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Article abstract

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International Trade Unionism

The United Mine Workers in Eastern Canada, 1900-1920

C. Brian Williams

This paper reports evidence gathered in the case of the United Mine Workers of America and its activities in Eastern Canada during the period 1900-1920.

The international character of the Canadian trade union movement is not only a principal feature in its history and evolution, but also unique to the global community of trade union movement. The phenomenon has appeared only once, and that is within the trade union movements of Canada and the United States. In 1966, *Relations Industrielles* published the conclusions of a study into the causes of international trade unionism. The study concluded that international trade unionism was a result of the impact of (1) coterminous Canadian-American labor, product, and capital markets on Canadian and American labour organizations, (2) preference shown the American organization by Canadian workers because of its superior development, and (3) in cases centered in Québec, the influence of the Roman Catholic church. The presence and impact of each causal factor varied from one case to another¹. The conclusions reported were based on evidence gathered from a number of case studies on international trade unionism. In 1984, *Relations Industrielles* published the case of the International Molders Union during 1860-1885². It focused on the impact of coterminous Canadian-American labour markets on Canadian and American locals. This paper reports evidence gathered in the case of the United Mine Workers of America and its activities in Eastern Canada during the period 1900-1920. It focuses on the impact of a coterminous Canadian-American product market and, when given a choice, the preference shown for the American organization by Canadian workers.

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1 C. Brian WILLIAMS, «The Development of Canadian-American Trade Union Relations», *Relations Industrielles*, Vol. 21, July 1966, pp. 332-355.

2 C. Brian WILLIAMS, «Impact of Labour Migration — The International Molders & Allied Workers in Canada, 1860-1885», *Relations Industrielles*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1984, pp. 335-363.

The United Mine Workers (UMW) case is particularly interesting and offers quite different features from what we had in the Molders case. It features Canadian and American penetration into each country's product market, intense concentration of production facilities as well as enterprise control and ownership, a pre-existing Canadian labour organization, a purely Canadian labour market, and very little American participation in the industry's capital market. The evidence in the case explains the UMW in terms of the impact of coterminous Canadian-American product markets on the Canadian and American labour organizations and a preference shown by Canadian workers.

THE EAST COAST COAL INDUSTRY

The major coal fields of eastern Canada were all located in the province of Nova Scotia. By far the most important field was the Sydney field on the east coast of Cape Breton Island. Since 1900, this field consistently accounted for well over 80 percent of Nova Scotia coal output. The main population areas in the field included Sydney, Glace Bay, Sydney Mines, and New Waterford. The field was located close to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and possessed excellent harbor facilities at Sydney and Louisbourg. The Sydney field was favored with the availability of cheap water transport to the St. Lawrence Valley, Montréal, Newfoundland, and other Atlantic coast points. Other island fields included Inverness, Mabou, and Port Head. The most important mainland fields were located in Pictou County in the Stellarton-Westville area and at Cumberland County in the Springhill-Joggins area. Like the west coast fields, the Nova Scotia fields contained only bituminous coal³.

Prior to Confederation, Nova Scotia producers relied very heavily on the export market. In 1866, the United States market absorbed well over 50 percent of the province's production. With the abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty in the same year, exports to the United States dropped to 20 percent in 1875 and to 10 percent in 1880. However, most of this loss was offset by the development of new markets in the St. Lawrence Valley. The National Policy of 1879 had a considerable impact on the Nova Scotia coal industry. It was affected directly by coal tariffs and indirectly by the development of industries fueled by Nova Scotia coal. In 1901, sales from all Nova Scotia fields totalled 3,119,335 tons. Approximately 998,814 tons were sold in Nova Scotia. Other major market areas included: Québec, 1,017,046 tons; United States (New England), 590,086 tons; Newfoundland, 105,620

³ The reader interested in a more detailed description of the Nova Scotia fields from 1900-1920 should consult *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946*, pp. 12-23.

tons; and Prince Edward Island, 53,773 tons. In 1913, production reached an all time high of 8,135,000 tons. However, the end of railway construction left the iron and steel industry of the province (and consequently the coal industry) with the need to find alternative markets. The problem was compounded because of the tendency of Canadian industry to concentrate in parts of Canada where use of Nova Scotia iron, steel, and coal was not economical.

In 1889, the Royal Commission on Relations of Labour and Capital questioned twelve Nova Scotia operators, the largest of which was the Springhill Mining Co. of Springhill with 1400 employees and about 30 percent of total coal output. The number of employees in firms interviewed by the commission totalled 4700, or about 75 percent of the total number of Nova Scotia miners. However, in 1893, the Springhill Mining Co. and a number of smaller operators amalgamated to form the Dominion Coal Co. By 1901, the Dominion Coal Co. accounted for 67 percent of the Nova Scotia coal input. In 1901, the Company acquired the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Co. and its subsidiary, the Acadia Coal Co., Ltd. Acquisition of these two companies raised the percentage of total output controlled by the Dominion Coal Co. to about 80 percent. In 1902, the Dominion Coal Co. amalgamated with the Dominion Iron and Steel Co. In November 1910, the Dominion Coal Co. acquired the second place producer, the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co., and raised its control to 91 percent of total output. From 1910 onwards, about 80 percent of the Nova Scotia miners were employed by the Dominion Coal Co. and its subsidiaries. In March 1928, the Dominion Coal Co. and a number of steel producers were combined to form the giant Dominion Steel and Coal Corp.

