

Constructing a Labour Gospel: Labour and Religion in Early 20th-century Ontario

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Article abstract

This paper considers the presence of Christianity in the labour movement in early 20th-century Ontario. During this period labour leaders were unquestionably disillusioned with the established churches and did not hesitate to criticize clergymen for their indifference and hostility to labour's cause. This disillusionment did not mean, however, that organized labour abandoned religion. Both moderate reformist and radical labour leaders articulated a non-sectarian, activist Christianity that helped them frame the issues they were concerned about. Alliances also developed between the churches and labour bodies at the national level and labour-friendly clergy and a small group of labour leaders in industrial centres in southern Ontario.

Constructing a Labour Gospel: Labour and Religion in Early 20th-Century Ontario

Melissa Turkstra

ON 14 DECEMBER 1900, just under 50 working men gathered in the lecture hall of James Street Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ontario, to meet with its pastor, Rev. J.L. Gilmour. Rev. Gilmour's primary objective in organizing this meeting was to solicit the opinion of workers in order to gain a better understanding of why more working men did not attend church. What is most striking about this meeting is how animated and frank these men were in their responses to the minister. Most of the men conceded that the church did have a message for workers; one worker even admitted that, in his opinion, Christianity was the only answer for the current social and labour problems while another quoted from the Bible to demonstrate that it had many relevant messages for workers. At the same time, the general consensus was that the churches were not successfully reaching the masses. Part of the problem, the men claimed, was the presence of "unchristian" manufacturers in the high offices of the church. Long hours and hard work were also cited as key factors keeping men from attending church. The men offered several suggestions of how the churches could amend this situation. First, ministers had to concentrate less on the spiritual welfare of the people and more on their temporal welfare. This meant, for example, that church leaders needed to join in the fight for the shorter workday and denounce the present competitive system. Ministers also had to return to the simple practical doctrine preached by Christ. Despite these criticisms, it was clear that working men were not completely alienated from the church. One worker questioned why working men were being singled out because, in his opinion, they were just as likely to regularly attend church as professionals and businessmen. Another worker stated that the working class had a responsibility to attend church even if it did have faults. Samuel Landers, future editor of the Hamilton *Labor News*, ac-

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knowledgeed that there were a few churches that attracted working men and attributed this to two factors: the attentiveness of these churches to workers' needs, and the concerted effort made by the pastors of these churches to visit their congregants. Probably the most remarkable statement at the conference was the response to Rev. Gilmour's concluding question; he asked, "How do men, who never attend church, know what is going on inside of them?" He was informed that the men discuss the sermons in the workshop.¹

The views that were expressed at the working men's conference in Hamilton in 1900 were not exceptional. Both moderate and radical labour leaders voiced similar ideas in various labour publications in early 20th-century Ontario. Like the working men at the Hamilton conference, these labour leaders were not shy about revealing where the churches had failed when it came to the working class. In the labour press, editors did not hesitate to portray the established churches as symbols of capitalist wealth and clergymen as puppets controlled by their wealthy constituents. They were also quick to point out that their strong critique of the churches did not imply a rejection of Christianity by carefully distinguishing between a true Christianity and a hypocritical "Churchianity."² While they underlined this distinction, this did not mean there was no interaction between labour leaders and the churches. Some labour leaders praised and cooperated with those clergymen who were willing to denounce the injustices of the industrial capitalist system and champion labour issues.

Historians in Britain and the United States and more recently in Canada have convincingly demonstrated the rhetorical and institutional influence of Christianity on the development of labour and socialist movements. This literature discloses that while many labour leaders had serious doubts, if not rejecting organized religion outright, historians cannot dismiss that very few of these leaders identified themselves as atheists and that many of these leaders had a strong religious background. Nor can they overlook the construction of what labour leaders liked to call a "true religion" or a practical social Christianity that was distinct from the institutionalized religion organized labour rejected. This radical social Christianity took Jesus as its role model and used Christian social teaching to address the daily struggles of the worker, reinforce or fuel a class-conscious critique of the capitalist system, and legitimate labour and socialist thought.³ One question that has been

¹*Hamilton Spectator*, 13 December 1900; *Hamilton Evening Times*, 13 December 1900.

²"Churchianity" was a term used to describe the church's obsession with creed, ritual, and wealth. See *Cotton's Weekly*, 28 January 1909.

³In Britain, this historiography has focused on the powerful influence of religion on the development of the Independent Labour Party in its formative years, specifically how Christian teachings infused the minds of prominent labour leaders who were raised in chapel culture. See, for example, W.W. Knox, "Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement c. 1900-1939," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23 (1988), 609-630; A.J. Ainsworth, "Religion in the Working Class Community and the Evolution of Socialism in Late Nineteenth

addressed in the British and American literature, but has received little attention in Canada, is whether the social awakening of the Protestant churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to a rapprochement between labour and the churches.

The purpose of this paper is not only to provide examples of the presence of religion in the formally organized labour movement in early 20th-century Canada,

Century Lancashire: A Case of Working Class Consciousness," *Histoire Sociale-Social History*, 10 (November 1977), 354-380; Eileen Yeo, "Christianity in Chartist Struggle 1838-1842," *Past and Present* 91, 109-139; Tony Jowitt, "Religion and the Independent Labour Party," in Keith Laybourn and David James, eds., *The Rising Sun of Socialism* (West Yorkshire 1991), 121-134. In the US, this historiography has focused on the impact of evangelical Protestantism on organized labour. See Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," in Herbert Gutman, ed., *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York 1976); Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia 1865-1915* (Philadelphia 1989); Jama Jazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington 1995); Clark Halker, *For Democracy, Workers, and God: Labor Song-Poems and Labor Protest, 1865-1895* (Chicago 1991); and Robert Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park, PA 1996). Some historians have even started to reconsider the assumption that the more radical sections of organized labour, like the Social Democratic Federation in Britain and the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States, were strongly opposed to religion. See Graham Johnson, "British Social Democracy and Religion, 1881-1911," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (January 2000), 94-115; Donald E. Winters Jr., *The Soul of the Wobblies: The I.W.W., Religion and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (Westport, CT 1985); and Harold Currie, "The Religious Views of Eugene Debs," *Mid-America: An Historical Review*, 54 (July 1972), 145-156. Canadian historians have made note of the religious upbringing of labour and socialist leaders and how religion informed labour and socialist thought and protest. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto 1971), 13-14, 82-103; Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto 1985), 152-179, 213-227; Norman Knowles, "Christ in the Crowsnest: Religion and the Anglo-Protestant Working Class in the Crowsnest Pass, 1898-1918," in Michael Behiels and Marcel Martel, eds., *Nation, Ideas, Identities* (Don Mills 2000), 57-72; Lynne Marks, "The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army: Religion and Working Class Culture in Ontario, 1882-1890," *Labour/Le Travail*, 28 (Fall 1991), 89-127; Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Toronto 1987); David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto 1999), 38, 172-174, 276; Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and a Search for a Third Way* (Montreal & Kingston 1999), 34-35, 37, 125, 224; Ian McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay's Writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897-1939* (St. John's 1996), xiii, 5, 59; Kevin Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement: Joseph Marks, the *Industrial Banner* and the Ontario Working-Class, 1890-1930," MA thesis, Queen's University, 1994, 36-40; Gene Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1978; Edward Penton, "The Ideas of William Cotton: A Marxist View of Canadian Society, 1908-1914," MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1978.

but to consider why religion continued to influence the thought and actions of labour leaders during this period. It will first explore labour leaders' disillusionment with the established churches and look at what changes they required the churches to make if they hoped to establish stronger ties with labour. It will then examine the non-sectarian, activist Christianity articulated by many labour leaders and consider how these beliefs helped them frame the issues they were concerned about. It will conclude with a close look at the alliances that developed between church and labour bodies at the national level and between labour-friendly clergy and a small group of labour leaders in industrial centres in Southern Ontario. It will carefully look at who in the labour movement was most committed to building these cross-class alliances, determine what they hoped to achieve from this cooperation, and examine the irreparable cracks in the foundation of these alliances as a result of the opposing positions of the churches and labour on a number of important issues. While this labour gospel helped moderate and radical labour leaders in interpreting and constructing the issues they were concerned about, any rapprochement between organized labour and the churches during this period was modest.

To better understand the relationship between organized labour and religion, I have examined a number of labour newspapers including the *Industrial Banner*,⁴ *Tribune*,⁵ the *Hamilton Labor News*,⁶ and the *Labor Leader*,⁷ as well as *Cotton's*

⁴The *Industrial Banner* was established in 1892 in Southern Ontario. Originally the mouthpiece of the Industrial Brotherhood of Canada, in 1903 it was published under the auspices of the Labor Education Association of Ontario. In 1912, the paper moved from London to Toronto and became a provincial paper under the direction of the Labour Educational Publishing Company. When the paper moved to Toronto, it changed from a monthly to weekly paper and increased from four to eight pages. Joseph Marks was the paper's editor from 1892 until 1919 when James Simpson took over this position. A year later, Marks severed ties with the paper. In 1920, its circulation was just under 29,000. See Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 21, 66, 146; Ron Verzuh, *Radical Rag: The Pioneer Labour Press in Canada* (Ottawa 1988), 97-98; *McKim's Canadian Newspaper Directory 1920*, 87.

⁵The *Tribune* was the mouthpiece of the Toronto District Labor Council.

⁶Established in 1912, the *Labor News* was an independent trade union newspaper. Samuel Landers was its editor until Fred Flatman, a socialist, took over as editor in 1918 and renamed the paper *New Democracy*. Flatman was ousted from this position in 1919 and replaced by Hamilton labour leader, Walter Rollo. See James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925* (Toronto 1991), 67-68. In 1920 national circulation for this paper was 4,500. See *McKim's Canadian Newspaper Directory 1920*, 36.

⁷The *Labor Leader* was established in 1919 and was a more conservative national labour weekly. It represented international unionism and did not tolerate the IWW or OBU. See *The Labor Leader*, 18 December 1925; 17 December 1926.

Weekly,⁸ the official organ of the Social Democratic Party of Canada [SDP].⁹ The Annual Report of the Proceedings of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada has been particularly helpful in understanding the alliances that developed between the churches and labour leaders at the national level. With the exception of the socialist *Cotton's Weekly* and the more conservative labour weekly, the *Labor Leader*, which were national publications, the other papers were regional and local Ontario labour newspapers. In the pages of these newspapers, readers were informed about the social and economic injustices of the industrial capitalist system like child and female labour, unemployment, Chinese immigration, and poverty. They could learn about workers who were striking for better wages and shorter hours, the labour reforms organized labour was fighting for, the appeal of trade unionism, and party platforms. For the editors of these papers, including the radical, anti-capitalist W.A. Cotton, these publications were an important vehicle to promote working-class solidarity and teach workers that through trade unionism and the ballot workers could achieve their goals.¹⁰ Although these labour publications are a useful window through which to examine the relationship between labour and religion, it is important to note that in looking at these papers I am, for the most part, analysing the voices of the organized, articulate, and earnest intellectual leadership of the labour movement, not the rank-and-file. I am also focusing on a particular group of leaders within the labour movement. In many cases, the leaders I refer to were from Southern Ontario. They were class-conscious craftworkers who had a particular idea of how the labour movement would evolve. They were moderate labour reformists who sought to secure a respected place for labour within industrial capitalist society through collective bargaining and labour representation in legislative bodies. These labourists, along with some socialists in the SDP, believed that social transformation would take place gradually through reforms, not revolution. With respect to religion, these men repeatedly insisted that it was not their role to intervene in the religious lives of workers because religion was a private matter and

⁸*Cotton's Weekly* was published in Cowansville, Quebec, between 1908 and 1914. In 1913, at the height of its success, the paper reached a national circulation of 31,000. See Penton, "The Ideas of William Cotton," 14.

