

The Toronto District Labour Council and Independant Political Action

Factionalism and Frustration, 1900-1921

Michael J. Piva

Volume 4, 1979

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt4art05>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Piva, M. J. (1979). The Toronto District Labour Council and Independant Political Action: Factionalism and Frustration, 1900-1921. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4, 115–130.

THE TORONTO DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL AND INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTION:

Factionalism and Frustration, 1900-1921.

Michael J. Piva

IN MOST western countries left-wing parties with firm electoral support emerge where rank and file organizations are closely tied to the party structure.¹ Such ties, however, have proved difficult to forge in Canada. Between 1900 and 1921 trade unions in Ontario flirted with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) but chose not to become direct affiliates. With union support the ILP did manage to win eleven seats in the Legislative Assembly in 1919, and two ILP ministers joined the leaders of the United Farmers of Ontario (UFO) to form a government. But that government was weak, and in 1923 the Conservatives re-established the political status quo. This defeat owed much to the inability of the political leadership to form and maintain solid organizational links between themselves and the rank and file organizations, the UFO and the trade unions.² As a consequence the political leadership remained organizationally isolated from the mass base. The continuing debate within the Toronto District Labour Council (DLC) on the question of political action illustrates the roots of this isolation. The DLC is useful in this regard since it was here that the ILP was

¹ For example, the British Labour Party and the German Social Democratic Party were both linked to the major trade union federations before the Great War. The Anarchists and the Socialists in pre-Civil War Spain were linked to the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo* and the *Union General del Trabajadores* respectively. Similarly the French and Italian Communist Parties have equally close ties with the major trade union federations in their countries. John Foster, meanwhile, employs a similar interpretive framework in his analysis of Oldham's radicalism during the industrial revolution in Britain. See John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London 1974), 73-107, *passim*.

² The UFO suffered from similar problems. The organization was divided between the supporters of Premier E.C. Drury's policy of "broadening out" and supporters of Secretary J.J. Morrison's policy of "group government." The Morrison faction succeeded in passing a resolution at the UFO's 1920 convention condemning Drury's coalition with the ILP. Drury commented that after "thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that our chances in the next election would be very slim." E.C. Drury, *Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E.C. Drury* (Toronto 1966), 107. His pessimism proved justified; he could not hope to survive the next election after his own electoral organization, the UFO, had condemned the government.

weakest, and it was here that the organizational problems were most clearly marked. The continuing factional struggle proved to be a major inhibiting factor which prevented united action and eliminated hope of success.

Independent political activity got off to a promising yet shaky start in 1900. The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) avoided third party political action but had no objection to central labour bodies at the municipal level becoming involved in electoral politics. In Toronto the Trades and Labour Council took action. After calling for a convention of all reform groups in the city it organized the People's Party. The Council — for the first and last time during the period — officially affiliated with the Party and agreed to pay a special *per capita* of two cents to help finance its activities.³ The new party contested the federal elections in November 1900, and prominent Council delegates including D.A. Carey, James Simpson, George Sangster, Charles March and J.H. Kennedy campaigned actively. The campaign, however, was short and poorly financed. The People's Party had a total income of only \$756.22; the campaign cost \$921.97 leaving a deficit which the party could not pay.⁴ The election results reflected the lack of proper organization; all three labour candidates lost their deposits and together carried only 4.7 per cent of the popular vote.⁵ Following this poor showing at the polls the People's Party collapsed.

The campaign pointed out the central problem of the Council in politics — discipline. In East Toronto, where the Council had not endorsed Alexander McFarren, the Liberals organized a "South Side Labour Club" which supported George Anderson, the Liberal, against A.E. Kemp, a notorious anti-labour employer.⁶ More importantly, in West Toronto T.H. Fitzpatrick from the powerful Typographical Union campaigned for the Conservatives. At one rally Fitzpatrick spoke as "a printer and a labour man." When someone in the crowd asked if he would vote for Hugh Stevenson, Fitzpatrick reportedly replied: "not on my life," and he advised workers not to "split" their vote.⁷

³ Toronto Trades and Labour Council, *Minutes*, 28 June 1900, 544, 9 August 1900, 553, and 27 September 1900, 561, Public Archives of Canada (PAC). In 1902 the name was changed to the District Labour Council.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1901, 13. The Council organized a special concert to raise money, but there remained \$80 which the Council had to pay directly. *Ibid.*, 14 February 1901, 594.

⁵ All references to elections contained in this paper are based upon the returns submitted to the Legislative Assembly and the House of Commons by the Chief Electoral Officers. These reports are published in the provincial and federal *Sessional Papers*. In all cases only the votes polled within the city limits were counted. Thus a reference to West York would include only the city not the entire riding. All calculations are my own. It should be noted that the Council had not endorsed Alexander McFarren, the "labour" candidate in East Toronto.

⁶ See the *Globe* (Toronto), 3 November 1900, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27 October 1900, 26.