THE PROVINCIAL WORKMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The Provincial Workmen's Association (PWA)⁴ represented one of the few attempts to establish a Canadian union. The PWA was a coal miner's union and limited its territorial jurisdiction to Nova Scotia. However, on several occasions it unsuccessfully attempted to interest western miners in

The following account on the structure, government and activities of the PWA is based on the pioneering work, H.A. LOGAN, *Trade-Union Organization in Canada*, pp. 81-102. More recent works include C.B. WADE, *Historic of District 26, United Mine Workers of America, 1919-1941*, Public Archives of Canada. Joe MACDONALD, *The Roots of Radical Politics in Nova Scotia: The Provincial Workmen's Association and Political Activity 1879-1898*, Carleton University, 1977. Sharon REILLY, *The Provincial Workmen's Association of Nova Scotia, 1879-1898*, M.A. THESIS, Dalhousie University, 1979, and Donald MACLEOD, «Colliers, Colliery Safety and Workplace Control: The Nova Scotia Experience, 1873 to 1910», Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1983, pp. 226-253.

affiliation and briefly extended its trade jurisdiction to other occupations in industries such as boot and shoe, glass and steel. The PWA was formed in the spring of 1879 during a strike at the Springhill Mining Co. against a recently declared wage reduction. Subsequently, a number of meetings were held, and, on August 19, 1879, the miners in attendance unanimously resolved «to form an association to defend and protect the interests of the miners and other workers about the collieries». The first lodge was organized at Springhill on September 1879 as Pioneer Lodge No. 1. During the next two months, lodges were organized at the Pictou collieries of Westville and Stellarton. On October 15, 1879, the five lodges organized by that date met at Truro in the first meeting of the Grand Council of the Provincial Miner's Association. Shortly after, organization was extended to the mines of Cape Breton. In 1881, the Association was incorporated by an act of the Nova Scotia legislature under the name of the Provincial Workmen's Association. The number of lodges and members fluctuated widely with the seasons of the year and economic conditions in the Nova Scotia coal industry. In 1895, the number of lodges totalled 16 with a membership of about 2000, or about 25 percent of the Nova Scotia miners. At no time prior to 1900 were the miners anywhere near complete unionization.

The aims of the PWA, according to Article 2 of its constitution, were to advance wages «as the states of the trade shall warrant or allow»; to shorten the hours of labor; to secure the true weight of the miner's output; «to strive in obtaining better legislation whereby the more efficient management of mines... may be effected — thereby securing the health and safety of the workmen»; «to secure compensation for injuries received while at work — where the employers may be liable»; «to support lodges and their members who may be locked out by their employers» or may be «forced to discontinue work on account of insufficient wages or from any unjust cause whatsoever», and finally to foster virtuous habits among its members and to improve their condition morally, mentally, and socially⁵.

From the beginning, the organization had an official organ in the *Trades Journal*, edited by grand secretary Drummond. In 1884, Drummond purchased the Association's interest in the paper and thereafter received an annual subsidy for conducting it in the interests of the Association. The ready pen of the able and educated grand secretary was an important force in laying the foundations and coloring the thought of the organization, in airing the miners' grievances, and in establishing a recognition for the Association beyond its immediate membership.

⁵ *Provincial Workmen's Association Constitution and By Laws*, 1879, Article II, p. 3.

ACTIVITIES OF THE PWA

The activities of the PWA fall into two periods, depending upon the methods used to advance the objects of the Association. First, the period prior to 1900, with major emphasis on legislative enactment and political representation and minor emphasis on arbitration, collecting bargaining, and strikes. Second, the period after 1900, with major emphasis on arbitration, government investigation, and adjustment but with increased emphasis on collective bargaining and strikes. The PWA was not a striking organization. Until 1904, when dissatisfaction over the Association's methods reached major proportions and three years later when it was challenged by the UMW, the PWA never launched a major organization drive, never demanded a closed shop or checkoff, and never really pressed the question of recognition. It had no defence fund until 1903. In 1907, the fund amounted to only \$14,949.60. Strikes were generally held in disfavor. Up to 1898, only four strikes of any importance had been called. In each case only one colliery was involved.

Probably the outstanding feature of the PWA was its success in pressing legislation through the provincial government for the benefit of mine workers. It was during the earlier period that the more fundamental legislation, largely in the form of amendments to the existing mining laws, were passed. In 1880, the provincial government, at the request of the PWA, instituted a system of government supervised mine inspection. A year later, the Grand Council protested the make-up of the board of examiners. Subsequently, the government replaced the board of examiners with salaried deputy inspectors and miners' safety committees. The miners were given the right to inspect a mine, prepare a report, and file the report with the manager of the mine. In 1883, the Grand Council requested that each lodge appoint a committee to study the mining laws, prepare amendments, offer suggestions, and send the results to the grand secretary. Rapidly in order after this, the following legislation was secured: representatives of workmen were given the right to be present at coroner's inquests, with the privilege of examining witnesses; work places were to be examined at a specified time before the miners entered the mines; mines were placed under the control of licensed managers; a board of examiners was established to control the granting of mining certificates to miners and mine managers; suffrage was extended to all workers with an annual income in excess of \$250 and to all miners living in company houses of the annual value of \$150; no liquor licenses could be issued to establishments within a mile of the coal mine; the first *Arbitration Act* was passed; schools of instruction for miners were established, and the government granted financial aid to miner relief societies; provision was made for tribunals of arbitration in particular

cases; wages were to be paid semi-monthly; the employment of boys was regulated, with requirements as to age and education; miners were to be holders of certificates of competency; checkweighmen were to be chosen by ballot; shot firers were to have certificates; mine workers were to serve an apprenticeship of two years before being allowed to take charge of a working place; workmen were given the right to select their own doctors; withholding of wages for various kinds of taxes was forbidden unless by written consent of the worker; and, finally, a miner was given the right, when supported by twelve other miners, to prosecute a manager for any infringement of the *Mines' Regulation Act*.

The other class of issues which received the attention of the organization in this early period included a number of more immediate aspects of working conditions: fallen stone, low place work, introduction of machines, regular pay days, rates for overtime, and, finally, an eight hour day for underground and a nine hour day for surface men. Considerable effort was made to make the latter a matter of legislation, but without avail. The organization was instrumental in securing educational betterment through lodge activities and mining schools, accomplished considerable in the way of encouraging relief societies for accident and sickness, and became a force in the community making for sobriety with respect to alcohol. In contrast with some earlier unions in the province, the PWA gained the goodwill of the public and was accorded fair treatment in the labour and public press. The grand secretary was probably not overstating the case when in 1897 he spoke of the PWA as the «strongest single trade union organization in Canada».

After 1900, and led by a new general secretary, J. Moffat, the methods used by the Association to gain its ends shifted closer to those usually associated with «business unionism». Corresponding with the upward movement in the price of coal, the Association put forward demands for wage increases, proceeded to insure their permanence by means of trade agreements covering periods of up to two and three years, and sought, through the closed shop, to guarantee the union's protection from non-union men. Emphasis on arbitration, strikes, and written trade agreements appreciably increased.