⁹It is important to be clear about the group of socialists to which this study refers. It is not looking at the religious views of Marxist socialists or "impossibilists" within the Socialist Party of Canada [SPC] who most likely rejected religion. *Cotton's Weekly* represented the Social Democratic Party of Canada, which emerged in 1911 when the Canadian Socialist Federation joined the Manitoba Social Democratic Party. The SDP believed its goals could be attained both peacefully and gradually. Socialists who supported Christian reformism joined the SDP because it emphasized the similarities between Christianity and socialism whereas the SPC attacked Christian socialism. See Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900-1918* (Montreal & Kingston 1995), 32.

¹⁰For a more detailed description of the ideas of these labour leaders see Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement"; Penton, "The Ideas of William Cotton"; and *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*, vol. 2, 1992, "Samuel Landers," by Craig Heron.

churches private institutions.¹¹ The potential divisive effect the discussion of religion could have on the labour movement was one of the motivating factors behind these statements. Despite the avowed policy of the labour press to avoid this subject, it was not difficult to find references to religion in the pages of their newspapers. It is also important to point out that the references to religion very rarely differentiated between denominations or even between the Protestant and Catholic churches. They discussed the Christian “church” broadly speaking. It is clear, however, that labour leaders were really concerned with the Protestants, particularly the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists, to whom they turned for alliances.¹²

Labour, Christianity, and the Churches

Like the Knights of Labor and other labour movements before them, labour leaders in the early 20th century characterized the established churches as symbols of capitalist wealth and, therefore, part of the exploitive industrial capitalist system they were working so arduously to change.¹³ What they found particularly appalling were the wealthy capitalists who had monopolized the churches and used their power to control ministers. As one worker in a letter to the editor of the *Tribune* resentfully explained, “There is no getting away from the fact that the Church at present is for the class, not the mass.”¹⁴ Joseph Marks, editor of the *Industrial Banner*, voiced a similar complaint at a 1906 Labor Forward meeting, arguing that the working class was absent from the church because it catered to wealthy congregants.¹⁵ In a letter to the editor of the *Industrial Banner* in 1913, an observer characterized the religion in the churches as a charity religion that was becoming increasingly dependent on the contributions of wealthy congregants who, as a natural consequence, guided the policy of the churches and silenced its ministers. The writer complained, “The church practically teaches that God made this world not for the children of men, but for a special few, so that these favourites could live by the sweat of their neighbour’s face.”¹⁶

¹¹ See *Industrial Banner*, November 1911; *Labor News*, 10 March 1916; *Labor Leader*, 26 September 1924; *Cotton’s Weekly*, 21 January 1909.

¹² For a discussion of Catholics and labour in Quebec see Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire de la CSN, 1921-1981* (Montreal 1981).

¹³ Some of the religious rhetoric that is explored here was used by the Knights of Labor and other early labour movements. The Knights of Labor characterized churches as symbols of wealth. See Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 311; Marks, “The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army,” 108; Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small Town Ontario* (Toronto 1996), 63; Eileen Yeo, “Christianity in Chartist Struggle.”

¹⁴ *Tribune*, 4 November 1905.

¹⁵ *Industrial Banner*, March 1906.

¹⁶ *Industrial Banner*, 6 June 1913.

The more radical sections of the labour movement were even more critical of the mainstream churches. Perhaps no one could equal the vitriolic remarks of W.A. Cotton, editor of *Cotton's Weekly*, who described the churches as being “dragged at the heels of the triumphant capitalists” and “spoonfed on charity doles from the successful labor skimmers.”¹⁷ These critical remarks were not just rantings; organized labour provided condemning evidence to support its claim that wealthy congregants were indeed dictating the actions of ministers. In 1919, the *Industrial Banner* reported on the conflict that had arisen at Broadway Methodist Church in Toronto between its Quarterly Board and present minister, Salem Bland.¹⁸ The Board disapproved of Bland’s attendance at working-class meetings and advised that he follow their instructions because it paid his salary. The *Industrial Banner* warned the church of the potential consequences of such actions, stating that it “cannot afford to allow a few rich men to seal the mouths of the ministers” because “the impression will get abroad that if wealthy men in the Church can control the expressions of the ministers there cannot possibly be true presentation of the vital truths of the Gospel.”¹⁹ The paper, by differentiating between a true religion that considered the needs of the working class and a false religion that connected capitalism and established churches, was directly questioning the efficacy of the churches.

Also contributing to labour’s disillusionment with the churches was the apathy of clergymen with regard to labour issues. One trade unionist expressed his disappointment to the editor of the *Tribune*, writing, “of the twelve years that I have been a trade unionist, I have never seen a clergyman come and ask to be allowed to have a five minute conversation with them on any of their meeting nights, yet they wonder why the large majority do not attend the church.”²⁰ While the disinterest of clergymen was inexcusable, the blatant ignorance and hostility of clergymen to labour issues were more detrimental for labour. The *Industrial Banner* vigorously denounced a sermon preached by Rev. Ross of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in London, Ontario, the Sunday preceding Labour Day, in which he voiced his support for the open shop, attacked the minimum wage and boycott, characterized the Western Federation of Miners as a group of thugs, and stated that it was his belief that the church should stay neutral on issues that concern capital and labour.²¹

¹⁷ *Cotton's Weekly*, 18 August 1910; 13 October 1910.

¹⁸ It is not surprising that tension arose between the wealthy members of Broadway Methodist and Bland. Bland, a faculty member at Wesley College in Winnipeg between 1903 and 1918, was an exponent of radical social Christianity. He was one of the ministers who drafted the bold resolution passed at the Methodist General Conference in 1918 that called for cooperation and service to replace competition and profits. He was a champion of labour, discussing labour issues inside and outside of the pulpit, and welcomed the advancement of Labor churches because they embraced sociological ideas. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion*, 10, 75-76, 149-150.

¹⁹ *Industrial Banner*, 1 August 1919.

²⁰ *Tribune*, 4 November 1905.

²¹ *Industrial Banner*, September 1907.

If the churches wanted to mend relations with labour, they would have to do more than just show an interest in labour issues; labour believed it was the duty of the churches and its ministers to join labour in its fight for more just conditions for workers. The *Industrial Banner* questioned why the preachers of Toronto were not supporting the strike of female operatives at the Adams Shoe Company in 1912 who, without notice, received a serious reduction in wages. It noted the hypocrisy in this silence: "What can be said of the kind of civilization that can stand for it in a city where hundreds of church spires point upward to the skies, and where peace upon earth and good will towards men is openly proclaimed from its myriad pulpits on every Sabbath morn."²² In addition to supporting strikes, labour expected churches to endorse labour legislation. An article entitled "The Church's Opportunity" invited churches in Ontario to take an interest in the workmen's compensation for injuries act because it was essentially a moral and religious question. Such legislation was necessary, it argued, because hundreds of workers were sacrificed every year as a result of industrial accidents and the widows and children of these workers deserved protection from destitution. It queried, "Will the thousand pulpits throughout Ontario speak out and demand justice for the workers of the land?" Arguing that future relations between labour and the church depended on how the church responded to this issue, the article suggested: "If they do there can be no question as to the ultimate result, if they fail, then perforce the workers must fight the battle alone, as they have so often done before. Never before was the church so on trial as at the present moment."²³

Although labour was clearly frustrated with the inaction of churches, it believed that the churches were not only capable of but had a vital role to play in eliminating the injustice pervading society. Articles explicitly set out what changes the churches had to make if they were sincerely interested in amending their relationship with labour. Instead of remaining neutral in matters that concerned capital and labour, it was the duty of the churches to be involved in and publicize important moral and religious issues that affected the welfare of the people. The issues the churches were expected to address were quite progressive and included increases in wages and a decrease in hours of work, the abolition of child labour in factories, and equal pay for men and women for equal work or service.²⁴ This assistance also meant action. Churches had to take an aggressive stance against exploitive capitalists and make social and economic issues a priority. An article published in *Cotton's Weekly* in 1913 summoned the churches "to prepare the rich man for Heaven by condemning a system that allows some men to get rich while other men are starving," insisting that "the church has got to go into economic conditions or go out of existence." It proceeded to call on ministers "to go into the workshop as

²²*Industrial Banner*, 29 November 1912.

²³*Industrial Banner*, 21 November 1913.

²⁴*Industrial Banner*, August 1904, October 1904, October 1907.

Christ did and condemn the owners of the slave pens.”²⁵ The *Industrial Banner* expressed similar, although somewhat less blistering, remarks in an article published a week earlier entitled “The Awakening of the Church.” It informed the church that if it was to attract the masses, it had to provide both “an honest recognition of conditions that exist, and the will and the energy to combat evil of all kinds, whenever and wherever it may be encountered, no matter who or what interest may be adversely affected thereby.”²⁶ The paper reiterated these views in a spring issue the following year, suggesting that if clergy channeled half of the energy they dedicated to the liquor traffic to suppressing child labour, this curse would be eradicated. It urged ministers to use their pulpits to fight the exploitation of children, as the offenders committing these iniquitous acts were often churchgoers.²⁷

The labour press, in the early 20th century, described to their readers what it believed was wrong with the present state of the churches. The fundamental obstacle impeding the churches’ relations with workers was the inability of the churches to detach themselves from the exploitive industrial capitalist system. The labour press portrayed the churches as synonymous with this system; the control of the churches and its ministers by wealthy capitalists was simply an extension of capitalists’ abusive power. This did not mean that the churches were dismissed completely; it just meant that they were on trial. The message labour editors wanted to convey to their readers regarding the established churches was that they were a useful but not a necessary tool in workers’ efforts to secure a more equitable economic and social system.

Christianity in Labour’s Message

Whether the established churches did or did not join with organized labour in its fight to establish a more just society had little bearing on its view of religion. The labour press made a conscious effort to distinguish between rejecting the “churchianity” it identified with the churches and the true Christianity that gave meaning to the daily struggles of workers.²⁸ The *Labor News*, for example, explained that workers were vacant from the pews not because they were infidels and materialists but because they saw the church “as a tool of the employing class.”²⁹ And irregular church attendance, according to the *Labor Leader*, did not automatically qualify a person as a non-Christian.³⁰ Even the Social Democratic Party was not willing to reject Christianity. *Cotton’s Weekly* identified the ethics of Christianity and Socialism as identical and while it arrestingly announced “The churches are dead” because they do not address the human needs of the people, it did not reject

²⁵ *Cotton’s Weekly*, 12 June 1913.

²⁶ *Industrial Banner*, 6 June 1913.

²⁷ *Industrial Banner*, 4 April 1914.

²⁸ McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, 6.

²⁹ *Labor News*, 25 October 1918.

³⁰ *Labor Leader*, 13 February 1920.

Christ's teachings, remarking that "socialism alone is left to carry on the human work of Christ."³¹ Furthermore, although the paper promoted the freedom of religious thought, it flatly denied the contention that Socialism was anti-religious, stating it was "a lie spawned in the depths of the hellish brains of capitalist liars."³²

Not only did labour leaders reject the notion that it was anti-religious, they articulated a radical social gospel that applied their interpretation of Christian teaching to workers' struggles and insisted that social and economic regeneration precede individual regeneration.³³ This labour gospel was both a direct assault on the unrestrained individualism of laissez-faire capitalism and the individualist gospel that focused on the relationship between God and man.³⁴ For workers, particularly skilled workers whose craft traditions and autonomy were being threatened during this period by dramatic industrial changes like the concentration of capital, new scientific management practices, technological innovations, and new manufacturing industries that relied on huge pools of unskilled and semi-skilled immigrant labour, this labour gospel helped to frame the issues they were concerned about.³⁵ For labourists and socialists who were disillusioned with Lib/Labism, this labour gospel was an important source to interpret the problems workers experienced, communicate their ideas, and mobilize support for their respective movements.³⁶ This labour gospel was also an educative tool that not only made workers aware of the injustices of the established social and economic order, but provided them with a language of class that was necessary to strengthen their organizations and defend their interests in both the industrial and political arena.

