

## **The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montréal 1935-1945**

### **Le développement des syndicats industriels à Montréal de 1935 à 1945.**

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Article abstract

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# The Rise of Industrial Unions in Montréal 1935-1945

**Terry Copp**

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This is a case study of the development of industrial unions in one Canadian city during a crucial union-building decade. The experience of workers in Montréal contains unique elements which are related to the particular economic, social and political environment of the city but workers in Montréal were participating in a nation-wide, indeed continent-wide pattern of trade union activity. The context of this study is therefore not only local but provincial, national and continental.

The late thirties and the war years were the two periods when industrial unions, organizing all workers in a plant without regard for their specific skills, became a reality instead of a dream. Industrial unionism is usually associated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) but in many North American centres it was American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) affiliated "craft" unions which took on the task of adding unskilled workers to the ranks of organized labour.

During the early and middle years of the 1930s unions throughout North America faced a remarkably similar set of challenges. The "open shop" campaigns of the 1920s had seriously weakened the labour movement including the handful of industrial unions that had won some success during the war. Unions were on the defensive everywhere, struggling to survive when the Depression struck. Under Depression conditions, the best that most unions could hope for was to maintain some kind of embryonic form which would allow them to take up their organizing tasks when conditions were more favourable. It is impossible to place too much stress on the importance of cadres around which union activity could be built. Only in those centres and those industries where a union survived or was created

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during the Depression did the capacity exist to respond quickly and effectively to the opportunities presented by the war economy.

South of the border unions found allies in their national, and in some cases their state, governments. Measures such as the *National Industrial Recovery Act* and above all, the *Wagner Act*, promoted the expansion of trade unions though not necessarily the achievement of collective bargaining. Canadians were far less favoured by government intervention and union growth here during the 1930s was due more to a spillover effect from the United States than to domestic changes. Canadian union leaders stimulated by the apparent success of their union brothers in the States tried to match their achievements even though economic and legislative conditions were quite different. The largely unsuccessful struggles of the late 1930s nevertheless provided an invaluable training school for the labour leaders of the 1940s.

Trade union history, like all other topics, takes on a peculiar form when the specific area of study involves the province of Québec. The collective memory of events in that province is emotionally and politically coloured in a way that has been quite unique. On trade union matters French Canadians have focused on the history of the national syndicates to the neglect of other unions. As Evelyn Dumas put it in her book *Dans le sommeil de nos os*:

Myself and others of my generation have been made to believe that before was reached adulthood around 1960 there was nothing but darkness in Québec, a darkness that was brightened by a few great feats of arms like the strike of the Asbestos miners in 1949 or that of the textile workers in Louiseville a few years later. However... it was nothing like that. Not only did the Québécois workers know the meaning of fighting for their dignity and their bread at least from the thirties and even before, but organizations and institutions supported them which were not less Québécois for being neither nationalist nor Catholic<sup>1</sup>.

Evelyn Dumas' book was concerned with a number of dramatic strikes of the late thirties and early forties which demonstrated her thesis that all was not darkness before 1960. Strikes, as Stuart Jamieson has argued, are just the "tip of the iceberg"<sup>2</sup> indicating levels of unrest and activity of a much greater dimension. This study, which deals with essentially the same years covered by Dumas, tries to go beyond strikes and sketches at least the external features of the whole iceberg.

Montréal had long been one of the most active centres of trade union activity in Canada. Throughout most of the 20th century the city had been a battleground over which the divided forces of organized labour had fought a series of engagements against a common enemy. There had been occasional victories but they were outnumbered by scores of defeats. By the mid-

dle years of the Great Depression the only really viable trade unions in the city were the railway organizations, the building trades locals and a few craft unions of limited membership.

There were of course a large number of other trade unions in existence. In 1935 the Department of Labour received reports from 150 locals with a claimed membership of nearly 60,000 workers<sup>3</sup>. Such statistics are practically meaningless in analyzing the position of organized labour. The figures are derived from a Dominion Department of Labour questionnaire which simply asked known locals of recognized labour organizations to report on their paid-up membership. No method of checking the accuracy of the returns was instituted and no qualitative questions about the functions of the local were asked. In 1935 unions such as the International Longshoreman's Association, the National Seamen's Association and the Garment Workers Unions claimed large memberships which only existed on paper. Perhaps an identification with the union persisted through the trials of the thirties, but unions were rarely able to offer their members much assistance or protection.

With unemployment among wage earners in Montréal hovering around the 25% mark<sup>4</sup> no complex explanation of trade union weakness seems called for. The alleged reluctance of A.F.L.-Trade and Labor Congress of Canada (T.L.C.C.) unions to organize mass production workers in the inter-war years have little to do with a situation where even skilled craft workers had great difficulty in maintaining effective agreements. The problem of dual unionism posed by the existence of Catholic syndicates in fields already entered by the internationals was equally insignificant in the context of the Great Depression. In a number of areas the internationals and the *syndicats* were able to cooperate and few direct confrontations occurred in Montréal.

The withdrawal of the Workers Unity League (W.U.L.) from the labour scene may also be dismissed as an important factor in Montréal. The most active local affiliate of the W.U.L., the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Employees had been largely eliminated by the internationals before the order to disband was issued. The W.U.L.'s furniture, food and leather worker units had not enjoyed any real success in the city.

## THE LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Before examining the halting progress of the trade union movement in Montréal during the late 1930's it is necessary to understand the unique legal framework within which unions operated. The Québec government

was the first provincial authority to introduce legislation designed to codify wages, hours and some aspects of working conditions across a broad range of industry. The *Québec Collective Labour Agreements Act*, known popularly as the "Arcand Act", was introduced in 1934<sup>5</sup>. It allowed the Lieutenant-Governor in Council to issue a decree extending the provisions of any "collective agreement" to the entire industry in a designated region of the province, "providing the provisions of said agreement have acquired a preponderant significance and importance". The Act required the creation of a joint worker-management committee legally incorporated to enforce the terms of the decree which were restricted to questions of wages, hours, apprenticeship and the proportion of skilled and unskilled workers. No provisions relating to union recognition, seniority or check-offs were possible under the decrees. Workers who had jointed *bona fide* unions, those in employees associations as well as the unorganized were subject to the rulings of the joint board.

Other Canadian provinces were to introduce laws known as *Industrial Standards Acts* inspired by the "codes" of the *National Industrial Recovery Act*, but these differed from the Québec law in that a wage/hours code for an industry could be decreed after consultation with employers and employees rather than through judicial extension of the terms of a collective agreement. The Québec law became an important measure regulating the wages of tens of thousands of Québec workers but in other provinces "industrial codes" were essentially confined to the construction industry and a few "personal service" occupations.

The election of Maurice Duplessis' *Union Nationale* government in 1936 brought a bewildering series of changes to Québec labour law. In 1937 Duplessis amended the Arcand Act, renaming it the *Workmen's Wages Act* and including a broad and much praised (by labour) definition of the right to freely organize trade unions. At the same time, however, the Québec government repealed the *Women's Minimum Wage Act* and introduced a new *Fair Wages Act* covering both male and female workers<sup>6</sup>.

This created considerable confusion for it provided the government with a mechanism for making wage/hour rulings without reference to any previously negotiated collective agreement. Both the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (C.T.C.C.) and the international unions saw the new law as a direct attack upon the gains they had made under the Arcand Act and Duplessis' brief honeymoon with organized labour was over. The worst fears of union officials appeared to be confirmed when the Dominion Textile Company fought the 1937 textile strike with the claim that they intended to wait for the machinery of the *Fair Wages Act* to be in place and would not sign an agreement with the National Syndicate of Textile Workers.

However it must be noted that the *Fair Wages Act* was *not* used to override or replace existing agreements under the old system. Judicial extension of collective agreements in fact continued without any noticeable differences during the remainder of Duplessis' first term. Decrees issued under the *Fair Wages Act* were directed at unorganized and probably unorganizable sections of the work force<sup>7</sup>.

Labour's initial opposition to the *Fair Wages Act* was quickly forgotten during 1938 because in that year Duplessis introduced Bills number 19 and 20 which further altered the province's labour laws. Three aspects of the 1938 amendments enraged the labour movement. Firstly the definition of labour's right to freely organize was altered to include a parallel "right to work" clause which in effect outlawed the closed shop and the union shop. Secondly, the Cabinet was given complete discretionary power to alter decrees issued under either the *Fair Wages Act* or the *Collective Agreements Act*. Finally government employees and workers on government contracts were specifically excluded from coverage by either law<sup>8</sup>.

There can be little doubt that Duplessis wanted these amendments to give his administration the power to curb and control both the Catholic and the international unions. There can be no doubt as to labour's reaction to the new laws. However it is equally important to realize that the practical consequences of the changes were insignificant. The 1938 amendments were repealed by the Godbout Government in early 1940, so the life of the legislation was less than eighteen months. During that time the only evidence of the law's impact is in a few new collective agreements where cautious company lawyers inserted a phrase "as far as the laws of the province allow" after a closed shop clause<sup>9</sup>. There is no evidence that the discretionary power of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council was used to adversely affect the interests of workers<sup>10</sup>.