For example, in 1900 the Grand Council demanded a general wage increase of 12 1/2 percent. The demand was granted in Pictou County immediately and in Cumberland County after a strike threat. In Cape Breton, the Dominion Coal Co. curtly rejected the demand. The employees of the company subsequently decided to submit the matter to arbitration. The arbitration board ruled against the demand, arguing that an increase had been given in May 1900 and that the company's prices were still governed by

long-term contracts entered into before the advance in coal prices. However, it ordered that, if certain profits were made in the following year, the increases were to be granted. The profits were made and the order of the board was carried out.

Further, on June 1, 1904, the Association became involved in a strike of steel workers at Sydney, the most important strike in Canada during the year. The Dominion Iron and Steel Co. had reduced wages on December 1, 1903, as it alleged, «on account of the state of the market». The PWA, in April 1904, demanded a return to the wage scale of 1903. The strike involved practically the entire force of over 1500 men. In July, the company undertook to resume operations. A number of disturbances occurred and the authorities requested the aid of the militia. The Sydney board of trade proposed that the federal department of labour conciliate the dispute. The PWA rejected the proposal and blamed the department of labor for the presence of the troops. Finally, however, Deputy Minister King's services were accepted and he proceeded to Cape Breton and instituted conciliation proceedings. The PWA subcouncil, after receiving assurances from the company relative to non-discrimination, called the strike off on July 22. The failure of the 1904 strike was a severe blow to the Association. Many lodges, although not directly affected, had contributed heavily, some to the extent of mortgaging their assembly hall. But worse than the financial sacrifice was the subsequent futility experienced when scabs, to the number of several hundred, were engaged to work after the company lifted its suspension in July. More than anything else, this strike demonstrated the inability of the organization up to this time to carry out effective strike action. The defeat of the Association in the Sydney steel strike of 1904 stimulated the establishment of a defence fund. With slack employment in the mines, workers were unable to raise the necessary support from current contributions and were compelled to recognize the weaknesses of their position as a striking union. The fund, which was only to be drawn upon for major strikes, aimed at a goal of \$50,000 by 1910. However, by 1907, the Association had accumulated only \$14,000⁶.

In similar developments, a strike at Westville in November 1906 and others in 1907 at Sydney, Bridgport, and Springhill, while all short in duration, were of interest in that they marked the sterner side of the Association's drive for the closed shop. The closed shop policy was first recommended to the lodges by the Grand Council in 1905. The campaign was fairly successful. In the fall of 1907, the Nova Scotia collieries had advanced to almost complete organization for the first time in the history of

⁶ *LG*, p. 103.

the province. During 1907, applications were made under the recently passed *IDI Act* for boards of conciliation to investigate disputes involving lodges at Westville, Port Head, Stellarton, and North Sydney. The Springhill lodges applied for and were granted boards in July, November, and the following April.

WEAKNESS IN THE PWA

In 1906, a small minority in the rank and file, supported by the leadership of some lodges, began to speak out against the Association, its leadership, and its inability to obtain immediate gains. They argued that, while arbitration and government investigation and adjustments were superior to older methods used by the Association, they were too slow, too costly, and too often resolved in favor of the operator. As a result of this agitation, Thomas Haggerty, a representative of the United Mine Workers, was invited to address the September 1907 meeting of the Grand Council at Halifax. A resolution recommending affiliation with the UMW was overwhelmingly defeated. A second resolution, inviting UMW president John Mitchell to come to Nova Scotia to outline the aims, objectives, and workings of the international, and instructing the Association to hold a referendum on amalgamation, was also defeated⁷. In the late spring of 1908, a second rank and file movement developed and demanded that the PWA adopt a more militant and aggressive attitude. They argued that while the structure and methods of organization were adequate in earlier years, when the coal industry was comprised of small, separate companies, they were not adequate in an industry with concentration of capital. According to one account:

The hitherto efficient PWA soon learned to its sorrow that it had come face to face with a new foe of such formidable power that it must be met by other means than that which has been formerly employed. What means and methods were not clear, however, they dare not lose the weapons at hand in the hope of securing something more efficient. So from year to year the miners of N.S. struggled with unequal power, against this powerful combination in a fruitless effort to protect their interests⁸.

⁷ *Provincial Workmens' Association of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Constitution, By Laws, and Minutes of Proceedings of Grand Council, 1879-1917*, Vol. 3, 1907-1917 (hereafter referred to as *Minutes of Grand Council*), pp. 599, 641-642.

⁸ *Eastern Labour News*, Vol. 1, No. 27, August 7, 1909, p. 1. The history of the UMW/PWA conflict is dealt with at length in «Miners Controversy in Nova Scotia», *Eastern Labour News*, Vol. 1, No. 11, April 17, 1909, p. 1 and Vol. 1, No. 27, August 27, 1909, p. 1. Hereafter referred to as *ELN*.

One of the first of many cases which demonstrated the inability of the PWA to succeed using «...means...formerly employed» was the dispute within the Association over the three-year agreement concluded on December 29, 1904, between the «Dominion Coal Co. and its employees»⁹. It offered little in the way of improvements. Reports commenting on the agreement stressed that the objective of the three-year contract was to promote business permanence, stability, and provide steady employment¹⁰. However:

The mine workers were not so favorably impressed by these flattering promises, but the officers of the union could see nothing but the silver lining and with all their official influence, they urged and secured the adoption of the three year agreement.¹¹

On the expiration of the agreement on December 29, 1907, the company presented the PWA with a new agreement calling for reductions in some classes of work and increases in others. The locals rejected the proposals. Shortly after, the sub-council submitted an application for a Conciliation Board under the recently passed *IDI Act*.

After a week of hearings, commencing on March 2, the board unanimously agreed on an award. It was presented to the lodges and accepted by a large majority. The wage increases granted totalled \$70,000 per year for the company's 7000 employees. Except for the modest wage increases, the settlement pretty well corresponded to the company's original offer. However, the minority who opposed acceptance of the agreement had a different view of the agreement.