The majority of religious references in the labour press were centred, not on the divinity of Jesus, but on the temporal significance of his life.³⁷ Labour newspapers emphasized Jesus' working-class origins. Articles in labour newspapers pointed out the parallels between the life of Jesus and the lives of workers, noting that he was born into poverty and that his trade until the age of 30 was that of a hard-working carpenter.³⁸ An article printed in the Christmas issue of the *Labor Leader*, entitled "Jesus in Overalls," asked readers to remember that the clothes they stripped from his body before he was nailed to the cross were the clothes of a

³¹ *Cotton's Weekly*, 11 March 1909, 25 March 1909.

³² *Cotton's Weekly*, 8 May 1913.

³³ McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, 56, 67; Campbell, *Canadian Marxists*, 128; Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 38.

³⁴ Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 66; McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, 6-7.

³⁵ Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 4-5, 16-17; Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 54.

³⁶ Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 45-75; Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 73; Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 164.

³⁷ The Knights of Labor also focused on Jesus the worker. See Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 312.

³⁸ *Cotton's Weekly*, 24 December 1908; *Labor Leader*, 25 May 1928.

working man: "What! Jesus in overalls? Sure! He wore them. His overalls smelled of human sweat, and the soil of untarrying toil was upon them."³⁹ Jesus was an ideal representative of the working class. It was because of his authentic experience as a worker that Jesus was able to honestly understand workers' struggles, needs, and goals.⁴⁰

In addition to establishing his working-class origins, the labour press depicted Jesus as a heroic social reformer and the first great successful labour leader and invoked his ethical teachings and bold actions to fuel opposition to modern-day social and economic problems.⁴¹ Exploitive employment practices, for example, were inimical to Jesus' teaching. An article entitled "The People Want to Know" questioned what the Christian life meant in the 20th century and asked "if the Saviour of mankind, Who blessed little children, would approve of their exploitation by Christian employers who confine them in unsanitary factories" or "if a Christian employer who pays his female help one half the wages paid to men for the same work is honest or actuated by the spirit of his Master."⁴² Labour leaders also looked to Christianity to frame their critique of the use of immigrant labour and workplace safety. Demonstrating the deep ethnic division in the labour movement during this period, labour leaders characterized the efforts made by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association to overstock the labour market by giving bonuses to immigration agencies and transportation companies as "neither Christian, civilized, nor decent."⁴³ Referring to the number of workers killed and injured in a single year in the US, the *Industrial Banner* was quick to point out that not one employer who amassed his wealth from the labour of these workers was included in this record. It questioned, "Can we honestly claim that this is either a desirable or a Christian civilization. Some people pretend to believe that it is."⁴⁴

Labour leaders also drew on Jesus' ethical teachings to target the unequal distribution of wealth. These teachings were often used to garner support for the single

³⁹*Labor Leader*, 26 December 1924.

⁴⁰*Industrial Banner*, 19 March 1912, 29 August 1913.

⁴¹*Industrial Banner*, November 1908. Several historians have similarly noted that labour leaders and socialists invoked Christ's example in their fight against societal injustices. See Knowles, "Christ in the Crowsnest," 67; McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, 6-7; Knox, "Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement," 615.

⁴²*Industrial Banner*, May 1906.

⁴³*Industrial Banner*, February 1906. A major factor preventing solidarity in the labour movement during this period was the inability of organized labour to integrate non-Anglo-Celtic and non-White immigrants. Many Anglo-Canadian workers resented the fact that these sojourners were used as cheap labour by capitalists. See Craig Heron, "National Contours: Solidarity and Fragmentation," in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada 1917-1925* (Toronto 1998), 284.

⁴⁴*Industrial Banner*, January 1909.

tax, the panacea for land monopolization.⁴⁵ The *Industrial Banner*, for example, printed several speeches by W.A. Douglas, a vociferous proponent of the single tax, who often drew on the example of Jesus to reinforce his attacks on land speculation. In 1913, Douglas used the pulpit of King St. Methodist Church in Toronto to speak out against those land owners who had amassed their wealth from land monopoly. He queried, "What would Christ's answer be to the question, 'What is the greatest obstacle to the progress of the kingdom of God?' If he were to come, do you think he would be the guest at the homes of the very rich?" Jesus, Douglas continued, would probably ask, "Where is that brotherhood I came to this world to found?" and respond with the statement, "I cannot see it as I go among the people. In every city that I visit, the mansions at one end are like the palaces of princes, while the homes of the hard working people who produce the abundance of the wealth are of the poorest character."⁴⁶ Douglas proceeded to emphasize that land is a gift from the creator and he provided words of caution for those speculators who had not done any service for their fellow man: "Is it not quite possible," he asked, "that there are many men with great riches who will have great difficulty in passing the test of the day of judgment?" "Only when a man shows himself just as intense in his hunger and thirst for righteousness as he shows for the wealth that perisheth," he continued, "only when he struggles for the triumph of the Golden Rule as earnestly as he seeks for the rule of gold, only then can he be crowned with the blessing expressed by the Psalmist, 'Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord'."⁴⁷ He concluded by telling the congregation to take Jesus as a guide and "First Be Reconciled to Thy Brother."⁴⁸

Although Jesus was by far the most referred to biblical figure in the labour press, it looked to other biblical references to illustrate what changes were needed to the present industrial capitalist system.⁴⁹ The *Industrial Banner*, for example, in its "Easter Sermon" not only described Jesus' tenacity in agitating against the profit system, it also drew on several scriptural passages to provide a critique of this system. The passage by the Psalmist David, "Lord who shall ascend into the Taberna-

⁴⁵The 'single tax', which taxed unearned land values, was an important issue for organized labour well into the 20th century. See Allen Mills, "Single Tax, Socialism and the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba: The Political Ideas of F.J. Dixon and S.J. Farmer," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (Spring 1980), 33-56.

⁴⁶*Industrial Banner*, 2 May 1913.

⁴⁷*Industrial Banner*, 2 May 1913.

⁴⁸*Industrial Banner*, 2 May 1913. For additional examples in the *Industrial Banner* of Douglas invoking Christ's teachings to challenge land speculation see, 13 June 1913, 22 August 1913, 14 March 1914, 19 November 1915, 24 May 1918, 27 January 1922. A.B. Farmer, secretary of the Single Tax Association, also applied Jesus' example in an article published in the *Industrial Banner* entitled, "For Whom did God Make the World." See *Industrial Banner*, 20 June 1916.

⁴⁹Craig Heron also argues that religious imagery was part of labourist rhetoric. See Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," 63.

cle of the Holy One Him that hath not put his money out to usury,” warned speculators that there was no room for them in the House of God.⁵⁰ “That every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God,” from the Book of Ecclesiastes, substantiated organized labour’s claim that every man should have a share in what he produces.⁵¹ And the following words from Jesus’ brother, James, sent out a warning to the exploiters of wealth, “Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments moth eaten ... Behold the hire of the laborers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.”⁵²

In an effort to build unity in the labour movement, the labour press likened the actions of those notorious biblical characters who contributed to the downfall of Jesus to workers and labour representatives who had betrayed trade unionism. It used the traitorous action of Judas to express its hostility towards scabs. An article published in the *Industrial Banner*, entitled “We Have No Apology To Offer. Why We Hate and Despise the Scab,” lashed out at scabs: “Judas Iscariot was a hero in comparison with this modern thug, he had at least some little conscience left for he went out and hanged himself in detestation of his treachery.”⁵³ Trade unionists who did not purchase union label products received similar denunciations three years later when the paper wrote, “Judas was a prince in comparison to a man who carries a union card in his pocket and who persistently forgets to purchase union label products, and is equally forgetful of establishments that employ union labor.”⁵⁴ An article entitled “The Minister of Labor in the Role of Pilate” published in the *Industrial Banner* in 1913 effectively demonstrated organized labour’s disappointment with T.W. Crothers following his visit to Cape Breton to investigate industrial conditions. The Sydney Trades and Labor Council was particularly critical of the minister’s visit because instead of joining with the Council or other representatives of labour to investigate the conditions of workers, Crothers was accompanied by the parliamentary representative of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, the ex-MP for that constituency, and the controller of the same corporation. The minister, at a later stage, did accept the Council’s invitation to attend its meeting and talk about the objective of his visit and his observations. After watching Crothers dodge questions on working conditions in the Dominion Coal Company and the Nova Scotia Steel Company and evasively comment on collective bargaining, the eight-hour day, trade unionism, and the minimum wage, a delegate from the Council remarked, “Another instance of Pilate washing his hands.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰*Industrial Banner*, 18 April 1919.

⁵¹*Industrial Banner*, 18 April 1919.

⁵²*Industrial Banner*, 18 April 1919.

⁵³*Industrial Banner*, March 1911.

⁵⁴*Industrial Banner*, 13 March 1914.

⁵⁵*Industrial Banner*, 26 December 1913.

Labour leaders also drew on Jesus' teachings and other biblical lessons and characters to illustrate the effectiveness of labour unions and to underline that workers themselves were the agents that would effect a more just and equitable society. An article entitled "Trade Unionism Stands for the Open Door" tried to impress upon wage earners the need to join trade unions by noting the similarities between unionism and the early church. Both were wide open to new members; trade union organizers were the missionaries preaching the benefits of affiliation; both provided better improved conditions through brotherly cooperation and mutual assistance; both uplifted moral standards; and both faced the malevolence of and persecution by bitter opponents.⁵⁶ While labour leaders did not hesitate to identify with the early churches, they argued that the present churches, while providing important theories like the Golden Rule and the law of love, lacked legitimacy because they were not solving social and economic problems. Trade unionism, on the other hand, was a legitimate institution because it was acting out the teachings of the Bible. For example, by emancipating children from exploitive labour practices, trade unionism was obeying the command, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"; "Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."⁵⁷ Also, in contrast to the churches, trade unionists were responding to the call of the workers who "want to enjoy life now and here. They have no objection to occupying mansions in Heaven after they have passed from this mundane sphere, but they can't see why they don't have a few Heavenly conditions lying around in this year of grace 1911."⁵⁸ By securing workers better homes, better food, and better clothing labour leaders claimed to be bringing about the conditions of heaven on earth.⁵⁹ It was its attention to human issues that organized labour identified itself as "seeking to establish the 'Brotherhood of Man'," which was vital to "perpetuating the belief in the 'Fatherhood of God'."⁶⁰ Like the Knights of Labor and earlier Christian socialists, labour leaders in the early 20th century emphasized the value of labour unions and depicted them as the true model of Christianity.⁶¹

Socialists also drew on an activist Christianity to frame their calls for an alternative society. *Cotton's Weekly*, on several occasions, identified socialism with Christianity, stating that "socialism is simply applied Christianity. The golden rule applied to every day life"⁶² or that socialism "has for its foundations the very ele-

⁵⁶ *Industrial Banner*, January 1906, October 1911.

⁵⁷ *Industrial Banner*, October 1911.

⁵⁸ *Industrial Banner*, August 1911.

⁵⁹ *Industrial Banner*, August 1911.

⁶⁰ *Industrial Banner*, October 1911.

⁶¹ Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be*, 311-312; McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, 6.

