

The Impact of a Strike on the Attitudes and Behavior of a Rural Community

Clive H.J. Gilson, Ian S. Spencer et S. Granville

Volume 44, numéro 4, 1989

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050534ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050534ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)
1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Gilson, C. H., Spencer, I. S. & Granville, S. (1989). The Impact of a Strike on the Attitudes and Behavior of a Rural Community. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 44(4), 785–804. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050534ar>

Résumé de l'article

Cet article a pour objet de reconsidérer, dans une perspective nouvelle, le rôle et la signification d'une grève en milieu rural. Celle-ci touchait onze employés d'une succursale bancaire à Antigonish en Nouvelle-Écosse. Jusque ici, les spécialistes ont tenté d'expliquer ses effets dans la communauté par des variables abstraites reliées au domaine des relations professionnelles: prédisposition à la grève, désir du syndicat, penchant à formuler des griefs, etc. La présente étude tend plutôt à inverser la méthode traditionnelle en ce sens que les données auxquelles on s'intéresse visent à mesurer l'impact d'une grève sur la collectivité locale. Aussi, un des aspects importants abordés dans cette enquête consiste-t-il à se rendre compte jusqu'à quel point la population de la ville a donné son appui aux grévistes et, ce qui est encore plus fondamental, à se demander si la grève a eu quelque influence sur l'attitude des gens postérieurement à l'arrêt de travail. Afin de comprendre ce point ainsi que d'autres aspects de l'engagement de la communauté dans cette grève, on a distribué au hasard (à partir des relevés du recensement) un questionnaire à un certain nombre d'habitants de la ville et du comité d'Antigonish de façon à connaître leurs réactions devant cet événement.

La révision des écrits sur la question laisse voir que les petites communautés, par le jeu d'un système de valeurs fondé sur la subordination, peuvent apporter un soutien notable à certains travailleurs en conflit avec de grandes entreprises dont le siège social se trouve à l'extérieur. On estime que ce soutien peut exister pour des salariés qui ne relèvent pas de la théorie de «la masse isolée» conformément à la pensée de Kerr et Siegel. Aussi, Lowe a-t-il suggéré que ces collectivités peuvent être à l'avant-garde de campagnes de syndicalisation, principalement dans des secteurs de services comme les banques. Au contraire, d'autres soutiennent qu'elles se présenteront comme «un système intégré» où l'appui à une grève s'enchaînera naturellement.

Les études théoriques révèlent une lacune surprenante en ce qu'on a fait peu d'efforts pour mettre au point une méthode de mesure capable d'indiquer l'ampleur du support accordé à une grève. En conséquence, le troisième objet de l'article est-il d'élaborer une typologie du degré d'engagement de la communauté qui puisse remplacer des évaluations du militantisme communautaire qui sont, en grande partie, restées subjectives.

Le résultat des fréquences qu'on retrouve au tableau 1 de l'article indique que, en général, le soutien aux grévistes était très élevé et qu'une majorité des répondants posèrent au moins un geste concret en leur faveur. D'un autre côté, le nombre de personnes qui ont participé aux activités de grève était très faible. De plus, les raisons invoquées pour ce faire ne permettaient nullement d'y déceler un ardent support aux «lutes syndicales». Les répondants soutenaient fondamentalement la grève pour des motifs de «justice naturelle». Par conséquent, la communauté appuyait l'arrêt de travail sans que son comportement ne remette en cause la structure et la convenance du système de valeurs existant. En d'autres mots, on ne voyait aucune déviance dans ce soutien à une grève.

Considérée en tant qu'analyse statistique à double variable, la variable qui explique le mieux l'appui de la collectivité consistait dans des attitudes antérieures à la fondation du syndicat. Pour vérifier davantage cette constatation, les auteurs ont établi une classification du degré de participation de la population, ce qui a révélé que les gens les plus favorables à la grève agissaient pour des motifs n'ayant rien à voir avec le syndicalisme. Le tableau 3 démontre que leur appui se référerait au fait que les grévistes avaient «moralement raison», qu'ils les connaissaient personnellement et qu'ils étaient de sexe féminin.

Les auteurs ont trouvé rien d'autre pour expliquer cette contradiction que l'hypothèse selon laquelle il existe dans les familles une tradition favorable aux syndicats. Nous pouvons aussi penser que ces militants ont tendance à s'identifier aux causes et aux débats pour manifester leur opposition aux institutions qui, possiblement, les expriment. On peut aussi y voir le rejet de «la bureaucratie syndicale» ou du cynisme en matière d'organisation.