Two other "anti-labour" laws of the Duplessis regime must be briefly considered. The famous "Padlock Act" (*An Act Respecting Communist Propaganda* 1937) was supported by the C.T.C.C. and even the Québec Federation of Labour (founded in 1938) maintained that the law "may have been good and fully justified" but had one "grave omission", — its failure to define Communism<sup>11</sup>. No defense of this law is intended when it is pointed out that the law was not used to attack functioning trade unions in Québec during the 1930's but was directed at Communist political groups<sup>12</sup>.

The innocuously named *Act to facilitate the exercise of certain rights* (1938) was of great potential danger to the labour movement. It attempted to make unincorporated associations and unions liable in civil law thus opening the door to law suits against unions for the actions of their mem-

bers. Ironically the only judicial test of the validity of this act came when a union, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (I.L.G.W.U.), attempted to sue an employer for back wages for its members on the grounds that if the union could be sued, it must have the right to sue in return. The Superior Court of Montréal refused this claim and offered the opinion that the statute would not hold up in court if used to sue a union either<sup>13</sup>. Apparently this was never tested and the law remained a dead issue.

In summary while it would seem difficult to question the traditional view of Duplessis' anti-labour intentions, the practical consequences of his regressive labour policies were of little significance in the actual evolution of the labour movement during the 1930's. What was important was the impact of the collective agreements extension law which, in practice, remained in force without significant change throughout the period under review.

### INDUSTRIAL UNIONS IN THE LATE THIRTIES

Before proceeding to an examination of the growth of specific industrial unions in Montréal it is important to remind ourselves of the actual structure of industry in the city. Table 1 ranks the fourteen most important manufacturing industries by number of workers in Montréal in 1938<sup>14</sup>.

TABLE 1

Montréal Manufacturing Industries Ranked by Number of Workers 1938

<i>Industries</i>	<i>Employees</i>
1. Women's Clothing	11,021
2. Railway shops	7,009
3. Men's Clothing	5,557
4. Textiles	4,652
5. Boots and Shoes	4,514
6. Baking, Confectionery	4,447
7. Tobacco Products	3,957
8. Electric Equipment	3,440
9. Iron and Steel	3,301
10. Brewing	1,521
11. Hats and Caps	1,439
12. Cheese and Butter	1,406
13. Meat Packing	1,288
14. Bronze and Copper	1,085

These then were the main categories of industrial workers likely to be involved in union activity. Not represented in the list are the two most im-

portant groups of organized workers in the city, the railway running trades and the building workers. (Also missing are workers in war-related industries developed after 1940.) Let us deal with these industries individually.

Throughout the 1930's a bitter war, marked by frequent strikes, was waged in the garment district. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers (A.C.W.A.) and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (I.L.G.W.U.) were both struggling to keep their locals alive in a situation where union agreements were almost impossible to maintain. From 1934 in the case of the A.C.W.A. and 1937 in the case of the I.L.G.W.U. the local labour situation was stabilized in the sense that these two unions were unchallenged in the industry and had organized their own joint boards to coordinate the activities of the constituent locals.

This did not mean that the clothing industry had been successfully unionized. The Amalgamated still faced the daunting prospect of organizing workers who were without jobs six to eight months of the year and could consequently be tempted to take any available work at almost any wage. The clothing manufacturers also tried out-of-town contracting in cities such as Sherbrooke to avoid union rates. Six months after the A.C.W.A.'s "successful" recognition strike of September 1933, 4 000 workers were out for ten days in an abortive attempt to win the 40-hour week and the union shop<sup>15</sup>.

It was in the context of an ongoing struggle that the Amalgamated agreed to a judicial extension of the wage and hour provisions of its agreement to the entire industry in the province (February 1935)<sup>16</sup>. In theory non-union shops would henceforth be required to pay union level minimum wages. The battle was now to be focused on union agreements and in September of 1935 the A.C.W.A. supported a month-long strike against one firm winning a closed shop for 900 workers<sup>17</sup>. Three more such strikes were won in 1937, and one in 1938<sup>18</sup>. The A.C.W.A. enjoyed relative success in the late 1930's, but its wage gains were modest and large parts of the industry were left unorganized.

The Arcand Act had played a significant role in the development of the Amalgamated in Montréal. Government regulation of wages and hours allowed the union to focus its energies on recognition and to gradually expand its base. The union was thus in an excellent position to seize the opportunity presented by the war.

It is more difficult to thread one's way through the history of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union because attention has long been focused on the dramatic strike of 1937. Throughout the first six years of the depression, local I.L.G.W.U. militants had 'won' a number of strikes only



to see the fruits of victory slip away, once the brief 'season' was over. Rivalry with the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers had also taken its toll and the union willingly agreed to judicial extension of a hard-won wage agreement obtained after a two week strike in August of 1935<sup>19</sup>. With the rival communist union out of the way, (disbanded with the other Workers Unity League Organizations) and the wage question temporarily settled for the industry, the way was open for a union organizing drive. In April of 1936, the Dress Cutters, the elite of the trade, launched their third attempt to obtain a union shop. The Montréal Dress Manufacturer's Guild capitulated after a week and the I.L.G.W.U. was encouraged to believe that the Montréal market could now be unionized.

The *grève des midinettes* of 1937 is famed in song and story<sup>20</sup>. The union's international headquarters provided maximum support in the struggle sending one of the most experienced organizers, Bernard Shane, to Montréal as well as providing ample financial assistance. Shane was soon joined by I.L.G.W.U.'s dynamic troubleshooter, Rose Pesotta, a lady who specialized in strike support activities. A newspaper was published, a canteen opened, social activities organized and the strikers made to feel that they were part of a great international movement<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the hastily improvised appearance of a rival National Catholic Syndicate, which was instantly recognized by the manufacturers guild, the strike continued until the bulk of the employers, desperate to get the season's work completed, signed a union contract. It was a famous victory except that, like previous attempts to organize the less-skilled workers, the agreement did not last a year. The economic 'boomlet' of 1937 was followed by a renewal of desperate depression conditions in 1938 and it proved impossible to maintain the union shop. Fortunately the I.L.G.W.U. ordered Bernard Shane to remain in Montréal and together with the young Claude Jodoin and other activists, the organization survived through two miserable years of setbacks. The union's troubles were compounded by the lapsing of the *Québec Collective Agreements Act* decree for the industry<sup>22</sup>. It was not until April of 1940 that the I.L.G.W.U. was again ready to take on the manufacturers in a mass strike. The I.L.G.W.U. had certainly fought the good fight in the thirties; they had created a core of activists, membership loyalty and provided good leadership. All they lacked was a collective agreement.

Other international unions were actively organizing in the more specialized segments of the garment industry. Little attention has been paid to the United Hat, Cap & Millinery Workers in the existing literature even though the Montréal organization was one of the larger labour units in the country

during the late thirties. The Hatters were involved in a number of strikes throughout the 1930's and in the fall of 1937 were able to force an agreement on fourteen men's hat manufacturers which was extended to the industry in December of 1937<sup>23</sup>. The agreement did not, of course, include union recognition but the Hatters obtained a dominant position in the trade over the next several years including a closed shop agreement with the majority of manufacturers.

The record of one other 'garment' industry union may be briefly noted. Two Montréal-based locals of the International Fur Workers Union successfully negotiated a 40-hour week agreement in 1936<sup>24</sup>. Judicial extension of the decree followed immediately and the furriers were able to secure marked improvements in their contract in subsequent years.

The story of the various attempts to organize workers in Canada's primary textile industry is one long tale of misery. Whether the mill was located in Hespeler, Welland, Cornwall, Valleyfield, Montmorency or Montréal, whether the organizers were affiliated to the W.U.L., the A.F.L., the C.I.O. or the C.T.C.C., the pattern of labour relations is much the same.

Very little has been published about textile strikes in Ontario<sup>25</sup> but the history of the Québec struggle has been under intense discussion for a number of years<sup>26</sup>. For present purposes it will be sufficient to trace the main outlines of the story of the rise and fall of the National Catholic Textile Syndicate in Montréal during the years 1937-1939. The *syndicat* began organizing in late 1936 and had considerable success in the smaller Québec mill towns. Lacking a strike fund and woefully short of experienced organizers the union leaders nevertheless launched a campaign to reach a collective agreement with one of the province's largest employers, Dominion Textiles.

C.B. Gordon, President of the Company, was apparently confident that the union could be beaten and he flatly refused to meet with *syndicat* leaders. The best that Gordon would offer was cooperation with any wage-hour ordinances issued under the soon-to-be established *Fair Wages Act*. As the date for the promulgation of the Act approached the *syndicat* decided to try and force the company to negotiate and a strike was called at all the company's Québec mills.