⁶² *Cotton's Weekly*, 25 February 1909.

ments of Christianity.”⁶³ It also noted that “the ethics of socialism are identical with the ethics of Christianity”⁶⁴ and “socialism is Christianity put into practice.”⁶⁵ Socialists also noted the parallels between their experiences and the life of Jesus.⁶⁶ An article entitled “Christianity and the Working Class Movement” provided an interpretation of the death of Jesus from the point of view of workers. It argued that Jesus was crucified not because he declared himself the son of God but because his teachings of righteousness and his call to end the then-existing dispensation instilled in the common people a sense of their own dignity and a spirit of independence. Because his teachings were stirring up the people, Jesus was considered a threat to the ruling class and his teachings were subsequently depicted as subversive, and he was crucified. Like Jesus’ teachings, socialist doctrines were depicted by the capitalist class as subversive and some socialists, like the Haymarket anarchists, were killed as a consequence.⁶⁷

Socialists also used certain biblical passages to support their ultimate goal of a cooperative commonwealth. An article entitled “Jesus and Union” contributed by H.H. Stuart of Newcastle, New Brunswick, who founded the Fredericton Socialist League, argued that the apostles, in following the teachings of Jesus, set out to abolish class distinctions. Socialists just had to refer to Acts 2 verses 42, 44, and 45 for verification: “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things he possessed were his own but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked ... And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”⁶⁸ Stuart argued that if the principles taught by the apostles were applied to modern conditions, the class distinctions evident in the relations between landlord and tenant, employer and employee, and lender and borrower would be abolished and replaced by a cooperative commonwealth.⁶⁹

In early 20th-century Canada, labour leaders articulated an activist Christianity that helped them to understand and construct the real world issues they were concerned about. Labour leaders drew on scriptures to challenge exploitive employment practices and profiteering and to achieve a greater solidarity among workers. Casting scabs and non-union label users in the role of Judas and the Minis-

⁶³ *Cotton's Weekly*, 4 March 1909.

⁶⁴ *Cotton's Weekly*, 11 March 1909.

⁶⁵ *Cotton's Weekly*, 13 February 1913. See also Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy,” v, 278.

⁶⁶ Other historians have also looked at socialists’ references to Jesus Christ and the parallels they made between his experiences and the experiences of socialists. See Winters, *The Soul of the Wobblies*, 16, 62, 76; Currie, “The Religious Views of Eugene Debs,” 154.

⁶⁷ *Cotton's Weekly*, 7 August 1913.

⁶⁸ *Cotton's Weekly*, 1 April 1909.

⁶⁹ *Cotton's Weekly*, 1 April 1909. For additional examples of how socialists reconciled religious ideas to their own goals see Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy,” 86, 89, 93.

ter of Labour in the role of Pilate was not only an effective way to illustrate to workers who their adversaries were, but an attempt to persuade those workers who were crossing picket lines or not buying union label products to join in solidarity with organized workers. Labour leaders also underscored the distinctiveness of their labour gospel, arguing that it did not simply theorize but acted on Christian teaching, working to end the injustices of the industrial capitalist system and improve the material lives of workers.

An article published in the *Industrial Banner* in April 1919 entitled “Our Easter Sermon” encapsulates why both trade unionists and socialists were so inclined to draw on the example of Jesus:

Labor and Socialists at the Easter time, regardless of theological beliefs, can pay homage to the lowly Carpenter of Nazareth, the Labor Leader, the Social Reformer, who raised the flag of economic freedom for the workers of this day, who up to that time, since the crushing of the Big strike at the building of Solomon’s Temple, had no great leader to espouse their cause. To-day the Labor and Socialist movement is the Spirit of the Ages brought up to date. It is the voice in the wilderness preparing the way and making the paths straight for general economic justice.⁷⁰

What is important about the previous quotation is not only the reference to Jesus but the writer’s inclusion of the phrase “regardless of theological beliefs.” It sheds light on a point of contention between historians in Canada who question whether the use of religious language meant that Christianity was a major source of labour leader’s thinking or implied strong religious belief.⁷¹ Craig Heron in his examination of labourism in Canada admits that religious imagery permeated labourist rhetoric but argues that working-class leaders drew on this imagery to express their politics because it was part of a public discourse. Indeed, for some labour leaders the Bible was a useful source to provide an inspirational message of an alternative society or to legitimize their struggles to bring about social and economic change. But, he argues, it was the secular influence of working-class liberalism more than the Bible that provided the moral basis of working-class politics. Lynne Marks, in her examination of the religious beliefs and practices of the Knights of Labor in late 19th-century Ontario, challenges Heron’s claim that the use of religious imagery simply meant that organized labour accepted a common mode of discourse; instead she contends that the Order’s use of religious rhetoric was more than a matter of tactics and an acceptance of discourse, it indicated acceptance of the basic tenets of

⁷⁰*Industrial Banner*, 18 April 1919.

⁷¹Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” 64. James Naylor goes even further and argues that the Southern Ontario labour movement did not regularly use religious themes to legitimize activities. See Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 88.

Christianity.⁷² Kevin Brushett, in his study of Joseph Marks, provides additional insight on this debate. He challenges Heron's distinction between a secular and sacred liberalism, arguing that the application of Christian teachings to trade unionism and socialism and the belief in a new age of Christianity not only demonstrated that Christian morality influenced liberalism, socialism, and radicalism but that they were considered inseparable from Christian morality.⁷³

It would be presumptuous to make any conclusive statements about the extent of religious belief on the basis of labour leaders' use of religious language alone. It is more useful to start with the notion that religion was indeed present in the labour movement and to accept that there were different and overlapping reasons why labour leaders decided to frame their demands for social and economic reform and recognition of trade unionism and socialism in religious terms. First, some labour leaders no doubt used this language because they held strong religious beliefs and accepted a non-sectarian, activist Christianity.⁷⁴ That organized labour regularly drew on the Bible for its moral critique of industrial capitalist society demonstrates that although religion may not have been the only source of labour leaders' morality, it was a powerful one. It also suggests that at least some of these leaders agreed with many Christian values. It is not surprising that labour leaders took examples from the Bible. As several British historians have noted, the Bible was an important part of the daily lives of these leaders in their childhood years. Arguably, it was the most widely read publication in most working-class communities and work-

⁷²Marks, "The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army," 103-110. American historians have also argued that Christianity was a vital part of the foundation of the Order. See Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 79 and 84; Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*, 99-100.

⁷³See Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 38-39. Jama Jazerow, in his examination of the role religion played in the lives of workers in Antebellum America, similarly argues that the equality espoused in the Declaration of Independence and the republican heritage of the American Revolution were based on faith in God and Christianity. See Jazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America*, 180.

⁷⁴There is a rich historiography in Britain that identifies the religious upbringing of labour and socialist leaders and demonstrates how Christianity continued to powerfully shape labour and socialist thought. See, for example, Knox, "Religion and the Scottish Labour Movement, 609-630; Ainsworth, "Religion in the Working Class Community," 354-380; Yeo, "Christianity in Chartist Struggle," 109-139; Jowitt, "Religion and the Independent Labour Party," 121-134. In the United States see Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement"; Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*; Jazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America*. In Canada see Knowles, "Christ in the Crownsnest," 57-72; Marks, "The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army," 89-127; Allen, *The Social Passion*, 13-14, 82-103; Frank, *J.B. McLachlan*, 38, 172-174, 276; Campbell, *Canadian Marxists*, 34, 37, 125, 224; McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, xiii, xiv, 5, 57-58; Craig Heron, "Working-Class Hamilton, 1895-1930," PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, 1981, 615-18; Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 4-5; Brushett, "Labour's Forward Movement," 38; Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 88.

ing-class children would have been made familiar with this text at Sunday School, state-funded elementary school, or home.⁷⁵

Second, labour newspaper editors may have interpreted and constructed the injustices in industrial capitalist society as Christian problems and characterized labour unionism and socialism as the embodiment of Christian teaching because they believed their readers strongly identified with Christianity.⁷⁶ This may explain why the labour press was so careful not to be identified as irreligious; it realized that an outright rejection of religion could alienate potential supporters.⁷⁷

Third, it is also likely that labour leaders recognized that using Christian ethics to form its critique of society was an effective way to demonstrate to those readers who were not from the working class that their struggle against the social and economic injustices pervading society was a legitimate one.⁷⁸ As we will see later, clergymen in Ontario received the *Industrial Banner*.

Finally, labour leaders may have viewed the Bible as a useful tool to make workers aware of the need to make changes to the existing industrial capitalist system and instill certain collective values and promote working-class solidarity. This last reason follows the argument of British historian, Chris Waters, who examines the attempt by socialists to transform popular culture in late Victorian Britain. According to Waters, socialists realized that if they were going to successfully create an alternative society they had to not only transform the existing political and economic systems but the cultural system as well.⁷⁹ This cultural transformation re-

⁷⁵See S.C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880-1939* (Oxford 1999), Chapter 6; Ainsworth, "Religion in the Working Class Community," 362-363, 370; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London 2001), 141-143. The Cape Breton radical labour leader, J.B. McLachlan, read the Bible on Sundays with his family and carried a pocket edition of the New Testament with him. See Frank, *J.B. McLachlan*, 124, 183, 276; Colin McKay, a socialist, who wrote prolifically for various labour papers in Canada was also familiar with scripture from attending Sunday School as a child. See McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada*, xiv. Marxist socialist Arthur Mould was a Methodist lay preacher in England. See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists*, 124.

⁷⁶See Marks, "The Knights of Labor and the Salvation Army," 103.

⁷⁷Graham Johnson in his study of the British Marxist party, the Social Democratic Federation, argues that the SDF downplayed the atheist views of some of its prominent members and concluded that Socialism and Christianity were not antagonistic because it did not want to alienate potential members. See Johnson, "British Social Democracy and Religion," 101-104.

⁷⁸See Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 197-198.

⁷⁹Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Manchester 1990), 13. Peter Campbell in his study of Canadian Marxists also notes how socialists in their attempts to build an alternative culture did not create new theories, categories, and language, but borrowed them from the existing capitalist society and reinvented them to further their cause. Marxists, for example, did not totally reject psychology, but invented a "working-class psychology." See Campbell, *Canadian Marxists*, 74.

quired socialists to make workers aware of the need to change the existing system and to instill in them a collective faith of self-improvement, self-culture, and self-discipline.⁸⁰ Socialists believed that one way they could reach workers was through leisure, and they subsequently worked to construct an alternative form of leisure that would become the foundation of a socialist culture.⁸¹ In order to construct this alternative, socialists drew on many of the values of the dominant culture and transformed and extended specific cultural idioms already familiar to workers.⁸²

If we follow this argument, religious discourse was present in the labour press in early 20th-century Canada because moderate and radical labour leaders understood that one way they could effectively reach workers with their message was through religion. The activist Christianity that labour leaders drew on to interpret and construct labour issues helped make workers aware of the injustices of the industrial capitalist system and cultivate in them a desire to change this system. The depiction of Jesus, particularly the emphasis on his humble origins and experience as a worker, his message of brotherhood and righteousness, and his tenacity in challenging the inequities of the ruling system of the day underlined the dignity of labour and the values of self-determination, mutual assistance, and community responsibility.⁸³ By characterizing themselves as the agents that would establish a just social and economic system or the kingdom of God on earth, trade unionists and socialists also importantly demonstrated to workers that they would only advance by their own efforts. An editorial in *Cotton's Weekly* in 1908 insightfully reflects on how Jesus' teachings have been effectively appropriated to maintain or challenge power:

Each dominant class wants to monopolize Christ, or rather each class wants to put its own construction upon the teachings of Christ. Thus in slave days in the South the southern planters declared that Christ approved of slavery. In the middle ages the feudal lords considered themselves as the representatives of Christ upon earth and consequently whatever they did was backed up by Christ's authority.⁸⁴

In the early 20th century, labour leaders articulated an activist Christianity that helped them frame the social and economic problems that were of concern to them. This labour gospel was distinctive to the working class and became part of these leaders' attempts to change the industrial capitalist society.

⁸⁰Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 187.

⁸¹Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 15.

⁸²Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 94 and 116.

⁸³Weir makes a similar argument about the Knights of Labor and the practical Christianity it espoused. See Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*, 100. Winters argues that the IWW borrowed hymn tunes, hymn singing, camp meeting, and revivals to more effectively convey their points and build solidarity. See Winters, *The Soul of the Wobblies*, 29.

⁸⁴*Cotton's Weekly*, 24 December 1908.