The original Council motion endorsing Stevenson and Dr. Henry G. Hargrave had included a clause that any officer who failed to support the candidates of the People's Party should resign. Although Fitzpatrick was not at the time a Council officer, he was a prominent delegate and had served as librarian. Following the election the Council, on a motion by Sangster, censured Fitzpatrick, but censure meant very little. At the Council's next meeting the executive appointed Fitzpatrick to the credentials committee, in January 1901 the delegates elected him to the business committee, and in February 1902 the executive appointed him to the special amalgamation committee charged with the reorganization of the Council.⁸

Discipline would remain the central problem which continually disrupted the Council's programme for political action. The importance of discipline lay in the factional struggle between the DLC's left, centre and right wings. The left, led by printer James Simpson, favoured the Socialist Party. The left wanted the DLC to endorse the Socialists and failing this, to avoid the formation of a separate labour party which would compete with the Socialist Party. Although the left could always count several prominent DLC delegates within its ranks, its power within the Council was to a very large extent based upon the personal influence of Simpson, one of the most active unionists in the city. Between 1900 and 1921 Simpson served one term as DLC president, six terms as TLC vice-president, sat on many important DLC committees, and frequently represented the Council at both AFL and TLC conventions.

The right wing, led by a variety of people, endorsed the AFL's non-partisan approach to politics. The right argued that the DLC, like the TLC, should restrict itself to its lobbying activities. During elections the Council could support the "friends" and oppose the "enemies" of organized labour, but neither the TLC nor the DLC, according to the right, should contest elections or endorse a particular party. Although a minority on the question of political action, the right wing held many key positions and exerted considerable influence within both the DLC and the TLC. In addition, during the early years of the century the right could count on the support of the left in its efforts to block the formation of a labour party.

The labourites constituted the largest faction — perhaps equal in size to the combined strength of the right and left. This group opposed endorsing either Liberals, Conservatives or Socialists. They favoured direct political action with the DLC sponsoring a labour party. But the labourites always shied away from making the DLC itself a labour party or involving the DLC too closely in the internal operations of the various parties which it helped spawn.

With the possible exception of the extreme left and the extreme right, tactical rather than policy disputes provided the basis for the factional struggle. Each faction accepted a wide range of specific policies as well as broad prin-

⁸ Toronto Trades and Labour Council, *Minutes*, 8 November 1900, 571, 22 November 1900, 572, 24 January 1901, 588, and 27 February 1902, 92.

ciples, and the inclusion of both reform and socialist political objectives in the DLC constitution reflected this ideological balance. For example, the first demand in the constitution called for the "Collective ownership by the people of all the means of production and distribution, and all means of communication and transportation,"⁹ which pleased the socialist delegates. The second demand was similar but more limited which pleased the moderate anti-monopoly labourites; the DLC called for "Public ownership of all industries controlled by monopolies, trusts and combines." In addition the Council demanded the abolition of the Senate, the abolition of prison labour, the abolition of the contract system in public works, the institution of the initiative, the referendum, recall and proportional representation, the creation of national accident, unemployment and old-age insurance, the reduction of hours and the granting of equal pay and all civil and political rights to women as well as the "abolition of all laws discriminating against women." At the provincial level the DLC called for better factory inspection, the abolition of the truck system, the establishment of weekly pay in "lawful money" and the elimination of scrip. The DLC also called for free compulsory education. In municipal politics the DLC demanded the elimination of all property qualifications and municipal ownership of all gas, electrical, telephone, street railways and other municipal franchises.¹⁰ This list of demands provided the platforms for the various local labour parties¹¹ as well as the provincial ILP from 1917 to 1920.

The Socialist Party, meanwhile, employed more flamboyant rhetoric, but in the end their specific proposals were as gradualist as the ILP and the DLC. In its 1905 Manifesto the Socialist Party "re-affirms its allegiance to the principles of international revolutionary socialism" as well as its "immediate demand . . . [for] the collective ownership and democratic management of all means of production." Yet the Socialists recognized that the revolution was not an immediate likelihood and declared that "while capitalism lasts the Socialist Party will wring such concessions as it can from the capitalist governments." These would include in 1905 the abolition of franchise restrictions, the extension of free public education and a rather vague call "to better the condition of wage-workers."¹² This was a rather mild programme even for 1905.

The degree of public ownership provided the only substantial ideological issue open to serious debate within the Council. The issue at times could generate considerable tension, but labourites and socialists usually joined to insure the maintenance of public ownership as a principle of organized labour. The issue arose, for example, in 1904 when the TLC defeated a motion calling

⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-119.

¹¹ The platform of the Canadian Labour League, for example, was virtually a carbon copy of the DLC constitution. See the *Toiler* (Toronto), 11 November 1904, 1.