At the expiration of the three year contract the Company posted two contracts for the officials of the PWA to sign. One of them was a bad contract and the other was a worse one. The Company said, «take your choice; if you don't take the bad one, you will be forced to take the worse one». The men did all they could to extricate themselves from the power of this great corporation, but with the limited power of this organization to resist any encroachments upon their right, with the approach of winter and the influence of the PWA officials as before, thrown on the sides of its acceptance, the mine workers were eventually forced to recognize the inevitable and accept the terms of the company. To protect themselves, as they thought, for the future, the representatives of the company insisted that the agreement be for one year and six months, to bring its termination in the work of the winter season, when no coal was needed, and the men least able to resist any other condition of employment it desired to impose.¹²

9 *LG*, Vol. 5, No. 8, February 1905, p. 782. The company's 7000 employees were represented by officers of the Cape Breton sub-district. The fifteen locals represented included Golden Rule, Kimberly, Unity, Steadfast, Olive, Equity, Bayview, Wilson, Independence, Queens, Aberdeen, Power, Keystone, Ironsides, and Island.

10 *LG*, Vol. 5, No. 11, May 1905, p. 1222.

11 *ELN*, *op. cit.*

12 *ELN*, *op. cit.*

In the months following the signing of the Cape Breton agreement and other similar agreements, the minority opposed to the agreement steadily increased. Finally, in January 1908, the officers of the PWA and the organization's policies in dealings with the operators were openly challenged. A special meeting of the Grand Council was called at Halifax in May 1908 to discuss the advisability of amalgamation. Eight lodges had indicated an interest in affiliation. The meeting was a stormy one. The secessionists argued that the PWA had shown itself incapable of dealing with the situation at Springhill and charged that the majority at the convention had been bought and sold by the officers. It was finally resolved to submit the issue to a referendum of the general membership¹³. The ballot was to offer a choice between an «improved PWA» and «affiliation with the UMW». The Grand Council sanctioned the referendum and agreed to abide by the will of the membership. The referendum was conducted throughout the Nova Scotia coal communities on June 24. About 10,000 miners were entitled to vote¹⁴. The final count showed 2,448 in favor of an «improved PWA» and 2,860 for affiliation with the UMW. Shortly after the results of the referendum were announced, the international executive board of the UMW received a wire requesting that Nova Scotia miners be admitted to the organization. President T.L. Lewis wired back that the «members of the board were happy to act favorably on the petition»¹⁵.

ACTIVITIES OF THE UMW

However, the majority of the Grand Council, in the light of the results of the balloting, began to have second thoughts. At the annual meeting of the Council held in Halifax in late September, the May resolution authorizing the referendum was declared illegal. The minority proposed that article 21 of the constitution, which read «this association cannot be dissolved so long as one lodge with forty members shall object thereto», be changed to provide dissolution if voted by «the majority of the members». The proposal was defeated and the constitution remained unchanged. On the general subject of affiliation with the UMW, the following resolution was passed 47 to 7.

Whereas during the year much agitation has been caused by some of the lodges of the provincial Workmen's Association with the purpose to destroy the Association by bringing in the UMW; and whereas this agitation tends to destroy the usefulness of the Association and also burdens it with unnecessary expenses: be it hereby resolved

13 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 4, October 1908, p. 423 and *Minutes of Grand Council*, pp. 655-668.

14 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 1, July 1908, p. 12.

15 *UMWJ*, Vol. 19, No. 8, July 2, 1908, p. 3, also, Vol. 19, No. 9, July 9, 1908, p. 7.

that this grand council deems the agitation for any other labor organization sufficient cause for the revoking or suspension of charters of lodges so agitating and gives the grand executive authority to revoke the charters of such lodges. And we further recommend that no agitation be permitted in any subordinate lodge.¹⁶

In the meantime, as a result of the wire sent to President T.L. Lewis and subsequent requests from seceding locals, international organizers Bousfield and Patterson (from District 18) were dispatched to the Nova Scotia fields from District 18.

With the open organization of Nova Scotia mines by the UMW, events began to develop quickly. In September, UMW supporters obtained a temporary injunction restraining the Grand Council from handling the funds of the PWA. The supreme court dissolved the order in October¹⁷. Shortly thereafter, the grand secretary of the Association, John Moffat, was placed under arrest on the charge of perjury on information laid by members favoring UMW affiliation. During November he was tried and honorably acquitted¹⁸. In February 1908, the Grand Council held a special session in Sydney. An organizer was appointed, and a resolution urging protection for the Canadian coal trade was dispatched to the federal government in Ottawa¹⁹. A second special meeting of the Grand Council was called at Sydney in February. A number of resolutions were adopted which hinted at the nature of the conflict which was soon to sweep through the coal fields of Nova Scotia²⁰. District 26 was formally established during the second week of March 1909. Under the direction of organizer Bousfield, a constitution was adopted and officers were elected and installed²¹. The first incident directly related to the subsequent conflict between the PWA and the UMW was the discharge of UMW members from a Dominion Coal Co. mine at Glace Bay. The UMW had either to take action in their defense, or withdraw from the Nova Scotia field. Initially, UMW action took the form of giving financial support to discharged UMW supporters. However, it was soon realized that this action was not sufficient. In late March 1909, international organizers James B. McLennan and Peter Patterson, applied to the Department of labor for the appointment of a conciliation board to review matters in dispute. The application was granted. The report of the board and of a similar board constituted to deal with the UMW's dispute with the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co. set out the major themes and

16 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 4, October 1908, p. 423 and *Minutes of Grand Council*, pp. 669-673.

17 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 5, November 1908, p. 532 and Vol. 9, No. 6, December 1908, p. 641.

18 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 6, December 1908, p. 641.

19 *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 9, March 1909, p. 916.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 992. The Canadian Federation of Labour was one of the two national centers at that time.