The Churches as Labour's Allies

In 1911 the *Industrial Banner* acknowledged the friendship between organized labour and the churches when it responded to a letter published in the *Globe* by Moses Baritz, organizer for the Socialist Party of Canada. Baritz had challenged the statement of Methodist Superintendent S.D. Chown that socialism was founded upon the teachings of Christ. Not only was socialism opposed to all religions, according to Baritz, but all religions would be abolished with the establishment of a socialist regime. While the *Industrial Banner* assured its readers that Baritz was entitled to his private opinion, it chastised him for antagonizing the church, a force that was friendly to the labour movement.⁸⁵ This defensive response by the *Industrial Banner* is not surprising given that its editor was among the few labour leaders who saw building alliances with progressive clergymen in the Protestant churches as a practical and effective way to secure middle-class support for labour reforms.⁸⁶ While the presence of this cross-class alliance must be appreciated, it is important to point out that the labour leaders I refer to below were, for the most part, from Southern Ontario, their efforts to build an alliance was most evident in the years leading up to World War I, and their alliance with the churches was tenuous as a result of deep divisions between labour and the churches on a number of issues.

The literature on social Christianity in dealing with the alliances that developed between labour and the churches has centred on the “radical” social gospellers in the West — namely J.S. Woodsworth, William Irvine, William Ivens, Salem Bland, and A.E. Smith.⁸⁷ Dominating this discussion has been the disaffection of these men from the major Protestant churches,⁸⁸ their involvement in the Winnipeg

⁸⁵*Industrial Banner*, January 1911.

⁸⁶Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” 64; Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy,” 390. Penton, in his study of William Cotton, argues that Marxist socialists disliked Christian social reformers because they were a rival movement, competing with them for the same constituency. While both groups denounced privileged access to wealth, Marxist socialists characterized the activities of Christian social reformers as a bourgeois attempt to hinder the socialist movement. See Penton, “The Ideas of William Cotton,” 146. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue that women’s organizations, labour leaders, and agrarian reformers allied with church leaders because the cultural authority and national prestige of the church protected these groups from criticism. See Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal & Kingston 1996), 108.

⁸⁷Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959); Tom Mitchell, “From the Social Gospel to ‘the Plain Bread of Leninism’: A.E. Smith’s Journey to the Left in the Epoch of Reaction After World War I,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 33 (Spring 1993); A.R. Allen, “Salem Bland and the Social Gospel of Canada,” MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1961; Allen, *The Social Passion*, Chapter 5.

⁸⁸Out of these five men, Salem Bland was the only one who continued his ministry in the Methodist Church. Irvine left the Presbyterian Church in 1916. Woodsworth and Ivens left the Methodist Church in 1918 and Smith in 1919. There is some debate as to the reasons why

Strike,⁸⁹ their formation of the People's Church and labour churches,⁹⁰ and their venture into labour politics.⁹¹ The emphasis on these clergymen in the West has skewed our understanding of the relationship between labour and the churches in two important ways. First, it has concealed the admirable efforts of clergymen in other parts of Canada who boldly spoke out in favour of labour and shared many of the views of the "radical" social gospellers. Second, it has downplayed the alliances that developed between the reformist wing of the labour movement and socially conscious churches and clergymen.⁹² Labour historians, on the other hand, while acknowledging labour's motives for allying with the churches, have overlooked some of these alliances, especially at the local level, and overstated the ideological differences between these two groups.⁹³

Before World War I, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada [TLCC] and labour leaders in Southern Ontario allied with various church bodies and clergymen because they saw this collaboration as an opportunity to assist the advancement of labour. One of the first examples of cooperation between organized labour and the churches was between the TLCC and the Lord's Day Alliance [LDA], an organization formed by the Protestant churches in 1889 which sought legislation to secure the

these men left the church. McNaught argues that Woodsworth and Ivens left the Methodist Church because their social outlook conflicted with the more cautious and conservative views of the church. See McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, 97-98. Allen dismisses this contention and argues that while these ministers encountered hostile congregants at the local level, the higher courts of the church supported them and that it was on their own initiative that they became further separated from the church. The pacifist views of Ivens and Woodsworth were also important factors in their disaffection from the church. See Allen, *The Social Passion*, 48, 54. Christie and Gauvreau attribute this disaffection to the peculiar political relationships, specifically the dominance of conservatives within Winnipeg Methodism at that time. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 33.

⁸⁹See Allen, *The Social Passion*, Chapter 5; McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, Chapter 8.

⁹⁰William Ivens left the church and formed a labour church in Winnipeg in 1918. A.E. Smith established a People's Church in Brandon, Manitoba, in 1919.

⁹¹Woodsworth represented the Independent Labor Party at the national level throughout the 1920s. He was also leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. A.E. Smith joined the Dominion Labor Party and won the Brandon riding in the Manitoba provincial election of 1920. He was defeated in 1922. He joined the Communist Party in 1925.

⁹²Although religious historians have recognized some of these alliances, they have failed to look at these alliances from the point of view of labour. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, Chapter 3. There was a small group of Christian socialists including clergymen and some leading trade unionists who formed alliances outside of the established churches. The Christian Socialist Fellowship in 1914 and Church of Social Revolution founded by W.E.S. James in 1915 were two examples of this alliance. Christian socialism, however, had died out by 1919. See Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 88-90.

⁹³See Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," 62-64; Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 88-90.

day of rest.⁹⁴ Seeing that both groups had similar aims, labour wanted workers to have one free day from work and the Alliance wanted one free day to worship, organized labour not only lent a supportive voice but several prominent labour advocates were members of the alliance which was successful in securing the passage of the Lord's Day Act in 1906.⁹⁵ Cooperation between these two groups continued after this legislation was passed. Representatives of the LDA received high words of praise from labour leaders for their support of labour initiatives and were warmly welcomed at the meetings of local trades and labour Councils. The *Industrial Banner* praised the Alliance for its "commendable willingness to co-operate with the Trade Union movement," noted that it was "an ardent and outspoken champion of the Saturday half-holiday," and pointed out that its General Secretaries J.G. Shearer⁹⁶ and T.A. Moore⁹⁷ sported union labels on their clothing, and that the official organ of the Alliance was printed in a union shop.⁹⁸ In 1907, the members of the Twin City Trades and Labor Council heartily applauded General Secretary Shearer after he gave an entertaining address.⁹⁹ Three years later, at a meeting of the Brantford Trades and Labor Council, Shearer mentioned the cooperation between

⁹⁴Sharon Meen, in her study of the Protestant churches' fight for the Sabbath, argues that in the mid-to-late 19th century there was no effort by the TLCC or the LDA to lobby one another, although organized labour did support Sabbath observance during this period. Starting in 1900, however, the LDA contacted labour groups and made an avid attempt to include workingmen in their membership. The LDA received strong support from labour in its Federal campaign in 1906. See Sharon Meen, "The Battle for the Sabbath: The Sabbatarian Lobby in Canada, 1890-1912," PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979, 39-40, 184, 216. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, in their examination of the efforts of the Protestant churches to prohibit the Sunday street car in Toronto in the late 19th century, disclose that the initial support of the TLCC supported the efforts of the LDA. See Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company* (Toronto 1977), 61-62.

⁹⁵John Tweed, president of the TLCC and four of his executive members, as well as D.J. O'Donoghue, were members of the Ontario Lord's Day Alliance. Arthur Puttee, editor of the Manitoba labour newspaper, *The Voice*, was a member of the Manitoba Alliance board in 1902. Ralph Smith, the president of the TLCC (1898-1902) and MP for Nanaimo was president of the BC Alliance in 1904. See Meen, "The Battle for the Sabbath," 318. The TLCC's legal advisor and solicitor were also part of the delegation to Ottawa to support the Bill. See *Industrial Banner*, January 1906, November 1911.

⁹⁶Shearer had been involved in moral and social reform since the 1890s. He was head of social service of the Presbyterian Church and a key figure in the creation of Lord's Day Alliance and Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada. See Allen, *The Social Passion*, 31.

⁹⁷Like Shearer, Moore had been interested in moral and social reform since the 1890s. He was head of social service in the Methodist Church. See Allen, *The Social Passion*, 31-32.

⁹⁸*Industrial Banner*, January 1906. Similar words of praise were expressed in the *Industrial Banner* a year later following the enactment of the Lord's Day Act. See the *Industrial Banner*, May 1907, January 1909.

⁹⁹*Industrial Banner*, May 1907.

the Alliance and labour and told the audience that the Alliance supported the Saturday half-holiday and that he personally supported the five-day week.¹⁰⁰

Although labour exchanged fraternal delegates with the LDA and expressed enthusiasm for its support of labour initiatives, labour leaders made it clear that their support of one day free from work was based on economic not religious grounds.¹⁰¹ Commenting on legislation to secure the day of rest, the *Industrial Banner* in 1906 stated that this legislation was “absolutely necessary for the welfare of the working masses.” This legislation should be supported, it continued, not on religious grounds but because workers have a right to have one day of rest to spend as they desire.¹⁰² Commenting on the enactment of the Lord’s Day Act¹⁰³ the following year, the paper reiterated that labour supported the passage of the bill on economic not religious grounds and added that “the act compels no man to go to church or be religious, but it does guarantee that he shall have the right to enjoy his home and get acquainted with his family one day every week.”¹⁰⁴ The *Industrial Banner* was trying to be neutral on the question of religion as labour unions were made up of Protestants, Catholics, a large number of non-Christians like Jews who regarded Saturday as their sacred day, adherents of other religions, as well as free thinkers.¹⁰⁵

Cooperation between labour leaders and the church continued in the church-led Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada [MSRCC].¹⁰⁶ Like the LDA,

¹⁰⁰ *Industrial Banner*, June 1910. Meen explains that organized labour supported the churches in their fight for a day of rest because the churches would, in turn, give their support for the labour’s petition for a shorter work week. See Meen, “The Battle for the Sabbath,” 42, 185.

¹⁰¹ Organized labour supported the Sabbatarian cause because they were concerned that the seven-day work-week would spread to other businesses and that labour would still only get paid for six days of work. The fight for the Sunday day of rest was also part of its attempt to have a shorter work-week, which included a Saturday half-holiday and eventually a four-day week. See Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 62; Meen, “The Battle for the Sabbath,” 42, 119; Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy,” 280. After 1900, the LDA de-emphasized the religious aims of its cause in order to attract organized labour although it still was primarily a religious organization and its leadership supported the cause for religious reasons. See Meen, “The Battle for the Sabbath,” 184, 186, 197.

¹⁰² *Industrial Banner*, January 1906.

¹⁰³ The Dominion Lord’s Day Act came into force throughout Canada 1 March 1907.

¹⁰⁴ *Industrial Banner*, January 1907.

¹⁰⁵ *Industrial Banner*, January 1906, August 1908.

¹⁰⁶ The MSRCC was later named the Social Service Council of Canada in 1913. To avoid confusion I will use MSRCC to represent both. The MSRCC was established in 1907 and included a wide range of social reform groups including the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, farmers’ organizations, the National Council of Women, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Although the initial aim of this body was to pressure the government to pass temperance legislation, its scope widened to include numerous social issues that were important to organized labour like the conditions of sweated labour. It also worked to obtain

several prominent labour leaders were members of the MSRCC. Representing the TLCC at the meetings of the MSRCC between 1908 and 1915 were a number of presidents including Montréal Labour MP Alphonse Verville, William Glockling, BC socialist J.C. Watters, as well as other executive members of the TLCC including Vice-President James Simpson, Secretary-Treasurer Paddy Draper, and Solicitor John G. O'Donoghue. Hamilton's labour MPP Allan Studholme, the leader of the Toronto District Labor Council Fred Bancroft, and leader of the plumbers' union John W. Bruce.¹⁰⁷

Clergymen representing the MSRCC were also welcomed at the annual meetings of the TLCC. The most prominent church leader at these meetings was Presbyterian minister J.G. Shearer, secretary of the MSRCC, who formally addressed the Congress on several occasions. That the members of the Congress respected Shearer for his efforts to narrow the gulf between labour and the church was evident in the warm reception he received at their annual meetings. At the annual meeting in 1907, Shearer thanked the Congress for its support of the Lord's Day Act and proceeded to suggest that fraternal delegates speak at the Presbyterian Synod in Winnipeg and at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. After the minister "resumed his seat amidst applause," Mr. O'Donoghue, Solicitor of the Congress, commented that the LDA and Rev. Shearer were the best friends labour had.¹⁰⁸

Shearer received a similar reception at the annual meeting the following year in Halifax when "the Congress with the closest attention" listened to him invite active cooperation between organized labour and the Department of Moral and Social Reform of the Presbyterian Church. He concluded his address by asking the members of the Congress to consider accepting clergymen as honorary members who would obviously not have the right to vote but could participate in discussions on the floor and, speaking for himself, be glad to pay membership dues. Not only did Shearer receive applause and cheers, his request was received with cries of "we'll send around the organizer."¹⁰⁹ Shearer was not the only church representative to receive a positive reception from the Congress. Methodist minister, T.A. Moore, as-

the equitable distribution of wealth, fought against poverty, and favoured the arbitration of industrial disputes. In the 1920s the Council broadened its scope to include child welfare, old age pensions, and unemployment insurance. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 198, 208-209.