Well-manned (and womanned!) picket lines were thrown up around the mills and sporadic incidents of rock throwing and shoving matches erupted. The company responded by closing its plants and preparing to starve the strikers out. The strike quickly became a *cause célèbre* in Québec with the French language press and most local parish priests in full support of their

national union's struggle against the English "big interests". Despite this public backing the union was in deep trouble. It had always been especially weak in Montréal where, even according to its own estimates, just half the workers were union members. When after a two-week shutdown the company reopened its three Montréal plants, hundreds of hungry workers showed up to man the machines. Clashes between strikers and scabs, massive police intervention and some near riots led Archbishop Villeneuve to intervene "in the interests of social peace and harmony". The somewhat desperate *syndicat* welcomed this development, as did Premier Duplessis whose anti-strike statements ("I will not stand for intimidation and sabotage... this government will not be run by the international unions, the national unions or by anyone else...")<sup>27</sup> had won him few friends in French Canadian circles.

Dominion Textile's management approved the idea of Villeneuve as mediator but did not change its policies. The strike settlement reflected this situation. Instead of union recognition the company agreed to meet with a committee composed of two union and two non-union employees. It offered to reduce the work week from 55 to 50 hours but granted an overtime differential of just 5%. Piece workers got a 4% increase with a 7% adjustment for the lowest category of hourly-rated employees<sup>28</sup>. The final agreements, separate for each mill, were signed on December 27, 1937 and were to run to the following September, except that there was a clause which allowed either party to terminate the agreement with three months' notice. Forty-two days after signing, Dominion gave the required notice and then proceeded to set up shop committees in each of its mills. The *syndicat* lacked both the resources and the will to contest this action effectively and instead appealed to Premier Duplessis to protect the workers from announced wage cuts by an ordinance of the Fair Wage Board<sup>29</sup>! The Montréal and Valleyfield locals soon collapsed although in other centres the *syndicat* managed to survive until after 1944 when a new legal framework and a new economic climate made another organizing drive plausible.

It would be easy to join the ranks of those who have taken a number of cheap shots at the C.T.C.C. and its textile federation for the failures of 1937-38. It seems more relevant to point out that no one had any success in organizing the textile industry until late in the war and then Québec and the C.T.C.C. kept pace with other regions and other unions.

Union activity in Montréal's railway shops dated back to the early years of the century. The details, in no way peculiar to Montréal, are given in sources such as Harold Logan's classic *Trade Unions in Canada*. Essentially skilled workers, journeymen and apprentices belonged to one of the

A.F.L.-T.L.C. craft unions linked together in a Railway Shop Federation. The International Association of Machinists with two large 'Lodges' in Montréal was the biggest union but half a dozen other internationals were involved in contracts for their respective trades<sup>30</sup>. Unskilled workers were not part of the system before the second World War.

Union activity in the city's large boot and shoe industry also had a long history<sup>31</sup> but it was mainly a story of defeats. The A.F.L. Boot and Shoe Worker's Union (B.S.W.) had one local in the city, no. 249, which dated its charter from 1902<sup>32</sup>. Like locals in other cities the Montréal organization had to contend with a highly fragmented industry and the steady dilution of skilled labour requirements. In Montréal as in other North American centres dual and indeed multiple unionism added to the difficulties. The new (1937) C.I.O. union, the United Shoe Workers of America<sup>33</sup>, never put in an appearance in Montréal but the National Catholic Syndicate, *La Fédération Nationale du cuir et de la chaussure*, did offer direct competition.

Neither union possessed any real power and workers had been thoroughly demoralized by the loss of several strikes called to protest wage cuts in the early thirties<sup>34</sup>. The boot and shoe industry was the first to be covered by a decree under the Arcand Act, August 25, 1934<sup>35</sup>. The collective agreement extended to the industry was negotiated by the *syndicat*. It provided for some advance on existing wage rates but it was, to put it politely, a modest achievement. It was not until 1938 that the B.S.W. became a party to the agreement and the participation of the International added nothing to the strength of the workers' negotiating position<sup>36</sup>. In summary, it is clear that boot and shoe workers in Montréal remained largely unorganized and underpaid, just like their fellow workers in other parts of North America. The value of judicial extension of a collective agreement was not readily apparent when the agreement was of little value.

Food processing had always been a major source of employment in Montréal. If we were to include brewing, tobacco and distilling in this category, it would be second only to the garment trade as an industry. The A.F.L.-T.L.C. unions, with jurisdiction in the various segments of this industry, were in deep trouble all across North America during the early thirties. The baking jurisdiction, for example, was torn by strife between the Bakery and Confectionery Workers and the Amalgamated Food Workers<sup>37</sup>. After a merger was effected in 1935 and certification under the *Wagner Act* made available (1937), the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union of America (B.C.W.) began to make progress in the United States. In Montréal two locals, one covering "certain Jewish bakeries" and a second, Local 55 in the general baking field, were active. Local 55's agree-

ment with several Montréal bakeries was judicially extended in January of 1937<sup>38</sup> and was annually renewed. The large bread and biscuit companies were quite untouchable in the thirties although modest attempts were made.

The Tobacco Workers International Union (T.W.I.U.) had virtually ceased to exist in the United States during the early depression years. It was not until after 1937 that the union was able to sign contracts with the big companies and up until 1940 a long litigation battle with the P. Lorillard Company absorbed all available energies and funds<sup>39</sup>. Shortly thereafter, as we will see, the T.W.I.U. moved into Montréal.

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, and after 1937, the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (P.W.O.C.) were the two major factors in the meat packing industry. Both were completely stymied during the late thirties all across North America. The Amalgamated did create one local in Montréal in 1938 but it was soon disbanded<sup>40</sup>. Neither the Amalgamated nor P.W.O.C. got anywhere in other Canadian cities before the war<sup>41</sup>.

The major union in the brewing and distilling industry, the United Brewery Workers, had virtually disappeared during prohibition. Revived in 1933 it faced a concerted attempt on the part of the Teamsters to take over its jurisdiction. The beer wars of the late thirties and forties left the union with few resources and it was expelled from the A.F.L. in 1941<sup>42</sup>. The Teamsters in Montréal never tackled the breweries and it was not until 1941 that a new A.F.L. affiliate, the Distillery, Rectifying, Wine and Brewing Workers, became active. The various parts of the food processing industry were not exactly fertile fields for union organization in the late thirties anywhere in North America.

We can deal quite briefly with the other industries. Montréal was an important centre for the manufacture of electrical equipment but no union attempted to organize production workers before 1937. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (I.B.E.W.) (A.F.L.-T.L.C.) remained a craft union in Canada until after 1940 and the new (1937) United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers was a tiny and ineffective organization until the war years. Montréal's iron and steel industry was composed of small fabricating and hardware plants with the exception of Dosco's Peck Rolling Mills. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee (S.W.O.C.) arrived in Montréal after 1940 and began intensive organizing from 1941 on.

During the late 1930's a number of unions led by affiliates of the A.F.L.-T.L.C. had tried to break through the barriers created against trade unions in Montréal. It is important to recognize two things about the

period. First, unions achieved very little in the pre-war years. Even those units which were able to win a collective agreement and see it extended to the industry, accomplished little more than a standardization of very low wages. It was the war and the gradual transformation of individual sectors of the Montréal economy that allowed existing unions to seize opportunities to win better contracts and membership loyalty. The second point to note is that unions which had created cadres, however weak, during the thirties, were in a much better position than other labour organizations to take advantage of the new economic realities. Between 1940 and 1942 virtually all of the important victories won by unions were accomplished by internationals which had established their presence in the city before the war. The greatest achievement of the active Montréal unions was that they survived. The labour situation in that city was quite typical of experiences in other Canadian cities. Oshawa notwithstanding, there was no great surge of union-building activity in the late 1930's. By the summer of 1939 the trade union movement in Montréal, as in all of Canada, was in desperate straights.

#### 1939-1940

Before discussing the growth of trade unions in Montréal during the war years we must establish a revised picture of the industrial structure of the city. Table 2 is based on the 1941 census, thus providing data from a quite early phase of the war economy. It is suggestive rather than fully descriptive of the dramatic changes of the war years<sup>43</sup>.

Our purpose now is to establish the impact of trade union activity in each of these industries. It is important to recognize that the economic and legislative environments were not static during the war years. At the risk of oversimplifying, four distinct periods can be identified: September 1939 to December 1940; January 1941 to October 1941; October 1941 to December 1943; and the last two years of the war. The specific dates are related to changes in government economic and labour policy but the fourfold division also corresponds fairly well with changes in the Canadian and Montréal economies to which the government was responding through its war-time regulations.

The first period was marked by a very uneven economic recovery effecting some sectors of the economy. The full impact of war expenditures was only apparent in the last months of 1940. Labour policy during these two years proved to be virtually neutral in its effects neither encouraging labour unions nor actively limiting their powers to function in the arena of free col-

**TABLE 2**  
**Montréal Manufacturing Industries Ranked by Number of Employees: 1941**

<i>Industry</i>	<i>Employees</i>
1. Garments	26,474
2. Baking and Confectionery	8,358
3. Aircraft	7,749
4. Munitions	6,641
5. Textiles	6,328
6. Boot & Shoes	6,253
7. Railway Rolling Stock	5,825
8. Electrical Equipment	4,953
9. Foundry Products	3,940
10. Boilermakers, Machinery	3,678
11. Tobacco	3,671
12. Iron and Steel	3,299
13. Furniture and Upholstery	2,802
14. Shipbuilding	1,879
15. Fur	1,739
16. Sheet metal	1,517
17. Brewing & Distilling	1,448
18. Brass and Copper	1,240
19. Meat Packing	632
20. Explosive and Ammunition	619

lective bargaining. The Dominion Government's emergency war powers were used to issue P.C. 2685 an Order-in-Council which declared that fair and reasonable standards of wages and working conditions *should* be observed and that the right of workers to form their own unions *should* be recognized but the order proved to be quite meaningless. When labour complained, the responsible Minister declared "the order was not meant to be coercive."<sup>44</sup>

On the positive side the government did not invoke any form of wage control until December of 1940 so workers in industries which were stimulated by war orders were able to develop effective bargaining strategies.