¹² See "Municipal Election, 1905, Manifesto of Local Toronto, Ontario Socialist Party," Phillips Thompson Papers, PAC.

for the "common ownership by the People of the means of production and distribution." The DLC passed a motion of "regret that so many Labor Leaders failed to vote in favor of the above resolution" since, as Simpson pointed out, the resolution in question was "a Declaration of principle in the Constitution of this Council."¹³

All delegates accepted some public ownership in principle, but they disagreed on the extent of such ownership. Even the right supported municipal ownership of municipal franchises, the most important being the street railways. Labourites went further and called for the nationalization of all natural resources as well as all communication and transportation companies. Only the socialists demanded the nationalization of all the means of production. In practical terms, however, the differences between Council delegates were minor.

Rather than specific policy proposals, the major bone of contention between labourites and socialists concerned the composition and control of the party. The labourites showed a marked preference for a party controlled by those who had risen from their own ranks — they wanted a trade unionist party. The various ILPs reflected this bias; prior to 1916 these parties were composed almost exclusively of trade unionists. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, included a wide variety of people ranging from unionists like Simpson to journalist-philosopher-gadflies like Phillips Thompson. The Socialist Party could count several prominent unionists in its ranks, people who also sat as delegates to the DLC, but they were not the predominant voice within the party. This can be illustrated by examining the twelve Socialist candidates who contested the 1908 and 1914 provincial elections. Simpson alone had held an executive office in the DLC. Only two others, Wilfrid G. Gribble and Ernest A. Drury, had held an office in a local union between 1901 and 1914.¹⁴

The left and the centre, meanwhile, continually attacked one another for "splitting" the labour vote. Sometimes the ideological differences between the two parties were discussed but only in the vaguest terms.¹⁵ This is not to say, however, that the factional struggle was not critical in determining the nature of labour politics in the city. No party which claimed to represent workers could long survive without the support of the unions and the DLC. The trade unions were the only institutions capable of providing activists, stable organization and stable financial support.

The factional fight within the DLC was most intense between 1900 and 1907. The labourites clearly held an overall majority within the DLC and suc-

¹³ DLC, *Minutes*, 13 October 1904, 424-425, PAC.

¹⁴ Based upon a survey of the DLC minutes and trade union reports submitted to the Bureau of Labour. See Ontario, Bureau of Labour, *Report of the Bureau of Labour, 1900-1915* (Toronto 1901-1916).

¹⁵ See, for example, the *Toiler*, 18 December 1903, 2 and 15 January 1904, 3.

ceeded in using the Council as a springboard for the formation of several labour parties. But the Council lacked a sustained commitment. This lack of commitment can be illustrated by examining two remarkably similar failures to enforce discipline. In both cases delegates, the majority of whom supported the labour party, refused to deal with the deviant behaviour of Council officers.

The first case involved James Simpson during his one and only term as president of the DLC in late 1903. The second involved Robert Hungerford who helped defeat Simpson in the 1904 DLC elections. In 1903 the Council passed a Municipal Committee report committing DLC officers to support only Labour Party candidates; Simpson not only refused to be so bound but reaffirmed his commitment to support only Socialist Party candidates. Hungerford, meanwhile, had campaigned in a January 1906 by-election in North Toronto for the Conservative William K. McNaught who was running against Simpson. In both cases the majority of the delegates strongly criticized the actions of their president. Both Simpson and Hungerford submitted their resignations, but in each case the delegates, after condemning their behaviour, rejected their resignation. Simpson, however, was defeated in his bid to be re-elected DLC president; he would not be elected again to an executive post within the Council until the war. Hungerford refused to stand for re-election, and in 1907 the Whitney government appointed him as one of the province's factory inspectors.¹⁶

By mid-1906 several things had become clear. The right wing which supported non-partisan — and in most cases individual old-party partisan — politics had been reduced to a numerical minority within the Council. At the same time the DLC refused to endorse the Socialist Party as the left wing wished. The majority, and it would eventually become an increasingly large majority, favoured third party political action. But the DLC never transformed this desire into a solid commitment. The DLC frequently initiated the formation of a labour party but in all cases remained aloof. With the exception of the People's Party, the Council did not affiliate with any of the various labour parties organized. Failure to affiliate meant failure to commit the DLC to financial support. Without stable financing no party could expect to produce results or, indeed, to survive. Interest in third party political activity was as a result confined to election time. This in turn meant the formation of a new party, usually too late to campaign effectively, at each election. After the election the party would crumble. An anonymous letter writer summed up the frustrations of labour party advocates in 1906:

Why, then, does not the Labor party get its machinery in working order instead of SPOUTING HOT AIR, as is the PRESENT CUSTOM? And it is not random speaking to call

¹⁶DLC, *Minutes*, 13 July 1903, 186, 13 August 1903, 187, 10 September 1903, 194, 8 October 1903, 200, 204-205, 22 October 1903, 210, 12 November 1903, 212, 26 November 1903, 216, 18 February 1906, 143, 1 March 1906, 153, and 11 April 1906, 171-173.

some of the discussions of the Toronto District Labor Council hot air with a capital H.¹⁷

At this point the depression intervened to create yet more frustration for the political activists in the unions. Indeed, the depression threatened the very life of the Council itself as many local unions collapsed, membership in others declined sharply, absenteeism at Council meetings rose, committees stopped functioning and the leadership became less stable. In this situation, and with both the right and the left opposed, it was not to be expected that the DLC would participate directly in the activities of the ILP.