¹⁰⁷Several of these leaders were represented on the various committees of the MSRCC. Studholme and Simpson were members of the Committee for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, Studholme was a member of the Political Purity Committee, and John Bruce was a member of the Committee on Marriage, Divorce and Mormonism. NA, Canadian Council of Churches, Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada Minutes; NA, Canadian Council of Churches, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Social Service Council.

¹⁰⁸*Report of Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1907, 37.

¹⁰⁹*Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1908, 73.

sistant secretary of the MSRCC, attended the Congress' annual meeting in 1912. Although his main purpose in attending the meeting was to discuss the report on Social Service, he told the members that he believed men had the right to organize and he had used his pulpit to express this belief. Referring to the words and actions of Moore, President J.C. Watters stated, "'May his tribe increase' ... and if every minister would give expression to the same sentiments conditions would change for the better."¹¹⁰

Alliances between labour leaders and the church were not only taking place at the national level, labour bodies in Southern Ontario also encouraged cooperation with church bodies and progressive clergymen. The *Industrial Banner* reported on a meeting of the Independent Labor Party in London in 1908, making special note of Rev. Inkster, who expressed his desire to join the party, citing his sympathy with the aims of the organization. The report proceeded to encourage members of the industrial and social reform organizations to unite, stating "it might be well if the social reformers in other parts of Canada would take similar action. Instead of pulling apart, the time has come to move together in unison. Therein lies the future hope of labor."¹¹¹ During his pastorate in Brantford, Congregational minister W.E. Gilroy addressed the Brantford Trades and Labor Council where he not only denounced the working conditions of female workers and the lack of enforcement of the factories act, but boldly challenged the discrepancy between the profits of Brantford factories and the wages received by workers at those factories. When he was later minister at First Congregational in Hamilton, he spoke at a mass meeting of striking machinists in the city in 1916, addressed meetings of the Socialists and ILP of East Hamilton, and was asked by the Brantford ILP to run as a candidate for their party in the 1917 Federal election.¹¹²

Labour leaders also attended the meetings of various local church bodies and used church platforms to publicize and educate people on labour issues. In March 1908, members of the London Trades and Labor Council attended the regular meeting of the Ministerial Alliance in that city where both groups agreed that cooperation would benefit both sides.¹¹³ James Simpson on a number of occasions used church space to talk about labour issues. He talked to United Bible classes in Brampton about the purpose and power of the labour movement and, as managing director of the Labor Educational Publishers Limited, delivered an address on the subject of "Industrial Relations" before the Ministerial Association of Hamilton.¹¹⁴ Simpson, along with other labour leaders, like Labour MLA Allan Studholme, Ham-

¹¹⁰*Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada 1912*, 75.

¹¹¹*Industrial Banner*, December 1908.

¹¹²Melissa Turkstra, "Social Christianity and the Working Class in English Canada, 1900-1930," PhD thesis, York University, 2005, 211, 218-220.

¹¹³*Industrial Banner*, May 1908.

¹¹⁴*Industrial Banner*, 8 April 1914, 9 January 1920.

ilton labourist Harry Halford, *Labour News* editor Samuel Landers, Hamilton labour politician Walter Rollo, and labour spokeswoman Laura Hughes spoke at non-denominational Sunday afternoon men's meetings at First Congregational and Knox Presbyterian churches in Hamilton.¹¹⁵

In addition to cooperating with labour-friendly church bodies and clergymen, the labour press praised enlightened ministers who aggressively spoke out against the social injustices in society. The clergyman who received the most attention in the labour press was Charles Stelzle, head of the Department of Church and Labor and the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the US. Both the *Industrial Banner* and *Labor News* published the weekly articles Stelzle wrote for the American and Canadian labour press throughout the early 20th century. There were several reasons why he received such favourable attention from organized labour. Not only did he spend his childhood living in tenement housing in the Bowery, at the age of eight he started working in a cigar factory and later worked as a machinist and joined the International Association of Machinists.¹¹⁶ When he became a minister, he made the working class his priority. He was a staunch supporter of organized labour and spoke out against the exploitation of women and children, and supported workers' right to collective bargaining and the equitable distribution of the products of industry.¹¹⁷ Like organized labour, he promoted the church's involvement in solving present-day problems because they were moral and religious problems.¹¹⁸ That the labour press in Canada held the utmost respect for Stelzle was illustrated in its announcements of his pending visits to Hamilton and London.¹¹⁹ The *Industrial Banner* in October 1909 reported that Stelzle would be speaking at the YMCA and First Presbyterian Church and proceeded to tell union men that they should make an effort to see him.¹²⁰ In December 1912 the *Labor News* informed Hamilton's wage earners that Stelzle was scheduled to speak at Knox Presbyterian Church in the middle of January and told them that they would enjoy his addresses.¹²¹ The labour press also showed unwavering support for the minister when the Presbyterian Church in the US accused him of being a socialist writer. In re-

¹¹⁵ A number of these meetings were advertised in the *Labor News*. See *Labor News*, 28 November 1912, 6 December 1912, 13 December 1912, 20 December 1912, 27 December 1913, 6 November 1914, 10 November 1916. The Pleasant Sunday Afternoon [PSA] meeting was a non-denominational meeting for men to discuss political and social issues. Woodsworth attended PSA meetings in England during his visit. In Winnipeg he established the People's Forum Movement. See McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, 12, 44.

¹¹⁶ For an overview of Stelzle's life see, Charles Stelzle, *A Son of the Bowery: The Life Story of An East Side American* (New York 1926).

¹¹⁷ *Labor News*, 18 October 1912, 15 November 1912.

¹¹⁸ *Labor News*, 12 July 1912.

¹¹⁹ *Industrial Banner*, October 1909; *Labor News*, 13 December 1912; *Labor News*, 2 January 1914.

¹²⁰ *Industrial Banner*, October 1909.

¹²¹ *Labor News*, 13 December 1912.

sponding to these charges, the *Labor News* duly noted that “he has addressed more workingmen on religious and social subjects in the United States during the past five years, than perhaps any other preacher in America.”¹²² It was because of this tireless effort that the paper could unreservedly state that “Labor in the United States and Canada stands with Stelzle”¹²³ and characterized him as “a dependable and able champion of the people and their cause.”¹²⁴ A report on Stelzle’s visit to Hamilton in March 1914 published in the women’s column of the *Labor News* best captures his appeal to workers: “Mr. Stelzle thoroughly understands the problems with which he deals and speaks as one having authority, the authority of personal experience of the conditions and needs of the vast army of workingmen whose cause he so ably advocates.”¹²⁵

Although Stelzle was the model clergymen in the eyes of the labour press, labour newspapers did not hesitate to sing the praises of those clergymen in Canada who were boldly supporting labour initiatives. The writer of the “Labor World” column in the Toronto labour paper, the *Toiler*, the official organ of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, made note of the work of W.E. Gilroy, at that time pastor of Broadview Avenue Congregational. In 1902 Gilroy attended a meeting held in the interests of James Simpson who was running as a socialist candidate in the East Toronto campaign. The writer commended the minister for his “thorough conception of the present condition of the human family” and his ability to make his sermons understandable to his listeners. An increase in the number of men like Gilroy in the pulpits, continued the writer, would not only get rid of the bad influence of the wealthy few in the church, it would draw willing workers to the church again “to what should be the house of refuge from the tyranny and greed of those who have crowned money as kin this world.”¹²⁶ Ten years later the *Industrial Banner* admitted:

In many instances today the sermons preached have taken just as strong and pronounced ground as even the most advanced Labor agitators have assumed. We believe there is a growing tendency on the part of clergymen and prominent church workers to recognize the social injustices that exist and to be honestly seeking for a solution to them.¹²⁷

Cotton’s Weekly reported on the efforts of Byron Stauffer who scolded his wealthy Toronto congregation for displaying their wealth when workers, particularly women, did not receive a living wage. It commended Stauffer for a sermon that was “different from the usual pulpit dope dished out.”¹²⁸ Organized labour was also im-

¹²² *Labor News*, 20 September 1912.

¹²³ *Labor News*, 20 September 1912.

¹²⁴ *Labor News*, 25 October 1912.

¹²⁵ *Labor News*, 6 March 1914.

¹²⁶ *Toiler*, 30 May 1902.

¹²⁷ *Industrial Banner*, January 1912.

¹²⁸ *Cotton’s Weekly*, 30 January 1913.

pressed when ministers joined together to support labour. The *Industrial Banner*, for example, printed the following resolution adopted by the Winnipeg Ministerial Association:

To the Workers of Winnipeg and to the Trades and Labor Council, who by organized effort are seeking to lift the crushing burdens of the poor and to reduce the hardships and uphold the dignity of labor, this ministerial association sends congratulations upon the progress which the cause of labor has made, and conveys to them the greetings of human brotherhood and the pledge of sympathy, and of help in a cause which belongs to all who follow Christ.¹²⁹

Before World War I, labour leaders in the Southern Ontario labour movement built an alliance with progressive clergymen at the national and local levels; in the years directly following the war, these leaders were becoming more convinced that the churches, with their call for industrial democracy, were sincere in their sympathy for workers and their struggles. The resolutions of the Methodist Church in 1918 which called for a cooperative system of service to replace the present competitive system of profits elicited the most optimistic response from these leaders. An article in the 18 October 1918 issue of the *Labor News* entitled "Methodists Out for the Common People" and the headline of a 17 January 1919 issue of the *Industrial Banner*, "Far Reaching Pronouncement Outlines a Basis for Economic Reconstruction: A Great Church Insists That Business Shall Be Run No Longer For Corporation Profits,"¹³⁰ demonstrated that organized labour was encouraged by the radical recommendations of the Methodist Church.¹³¹ Labour leaders believed this call for social reconstruction would not only result in future cooperation with the churches but would inevitably lead to great political, economic, and industrial changes.¹³² That some of these leaders viewed the churches' statements with optimism was also evident in a statement in the *Labor News*: "If the Methodist ministers follow up the platform laid down by the Conference some of us fellows might have to start going to church again."¹³³

The alliance that was being built between progressive clergymen in the Protestant churches did not include all members of the labour movement, however; there were deep divisions between labour and the churches on a number of important issues. There were differences between organized labour and the churches on the Sabbatarian issue starting in the late 19th century. Although the TLCC initially

¹²⁹*Industrial Banner*, 3 October 1913.

¹³⁰*Industrial Banner*, 17 January 1919.

¹³¹*Labor News*, 18 October 1918. The other Protestant churches followed with similar recommendations and labour recognized their resolutions as well. See, for example, the *Industrial Banner's* recognition of the resolutions passed by the Eastern Association of Baptist Churches in 1919. *Industrial Banner*, 27 June 1919.

¹³²*Industrial Banner*, 14 March 1919.

