuter ces conclusions.

Smith démontre que les variations dans le temps dans les conflits industriels au Canada peuvent s'expliquer en particulier par les variations dans les taux de chômage et les changements dans les taux des salaires réels. Ceci conclut-il, indique que nous pouvons comprendre ce qui est arrivé au milieu de la décennie 1960 comme étant une nette répercussion des conditions normales du marché du travail. En conséquence, point n'est besoin de l'expliquer par le militantisme syndical. Rinehart, d'autre part, voit dans la non-ratification des conventions collectives, les grèves sauvages et la violence auxquelles se réfère le rapport Woods, la preuve d'une insatisfaction généralisée du milieu de travail et de la direction syndicale dont on peut s'attendre à ce qu'elle génère des conditions de travail troublées.

La thèse de D.A. Smith n'apprécie pas adéquatement les points soulevés dans le rapport Woods. Il concentre l'attention sur la répartition des grèves dans le temps, alors que c'est leur contenu qui est en jeu. Pour réfuter l'explication du «militantisme», Smith devait démontrer que les prétentions du rapport Woods au sujet des rejets de conventions collectives, des grèves sauvages, etc. étaient fausses.

Rinehart assume que les affirmations de Crispo et d'Arthurs au sujet des grèves sauvages, etc. qui furent retenues dans le rapport Woods, sont vraies. Mais, en fait,



il n'y a pas de preuve absolue que des changements qualitatifs dans les conflits industriels au Canada se soient produits au milieu de la décennie 1960 comme le soutiennent Crispo et Arthurs. Et il y a quelques indices qui contredisent ces prétentions. La thèse de Rinehart affirme aussi que les grèves sauvages ont un caractère véritablement radical. Mais cela ne se vérifie pas clairement non plus.

En conclusion, on peut dire qu'il y a matière à scepticisme au sujet des caractérisations des grèves au Canada telles que présentées à la fois par Rinehart et Smith. Ce qui est le plus troublant relativement à la façon d'envisager les conflits industriels chez chacun de ces auteurs c'est, cependant, leur tendance à éviter de considérer des caractérisations qui pourraient être différentes des leurs.

## **PARTICIPATION ET NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE**

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