Of equal importance was the collapse of the labour press in Toronto which had always had a rather shaky existence. Financial problems had plagued the Toiler since its inception, and the paper eventually stopped publication at the end of 1904. By that time Fred Perry had taken over the assets, and in September 1905 he launched the Tribune which became the new official organ of the DLC. In an effort to improve the paper's financial position, Perry began selling greater advertising space, including one ad for W.R. Johnstone and Company which was on the United Garment Workers, Local 185 unfair employers' list. Following UGW protests a special committee to "censor" the Tribune was established, but relations with Perry continued to deteriorate. The DLC eventually withdrew its endorsement of the paper which quickly collapsed.¹⁸ Although the Toiler and the Tribune never enjoyed much success, they had, nevertheless, provided militants with a political organ. The absence of a labour paper controlled by the DLC after 1906 only exacerbated the innumerable other problems facing the political movement and helped isolate the leadership still further. The DLC would not have access to a political organ again until 1914 when the Industrial Banner was transferred from London to Toronto and became a weekly instead of a monthly.

As the problems at the local level multiplied during the depression, political activists could gain some encouragement from the TLC's changing attitude toward direct political action. Advocates of third party politics had always been vocal within the Congress, and at the Victoria convention in 1906 they finally mustered enough votes to pass a motion by which the TLC endorsed but would not itself form a labour party and recognized provincial autonomy in the formation of such parties. P.M. Draper, the TLC's secretary-treasurer, then moved that the Congress' provincial executives "organize founding conventions of the Canadian Labor Party in their respective provinces."¹⁹ Ontario's

¹⁷ *Tribune* (Toronto), 4 August 1906, 5. Capitals are in the original.

¹⁸ Toronto Trades and Labour Council, *Minutes*, 8 February 1900, 517, 22 November 1900, 573, 13 December 1900, 578, 14 February 1901, 595, 25 April 1901, 15-16, 9 May 1901, 17, 8 August 1901, 38, 24 October 1901, 55, 29 October 1901, 56, and DLC, *Minutes*, 15 June 1905, 25, 6 July 1905, 39, 20 July 1905, 45, 27 July 1905, 51-53, 17 August 1905, 61, 8 September 1905, 67, 18 September 1906, 269, 1 November 1906, 291, 15 November 1906, 303, 20 December 1906, 321, and 31 January 1907, 351-357.

¹⁹ The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, *Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual*

provincial executive organized a convention, held in Toronto in March 1907, which attracted 600 delegates from all parts of the province. The socialists tried and failed to have the convention endorse the Socialist Party; the delegates instead founded a new party, the Ontario Section of the Canadian Labour Party (CLP). There was, however, no Canadian Labour Party, only an Ontario Section.²⁰

The main problem facing the CLP was the formation of local constituency organizations. A few cities had already organized ILPs, and these were soon joined by others including Toronto in December 1907.²¹ Although the CLP issued all charters for local ILPs, real power lay in the hands of the local organizations which remained virtually autonomous. The CLP eventually withered, but many of the ILPs in various municipalities survived and provided the basis for later growth.

The Toronto ILP (TILP) proved a weak and ineffectual organization primarily because of its tenuous relations with the DLC. Trade unionists, most of them prominent within the Council, made up the entire TILP executive, yet the DLC kept the party at arm's length. When the question of endorsing candidates for the municipal elections arose in late 1907, the right, supported by the left, prevented the Council from endorsing anyone.²² In February 1908 TILP supporters failed in an attempt to amend the DLC constitution requiring all officers to support only TILP candidates. Then, in May the Council refused to contribute money to the TILP.²³ The DLC had by this time decided to have nothing to do with the party which it considered a separate organization.

A combination of left and right wing delegates had succeeded in blocking close relations developing between the DLC and the TILP during and immediately after the 1907 depression. The revitalization of the labour movement after 1910, however, strengthened the centre, and as a consequence the demand could again be heard for a new labour party. The Socialists, meanwhile, split, and the moderates in Toronto formed the Social Democratic Party (SDP)²⁴ which, unlike the old Socialist Party, was more receptive to the idea of

Convention of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, 1906, 7. Also see Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour: 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 82-83 which remains the best general survey of national and provincial labour politics.

²⁰ See the *Industrial Banner* (London, Toronto), April 1907. The platform for the provincial election was printed in the June 1908 issue.

²¹ See the *Industrial Banner*, December 1907. Officers elected to the TILP were: President William J. Bruce (Plumbers), Vice-President L.H. Gibbons (Machinists), Secretary Magnus Sinclair (Street Railway Workers), Treasurer William J. Hevey (Cigarmakers), H.B. Woodrow (Painters), John Corcoran (Brewery Workers), and James Watt (Tailors) were elected to the executive committee.