¹³³*Labor News*, 25 October 1918.

endorsed the prohibition of Sunday street cars in Toronto in 1891, it was the conservative wing of the TLCC that joined forces with the LDA; workers in Toronto were strongly opposed to this prohibition. When the question of street cars arose again in subsequent years, the TLCC listened to their followers and did not support the Sabbatarian cause.¹³⁴ After the Lord's Day Act was passed in 1906, and especially after World War I, the differences between the two sides became apparent. Organized labour firmly believed that Sunday was a day for workers to do what they wanted, like attend sports.¹³⁵ Organized labour, in fact, became one of the major critics of the Alliance because of the Alliance's insistence on enforcing legislation and restricting recreation on Sundays.¹³⁶

An even greater obstacle undermining this alliance was the powerful opposition of radical members of the TLCC in the West.¹³⁷ As early as 1911 these members demonstrated that they were a serious force to be reckoned with, when they almost ended the Congress' affiliation with the MSRCC. At the annual meeting in Calgary in 1911, delegate McVety of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Congress and delegate Stubbs proposed an amendment to end affiliation with the Council. The amendment was narrowly defeated by a vote of 50 to 52.¹³⁸ Just four years later, at the annual meeting in Vancouver, the Congress again voted to withdraw from the Council. At this meeting delegates Peebles of Edmonton Local 53. Hotel and Restaurant Employees International Alliance, Naylor of the Cumberland Local United Mine Workers, Mansell of the Vancouver Local Bookbinders, Kramer of the Win-

¹³⁴Armstrong and Nelles, *The Revenge of the Methodist Bicycle Company*, 61-3, 102, 177; Meen, "The Battle for the Sabbath," 120-21. Homel in his study of James Simpson argues that there was not a serious interest of workers in the Lord's Day. Outside the exchange of a few delegates between the TLCC and LDA at their annual conventions there was little other activity. See Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 281-82.

¹³⁵See Barbara Schrodt, "Sabbatarianism and Sport in Canadian Society," *Journal of Sport History*, 24 (Spring 1977), 22-33; Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 282.

¹³⁶Meen, "The Battle for the Sabbath," 272.

¹³⁷Similar events were happening in the US. In March 1914 Local No. 6 of the International Typographical Union adopted a resolution which excluded representatives from church organizations at the conventions of the American Federation of Labor. It urged other affiliated trade unions to do the same. See *Labor News*, 20 February 1914. A few months later the central body of Milwaukee followed suit and passed a similar resolution. See *Labor News*, 22 May 1914. American historian Ken Fones-Wolf comments on this attempt to sever labour's alliance with the churches. See Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 120.

¹³⁸*Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Trades and Labor Congress of Canada 1911*, 96. The annual meeting of the TLCC was held in Calgary. At this meeting western delegates were able to pass a resolution endorsing industrial unionism and elected James Watters, a BC socialist, as president. See Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History* (Toronto 1996), 42.

nipeg Local Brewery Workers, and Wells of the Vancouver Trades and Labor Council recommended that the TLCC withdraw from the MSRCC because it went on record as favouring prohibition. Despite the strong opposition from James Simpson, the recommendation was adopted by a vote of 72 to 66.¹³⁹ What is important about the events of 1911 and 1915 is that both of these meetings were held in the West. Western delegates strategically introduced amendments to sever connections with the MSRCC when the TLCC meetings were scheduled in the West and consequently when more delegates would have been attending from this region. Not only are the events of 1911 and 1915 a good example of the divisiveness between the more radical western labour movement and the more moderate eastern labour movement that dominated the TLCC, they also suggest that religion may have been one of the factors that effectively expressed this division.¹⁴⁰ Although the western delegates had succeeded in formally severing ties between the TLCC and the MSRCC in 1915, a handful of more moderate labour leaders, all from Southern Ontario, continued to maintain ties with the Council and influence its program.¹⁴¹ TLCC President Tom Moore, James T. Gunn, a leader of the electrical workers, J.G. O'Donoghue, and James Simpson were members of the MSRCC's Committee on In-

¹³⁹ *Report of Proceedings of the Annual meeting of Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1915, 106-107. As Shearer pointed out to the members of the Congress in 1916, it was one of the provincial branches of the SSC that spoke out in favour of prohibition, an action that went against the policy of the Congress. *Report of Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1916, 118-119. This suggests that these delegates were looking for any reason to disconnect from the SSC.

¹⁴⁰ In his examination of late 19th-century Chicago, Bruce Nelson finds that the religious differences between religious and non-religious workers caused significant divisions within the working class. See Bruce Nelson, "Revival and Upheaval: Religion, Irreligion, and Chicago's Working Class in 1886," *Journal of Social History*, 25 (Winter 1991), 233-253. The divisiveness between eastern and western delegates of the TLCC continued to increase in subsequent years. At the TLCC annual convention in 1918, radical western delegates with the support of some eastern delegates presented the radical program of industrial unionism but were unsuccessful in their attack on the Congress leadership. They were defeated by the moderate craft unionists in central Canada who elected the more conservative carpenter union leader, Tom Moore, as president. The following year, radical western delegates committed to socialism and industrial unionism organized their own regional conference in Calgary in March and chose to secede from the TLCC and form a new militant organization, the One Big Union. See Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 168-169; Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 51.

¹⁴¹ Christie and Gauvreau fail to note the withdrawal of the TLCC from the Council in 1915. They argue that the TLCC continued to shape the reform program of the Social Service Council during and immediately after World War I. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 211-212.

dustrial Life and Immigration.¹⁴² Several labour leaders including Alfred W. Mance, secretary of the Toronto District Labour Council, and J.A.P. Haydon of the TLCC, Harry Fester of the Hamilton TLCC, Tom Moore, and J.T. Gunn contributed numerous labour articles to the Council's publication, *Social Welfare*.¹⁴³ Although the formal separation between the TLCC and MSRCC was a definite setback for those labour leaders who saw the practical advantages of an alliance with the churches, the most potent force preventing any long-term cooperation between these two groups was prohibition.

Prohibition was the most hotly contested form of moral critique of working-class life. While prohibition was one of the great moral crusades of the Protestant churches, for organized labour, it was an issue where there was a distinct difference of opinion. A number of labour leaders applauded the sober morality of Protestant religion, speaking out against drinking in saloons and some even supporting prohibition, particularly those who were members of the MSRCC.¹⁴⁴ Other labour leaders, however, resented the temperance societies that ignored the economic and social causes of drinking. Those who worked in the alcohol business were especially opposed to prohibitive measures like the reduction of licences because they feared losing their jobs. Many leaders also saw prohibition as class-biased legislation that targeted the social lives of working men. The only option for working men, they argued, was to drink in hotel saloons because they could not afford to drink at home or in private clubs. By World War I, organized labour vocally opposed prohibition and by 1919 was rallying around the demand for beer.¹⁴⁵ Organized labour's fight to drink moderately and responsibly collided with the demand by the Protestant churches for a dry regime and was another example of the divisions between churches and the labour movement.

If Sabbatarianism, prohibition, and East-West divisions in the Canadian labour movement led to increasing tension between the churches and the labour movement by World War I, the deterioration of the relationship between organized labour and the churches in the immediate post-war period can be attributed to the

¹⁴²NA, Canadian Council of Churches, Social Service Council Minutes — Committee on Industrial Life and Immigration.

¹⁴³*Social Welfare* 1 April 1919, June 1919, 1 August 1920, 1 March 1921, July/August 1921, 1 April 1922, 1 August 1922, September 1922, August 1927, August 1929; NA, Canadian Council of Churches, Social Service Council Minutes — Committee on Industrial Life and Immigration.

¹⁴⁴Simpson's deep commitment to prohibition was the result of his background as an artisan and Primitive Methodist. See Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy," 283-84.

¹⁴⁵See Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto 2003), 219-231; Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Democracy," 283-293. Homel notes that Simpson's efforts to place unionists in the MSRCC were a failure because those who were elected did not support licence reduction. See Homel, "James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Democracy," 432.

inability of the churches to act on their proclamations and a resurgent labour movement that relied less on middle-class support for labour's cause. Whether the church was in fact sincere in its proclamations would be tested in the summer of 1919 when the Methodist Church was forced to deal with the confrontation taking place between the wealthy officials at Broadway Methodist Church and their minister Salem Bland.¹⁴⁶ These wealthy officials attempted to oust Bland because he was attending workers' meetings. Such behaviour, the *Industrial Banner* believed, clearly contradicted the resolutions passed by the church the previous year. The paper proceeded to remind the church that similar sympathy toward wealthy congregants resulted in the formation of labour churches in Winnipeg and warned that if the church continued to remain silent on this issue, "there will be very fertile ground created for a Labor Church in Toronto."¹⁴⁷ The same month the *Labor Leader* reported that there was talk of starting a labour church that would more directly address how Christianity related to labour and that Bland would be the perfect candidate to fill the pulpit.¹⁴⁸ "In fighting and winning this encounter," writes historian Richard Allen, "Bland not only won a victory for the freedom of the pulpit and saved Methodist social policy from an implicit defeat, but he also demonstrated that the radical social gospel could win its battles with conservative interests within the church."¹⁴⁹ What is also telling about this event is that the reformist wing of the labour movement in Southern Ontario was beginning to show signs that it was losing faith in the ability of established churches to meet its needs.

Another event suggesting the weakening of the alliance between labour and the churches again involved Bland. This time it had to do with the release of his book, *The New Christianity, or The Religion of the New Age*, in the spring of 1920. Although this book received a mixed reaction in the church community, it was favourably received by organized labour.¹⁵⁰ In its review of the book, the *Industrial*

¹⁴⁶The Presbyterian minister William Irvine encountered backlash from the wealthy congregants at his post in Rainy River as did Methodist minister J.S. Woodsworth at Gibson's Landing in BC because of their social views and views of the war. Both ministers consequently resigned from the ministry. According to Allen, this was the result of the attitude of the congregation, not the higher courts of the church who supported both men. Although William Ivens was dismissed from his position at McDougall Church in Winnipeg, he was offered another station in Winnipeg. He requested a year without station to form a labour church, which was accepted by the stationing committee. Following the Winnipeg Strike, however, he was dismissed by the church. See Allen, *The Social Passion*, 46-54, 115.

¹⁴⁷*Industrial Banner*, 1 August 1919. This was a threatening statement as the Methodist church considered the Labour churches a real concern. See Allen, *The Social Passion*, 172-173.

¹⁴⁸*Labor Leader*, 1 August 1919.

¹⁴⁹Allen, *The Social Passion*, 149.

¹⁵⁰Allen, *The Social Passion*, 154-56. Causing the most controversy in church circles was Bland's view of the close interrelation of Protestantism and capitalism.

Banner recommended it to every trade unionist and member of the Labour Party and commented that it would provide workers with “a broader and more divine conception of the whole Labor movement.”¹⁵¹ Some of the major points highlighted in this review were Bland’s interpretation that labour was already essentially Christian because of its devotion to the fundamental principles of brotherhood and democracy, although it needed to become conscious that it was Christian and could only attain success if it followed Christian lines. It also noted Bland’s belief that the strife between capital and labour would never be resolved and that the only resolution was a new social order where workers replaced capitalists as the controllers of industry. The review commended Bland for his “courage and daring in the midst of so much orthodoxy,” arguing that it was “equal to that of his fellow Christian ministers in the West who considered it their duty to give up their pulpits and join in Labor’s ranks, throwing themselves into the economic struggle for the elimination of human misery and the maintenance of freedom and greater development thereof.”¹⁵² That the relations between organized labour and the churches were waning was not only evident in the review’s praise of those Christian ministers in the West who had left the church, but in its attitude that “Whether the book ‘starts something’ in church circles is a matter of minor consideration to Labor.”¹⁵³ What is clear about labour’s reaction to Bland’s book is that it was ready to ally itself with those Christian leaders who best conveyed labour’s views; whether these leaders were represented in the established churches or not seemed to be of little interest to labour. What is important about both the response of organized labour to Bland’s potential dismissal from Broadway Methodist Church and his book, *The New Christianity*, was the timing of this response.