21 *UMJW*, Vol. 19, No. 45, March 18, 1909.

major issues which persisted throughout the ten-year period of conflict between the UMW and the PWA. Of more importance, the report of each board was, in a very real sense, a classic statement of the issues and arguments raised against the operation of international unions in Canada. These issues and arguments were not new, they had been expressed before, but never with such forcefulness, never in a situation which received such publicity, and never in such a major Canadian industry as Nova Scotia coal mining²². The most important question faced by the board was the district's demand for recognition. The principal objection filed by the company was that «the UMW is... practically a foreign organization, having dangerous and menacing powers under their constitution». Although the UMW was international in membership, the company asserted, the principal executive officers and the bulk of the members resided in the United States. The company pointed out that the locus of control in the United States had a serious bearing on the coal trade in Nova Scotia, as American producers were making inroads into the Canadian markets. Consequently, so the company argued, anything that tended to interfere with the marketing of Nova Scotia coal in the St. Lawrence market naturally affected the interests of the coal company and the Nova Scotia miners. The board was impressed with the company's argument. It commented in its report:

The board considered this objection of the coal company a very grave one, because with one foreign organization controlling the miners, labor difficulties in the United States would almost certainly lead to complications in Nova Scotia. If through labour troubles in the United States a market opened up there for Nova Scotia coal at profitable rates, pressures would undoubtedly be brought to bear on the miners in Nova Scotia to prevent export of our coal to the United States. It is true that the UMW is recognized in western Canada, but there the conditions are different because while Nova Scotia mines are finding it increasingly difficult to hold their own against the United States coal in the St. Lawrence trade, the Canadian mines of the west not only hold their own market, but in many cases can afford to export to the United States, notwithstanding the duty.²³

On July 23, 1909, the Minister of Labor received an application for a board to investigate a recognition dispute between the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co., Ltd. and Springhill Local No. 469 of the UMW²⁴. The question of recognition first arose in 1908 when the PWA lodges at Springhill, Pioneer, and Mechanics were amalgamated into Local No. 469 of the UMWA. The board accepted evidence which reported that 1000 of the 1200

²² *LG*, Vol. 9, No. 11, May 1909, p. 1227. For a detailed account of the activities of the board and the majority and minority reports, see Vol. 9, No. 11, May 1909, pp. 1225-1234.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 1230.

²⁴ *LG*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 1909, p. 191. For a detailed account of the activities of the board and reports, see *LG*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 1909, pp. 190-217.

employees of the Springhill mines were members of local No. 469. After the formation of the UMW local, the genral manager was advised that the PWA lodges had dissolved and was requested to recognize local No. 469. The manager replied that no action could be taken until the litigation arising from the dissolution of Pioneer Lodge was settled. Witnesses called on behalf of the employees agreed that only the UMW was in a position to protect their interests. In its report the board summarized its arguments:

...It was urged that the constitution and bylaws of the UMW was (sic) better adapted for the purposes and interests of an organized body of miners than the PWA; that its methods of working were more favorable to pleasant relations between the management and the men, and that sundry advantages were derived from connection with a body having a large membership extending over various portions of the continent of North America. It was also claimed by the employees that men employed in any large mining enterprise had a perfect right to choose for themselves what form of organization they should adopt.²⁵

The position of the company did not change much from the position taken at the earlier board. According to the board's report:

The company contends that it should not be required to encourage and help support the foreign labor organization, the main body of whose members are working to produce coal to supplant Nova Scotia products in Canadian markets to the demoralization of its business and possible annihilation of its property. The company further says that owing to the depression in the United States last year and this, a determined effort has been and is being made by the American operators to capture the St. Lawrence trade and large quantities of American coal have been sold to the extent of depriving Nova Scotia companies of their right to important Canadian markets. The result of this intrusion is to make local competition in the province keener and to depreciate values to such a degree as to either compel Nova Scotia operators to cease producing or force them to make a reduction in wages. The cost of producing coal in the United States is only one-third of the cost of producing coal f.o.b. cars in the deep mines and heavy pitching seams on the main land of Nova Scotia, and the result, if this intrusion continues, will be that Nova Scotia operators will either close down or the cost of production be reduced.²⁶

After pointing out that due consideration was given to both sides of the question and to the Nova Scotia coal industry, the board agreed on the following curious conclusion.

In the present instance, this board does not feel under all the circumstances that it ought to definitely express an opinion that the company should recognize local 469 of the UMW. It may or may not be desirable that the company should do this, but it seems to your board that in view of the representations made it would be exceeding the just limits of its function to express any definite opinion as to what the company

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

ought to do in this regard. We think it ought to be left to the judgment and discretion of the company as to how far it will officially recognize an organization having its control authority outside the province, and largely under the control of interests that may be at some time in acute competition with the interest of the company.²⁷

The failure of the two boards to grant the UMW recognition and other immediate demands meant that the international was again faced with the problem of either taking alternative action or withdrawing from Nova Scotia. It very quickly decided on the former alternative.

UMW/PWA CONFLICT: THE GLACE BAY STRIKE

On July 6, 1909, the international authorized a strike at the Glace Bay mines of the Dominion Coal Co. On July 7, violence broke out between the UMW and PWA supporters at Dominion No. 2 mine. This strike was destined to run for nine months, but almost from the second day there were signs that the UMW miners faced total defeat. On July 22, the company estimated that only 2400 of its 6500 employees were not at work. The company had banked large quantities of coal and with the reduced output had adequate supplies to fill orders. In August, production was estimated at 50 percent of normal output. By October, the number of strikers still out had decreased to 1,875 and output had increased to 75 percent of normal capacity. On November 4, 1909, the agreement between the company and PWA was renewed until December 31, 1911. Finally, on April 28, 1910, the international called off the strike and about 100 men unsuccessfully applied for reinstatement²⁸.

The Glace Bay strike and a subsequent strike at Springhill were essentially recognition contests between two rival labor organizations rather than strikes for improvement in wages and other working conditions. On one hand, UMW supporters attempted to keep the mines closed, and on the other hand, PWA supporters and the company attempted to keep the mines open. Later, as the strike wore on, the conflict became less a question of support for rival organizations and more a struggle between those who wanted to work and those who could not or did not want to work. By

²⁷ *LG, Ibid.*, pp. 196-197. Conciliation Boards in no way spoke on behalf of the Department of Labor.

²⁸ The foregoing account of events leading up to the strike and course of the strike were based on reports published in *LG*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 1909, pp. 254-256, 260; No. 3, September 1909, p. 383; No. 4, October 1909, p. 516; No. 5, November 1909, p. 605; and No. 11, May 1910, p. 1326.

January 1910, the only issue that prevented a man from working was his allegiance to the UMW. The PWA held to the position that it must honor its agreement with the company and that the miners of Nova Scotia must temper their demands in the light of the competitive situation of the island mines.