²² DLC, *Minutes*, 26 December 1907, 42 and 19 December 1907, 38.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2 January 1908, 46, 20 February 1908, 8, 16 April 1908, 28, and [7] May 1908, 34. Also see 21 May 1908, 39-40 and 1 October 1908, 73.

²⁴ See Jacquelin F. Cahan, "A Survey of the Political Activities of the Ontario Labour

working in conjunction with the TILP. These two currents produced the first tentative steps in the direction of a political merger between the SDP and the TILP. In the short term, however, the SDP would cripple the movement with their attempts to turn joint action to their own advantage.

The first move in the direction of cooperation came in late 1912 when the DLC passed by a "substantial majority" a motion calling for the creation of a joint electoral committee which would include the SDP, the TILP and the DLC. This committee, again illustrating the absence of divisive ideological issues, had little difficulty formulating a platform for the municipal elections which was endorsed by each constituent body. The DLC also voted \$100 for the municipal campaign. Although the committee named candidates, each candidate maintained his own party affiliation. Thus, Simpson ran as a Socialist.²⁵ The same procedure was followed in the 1914 municipal elections, and the Joint Election Committee succeeded in electing Simpson to the Board of Control.

With this victory the Joint Election Committee decided to contest the 1914 provincial elections. By this time a complete merger should have been relatively easy. Socialists Simpson and Fred Bancroft represented the DLC on the Joint Election Committee. P.C. Young, a member of the DLC's executive committee, and C.F. Holl, who had served one term as vice-president and two terms as president of the DLC, represented the SDP. The TILP sent Henry Woodrow, sergeant-at-arms of the DLC, James Stevenson and F.C. Cribben, both members of the executive committee of the DLC, James Watt, president of the DLC and James Richards, who in January 1915 would succeed Watt as president of the DLC, as its representatives.²⁶ With such an exchange of personalities it was impossible to tell where either the SDP, the TILP or the DLC ended and where the other organizations began.

Despite this, however, it soon became clear that the SDP lacked the necessary spirit of cooperation. As in 1913, each organization endorsed a joint platform drawn up by the Committee. Each organization was to submit a list of candidates to the Committee which would make the final decision on who would run. But the SDP then precipitately withdrew from the Joint Election Committee and unilaterally named four candidates. The TILP, apparently, was prepared to nominate two candidates to be submitted to the Committee, but the withdrawal of the SDP aborted this effort. No TILP candidates contested the election. The DLC immediately backed off and on 18 June, 11 days before the election, withdrew from the Joint Election Committee.²⁷ The breakup of the Committee proved disastrous for the SDP. Its four candidates carried only 1.6 per cent of the popular vote compared to 4.5 per cent won by two temperance

Movement, 1850-1935," Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1945, 28-30.

²⁵ DLC, *Minutes*, 1 August 1912, 134-135, 3 October 1912, 155, 5 December 1912, 174, and 19 December 1912, 177.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 April 1914, 310-311, and 16 April 1914, 315-316.

²⁷ For a copy of the platform see the *Industrial Banner*, 12 June 1914, 1. Also see DLC, *Minutes*, 18 June 1914, 340.

candidates. The SDP's best showing was in North-West Toronto Seat B where W.E.S. James obtained a paltry 5.5 per cent of the vote.

The 1914 merger movement failed because of the SDP's desire to maintain a separate identity and party structure. The SDP felt its position to be strong enough to displace the TILP eventually and become the only party on the left. Simpson's election to the Board of Control undoubtedly contributed to this illusion. But the collapse of the Joint Election Committee demonstrated that, even within the context of the political left, the SDP was a minority party and had no significant electoral support. The SDP paid a very high price for its tactical blunder; Simpson failed in his re-election bid in 1915. After this defeat the SDP entered a period of decline hastened by the war and police harassment. Moderates in the party were eventually absorbed by the ILP.

The war also augmented many social and economic problems in Toronto society which further alienated labour,²⁸ and, beginning early in 1916, militants throughout the province opened a new drive to reorganize local ILPs. The British Labour Party served as a model in the reorganization effort; the new ILPs would be federated parties with the SDP, other reform groups, and, it was hoped, the trade unions directly affiliated. These new local ILPs, then, were very different than the pre-war ILPs; they were no longer parties composed almost exclusively of trade unionists. And as local activity increased there came a new demand for the organization of a provincial party to replace the now defunct CLP. Finally local organizations from 15 cities met in July 1917 to found the ILP of Ontario.²⁹

The TLC gave its blessing, if not its active support, to political action. In September 1916 the executive had been ordered to investigate the advisability of forming a labour party for Canada. In May 1917 the DLC called upon "the Executive of the Dominion Trades Congress, to place before the next meeting of the Congress, the urgent necessity of organizing a Canadian Labor party" and instructed its delegates to introduce such a resolution at the TLC convention.³⁰ At its convention later in the year, the TLC recognized that the local autonomy policy adopted in 1906 had failed, but it did nothing to alter that policy. The TLC recommended the formation of a labour party but took no specific action.³¹ After the convention a meeting was called for March 1918 to found a "national" party. The new party assumed the old name — the Ontario Section of the Canadian Labour Party — but, as in 1907, there was only an Ontario section.³² In theory the new CLP would contest federal elections while

²⁸ See DLC, *Minutes*, 2 March 1916, 20-21, 1 June 1916, 57f., 1 September 1916, 95, 12 October 1916, 100-103, 1 March 1917, 147, 10 May 1917, 168, 19 July 1917, 181, and 5 September 1918, 51-53. Also see the TLC's "Pronouncement of Organized Labor in Canada on War Problems," 19 June 1917, [174].