The men's clothing industry was one of the first to be transformed as orders for military uniforms poured in. A strike was launched on November 22nd 1939 and agreement was quickly reached on a ten percent wage increase<sup>45</sup>. The new agreement was then "extended" by Order-in-Council.

The I.L.G.W.U. tried to follow the Amalgamated's example, but a strike begun on December 19th faltered and four employees were dismissed. A series of disputes with individual firms followed. Then on April 22, 1940 a mass walkout involving close to 5 000 workers took place. Scattered

picket-line incidents led to arrests but the strike grew<sup>46</sup>. After just a week an agreement was reached which provided for a five percent increase beginning in June and a further five percent when a new Collective Agreement Extension order was issued for the industry. The I.L.G.W.U. also won the union shop, the 44-hour week and time-and-one-half for overtime after the first four hours. Overtime was limited to a maximum of eight hours a week in an attempt to make more jobs available.<sup>47</sup> It should be emphasized that it was this strike and not the famous 1937 battle that finally established the I.L.G.W.U. in Montréal.

Another major needle trades union in the city, the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers had won extension of its Montréal agreement to the entire province in January of 1939<sup>48</sup>. The following winter negotiations produced substantial gains of \$2.00 a week across the board. For lower paid workers this meant increases of more than 15%<sup>49</sup>. The International Fur Workers Union won the 40-hour week and a ten percent wage increase in August of 1940<sup>50</sup> without a strike. No such gains were recorded in the troubled boot and shoe industry or in the various components of the vast food processing industry. No progress was made in the first year of war in the textile industry nor in the furniture field.

The most dramatic evidence of the existence of a war economy in Montréal was the rapid growth of the aviation industry which soon became the largest single employer of labour in the city. Montréal had long been an important centre of activity for the International Association of Machinists (I.A.M.). Two railway shop lodges, 111 and 118, dated their charters back to the 19th century and two additional locals, a contract shop lodge and a brass workers unit were solidly established in the 1930's. The I.A.M. had begun to claim jurisdiction in the aircraft industry in the United States during the mid-thirties and Canadian officials were ready and willing to move quickly when war orders began to transform this country's miniscule production facilities into factories for mass production of trainers and combat airframes.

In Montréal the I.A.M. chartered a single local, Lodge 712, to organize the entire aircraft industry. The union gave that task to a Scottish tool-maker named Robert Haddow who had been active in the Machinists for some time. Haddow was appointed as the Grand Lodge's business agent for the Montréal district in November of 1939. By the spring of 1940 an extensive organizing drive was underway<sup>51</sup>. Initially the major companies were unwilling to negotiate and the union appealed to the Federal Department of Labour for the appointment of a Board of Inquiry under the *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act* (I.D.I.A.). After presentation of the union's case, Canadian Car and Foundry officials agreed to immediate negotiations. An



agreement was signed before the I.D.I.A. Board concluded its hearings. A similar contract was then negotiated with Canadian Vickers<sup>52</sup>; thereafter the union was firmly established in the local aircraft industry. Early in 1941 Noorduyn Aviation, Fairchild and Federal Aircraft recognized the union and negotiated separate agreements<sup>53</sup>. This had all been accomplished without a strike and without any representation votes. Indeed it is not by any means clear that Lodge 712 had enrolled a majority of the aircraft workers in the union when it was recognized as the sole bargaining agent.

When one recalls the problems encountered by the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America International Union (U.A.W.), the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and other industrial unions in this period, the rapid unionization of one of Montréal's largest mass production industries is especially striking. At first sight the key variable would appear to be management attitudes for there is no evidence of the kind of *doctrinaire* anti-union views which were so common in other sectors of Canadian industry. But two other points must be considered. The International Association of Machinists had a well-established reputation as a "responsible", i.e. conservative, craft union. It was not a 'militant' C.I.O. union associated with sit-down strikes or other industrial "sabotage" and did not seek to obtain any form of union security, not even a voluntary checkoff. It was in reality an industrial union, uniting tool-makers, production workers and labourers in a single bargaining unit. However the leadership at the international, national and local levels appeared to be composed of solid reliable craft unionists.

Since there was no wage control order in effect and since the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme gave the industry top priority in Ottawa, management had little difficulty in agreeing to premium wages. Unskilled production workers got 40¢ an hour, semi-skilled workers 60¢ and journeymen 75¢ under the agreements<sup>54</sup>. These wages were about 30% above rates in comparable occupations and the aircraft industry experienced little difficulty in recruiting workers.

One other war industry of obvious importance, ship-building, was less easily organized. The International Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders won wage increases of ten percent for its 130 members after a two-day strike called in support of an I.D.I.A. board majority report<sup>55</sup>. In the meantime unskilled workers enlisted under the banner of an Independent Industrial Union of Shipyard Workers. Brief work interruptions were halted when the Department of Munitions and Supply organized a representation vote which the union lost by a wide margin<sup>56</sup>. The Boilermakers and the A.F.L. skilled trades unions, the I.B.E.W. and Sheet Metal workers had long held contracts in the industry. In 1940 they made no attempt to organize produc-

tion employees. In the industrial department of Vickers an unaffiliated shop committee<sup>57</sup> won wage increases averaging ten percent for both skilled and unskilled workers. It should be noted that, in contrast to the aircraft industry, shipbuilding activity in Montréal was very slow in 1940. No organizing drives developed in other metal trades industries.

## 1941

The Dominion Government's attitude towards the war and war production had been transformed by the events of May-June 1940 but it was not until the end of that year that the authorities intervened directly in the management of the economy by freezing prices and regulating wages.

On December 16, 1940 two Orders-in-Council of Major importance were issued. P.C. 7440 took the form of an instruction to Boards of Conciliation established under the *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act*. (The authority of the I.D.I.A. was concurrently extended to all war-related industries, P.C. 3495.) The essence of the wage control order was that basic wage rates in war-related industries were to be frozen at their 1926-29 level, or any higher level since established. The only exceptions to this rule were when "it can be clearly shown that when such level was established wages were depressed and sub-normal or unduly enhanced."<sup>58</sup>

Conciliation Boards were also allowed to authorize (not order) the payment of a cost-of-living bonus based on increases in the national cost-of-living index. The bonus was to be paid in a flat amount per week "uniform to all workers" since "the burden of the rise in the cost-of-living of the necessaries of life falls without distinction on all classes." Wage control was to be applied only to the pressure points in the economy or to put it somewhat differently, in those areas where labour was most likely to win wage increases through collective bargaining.

The Minister of Labour, Norman McLarty, clarified the meaning of the order in early 1941. He argued that since it would be impossible to determine the bonus independently for each occupation or economic area, a standard figure of \$25.00 a week should be used as the basis for calculating the bonus for adult male workers. For every five percent increase in the cost-of-living index a maximum bonus of \$1.25 might be allowed. Women and males under 21 were to receive a five percent bonus to a maximum of \$1.25 a week<sup>59</sup>. This very serious example of discrimination against female workers is fairly indicative of government attitudes towards women workers at this stage of the war — before a manpower crisis had developed.

The practical significance of P.C. 7440 may be illustrated by examining the quite bitter confrontation which developed at Dosco's Peck Rolling Mills plant in Montréal during the spring and summer of 1941. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee's Local 2174 had won the support of the overwhelming majority of the employees and brought a long list of grievances before I.D.I.A. Conciliation Board. The issues of union recognition and working conditions were dealt with relatively easily and the company and union were also able to reach agreement on a five-day 54-hour week with time-and-one-half for overtime. The real problem was wages and on this issue the majority report of the Board developed a very narrow interpretation of P.C. 7440 which became known as the Peck Rolling Mills formula.