The most frequent charge levied against the UMW, and also the earliest argument to appear against it, was that it was a «foreign» organization, not familiar with the Nova Scotia situation, and that its activities in Nova Scotia were part of an American conspiracy to force Nova Scotia coal out of the Canadian market in favor of American coal. The most ardent supporters of this view were the coal companies, the PWA leadership, and most of the Nova Scotia public press. As noted earlier, conciliation boards held a similar view. One other frequent charge was that the UMW condoned the calling of strikes in breach of contract. Early in March 1909, Harry Bousfield, international organizer and co-ordinator of Nova Scotia affairs, in articles and interviews undertook to answer these charges²⁹. In June, while visiting the Nova Scotia fields, president T.L. Lewis published replies to charges that the international dominated the officers of District 26³⁰. Before long, the public and labor press of Nova Scotia were lined up behind their respective champions of labor's cause. The pro-international Sydney *Post* engaged in an aggressive editorial duel with the Nova Scotia coal operator's spokesman, the Sydney *Record*. Probably the most capable of the labor papers was the *Eastern Labour News* under the direction of J.E. Merrill of Moncton, New Brunswick. While the *Eastern Labour News* was admittedly pro-UMW, it was able to raise itself above the level of name-calling and the questionable arguments presented by most of the public and labor press. One of its first editorials appeared in late March 1909. It was followed by numerous columns devoted to the UMW/PWA dispute³¹.

29 «Explains Matters in Nova Scotia», *UMWJ*, Vol. 19, No. 46, March 25, 1909, p. 2 and «Bousfield on Nova Scotia Situation», *UMWJ*, Vol. 20, No. 21, May 13, 1909, p. 2.

30 «Are the Outside Organizations Foreign Unions?», *ELN*, Vol. 1, No. 21, June 26, 1909, p. 3 and «Local Union not Dominated from the United States», *ELN*, *Ibid*.

31 The labor and public papers of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were noted for their aggressive and educated editorial comments. The excerpts from the *ELN* are referred to only as illustrations of the position taken by the labor press. The total columns devoted to the UMW/PWA dispute by the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick press was enormous, and, in part, reflected the importance of coal mining to the maritime provinces. Other papers which actively participated in the controversy were: Sydney *Record*, and *Post*, Truro *News*, Moncton *Transcript*, St. John *Globe*. Papers which consistently supported the company's position included the Glace Bay *Gazette*, Sydney *Record*, and the Montréal *Witness*.

THE SPRINGHILL STRIKE, AUGUST 10, 1909-MAY 27, 1911

On August 10, 1909, the international authorized a strike by 1700 miners employed by the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co. at Springhill, Nova Scotia³². The issues in dispute — recognition, wage scales, and tonnage measurement — were taken to a conciliation board, but the award of the board was not accepted by the men³³. From the start of the strike to January 1910 the mines were completely shut down. However, beginning in early February, the company succeeded in obtaining men to take the place of strikers and one by one the mines started production³⁴. In March, the company reported 300 men at work. By June, the number of men working had increased to 400. Early in July, in response to a company request, a force of thirty federal troops was dispatched to Springhill as a «precautionary measure» in case of violence³⁵. A September estimate reported that half of the 1700 strikers had left and found employment elsewhere. On November 30, 1910, H.M. Plummer announced that the Cumberland Railway and Coal Co. had been purchased by the Dominion Steel Corp. In April 1911, the town of Springhill was placed under the jurisdiction of a police commission. As a result of police protection, a few strikers returned to work. However, the number of strikers still out was estimated as 900. On May 27, 1911, the strike was called off. The men accepted a reduction of 10 percent in wages and waived the right of union recognition. The Cape Breton and Springhill strikes were far from victories for the UMW. The men readily admitted that they were «beaten» and forced to «surrender». At Cape Breton, the ability of the company to capitalize on UMW/PWA conflict and to reopen the mines severely affected strike morale. At Springhill, greater solidarity was maintained and the lack of PWA support among the miners contained the company's efforts to successfully reopen the mines. The strikes brought the UMW little in return, and its position in the Nova Scotia fields remained as it was before the strikes. Above all, the strike did not settle the question of miner representation in the Nova Scotia field³⁶. After the Cape Breton and Springhill strikes, the status of trade

32 «Springhill Miners Vote to Strike», *UMWJ*, Vol. 20, No. 16, August 26, 1909, p. 3.

33 For details of events leading up to the strike, see *ELN*, Vol. 1, No. 29, p. 1, and Vol. 1, No. 32, September 11, 1909, p. 1.

34 Apparently the company was successful in recruiting miners in Pennsylvania (Wilkes-Barre) and Michigan. See «Mine Workers are Warned Not to go to Nova Scotia», *UMWJ*, Vol. 20, No. 17, September 2, 1909; «Strike Still on at Glace Bay — Stay Away», *UMWJ*, Vol. 20, No. 19, September 16, 1909, p. 1; and «Notice: Stay Away from Nova Scotia, Strike is On», *UMWJ*, Vol. 20, No. 34, January 6, 1910, p. 1.

35 *ELN*, Vol. 2, No. 26, July 30, 1910, p. 1.

36 For accounts of the progress of the strike see *LG*, Vol. 10, pp. 386, 516, 605, 821, 925, 1061, 1183, 1326, 1438; Vol. 11, pp. 122, 150, 263, 350, 483, 579, 679, 710, 774, 807, 872, 899, 921, 1014, 1040, 1148, 1199, 1296, 1338, 1425; and Vol. 12, p. 12. For the negotiations of the settlement see, *ELN*, Vol. 3, No. 16, May 20, 1911, p. 3, and Vol. 3, No. 18, June 3, 1911, p. 2 and 3.

unionism among the Nova Scotia miners continued without much change up to the early part of 1917. On November 30, 1911, the international was receiving per capita tax from seventeen Nova Scotia locals³⁷. By November 1913, the number had dropped to ten and by November 1915, to eight³⁸. On November 30, 1917, only Springhill local No. 469 was paying per capita assessment to the international³⁹.