²⁹ *Industrial Banner*, 6 July 1917, 1.

³⁰ DLC, *Minutes*, 10 May 1917, 167.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4 October 1917, [194].

³² See the *Industrial Banner*, 19 April 1918, 1.

the ILP would contest provincial elections. In practice, however, local ILPs remained the real functional units. The DLC soon became closely allied with the TILP after its reorganization. The reconstituted TILP now included both the old labourites and the SDP and invited trade union participation. The DLC, although rejecting direct affiliation, made arrangements in June 1917 by which it appointed two delegates to the executive of the TILP. Later in November the DLC gave the TILP \$100 to contest the federal elections and footed the bill for TILP advertising in the major newspapers.³³ Unlike its pre-war namesake, the TILP enjoyed the active organizational participation of the trade union movement; it was for all practical purposes a reconstructed Joint Election Committee.

The TILP nominated five candidates for the federal elections in December 1917. Despite the shortage of both time and money, the party made real, if modest, progress at the polls. Together the labour candidates carried 9.4 per cent of the popular vote as compared to 13.7 per cent won by six Liberal candidates.³⁴ Preparations immediately began for the expected provincial election.

The unchecked rise in the cost of living after the war coupled with the federal government's increasingly anti-labour policies — censorship by order-in-council, the crushing of the Winnipeg general strike, the deportation of British subjects, and Section 98 of the Criminal Code — produced an increasingly militant labour movement which drifted steadily leftward throughout 1918, 1919 and into 1920. At the same time local organization provided the ILP with a solid foundation. Everything pointed to a major breakthrough in the 1919 provincial elections, and this is indeed what happened. The UFO and the ILP combined to bring down the Hearst government. Toronto, however, proved a major ILP disappointment in the election.

³³ DLC, *Minutes*, 7 June 1917, 173, 15 November 1917, 204 and 7 February 1918, 9.

³⁴ Conscription was the major issue in 1917, and this may have weakened the TILP campaign in Toronto. Rank and file unionists were as patriotic as anyone else and enlisted in large numbers throughout the war. Officially the TLC was anti-conscription. The DLC supported this anti-conscription position arguing that it was "antagonistic to the Labor interests" creating a "veiled serfdom" which reduced independent citizens to the "level of the slave." *Ibid.*, 16 March 1916, 31-32 and 4 May 1916, 47-48. When the government finally introduced conscription, however, the labour movement backed down. The DLC's senior delegate to the 1917 TLC convention, Fred Bancroft, chaired the important Committee on Executive Council and Officers' Reports; recommendations submitted to the floor by the executive had to pass through Bancroft's committee. The resolution which finally reached the floor reaffirmed the TLC's anti-conscription position but added that "under our present form of government, we do not deem it right, patriotic, or in the interests of the Labor Movement or the Dominion of Canada, to say or do anything that might prevent the Government of Canada from obtaining the result they anticipate... by the enforcement of the law." The TLC passed this resolution 136-106. The DLC accepted the new TLC position without further debate. *Ibid.*, 4 October 1917, [194].

In Toronto the TILP contested only four ridings. They collected a meagre 7.2 per cent of the popular vote, less than in the 1917 federal elections. Their best showing came in Riverdale where John T. Vick out-pollled the Conservative but finished second to the Soldier candidate Joseph McNamara. In West York a Conservative won the election with only 31.7 per cent of the vote. In this riding Simpson finished second of four with 28.9 per cent. Unlike Vick, Simpson faced liberal as well as conservative opposition. Although the TILP had improved its previous showing in the ridings contested, Toronto proved to be the ILP's achilles heel. Factionalism within the DLC helps explain the failure of the TILP in the city. During the war the centre and left drew closer together; the right as a result became increasingly alienated from the majority in the Council. This produced a serious split in mid-1919 with the right charting its own course outside, and in defiance of, the DLC.

The factional split began in 1918 over the issue of the government's orders-in-council censoring the foreign and left-wing press. At a special meeting called to discuss censorship president A. Conn and secretary T.A. Stevenson rejected the credentials of delegate Lewis, a socialist, who in turn was not allowed to speak. The left unsuccessfully challenged this decision in subsequent regular meetings, and eventually Conn and Stevenson declined to stand for re-election in the January 1919 DLC elections.³⁵ The DLC promoted its vice-president, A. O'Leary, and elected William Hevey as secretary. O'Leary was identified with the right while Hevey, who before the war had been a member of the ILP executive, had moved progressively to the right as the centre drifted left.