The basic wage rate at Peck Rolling Mills was 30.7¢ an hour with an employer volunteered cost-of-living bonus of 15¢ a day. In fact, almost half of the 350 employees earned slightly less than this 'basic' rate and only thirty percent earned more than 40¢ an hour. Thus, on the basis of a 54-hour week the average wage would be less than \$20.00 a week. The Board learned that wage rates in 1926-29 had been below present levels (27.5¢ an hour) and the majority report therefore dismissed the unions' request for a 15¢ an hour increase. The majority report also rejected the relevance of the union's argument that Dosco workers in Sydney and Trenton and steelworkers in other areas were paid at higher rates and insisted that "it is difficult to see how the fairness and reasonableness of wage scales can be determined by other than local standards."<sup>60</sup>

The Minority Report written by Canada's outstanding labour lawyer, Jacob Cohen, contained a biting critique of his colleagues' views. Cohen argued that if this strict legalistic interpretation of P.C. 7440 was to be followed, conciliation boards could be replaced by "an official of the accounting staff of the department." He stated that he could not accept such an interpretation and noted:

... it is nowhere seriously suggested that the cost-of-living in Montréal justifies a lower wage rate. Beyond this I am unable to understand much less agree with a concept of variation in our social and economic standards. I know of no principle which justifies the proposition that any group of people, of any province or of any industry are mere stepchildren in the Canadian social order and expect to be satisfied with a lower standard of living...<sup>61</sup>

Cohen went on to advocate an increase to 40¢ an hour plus a cost-of-living bonus but Dosco's Peck Rolling Mills, backed by the majority report, stuck to existing wage scales. Employees went out on strike on April 23, 1941 and stayed out until June 11 when the Dominion Government offered to reconvene the Conciliation Board. The Board failed to meet during the summer and the dispute ended with the temporary collapse of local 2174.

The Department of Labour was swamped with requests for the appointment of I.D.I.A. Boards in the early months of 1941 and generally speaking, the Boards attempted to implement the Peck Rolling Mills formula. However in a number of cases, commissioners withdrew from a dispute when a settlement was reached even if the settlement clearly violated the wage control principles. Even more striking was the number of war-industry agreements containing significant wage rate increases which were reported by the *Labour Gazette* in its monthly summary of "Recent Industrial Agreements and Schedules of Wages". The government's wage control policy was a shambles, its only real effect was to provide employers who wished to resist wage demands with an elaborate rationale<sup>62</sup>.

The creation of 'full employment' and the steady rise in real income which characterized 1941 may account for some of the inertia of the local trade union movement. Established unions concentrated their energies on consolidating their position and improving wages. The Amalgamated chartered two new locals, tiemakers and shirtmakers<sup>63</sup>. The I.L.G.W.U. fought a series of small battles to force certain employers to live up to the collective agreement. The union pressed hard for payment of the full cost-of-living bonus but Bernard Shane and Claude Jodoin were not yet ready to assist in a general mass-organizing drive.

The I.A.M. under the energetic direction of Robert Haddow and Adrien Villeneuve, the business agent for the new Lodge 712<sup>64</sup> devoted its energies to a campaign to win wage increases, the 44-hour week and a closed shop in the aircraft industry. A strike vote was held on June 26, 1941 and almost 5 000 workers authorized a walkout<sup>65</sup>. Formal application for an I.D.I.A. Board followed and the dispute dragged on throughout the rest of 1941. In the end the union got very little; wage adjustments were to be made only in the context of the cost-of-living bonus and no form of union security was obtained, never mind the closed shop<sup>66</sup>.

The year did mark the first appearance of the United Electrical Workers (U.E.W.) in the city but it was not an auspicious beginning for Clarence Jackson's union. Electrolier Manufacturing had a relatively small staff compared to the industry giants, R.C.A., Marconi and Northern Electric but the U.E.W. had a solid base at the plant. Unfortunately the company moved first firing five union activists for 'incompetency'. This prompted a partial walkout which the company met by hiring new workers. Officials flatly refused to negotiate with "C.I.O." representatives and within four days the company was back at full production<sup>67</sup>. The U.E.W. was not having much success anywhere in 1941 and this incident seems to have ended their activity in Montréal for several years.

A realistic assessment of the Montréal labour scene at the end of 1941 would suggest that only four industrial unions, the A.C.W.A., the I.L.G.W.U., the United Hatters and the I.A.M. had accomplished much in the way of new organizing in the first two years of the war. While noting this we must remember that one of the largest war industries, the Angus Shops of Canadian Pacific Railway, was unionized before the war and new workers were brought into the existing structure of unionism in the railway shops.

During 1941 Canada crossed the threshold from a situation of labour surplus to one of growing labour shortages. Wage settlements in manufacturing had resulted in a 15 percent increase in wage rates 1931-41 but this figure is, of course, in no way indicative of increases in earned income for full employment and extensive overtime resulted in a much more dramatic rise in take-home pay<sup>68</sup>.

To summarize it is evident that in the first two years of the war the Federal government was reacting to and not directing changes in the Canadian economy. For wage earners in Montréal, and one suspects elsewhere in Canada, this pre-control era was a time of relative prosperity and opportunity. After ten years of massive unemployment and underemployment, full-time work at increasing wages was at last available. Dramatic food price increases and a marked rise in rental costs cast shadows over some families but prices were still below 1929-30 levels and little in the way of shortages had appeared.

This is, of course, a summary of overall trends and should not be taken as a statement applicable to all categories of workers. It is noteworthy, however, that the approach of full employment and the pull of high wage war industries had a measurable effect on wage scales in those non-war related industries regulated by the *Québec Collective Agreements Act*. For instance, the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, Local 2366 won an agreement with a Montréal ornamental iron and bronze company which included the 44-hour week and good wage increases. On October 9, 1941 a Québec Order-in-Council made this agreement mandatory for the entire industry. Many other industry-wide rulings which contained significant wage increases were issued in the fall of 1941 including a 10% increase in the tanning industry, 12.5% in women's cloaks and suits, 10% in men's hats and an average of more than 10% in the building trades<sup>69</sup>.

### 1942-1943

The government faced a very difficult problem in the latter half of 1941. An inflationary pattern remarkably similar to the one experienced

during the first two years of World War I was emerging and measures of the type announced in October 1941 could not have been postponed much longer. Thus began the second phase of government interventions in the economy. Mackenzie King's speech to the nation on compulsory price and wage control was a forceful summary of the need for immediate and drastic action to curb an inflation rate which had reached .8 percent a month.

The administrative mechanism established to enforce the wage stabilization order (P.C. 8253) was a National War Labour Board (N.W.L.B.) and nine Regional Boards. Increases in basic wage rates in all industries were now illegal unless written permission was obtained from the N.W.L.B. The Board could grant such increases only if it could be proven that wage rates were low.

as compared with the rates generally prevailing for the same or substantially similar occupations in the locality or in a locality which in the opinion of the National Board is comparable.<sup>70</sup>

The Order-in-Council had also appeared to make payment of a cost-of-living bonus compulsory but the methods of payment were complex and resulted in enormous confusion and frustration. The order stated that if an employer had been paying a cost-of-living bonus prior to November 15, 1941 he was required to add to that bonus an amount based on increases in the cost-of-living index. But if he wasn't paying a bonus, he did not have to begin such payment until February 15, 1942 and then he had only had to pay a bonus based on the rise in the cost-of-living index between the date of the last wage increase and January 1942<sup>71</sup>. A more certain method for creating chaos and litigation could scarcely have been devised. Workers in the same plant, never mind the same industry or town, would find themselves receiving dramatically different cost-of-living bonuses and while the sums involved in 1942 were not large, a completely unnecessary basis for grievances had been created.

This problem was not immediately understood but another weakness in the Wage Stabilization Order — the control of salaried employees was. On November 28th, 1941 J.L. Ilesley, the Minister of Finance, announced that the income tax division of the Department of National Revenue would administer P.C. 9298 the Wartime Salaries Order. Salaries were to be frozen but cost-of-living bonuses *could* be paid to employees earning less than \$3,000 a year. Promotions were to be reviewed by the Department of National Revenue and promotions where the total salary was above \$7,500 had to be approved in advance. It is not possible to comment on the effectiveness of these regulations in detail, but it is worth noting that between 1939 and 1946 the long established income relationship between white collar and

blue collar incomes shifted dramatically. In 1939 the average wage for "production workers" was \$975 and the average salary for supervisory and office employees was \$1,746. By 1946 the averages were \$1,156 and \$2,305<sup>72</sup>.

The N.W.L.B. began functioning in early 1942 and by November had dealt with 235 cases related to wage increases. In all but 20 instances wage increases were granted. Most appeals came from *employers* who sought permission to increase wages in the face of the intense competition for labour<sup>73</sup>.

The N.W.L.B. claimed to be implementing a number of guidelines which appeared designed to prevent or at least strongly limit wage increases and the observer is left wondering how the N.W.L.B. reconciled its stated policy with the actual record of its decisions.

The Board had declared that it would not accept arguments based on discrepancies from 'national' or United States wage rates and that it would not interfere in provincial minimum wage rulings. Yet 1942 wage rates increased by a further 10 percent on the 1939 figures for skilled labour and 14 percent for unskilled<sup>74</sup>. Not exactly stringent wage control!

The second area of concern for the N.W.L.B. was the payment of a cost-of-living bonus. The administration of this part of the order was totally chaotic in 1942 and in March 1 of 1943 the government tried to cut through the confusion it had created by instructing the N.W.L.B. (P.C. 2370) to use its own judgment in awarding a cost-of-living bonus by dating the month from which the bonus might be calculated back to any month after August 1939. The measure helped to take a good deal of pressure off the Board.

In December of 1943 the government again altered its wage control policy. P.C. 9384 declared that existing cost-of-living bonuses were to be incorporated into basic pay rates and no further bonuses were to be granted. All employers were required to establish a schedule of basic wage rates incorporating the bonus and these new rates could only be adjusted if it could be shown that "gross inequality or gross injustice" existed.