The widening rift between organized labour and the churches came at a time when labour was more confident, united, and class conscious than ever before. Starting in 1916, and for the next four years, union membership rose rapidly and workers joined together in an unprecedented number of strikes.¹⁵⁴ The Winnipeg Strike and the general strikes taking place across Canada in May, June, and July of 1919 were a testament to the wave of nationwide resistance. This was also a period of increased radicalism in the labour movement, especially in the West, where at the Calgary Labour Conference in the early spring of 1918, the One Big Union was formed.¹⁵⁵ This resistance was accompanied by a renewed interest in independent political action. There was a significant increase in the number of independent la-

¹⁵¹*Industrial Banner*, 11 June 1920.

¹⁵²*Industrial Banner*, 11 June 1920.

¹⁵³*Industrial Banner*, 11 June 1920.

¹⁵⁴Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory Kealey, “Canadian Strike Statistics, 1891-1950,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (1987), 85-145; Heron, “National Contours: Solidarity and Fragmentation,” 269-70.

¹⁵⁵Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, “The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm,” in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada 1917-1925* (Toronto 1998), 177.

bour parties at both the municipal and provincial level. In Ontario, the Independent Labour Party joined the United Farmers of Ontario to form a coalition government in 1919.¹⁵⁶

The 1921 Toronto printers' strike was the final blow that ended the alliance between the churches and labour. At the centre of this conflict were the Methodist Book Room and its intransigent superintendent, S.W. Fallis, who refused to give in to the printers' demand for a 44-hour week. Adding fuel to this fire was the firm's decision to continue the operation of the plant on an open-shop basis. Not all Methodists, however, sided with the Book Room. In addition to criticizing Fallis's provocative actions, Ernest Thomas made a concerted attempt to bring the two sides to an agreement, although his efforts failed to end the strike.¹⁵⁷ The *Industrial Banner* reported that the officials at most of the churches were sympathetic toward the printers, one church even helped to distribute the circulars which outlined the strikers' side of the fight.¹⁵⁸ Salem Bland, at the Methodist General Conference held in 1922, denounced the "militant" action of the Book Room in its fight against the printers.¹⁵⁹ Despite the sympathy of local church officials, the representative bodies of the churches refused to take the side of the strikers. In 1922, the International Typographical Union sent a letter to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the General Conference of the Methodist Church to plead its case. The Union received a disappointing response from both denominations. C.W. Gordon of the Presbyterian Church, who had served on numerous IDIA boards and was at this time chair of the Council of Industry for Manitoba, stated that "it is not the function of the churches to provide the machinery for arriving at such decisions."¹⁶⁰ It was clear that the union also could not rely on the Methodist Church to solve this conflict. The Methodist Conference passed the letter along to the Book and Publishing Committee who regretted the conflict between the Union and the management of the Book Room but did not find any charge of unfairness.¹⁶¹

That this strike caused irreparable damage to the alliance between labour and the churches was clear. The *Labor News* argued that the actions of the Methodist Book Room contradicted the 1918 Methodist General Conference resolutions. The

¹⁵⁶ James Naylor, "Striking at the Ballot Box," in Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt*, 155-163.

¹⁵⁷ Allen, *The Social Passion*, 180-188.

¹⁵⁸ *Industrial Banner*, 5 August 1921.

¹⁵⁹ *Labor Leader*, 13 October 1922.

¹⁶⁰ Allen, *The Social Passion*, 193. The Council of Industry for Manitoba was created to prevent industrial conflict. It consisted of two representatives of labour, two of the Employers' Association and a chairman, who was outside of these two parties. All were appointed by the government. The Council's work consisted of settling any disputes between workers and employers, company and company, union and union, and union and members. Gordon writes in his autobiography that out of the 107 cases that were presented before the Council for the four years it was active, there was not one failure. Charles Gordon, *Postscript to Adventure: An Autobiography of Ralph Connor* (New York 1938), 361-364.

¹⁶¹ Allen, *The Social Passion*, 193.

Industrial Banner stated, “The position of the Methodist Book Room in the strike of the printing trades is nothing less than tragic. It is a position from which the Church will not recover during its lifetime, and which can only be partly effaced when Church union is brought about and a new name is given to the united churches.”¹⁶² The noticeable decline in the number of references to the churches in the labour press also attests to the negative impact the strike had on the relationship between organized labour and the churches.¹⁶³

James Simpson’s speech at a symposium for labour leaders in 1929 best summarizes the erosion of the alliance. Commenting on how the churches responded to labour issues, Simpson, a vocal supporter of cooperation between labour and the churches, echoed the criticisms heard twenty years earlier, stating that labour believed “the church responds too willingly to the reaction of the prevailing industrial and economic order, and that it surrenders its authority as a great spiritual and moral force to the dictates of the wealth-owning class, with its material outlook on life.”¹⁶⁴ He proceeded to comment, “I cannot help but feel that the average minister and the church generally feels that it is stepping out of their legitimate sphere to interest themselves in the causes of strikes, lockouts, and industrial disturbances, generally” and further lamented, “it is an exceptional case for a minister to take a stand on the side of the workers, even when the issue between the employers and employees is a clear case of the former trying to enforce conditions upon the latter which are unfair and inhuman.”¹⁶⁵ Despite these faults, he asserted, “the Church has a responsibility to the masses which, if recognized, will lead to the most searching analysis of the ethical and spiritual basis of the many systems of wealth production.”¹⁶⁶ Simpson was calling on the church to awaken to the activist Christianity that he and other labour leaders were articulating and for the church to open its eyes to alternatives to capitalism.

Why were a small group of labour leaders in Southern Ontario so willing to engage with the churches before World War I? Labour leaders may have made a conscious effort to cooperate with the churches because a complete rejection of the

¹⁶²*Industrial Banner*, 8 July 1921.

¹⁶³Christie and Gauvreau argue that the MSRCC’s engagement with organized labour peaked in 1921 and began to wane in subsequent years as the council shifted its attention to a maternal feminist agenda. They point to other organizations that joined the SSC between 1921 and 1925, specifically the Dominion Grange, YMCA, WCTU, National Council of Women, Victorian Order of Nurses, Federation of Women’s Institutes, Canadian Council of Agriculture, Canadian Prisoners’ Welfare Association, and the Salvation Army — as evidence of this shift. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 211-212. The examination of the labour press suggests that the separation between labour and the SSC was a reciprocal process.

¹⁶⁴Jerome Davis, ed., *Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion: A Symposium of Labor Leaders Throughout the World* (New York 1929), 135.

¹⁶⁵Davis, ed., *Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion*, 135.

¹⁶⁶Davis, ed., *Labor Speaks for Itself on Religion*, 137.

churches might have alienated potential supporters.¹⁶⁷ Also, they would have recognized that church bodies and ministers were important models in the community and an alliance, therefore, would help put pressure on the government to pass legislation that was favourable to labour.¹⁶⁸ As this article has already disclosed, Christianity was an integral part of the ideology of these labour leaders.¹⁶⁹ Some of these leaders decided to develop alliances with progressive clergy who shared their interpretation of Christian teaching. For these leaders, alliances with the clergy helped to spread the activist Christianity that they believed in and educate society about issues that were important to them. James Simpson recognized the benefits of these alliances after attending the first meeting of the MSRC in 1908. In his report to the Congress later that year he provided a strong rationale for this coalition, arguing that “the social and moral conditions of the people are inseparably linked with their economic and industrial conditions” and cooperation, therefore, will provide “an opportunity for education and action that will advance the best interests of the wage workers of Canada.”¹⁷⁰ The following year Simpson urged the members of the Congress to continue its affiliation with MSRCC and assist the Council financially not only because “a splendid opportunity has been offered for the free and open discussion of subjects in which the wage workers are vitally affected” but also “representative of the Church, in its various denominations, are brought into touch with men active in the labor movement, and in the exchange of ideas we feel confident that truth will eventually prevail.”¹⁷¹ That the churches were a useful way to dis-

¹⁶⁷As already noted, the *Industrial Banner*, when commenting on the cooperation between the Trades and Labor Congress and the Lord’s Day Alliance, noted that the Congress was made up of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and members of other religions. See *Industrial Banner*, January 1906.

¹⁶⁸Labour historians have noted how these alliances benefited labour. See Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” 64; Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy,” 390. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue that women’s organizations, labour leaders, and agrarian reformers allied with church leaders because the cultural authority and national prestige of the church protected these groups from criticism. See Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 108. Ken Fones-Wolf, “Religion and Trade Union Politics in the United States, 1880-1920,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 34 (Fall 1988), 51.

¹⁶⁹The best example here would be James Simpson. See Homel, “James Simpson and the Origins of Canadian Social Democracy”; Naylor, *The New Democracy*, 88. Brushett in his study of Joseph Marks argues that Christian teaching shaped the ideas of this eminent labour leader. See Brushett, “Labour’s Forward Movement,” 38.

¹⁷⁰*Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1908, 9.

¹⁷¹*Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada* 1909, 68. Similar rationalizations were given for supporting the church and labour conferences organized by J.G. Shearer. The purpose of the church and labour conferences was to bring the two sides together to discuss social, moral, and economic questions. These

seminate information also played a role in the decision of the Trades and Labor Councils in London, Berlin, and Waterloo to regularly distribute the *Industrial Banner* to every clergyman in those cities. As the editor of that paper stated, “it is a good proposition to place it where it will reach and do good service for the advancement of organized labor.”¹⁷²

Conclusion

In early 20th-century Canada, labour leaders were not reticent in their denunciations of the churches, which they saw as symbols of capitalist wealth. Nor were they afraid to excoriate clergymen who were indifferent or openly hostile to labour’s cause. This deep resentment did not mean, however, that they abandoned religion. The labour movement during this period may not have been imbued with religiosity like the Knights of Labor in the late 19th century, but religion was present. Both moderate reformist and radical labour leaders believed in an activist Christianity and interpreted and constructed social and economic problems in light of these beliefs. This labour gospel helped make workers better understand these problems, build opposition to the present industrial capitalist system, and attract workers to their respective movements.

In addition to drawing on an activist Christianity to frame the issues they were concerned about, this paper has looked at the alliances that developed between labour leaders in Southern Ontario and the churches. The examination of these alliances suggests a richer relationship between the churches and labour than the work of other historians would suggest. While future research must look at alliances in other regions of Canada, it is evident that labour leaders in Southern Ontario cooperated with church bodies at national and local levels, sang high praises for those socially conscious churches and clergymen who championed the cause of labour, and readily admitted the benefits of the alliances with the churches.¹⁷³ Yet, support for a cross-class alliance was not shared by all members of the labour movement. This can be attributed to the deep divisions between the churches and labour on issues like Sabbatarianism and prohibition, but also to regional differences and the national and regional dynamics and diversity of the Canadian labour movement.

conferences were regularly held in the Labor Temple in Toronto and representatives included the Toronto District Labor Council and the Building Trades Federation as well as various religious denominations. Some of the subjects discussed included “Child Labor,” “The Sweating System,” “The Saturday Half-holiday,” “The Shorter Workday,” and “Women Workers: Their Wages and Conditions.” See *Report of the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada 1908*, 9.

¹⁷²*Industrial Banner*, September 1908.

¹⁷³That there was more hostility to the churches in the West substantiates Lynne Marks’s findings that there was greater religious indifference in this region. See Lynne Marks, “Exploring Religious Diversity in Patterns of Religious Participation,” *Historical Methods*, 33 (Fall 2000), 247-254.

The purpose of examining labour leaders' criticism of established churches, their promotion of an activist Christianity, and the alliances they formed with various church bodies and clergymen has not been to measure the extent of religious belief of organized labour. Some labour leaders were churchgoers, but certainly not all were. Some rejected organized religion but espoused an activist Christianity. Some were non-believers, but supported Christian principles. What is evident from this examination of labour publications is that, while labour leaders may have had a diverse range of religious beliefs or even non-belief, Christianity was present in the labour movement.