The January DLC elections set up a potentially explosive situation which quickly reached crisis proportions as a consequence of the general strike in the metal trades in May³⁶ and the founding of a new labour paper, the *Labour Leader*. During the course of the unsuccessful strike O'Leary and Hevey had become anathema to the Metal Trades Council which provided the backbone of the DLC's left wing. Labourites, meanwhile, took exception to O'Leary and Hevey's criticism of the *Industrial Banner's* radicalism, particularly after they became associated with the *Labour Leader* which attacked both independent political activity and what it saw as OBUism. This situation produced perhaps the most hotly contested elections in DLC history. In the July 1919 elections the left and centre presented a joint slate of candidates, and both O'Leary and Hevey were defeated. The left-centre coalition carried every executive post in the Council.³⁷

Subsequent to the July elections, Simpson charged O'Leary and Hevey with "disloyalty" to the labour movement. Specifically Simpson accused them of making an application to the Employers' Association for a secret gift or bonus of \$5,000.00

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 November 1918, 69 and 5 December 1918, 73-78.

³⁶ See *Ibid.*, 1 May 1919, 125 and 13 May 1919, 130.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 3 July 1919, 147 and 17 July 1919, 149f. The results of the election were

with which to treacherously serve the interests of the employers while appearing to represent the interests of labor, and with which to attempt the ruin of the official labor paper of this city which the workers have spent both money and effort to establish.³⁸

Simpson went on to argue that "the action of these two men will stand out as one of the most serious betrayals of trust that has ever been recorded in Trades Union history in this Dominion." At issue was the *Labour Leader* which, it was charged, had been financed and used by the employers to divide the Metal Trades Council in its strike. The DLC appointed a committee of five to investigate. Its report, submitted two weeks later, read: "After hearing Simpson's evidence, and in absence of any defense, the committee were of the opinion that Delegate Simpson was justified in bringing the charges."³⁹

But the DLC took no action to discipline its ex-president and ex-secretary. For three months delegates refused to act upon the investigation committee's report in spite of continued protests from the Machinists and a separate motion that O'Leary and Hevey be suspended as delegates. The *Leader*, meanwhile, continued its attacks upon radicals and upon ILP candidates in the provincial elections as right-wing unionists actively worked against the ILP.⁴⁰ The *Globe* reported that the Hearst government had tried to talk O'Leary, Hevey, and R.J. Stevenson into standing as Tory candidates; Stevenson was quoted as saying he would run "if he could oppose Jimmy Simpson in West York,"⁴¹ but apparently the sitting member was not prepared to vacate his seat.

During the municipal elections in January 1920 the *Labour Leader* again attacked ILP candidates; this proved the last straw for the DLC. Delegate Doggett introduced a Building Trades Council resolution, carrying an executive committee recommendation that it be accepted, which stated that the BTC views with disgust the attitude of the publishers of the so-called *Labor Leader* in attacking bonafide nominees of the Labor Party in the recent Municipal Elections, and further protest against any individual connected with this paper holding office in the Toronto Labor movement.⁴²

This resolution, together with a second asking all locals to withdraw credentials from delegates connected with the *Leader*, were passed. Later, in July 1920, the Council, by a vote of 84-8, rejected new credentials for Hevey issued by the Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 488, but this proved the only disciplinary action the Council was prepared to impose.⁴³

placed at the back of the minute book on 298. For a more descriptive account of the DLC elections see the *Globe*, 18 July 1919, 6.

³⁸ DLC, *Minutes*, 7 August 1919, 153 and *Industrial Banner*, 15 August 1919, 2.

³⁹ DLC, *Minutes*, 21 August 1919, 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1919, 160-162, 6 November 1919, 165-166, 4 December 1919, 170, and 18 December 1919, 172.

⁴¹ *Globe*, 15 September 1919, 3.

⁴² DLC, *Minutes*, 22 January 1920, 177-178.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15 July 1920, 203, 207 and 8 October 1920, 220. The Theatrical Stage Employees withdrew from the DLC as a consequence of this action.

In addition to the support from a few unions in Toronto, the *Leader* could count on support from the more conservative TLC. In 1921 the TLC decided to start a Bureau of Publicity; the Congress planned the publication of a new journal and signed a contract with "messrs. Stevenson and Hevey." The DLC protested and asked the TLC to cancel its contract but to no avail.⁴⁴

By this time, however, the militancy which had led to protests against an invitation to Samuel Gompers to address a labour day rally in Toronto⁴⁵ had reached its apex and was rapidly declining. As the wave of militancy receded, the DLC again retreated from political action. The retreat can be observed in the relationship between the DLC and the CLP.