By the end of 1943 the Dominion Government's price control policy had proven to be incredibly successful. The consumer price index had levelled off below the 120 mark (1939 = 100) and food prices had actually declined during 1943<sup>75</sup>. Wage control policies were another matter. For workers in Montréal the evidence suggests that the national index of wage rate increases underestimates the rise in wages<sup>76</sup>. Equally important is the rise in gross income due to overtime and the enormous gains in family income made possible by the rapid entry of married women into the labour force.

This then was the context within which the greatest organizing drive in the history of Montréal was launched. Between the fall of 1941 and the end of 1943 dozens of new locals were chartered and industries which had remained solidly non-union were forced to confront a new reality. What follows is a brief survey of activity in some of the major sectors of the city's industrial life.

### **Metal Industry**

After the I.A.M. accepted a near-total defeat in pressing new demands on the Aircraft industry, the union turned its energies to organizing the unorganized. Together with Alex Gould of the Boilermakers and Onésime Renaud of the Sheetmetal Workers, Bob Haddow formed a Metal Trades Council which was to focus energies on the munitions industry and other expanding war plants. Haddow had attended the 1941 convention of the A.F.L.'s Metal Trades Department where discussion centred on the breakthrough that cooperative efforts among A.F.L. affiliates had won for labour in other North American cities<sup>77</sup>. Back in Montréal the new Metal Trades Council singled out Defense Industries Ltd. with three area plants, Dominion Engineering, Vickers Shipyards, Canadian Car and Foundry and R.C.A. Victor as prime targets<sup>78</sup>.

The A.F.L. unions quickly found that they had serious competition in the field. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee had suffered an enormous setback in 1941 when their seven week strike against Peck Rolling Mills had ended in disaster. But late in 1941 they had begun to organize production workers at Vickers and gained footholds at a few other plants. In 1942 R.J. Lamoureux became the director of organization for the Montréal area and began to put together an impressive organizing drive<sup>79</sup>.

The two rivals fought their hardest battle at Vickers where in June of 1942 S.W.O.C. won a representation vote 1149 to 492<sup>80</sup>. The A.F.L. unions won bargaining rights at Defense Industries<sup>81</sup>, R.C.A. Victor<sup>82</sup>, one Dominion Engineering plant<sup>83</sup>, one Canadian Car and Foundry plant<sup>84</sup>, and a number of smaller establishments.

By the end of 1943 the Steelworkers had won agreements at Dominion Bridge<sup>85</sup>, General Steelwares, and Robert Mitchell<sup>86</sup>. They were also well on their way to contracts at a half-dozen smaller plants. Unions had not had it all their own way. Employees' associations had been formed at many plants to contest bargaining rights and the international unions lost some big ones including an important Canadian Car and Foundry plant for which the Steelworkers had worked very hard<sup>87</sup>. Still employees' associations signed agreements that included benefits very similar to those won by unions.



By the end of 1943 the metal industry in Montréal had undergone a quiet revolution. Seniority provisions, a grievance procedure, paid vacations, the 48-hour week, overtime pay and an increased number of statutory holidays were obtained in most agreements. Normally wage increases, which had to be approved by the War Labour Boards, were related to increases in the cost-of-living bonus but there were important exceptions to this rule. The Steelworkers won a major increase at Robert Mitchell Company and the I.A.M. was able to report wage gains in a number of its contracts. Union security clauses were very rare indeed. Maintenance of membership proposals, particularly the non-revocable checkoff were pressed by unions but few agreements signed before 1944 contained much beyond a 'no-discrimination' clause.

### **Electrical Industry**

Only one organization was really active in this field during 1942-43. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (I.B.E.W.) became a partner in the Metal Trades Council and that body won an agreement with R.C.A. Victor in September of 1942. The representation vote was 1185 to 122 in favour of the union<sup>88</sup>. In January of 1943 this unit became Local 1028 I.B.E.W. and remained with the A.F.L. until 1948 when the workers switched en masse to the United Electrical Workers (CCL-CIO)<sup>89</sup>. Northern Electric was untouchable given the successful paternalism of Bell Telephone. The other large company Marconi was the scene of a protracted and ultimately unsuccessful campaign which became a national *cause célèbre*. Unlike R.C.A., Marconi had moved into the company union business in earnest. The Québec Regional War Labour Board had obliged the company by permitting it to raise wages, something the same Board denied to the unionized workers at R.C.A. Marconi fought the union in other ways; union activists were fired and in one case the company simply defied a Dominion Department of Labour order to reinstate a worker<sup>90</sup>. Eventually a supervised vote accorded representation to the employees' association<sup>91</sup>.

### **Textiles**

Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent began organizing under the banner of the United Textile Workers of America in 1942. Initially they concentrated their efforts on the big Valleyfield mill where they maintained the union had majority support. Organizational work at Dominion Textiles' three Montréal plants was well under way by the fall of 1942<sup>92</sup> and continued throughout 1943. However the union failed to secure recognition for any workers in Montréal during this period.

### Boot and Shoe Workers

Local 249 of the Boot and Shoe Workers was one of the oldest locals in the city. It was also one of the least effective. Throughout 1942 and 1943 the union struggled to maintain agreements at the handful of small shops where it had won representation. Charles McKercher and René Champagne who were the two successive business agents of the local, tried to organize the sixty-five different plants but with little success. In 1943 John Mara, the International President, bemoaned the fact that more than two-thirds of the industry was not organized<sup>93</sup>. He did not say how many were organized or by whom, but the union was clearly ineffective. During 1942 nearly 4 000 workers had gone out in a loosely-organized protest over failure to pay the full cost-of-living bonus. The Catholic syndicate, and not the international, was the dynamic element in this dispute<sup>94</sup>. By the end of 1943 the international was having trouble collecting dues from its members and was in a general state of disorder<sup>95</sup>.

### Bakeries

Workers in the Bakery and Confectionery industry were covered by a decree of the *Collective Agreements Extension Act* which had been obtained by Local 55 of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers. Most of the industry was unorganized although several firms had signed agreements with the national syndicates. In the fall of 1941 Omer Gaucher headed up a new and more aggressive local executive. By the spring of 1942 Local 55 claimed to have 580 members and was ready to launch a major strike for union recognition, increased wages and the 54-hour week<sup>96</sup>. The local had the full support of the International. M.W. Irvine, the union's General Organizer, came to the city and a kitchen was opened for strikers and strike pay made available. Montréal Trades and Labour Council President, Paul Fournier, added his considerable energies and support was obtained from other unions<sup>97</sup>.

It all came to nought. The Department of Labour refused to appoint a conciliation board as baking was not a war industry<sup>98</sup>. Omer Gaucher and Irvine were arrested over incidents on the picket line and the companies secured an injunction limiting picketing from 4:00 to 7:00 a.m.<sup>99</sup>. The large bread companies sat back and waited the strikers out, refusing the necessary consent to establish a conciliation board and indeed, refusing to negotiate at all. The strike dragged on for more than a month, but gradually the workers returned, leaving Local 55 weak and divided<sup>100</sup>.

## **Tobacco**

The Tobacco Workers International Union came to Montréal in August of 1942 at the request of Paul Fournier. The month before, a brief spontaneous walkout had taken place at Macdonald Tobacco and Fournier, who was heading up a general Montréal Trades and Labour Council organizing drive, spoke to the strikers. He urged them to seriously consider the benefits of international unions<sup>101</sup>. Jean Duval, an international vice-president of the Tobacco Workers (he was from Louisville, Kentucky) arrived in the city and a mass meeting with speeches in Polish, Lithuanian, French and English, was held<sup>102</sup>. Two locals, no. 234 (Imperial Tobacco) and no. 235 (Macdonald) were chartered. Brief strikes served to demonstrate solidarity and Imperial Tobacco signed a first agreement on September 10th, 1942<sup>103</sup>. The 48-hour week, paid vacations, maintenance of membership and a joint application to the Regional War Labour Board for a five-cent-an-hour increase, were won. Macdonald Tobacco<sup>104</sup> was brought into the fold shortly thereafter. By early 1943 the bulk of the tobacco industry was solidly organized.

## **Brewing and Distilling**

The Montréal Trades and Labour Council was equally active in organizing workers at Molson's National Breweries and Seagrams. It was at the latter company's Ville Lasalle plant that the first break came. Paul Fournier provided assistance to an employees' association which had struck the distillery in July<sup>105</sup>. He convinced them to become a local of the Distillery, Rectifying and Wine Workers International Union, a new (1940) A.F.L. affiliate. Local 64 won a solid contract including the union shop, 44-hour week, paid vacation, overtime and seven statutory holidays<sup>106</sup>.

The Distillery workers acquired jurisdiction within the A.F.L. for brewery workers after the United Brewery Workers were expelled in late 1941<sup>107</sup>. Fournier began tackling Molsons and National in the fall of 1942 with the assistance of J.W. Lenger, a recently appointed Montréal T.L.C. organizer. Molsons never succumbed but National finally signed an agreement on April 12, 1943. The 48-hour week, overtime, six statutory holidays and vacations with pay were won but no union security clause was included<sup>108</sup>.