RESOLUTION

District 26 was formally dissolved in March 1915. The rapid rise in the cost of living during the war years, price stabilization, and the continued loss of the Montréal market placed severe strains on the agreements between the operators and the PWA. A general wage increase was obtained in 1916, but immediately thereafter the rank and file began agitating for more. The continued division of the miners' loyalty between the PWA and the UMW made the chances of improvement just that much more difficult. In March 1917, the federal Department of labor received applications for boards of conciliation from supporters of both the PWA and UMW. Both groups represented miners employed by the Dominion Coal Co. at Glace Bay⁴⁰. In view of the continued unrest between the supporters of each group, the Minister of Labour appointed a three-man royal commission to examine the situation «with a view to making such recommendations as in their opinion may serve to promote amiable relations between the company and its employees»⁴¹. While the dispute at Glace Bay was being examined, numerous disputes arose at the Dominion Coal Co.'s mines at Springhill and the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Co.'s mines at Sydney. The terms of reference of the commission were subsequently broadened to cover the new disputes. The commission found that two reasons existed for the unrest among Nova Scotia miners.

First, a feeling of discord resulting from the presence in the same field of two rival labor organizations. This feeling interfered in many ways with the successful prosecution of the industry in the different collieries, and produced widespread friction and irritation. (...) The other cause of unrest was the matter of wages.⁴²

³⁷ «Report of Secretary Treasurer», UMW *Proceedings*, 1912, p. 26.

³⁸ «Report of Secretary», UMW *Proceedings*, 1914, pp. 142-143, and «Report of Secretary Treasurer», UMW *Proceedings*, 1916, p. 150.

³⁹ «Report of Secretary Treasurer», UMW *Proceedings*, 1918, p. 155.

⁴⁰ *LG*, Vol. 17, No. 4, April 1917, p. 275.

⁴¹ *LG*, Vol. 17, No. 6, June 1917, p. 452.

⁴² «Report of Royal Commission in Disputes between the Dominion Coal Co., Ltd., and Employees at Glace Bay and Springhill, and the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Co., Ltd., and Employees at Sydney Mines», *LG*, Vol. 17, No. 6, June 1917, p. 453.

In each dispute, the commission recommended modest wage increases. However, of more importance, it recommended that the two unions explore the possibility of amalgamation. During the latter part of May and early June, a number of conferences were held to explore the amalgamation recommendation of the commission. On June 15, it was announced that an agreement had been reached. The new organization was called the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia⁴³.

In accordance with the agreement, the Grand Council of the PWA, at a meeting held at Sydney in June 1917, adopted a resolution dissolving the Association. Under the resolution, the assets of the PWA were to be transferred to the new union provided that it remained a «purely provincial union» and provided the new body refrained «from entanglement or connection with any union whose officers and headquarters are outside the province». However, despite the stipulation contained in the resolution, the new body began to take action which, by 1919, saw the Nova Scotia miners within the UMW fold⁴⁴. Shortly after its formal establishment, the Amalgamated assumed jurisdiction over the existing agreement between the PWA and the Dominion Coal Co. Subsequently, several wage advances were granted and the company agreed to the checkoff. By the end of 1917, the organization claimed a membership of 9000 men enrolled in 29 locals in Cumberland County and Cape Breton Island. The miners of Pictou County and Inverness, about 3000 men, were organized under federal charters issued by the American Federation of Labour.

In the spring of 1918, the large majority of Nova Scotia miners voted to secure affiliation with the UMW⁴⁵. Representatives of the operators, International, Amalgamated, and federal locals informally reviewed the transfer of contracts to the UMW and agreed to meet again in Montréal. At the Montréal sessions, steps were taken to formulate a new agreement and to establish the UMW in Nova Scotia. At a third meeting, representatives of the UMW and the operators met to negotiate a new agreement providing for the eight hour day and recognition of the UMW. Subsequently, the Amalgamated submitted a formal application to the international requesting a district charter. At a later meeting of the international executive board, the request was granted⁴⁶.

43 *LG*, Vol. 17, No. 7, July 1917, pp. 506-507.

44 *LG*, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

45 *Canadian Labour Leader*, Vol. 1, No. 14, January 12, 1918, p. 6 and Vol. 1, No. 21, March 2, 1918, p. 1.

46 *UMWJ*, Vol. 30, No. 3, February 11, 1919, p. 13.

CONCLUSIONS

The UMW/PWA case offers several interesting features such as (a) Canadian and American penetration into each country's product markets; (b) intense concentration of production facilities as well as enterprise control and ownership; (c) a pre-existing Canadian labour organization; (d) a purely Canadian labour market; and (e) little American participation in the industry's capital market. The activities of the UMW in Nova Scotia represented determined efforts by Nova Scotia miners to bring international trade unionism to the industry.

For much of its existence the PWA was a very successful labor organization. Its success was primarily in gaining improvements in mine workings and conditions of work, principally through its effectiveness in influencing legislation. It had some success dealing with employers over terms of employment when control and ownership of the industry was fragmented. The organization commanded strong support and loyalty from the people it represented. Eventually, cracks developed in member support for the organization. Criticism centered on PWA failure to gain improvements in bread and butter issues from employers and the methods employed. This criticism coincided with consolidation of control and ownership in the industry. The PWA was unable to effectively advance the miner's interest in the face of the changing character of the Nova Scotia coal industry. The UMW and its methods were offered as an alternative. It was Nova Scotia miners who initiated the drive to the international union structure and UMW supporters favoured the methods of collective agreement negotiating and business unionism over methods of political representation and legislative enactment.

The UMW responded affirmatively and established a Nova Scotia operation. Its participation was in part rationalized in the coterminous product markets and a penetration by producers in both countries. The motive behind UMW interest in Nova Scotia was not hard to find. It differed little from the motive behind UMW attempts to organize fields in the United States — the UMW could not permit non-union coal to compete with union coal.

The active and growing efforts of the UMW split worker support strongly between the UMW and PWA. In head to head competition there was no clear victor and neither organization was able to firmly organize the industry. Each organization offered a distinctive brand of trade unionism with each brand offering its own particular philosophy and methods. Although the PWA turned more to business union methods, it faced major problems. First, its limited potential membership would result in equally

limited organizing, negotiating, and strike activity. Second, the major coal fields of Canada were at extreme ends of the country. Separation presented difficulties in organizing and administration. Each section of the industry operated in distinctively different markets. The west coast industry relied heavily upon the markets of the United States and the east coast industry on both domestic and export markets. Third, the west coast industry was made up of a number of operators who had come together in an association. The east coast industry was essentially composed of one employer and the mines were part of an integrated coal and steel complex.