In early 1921 the Winnipeg Labour Party and the Ontario Section of the CLP, now led by H.J. Halford and Simpson, decided that the time had come for the organization of a national labour party. A call for a convention to occur simultaneously with the TLC convention went out. The new CLP elected John Bruce of Toronto and Simpson as president and secretary-treasurer. But the DLC's reception of the CLP was decidedly cool. When Simpson, who headed the DLC's delegation to the TLC convention, tried to submit his report in September 1921, it was tabled because it contained a report on the CLP convention as well.⁴⁶ In addition the CLP quickly aroused the jealousy of the ILP; Joseph Marks complained of CLP attempts to "take control of nominations" in the coming federal elections without regard to the ILP. The DLC then tabled a CLP request for affiliation.⁴⁷ The TLC adopted the traditional non-partisan AFL approach to the election. It sent the DLC a questionnaire to be submitted to all candidates to determine "their attitude on questions of industrial legislation." In an ironic bit of buck-passing the DLC referred the TLC's questionnaire to the CLP since, in the mistaken opinion of the Council, the Congress had established the CLP.⁴⁸

Despite its problems, the CLP managed to hold its own, although that was not much, in the 1921 federal elections in Toronto. The party named four candidates, and they carried between 11.4 and 15.1 per cent of the vote in their ridings. They won 7.2 per cent of the total popular vote in the city, the same percentage as in the provincial elections of 1919. The fact remained, however, that effective political action was as much a dream in 1921 as in 1900.

The evolving political debate within the DLC was characterized, then, by the continuing factional struggle which produced considerable frustration for activists. This factional split made it very difficult indeed to translate the ambiguous desire for political action into an effective organization capable of winning elections. The labourites had the votes in the Council to use it as a

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1921, 290.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 June 1920, 199.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 September 1921, 280.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1921, 283 and 20 October 1921, 287-288.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3 November 1921, 289.

springboard for the formation of a labour party, but these same delegates refused to commit the DLC to the support of the party. This resulted from the traditional idea, shared by most trade unionists including the socialists, that trade union organization and political organization were separate activities and must be kept separate. This attitude produced a consistent refusal by the Council, with the sole exception of the People's Party, to affiliate with labour parties which the Council itself had created. The DLC frequently took the initiative in forming labour parties, but then always cut itself off from its own protégé.

Complementing this weakness was the inability of the DLC to maintain interest in politics between elections. Elections prompted political organization, but once the election was over interest waned and the party crumbled. As a result no permanent organization existed to do the necessary spade work at the constituency level *between* elections. Effective political organization involved more than the nomination of candidates at elections, particularly during a period when the ballot did not provide party labels. It was probably true that, as the *Toiler* had argued in 1904, many voters, even when they voted, had no idea who the labour candidate was.⁴⁹

A permanent organization was vital because there were never enough unionists to elect anyone. Success at the polls depended upon the ability of the party to win the allegiance of a large block of workers many of whom had little or no contact with the labour movement on a regular and continuing basis. The inability to maintain permanent organization together with the inability to maintain a united front within the DLC crippled efforts to attract the uninitiated. The spectacle of trade unionists appearing as Liberals or Conservatives, or the *Labour Leader* attacking labour candidates consistently undermined the credibility of the ILP. Unfortunately the DLC went out of its way to avoid confronting the central issue of discipline within its ranks.

Insufficient financial arrangements proved yet another critical handicap for the ILP. Organization cost money; various labour parties organized during these years never had much money. When the ILP held its fourth convention in 1921, its financial statement showed an income of only \$533 with a meager \$265.97 cash on hand.⁵⁰ The Ontario Section of the CLP had an income of \$704.02 and \$612.24 cash on hand as of July 1921. Deposits cost considerably more than this. The financial straight-jacket in which the ILP and the CLP found themselves meant that there would never be a campaign of sufficient magnitude to attract an appreciable number of voters. The failure of unions to affiliate directly with these parties meant that the only potential source of stable revenue lay beyond the reach of either party.

It remains a moot point, however, if affiliation of city centrals like the DLC could have solved the financial problem. The DLC was almost as poor as the ILP

⁴⁹ *Toiler*, 8 January 1904, 1.

⁵⁰ Canada, Department of Labour, *Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1921* (Ottawa 1922), 52.

and the CLP. In December 1913 the DLC had only \$768.18 cash on hand. After a few lean years this went up to \$948.68 in December 1916. By December 1918 cash reserves had shrunk to \$654.04; in June 1919 reserves fell to \$611.05. The DLC, then, was having considerable difficulty living within its income without the added expense of political organization. And, again with the exception of the People's Party, it never tried to institute a special *per capita* on its affiliated locals for political purposes. Financial stringency provided the *coup de grâce* to the ILP and the CLP.

There would never be a labour party in Toronto until the labour movement solved its problems of discipline. A labour party could succeed only where the labour movement committed both its energies and its pocket-books to a sustained effort. The labour movement failed to do this during the first decades of the twentieth century. Poor people have never exerted much political influence. A poverty struck labour party which organizationally remained cut-off from its own base could exert little more.