## **Other Union Activity**

Several other industrial unions were active in the city during 1942 and 1943 but had little to report in the way of success. Local 302 of the Uphol-

sterer's International Union held several agreements in small plants, but in 1942 Wilfrid Bélanger, the international's organizer, led a strike against Simmonds which collapsed when a new company union won a representation vote<sup>109</sup>. A T.C.L. Federal local tackled the flour milling industry in November of 1942<sup>110</sup> but no contract was won. A T.L.C.-sponsored Butcher and Meat-cutters local was also active in 1942, but made no progress<sup>111</sup>.

By the end of 1943 most sectors of Montréal's industrial economy had been confronted with vigorous union activity. In many cases unions had been highly successful and a firm base had been built for further organizing drives. Large numbers of workers were still unorganized, but the situation was vastly different than it had been in 1941.

#### 1944-1945

The story of trade union activity in the last two years of the war can be sketched very briefly. Three major policy decisions enacted into law by the Dominion government transformed the thrust of the labour movement in Montréal as well as most other Canadian cities. P.C. 9384 established an effective mechanism for wage control which reduced the collective bargaining process to recognition, fringe benefit and union security issues. P.C. 1003, the Canadian Wagner Act, provided union leaders with a simple procedure for union certification and labour quickly turned to this process. The *Family Allowance Act*, despite labour's formal opposition, was welcomed by most workers and helped to limit discontent with the wage freeze.

Under these circumstances most Montréal unions devoted their energies to seeking certification and detailed contract improvement. The Dominion Government delegated its authority under P.C. 1003 to a Québec Wartime Labour Relations Board (P.C. 4871) a seven-man committee which included three competent trade unionists<sup>112</sup>. Scores of locals became certified in 1944 and 1945 and provincial conciliation officers were kept on the run by an equal number of demands for assistance in negotiating new contracts<sup>113</sup>. It would be tedious to review this activity though its importance in transforming the position of unions from bodies which has won a precarious existence into legally recognized institutions cannot be exaggerated.

Certification did not, of course, always lead to an improved collective agreement or necessarily to any agreement at all. Montréal's largest unorganized industry, textiles, continued to be a trouble spot despite the certification of United Textile Workers of America, Local 102. Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent found Dominion Textiles as reluctant as ever to agree to a

decent contract. The checkoff was achieved in September of 1945<sup>114</sup> but the immediate postwar years were to be marked by continued bitter confrontation in the industry.

Other sectors of the Montréal industrial economy were successfully organized during the last two years of the war. Perhaps the most notable new gains were made by the Chemical Workers, a T.L.C. affiliate which had four plants including Canada Cement and Domtar<sup>115</sup>. Phil Cutler, who had led the Chemical Workers' organizing drive, was also the moving force in cracking a bastion of company unionism, the American Can Company, whose 800 employees voted union in June of 1945<sup>116</sup>.

The situation in the meat packing industry also improved dramatically after 1943. A locally based Montréal Packing Plant Employees' Union won certification at Canada Packers and Swift in early 1944 and two more locals were added before the end of the year<sup>117</sup>. The union became the core of the Packing-house, Butchers and Allied Food Workers (T.L.C.) in 1945 and under the leadership of Paul Lecours mounted an energetic drive to organize other parts of the food processing industry<sup>118</sup>. A.T.L.C. federal local was chartered to represent workers at the two big sugar refineries and in October of 1945 Armand Godin signed a contract with the companies on behalf of the union<sup>119</sup>.

The United Rubber Workers (U.R.W.) established a foothold in the city in 1944 when they organized Dominion Rubber's operation<sup>120</sup>. The U.R.W. had won recognition at the sister plant in Kitchener but had paid little attention to the smaller Montréal operation until late in the war.

The Steelworkers found certification invaluable in organizing five small Montréal plants including Montréal Hardware and Crane<sup>121</sup>. A bitter confrontation developed at Stelco's two plants which the union characterized as the result of a company "reign of terror". The first certification attempt, in 1944, failed but in July 1945 Local 3258 was certified at Lachine and in November Local 3260 at St. Henri<sup>122</sup>. By the end of the war the Steelworkers were strongly established in Montréal with twelve locals and were ready to join in the national campaign to break the wage freeze in 1946.

## CONCLUSIONS

A brief review is now in order. Of the twenty leading manufacturing industries in Montréal (Table 2), fifteen had been heavily unionized by 1945. The largest unorganized industry, baking and confectionery, had resisted all efforts and entered the postwar period essentially untouched by unioniza-

tion. Textiles, the second largest category succumbed to the steady pressure of the U.T.W.A. immediately after the war. The boot and shoe industry and the furniture and upholstery business were to require years of further effort before significant gains were made<sup>123</sup>. The fifth unorganized industry, electrical equipment, included one major operation R.C.A. which was unionized but the large Northern Electric and Marconi plants remained outside the fold. The United Electrical Workers won a number of smaller plants in the immediate postwar years but was unable to crack the giants.

This represents a fairly impressive record of trade union achievement on a par with that of any other large North American city. Indeed there is little in the history of the ten year period that we have surveyed that is not perfectly congruent with the overall pattern of trade union growth in comparable cities. The story of trade union activity in Montréal during these years is best understood as a chapter in the history of North American trade unionism. The important variable in Montréal as elsewhere were the nature of the industries, the state of the labour market and the commitment (or perhaps the timetabling) of organizational resources of the trade union with jurisdiction in the field. On balance Québec labour legislation, while of minor importance, was supportive rather than destructive when compared to other Canadian jurisdictions. The language barrier seems to have had little significance in Montréal. It was a problem to be overcome and it was largely up to French Canadians to overcome it; however most unions functioned in both languages without great difficulty. I can see no evidence whatsoever which would suggest that Montréal trade union activists or workers were influenced by any system of thought peculiar to the province of Québec<sup>124</sup> or by any unusual *mentalité*.

#### Footnotes

1 E. DUMAS, *The Bitter Thirties in Québec*, Montréal, 1973, p. 128.

2 S. JAMIESON, *Times of Trouble*, Ottawa, 1966, p. 23.

3 *Labour Organization in Canada*, 1935.

4 See Terry COPP, "Montréal's Municipal Government and the Crisis of the 1930's", in Artibise and Stelter, *The Useable Urban Past*, Toronto, 1979.

5 For a detailed discussion of the origins of the "Arcand Act" see Gérard HÉBERT, *L'extension juridique des conventions collectives dans l'industrie de la construction dans la province de Québec 1934-1962*, Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, 1963.

6 These statements are based on a review of all the degrees relating to both Acts which are published in full in the *Québec Gazette*.

7 *Idem*.

8 Not to be confused with the Bills of the same number introduced in 1954. See *Canadian Annual Review*, 1937-1938, p. 230 for a review of the legislation and the controversy.

- 9 *Labour Gazette*, 1939, p. 523.
- 10 Again statement based on a review of decrees in *Québec Gazette* 1938-39.
- 11 *Labour Gazette*, 1939, p. 297.
- 12 *Debates*, Canadian House of Commons, 1938, pp. 3375-3379.
- 13 *Labour Gazette*, 1939, p. 544.
- 14 Edras MINVILLE (ed.), *Montréal économique*, 1943, p. 230.
- 15 *Labour Gazette*, 1934, p. 810.
- 16 *Québec Gazette*, February 17, 1935.
- 17 *Labour Gazette*, 1936, p. 126.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 1938, p. 259; 1939, p. 268.
- 19 *Québec Gazette*, Nov. 9, 1935.
- 20 See E. DUMAS, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3.
- 21 Rose PESOTTA, *Bread Upon the Waters*, New York, 1944, Chapters 24, 25.
- 22 *Labour Gazette*, 1939, p. 728.
- 23 *Québec Gazette*, December 22, 1937.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 1936, October 3, 1936.
- 25 See Alan YOUNG, *Organized Labour in Welland-Crowland*, B.A. Honours thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1977, for one account.
- 26 Alfred CHARPENTIER, *Les Mémoires d'Alfred Charpentier*, Québec, P.U.L., 1971, p. 140 ff.
- 27 *Montréal Star*, 26 August 1937.
- 28 CHARPENTIER, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 238.
- 30 A list of these unions appears in *Proceedings*, National War Labour Board, "Inquiry into Wages and Working Conditions", Ottawa, 1943, p. 103.
- 31 See Jacques ROUILLARD, *Les syndicats nationaux au Québec de 1900 à 1930*, Québec, P.U.L., 1979, Chapter 2.
- 32 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, Feb. 1938.
- 33 Gary M. FINK, *Labour Unions*, Westport, 1977, p. 347.
- 34 *Labour Gazette*, 1933, p. 147.
- 35 *Québec Gazette*, August 25, 1934.
- 36 Throughout the latter part of 1937 and 1938 the B.S.W.I.U. fought to obtain changes in the Agreement but with no success. See *Le Monde Ouvrier*, Ont.-Nov. 1937, March-May 1938.
- 37 FINK, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
- 38 *Québec Gazette*, January 14, 1937.
- 39 FINK, *op. cit.*, p. 393.
- 40 *Labour Organization in Canada*, 1938.
- 41 T. COPP (ed.), *Industrial Unionism in Kitchener 1937-1947*, Elora, 1976, Chapter Two.
- 42 FINK, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
- 43 Canada, *Census of 1941*, Vol. 7, Table 22, p. 796.
- 44 See Desmond MORTON with Terry COPP, *Working People: An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour*, Ottawa, 1980, Chapters 15, 16.
- 45 *Labour Gazette*, 1939, p. 1222.
- 46 *Montréal Star*, April 21st to 29th, 1940.
- 47 *Labour Gazette*, 1940, p. 968.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 1939, p. 627.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 390.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 977.