After years of conflict, and possibly exhaustion as a result, both organizations participated in moves to amalgamate. The subsequent organization evolved into a re-established District 26 of the UMW. When the choice was put, workers opted in favor of representation by the UMW. This selection was an endorsement of its philosophy and methods of trade unionism.

Le syndicalisme international

Les Mineurs unis d'Amérique au Canada (1900-1920)

Le caractère international du mouvement syndical canadien est non seulement une particularité de son histoire et de son évolution, mais c'est aussi un cas unique à l'intérieur de la grande collectivité du syndicalisme. Le phénomène n'est apparu qu'une seule fois au cours de l'histoire, et ceci au sein des organisations syndicales du Canada et des États-Unis. En 1966, *Relations industrielles* publiait les conclusions d'une étude sur les origines du syndicalisme international. Celle-ci démontrait qu'il était la résultante (1) de l'impact de marchés contigus du travail, des biens et des capitaux tant canadiens qu'américains sur les organisations syndicales de l'un et de l'autre pays, (2) de la préférence manifestée par les travailleurs canadiens pour le syndicalisme américain à cause de son développement plus avancé et (3) en ce qui a trait au Québec, de l'influence de l'Église catholique romaine. La présence et les conséquences de chacun de ces facteurs varient d'un cas à l'autre. Les constatations qu'on y rapportait se fondaient sur les conclusions tirées d'un bon nombre d'études de cas portant sur le syndicalisme international. En 1984, *Relations industrielles* publia un article sur l'évolution de l'Union internationale des mouleurs entre 1860 et 1875. Elle mettait l'accent sur la ressemblance des marchés du travail à la fois pour les sections locales canadiennes et américaines. Le présent article traite des observations recueillies dans le cas des Mineurs unis d'Amérique ainsi que de leurs activités dans l'est du Canada au cours de la période 1900 à 1920.

Les cas des MUA montre qu'il y a interdépendance des marchés des biens canadiens et américains, concentration poussée des moyens de production ainsi que con-

trôle et propriété des entreprises, un marché du travail essentiellement canadien, très peu de participation américaine dans le marché des capitaux dans l'industrie et une organisation ouvrière canadienne préexistante, *The Provincial Workmen's Association* (PWA). En l'instance, la présence des MUA s'explique donc par l'influence des marchés des biens canadiens et américains limitrophes sur les syndicats canadiens et américains, de même que par la préférence des travailleurs canadiens.

Pendant presque toute son existence, la PWA a été une organisation favorisée. Son succès apparaît d'abord dans les améliorations qu'elle a obtenues dans les exploitations minières et les conditions de travail, principalement par son efficacité à influencer la législation. Elle obtint aussi certains gains dans les négociations avec les employeurs en matière de conditions d'emploi à l'époque où le contrôle et la propriété dans l'industrie minière étaient fragmentés. L'Association disposait de l'appui et de la fidélité des personnes qu'elle représentait. À un moment donné, des lézards se firent dans le soutien qu'elle recevait de ses membres. La critique portait sur l'incapacité de la PWA d'arracher aux employeurs des avantages pécuniaires et sur les méthodes qu'elle utilisait. Cette critique coïncidait avec la consolidation du contrôle et de la propriété dans l'industrie. La PWA fut incapable de faire progresser efficacement les intérêts des mineurs face au caractère changeant de l'industrie charbonnière en Nouvelle-Écosse. Les MUA s'offraient comme alternative. En conséquence, ce furent les mineurs de la Nouvelle-Écosse qui ouvrirent la voie à la poussée vers le recours aux structures du syndicalisme international et les partisans des MUA favorisèrent les méthodes de la négociation de conventions collectives et le syndicalisme d'affaires de préférence au processus de représentation politique et de mesures législatives.

Les MUA acquiescèrent et entreprirent une campagne de recrutement en Nouvelle-Écosse. Leur intervention rationalisa partiellement les marchés des biens d'un côté et de l'autre de la frontière ainsi que l'interdépendance des producteurs des deux pays. Il n'est pas difficile de découvrir les motifs qui se cachaient derrière l'activité des MUA en Nouvelle-Écosse. Ils différaient peu des motifs qui prévalaient dans leurs tentatives de syndicalisation des bassins houillers des États-Unis — les MUA ne pouvant pas permettre au charbon «non-syndiqué» de concurrencer le charbon «syndiqué».

L'activité et les efforts de plus en plus croissants des MUA divisèrent considérablement l'allégeance des travailleurs entre l'une et l'autre association. Dans cette lutte nez à nez, il n'y eut pas de vainqueur indiscutable et ni l'un ni l'autre des groupements fut en mesure de syndicaliser fortement l'industrie. Chacune des organisations offrit sa propre marque de syndicalisme, chacune comportant sa philosophie et ses méthodes originales. Bien que la PWA se soit tournée davantage vers la formule du syndicalisme d'affaires, elle dut faire face à des problèmes majeurs. En premier lieu, ses possibilités de recruter des adhérents se traduisirent par une activité plus limitée de négociation, d'organisation et de grève. Deuxièmement, comme les principaux centres charbonniers se trouvaient aux deux extrémités du pays, cet éloignement présentait de grandes difficultés d'organisation et d'administration. Chaque secteur de l'industrie occupait des marchés différents. L'industrie de

la côte ouest reposait presque entièrement sur les marchés des États-Unis et ceux de la côte est tant sur les marchés domestiques qu'extérieurs. Troisièmement, l'industrie de la côte ouest était formée de nombreux exploitants qui s'étaient regroupés en association. L'industrie de la côte est ne comprenait, en fait, qu'un seul employeur et les mines constituaient un complexe intégré, engagé à la fois dans l'exploitation minière et la fabrication de l'acier.

Après des années de lutte, dont le résultat pouvait possiblement conduire à l'épuisement des adversaires, les deux groupements s'engagèrent dans un processus d'amalgamation. L'organisation suivante évoluera graduellement vers le rétablissement du District 26 des Mineurs unis d'Amérique. Lorsque le moment du choix définitif se produisit, les travailleurs préférèrent être représentés par les MUA, c'est-à-dire qu'ils optèrent pour la philosophie et les méthodes du vrai syndicalisme.

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