- 51 *Machinists Monthly Journal*, "Canadian Notes", Nov. 1939, April 1940.
- 52 *Labour Gazette*, 1940, pp. 763-768 (Board Report and Agreements).
- 53 *Machinists Monthly Journal*, Feb. 1941, April 1941.
- 54 *Labour Gazette*, 1940, p. 765.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 1234.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 1144.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 1940, p. 1114.
- 58 Text of P.C. 7440, in *Labour Gazette*, 1941, p. 22.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 1941, p. 407.
- 60 Text of Majority Report, *Labour Gazette*, 1941, pp. 372-376.
- 61 Text of Minority Report, *ibid.*, 1941, p. 377.
- 62 In his Minority Report Jacob Cohen had warned that the effect of the Peck decision was to leave workers not covered by P.C. 7440 "free to exercise their economic strength", while war workers "became the only group in Canada legally restricted against protecting or improving their economic status", *ibid.* This may have been the intent, but it did not work.
- 63 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, February 1, 1941.
- 64 In addition to Villeneuve the I.A.M. appointed Albert Brissette as a Grand Lodge representative with a specific mandate to work with the French-speaking membership, *Machinists Monthly Journal*, July 1941.
- 65 *Montréal Star*, June 26-30, 1941.
- 66 *Ibid.*, August 1, 1941.
- 67 *Ibid.*, March 27-31, 1941.
- 68 In March of 1941, the Department of Labour began to tabulate average weekly incomes for wage and salary employees. By September of 1941, some averages were \$26.03 (Canada), \$25.73 (Montréal), \$27.74 (Toronto), \$34.91 (Windsor). However crude this measure is, it is interesting to note that according to the 1941 census which covered the year ending May 30, 1941, the average weekly income of all wage and salary earners in Montréal was \$19.17. The *Labour Gazette* in commenting upon the steady rise in weekly incomes maintained "The situation results of course from several factors. The growing concentration of workers in highly-paid heavy industries, the extension of the system of paying wartime cost-of-living allowances, the increases in the amounts paid and the extensive use of overtime work..." *L.G.*, December 1941, p. 1522.
- 69 The *Labour Gazette* provides monthly summaries of proceedings under the Act. The examples cited are from September and October 1941.
- 70 *Labour Gazette*, 1942, p. 284.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- 72 M.C. URQUHART and K. BUCKLEY, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, p. 99.
- 73 See for example, *Labour Gazette*, 1942, p. 1237.
- 74 Wage rate figures from W.D. WOOD and P. KUMAR (eds.), *Canadian Perspectives on Wage-Price Guidelines*, Kingston, 1976, p. 182.
- 75 There is not space in a paper of this length to examine the new cost-of-living index which had been in use since the beginning of the war. I have checked the prices reported against food advertisements and rental rates in Montréal and they are generally very accurate except with regard to supermarket specials and bulk prices which undoubtedly lowered food costs for some families. The basket of goods and services used in the index were derived from intensive interviews with more than 4,000 Canadian families and represents a far better basis for making meaningful calculations on expenditure patterns than the previous index. See Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Family Income and Expenditure in Canada 1937-38*.
- 76 Per Capita (really per worker), income figures for Montréal were 60 percent higher than the 1941 census average in December 1943.



- 77 *Proceedings 34th Annual Convention A.F.L. Metal Trades Department*, September 28, 1941.
- 78 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, February 7, 1942.
- 79 *Steelworkers Canadian Edition*, July 31, 1942.
- 80 *Ibid.*, June 30, 1942.
- 81 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, August 24, 1942.
- 82 *Labour Gazette*, 1942, p. 1209.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 1942, p. 1267.
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 *Ibid.*, 1943, p. 1257.
- 86 *Steelworkers New*, May 5, 1943.
- 87 *Labour Gazette*, 1943, p. 1260. It should be noted that a number of "company union" agreements were signed in Montréal (as elsewhere) in 1942 and 1943. They usually provided comparable economic benefits to union agreements which undoubtedly became the standard. The demonstration effect of union activity greatly assisted the wellbeing of non-union workers.
- 88 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, October 9, 1942.
- 89 See Terry COPP, *The IUE in Canada*, Elora, 1980, Chapter Five.
- 90 See *Proceedings National War Labour Board Inquiry into Wages and Working Conditions*, Ottawa, 1943, pp. 312-318.
- 91 *Montréal Star*, July 17, 1943.
- 92 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, November 3, 1942.
- 93 *Ibid.*, March 27, 1943.
- 94 *Montréal Star*, August 17, 1942.
- 95 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, August 6, 1943..
- 96 *Ibid.*, March 7, 1942.
- 97 *Ibid.*, March 14, 1942.
- 98 *Labour Gazette*, 1942, p. 261.
- 99 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, March 14, 1942.
- 100 *Ibid.*, April 25, 1942.
- 101 *Ibid.*, July 7, 1942.
- 102 *Ibid.*, August 15, 1942.
- 103 *Labour Gazette*, 1942, p. 1207.
- 104 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, Sept. 19, 1942.
- 105 *Ibid.*, July 14, 1942.
- 106 *Labour Gazette*, 1943, p. 84.
- 107 G.M. FINK, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- 108 *Labour Gazette*, 1943, p. 1527.
- 109 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, Sept. 12, 1942.
- 110 *Ibid.*, November 11, 1942.
- 111 *Ibid.*, July 29, 1942.
- 112 *Labour Gazette*, 1944, p. 853.
- 113 Québec Department of Labour, *Report of the Minister*, 1945-46, p. 128 ff.
- 114 *Labour Gazette*, 1946, p. 380.
- 115 *Le Monde Ouvrier*, Aug. 26, 1944.
- 116 *Ibid.*, June 2, 1945.
- 117 *Ibid.*, March 18, 1944.
- 118 *Ibid.*, March 3, 1945.
- 119 *Ibid.*, Jan. 26, 1946.
- 120 *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1944.

121 *Steelworkers News*, May 1945, Oct. 1945.

122 *Ibid.*, July 1945.

123 The Upholsters Union did win control of one new manufacturer in 1944 and in that year Wilf Bélanger, the President of Local 302, became an international Vice-President of the union with responsibility for a newly-formed Canadian District. *Le Monde Ouvrier*, May 27, 1944.

124 It is worth noting that Pierre Elliot Trudeau, in his polemical attack on Québec's 'social thought' writes "The labour movement in our province seems, then, to have developed independently of our official social thought", *The Asbestos Strike*, p. 62.

## Le développement des syndicats industriels à Montréal de 1935 à 1945

Il s'agit ici d'une étude de cas portant sur le développement des syndicats industriels dans une ville nord-américaine au cours d'une décennie décisive dans la montée du syndicalisme. L'expérience des travailleurs montréalais renferme des éléments exclusifs qui se rattachent à l'ambiance économique, sociale et politique particulière à la ville, mais les travailleurs de la métropole participaient alors à une activité syndicale dont le modèle s'étendait à la grandeur du continent.

L'article décrit la législation du travail exceptionnelle qui était alors en vigueur dans la province de Québec ainsi que les initiatives subséquentes du premier gouvernement Duplessis. Même si l'on ne met pas en doute les données traditionnelles des desseins antisyndicaux de Duplessis, on estime que ses interventions n'ont eu que peu d'influence sur l'évolution véritable du mouvement ouvrier durant la décennie de 1930.

Dans cet article, on passe en revue les quatorze principales industries de Montréal en fonction de l'activité syndicale dans les années 1930. Les réalisations modestes du syndicalisme à Montréal se trouvent ainsi replacées dans leur contexte. La recension porte sur les vingt industries principales. On y décrit les conséquences des changements qui se sont produits dans les domaines économique et législatif en isolant quatre périodes distinctes: 1939-1941, 1941, 1942-1943 et 1944-1945. La législation fédérale du travail de même que les programmes de contrôle des prix et des salaires sont reliés à l'action syndicale.

L'essai démontre que quinze des vingt secteurs manufacturiers du temps de guerre étaient effectivement syndiqués en 1945 et souligne que ceci représentait une réalisation impressionnante qui se compare à celles des autres grandes villes nord-américaines. L'histoire du syndicalisme à Montréal est ainsi mieux comprise en tant que chapitre de l'histoire du syndicalisme sur l'ensemble du continent. Les variables importantes à Montréal étaient la nature des industries, l'état du marché du travail et la disponibilité des ressources aux fins de recrutement, lesquelles provenaient du syndicat international qui avait compétence dans l'industrie. Les différences de langue et de culture ne jouaient qu'un rôle secondaire dans la méthode de formation des syndicats.