Enfin, les répondants ont indiqué que l'expérience d'une grève dans une banque à Antigonish les avait rendus beaucoup plus conscients des conflits de travail et qu'il sont maintenant en mesure de soutenir les grévistes pour les motifs syndicaux traditionnels. De cette façon, de par «l'effet de démonstration», nous en déduisons que les grèves en milieu rural, comme celle dont il est question dans cet article, peuvent aider à augmenter la conscientisation des habitants et, par conséquent, engendrer une plus grande participation à l'action syndicale.

Dans la section de l'article consacrée à la discussion du sujet, on note que les chercheurs en relations professionnelles se sont enfin intéressés au milieu et à son impact sur des questions comme la fréquence et la durée des grèves. Une démarche antérieure à cet objectif réside dans l'appréciation de l'influence que les grèves peuvent avoir sur une collectivité. C'est alors seulement qu'il sera possible d'établir si l'appui de la communauté est suffisant ou non pour prolonger la durée d'un conflit de travail. Mais l'on n'a pas mis jusque ici en équation l'examen et la mesure de ce phénomène.

The Impact of a Strike on the Attitudes and Behavior of a Rural Community

C.H.J. Gilson

I.S. Spencer

S. Granville

This paper reviews the role and significance of the 1987-1988 Antigonish Bank Strike upon the rural community.

This paper reviews the role and significance of a strike upon a rural community. The format of the paper is as follows. First, we describe briefly a 14 week strike of bank tellers in the rural community of Antigonish, Nova Scotia between November 1987 and February 1988. This is followed by a review of the literature on the significance of community attitudes in terms of strike characteristics and outcomes. From this review of the literature we develop some descriptive and relational hypotheses concerning the strike in Antigonish. Next, we describe our research methodology which tests our expectations. Finally, a review of the survey results, seeks to establish a more quantifiable assessment of strikes and communities than has hitherto been available.

THE ANTIGONISH BANK STRIKE

This research study is centred on the Town (pop. 5,400) and County (pop. 19,000 including town) of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Antigonish County occupies the northeast corner of mainland Nova Scotia. The town lies approximately 200 km northeast of Halifax and 200 km west of Sydney. Although the resource based industries of fishing, farming and forestry, are substantial — each employing 400-500 workers and each with a value of

* GILSON C.H.J., Associate Professor, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

SPENCER, I.S., Assistant Professor, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

GRANVILLE, S., Research Assistant, Centre for the Study of the Future of Work, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

\$10,000,000 annually — Antigonish itself is predominantly a retail, commercial, educational and health care centre for a catchment area of approximately 50,000 people. The largest employers are St. Francis Xavier University (500), a regional Hospital (400) and the District School Board (400). Apart from the University Faculty, all these institutions are unionized. Town and county municipal workers, postal workers, and a small number of general workers make up the remainder of the unionized workforce. Union density, at 15% is below the provincial average of 30%¹.

Antigonish County is 90% Roman Catholic and the area, through the work of the University, is renowned for instigating the Antigonish Movement, which preached self-help during the 1930's — a philosophy now embodied in the Coady Institute, a training and development institute for Third World nations. Although the area is noted for its social conscience, Antigonish has been relatively strike free, national postal strikes notwithstanding, since the second world war. It is against this background that the Bank of Commerce bank workers' strike took place.

For reasons indicated below, the strike in question very quickly attained national prominence. More importantly, from a research perspective the strike offered the opportunity to review some recently made hypotheses concerning union organizing in the banking sector². For example, it has been argued that bank union membership growth might well take place in small communities as opposed to large data-processing centres in urban areas. According to Lowe's account of the origins of the Canadian Union of Bank Employees,

[...] the closely-knit inter-personal relations found in smaller communities may well have heightened the workers' sense of injustice when management mistreated their colleagues. The women had their roots in the area and intended to stay. Through economic necessity and the lack of better opportunities elsewhere they had settled into banking careers. Each branch became a stable work group. As working conditions worsened, all of these factors made it easier for workers to stand up for their rights and ultimately, to unionize (1979, p. 19).

Indeed, part of the rationale for this research study reflects our interest in exploring Lowe's contention that, «the small town branch may well be at the forefront of bank unionization» (1979, p. 19). For if it could be shown from this study that small communities do exhibit extraordinary support for bank workers under strike conditions, then further support will have been established suggesting that bank unionization should indeed begin to focus

¹ Figures obtained from the document, *Labour Organizations in Nova Scotia 1986*, Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Research Division.

² An analysis of the likely impact of the Free Trade Agreement, 1989, also points to the potential for union growth in the service sector of employment. See Magun et al., 1988.

upon rural as opposed to urban settings. Put simply, the extent and nature of community support, as Lowe implies, is a critical variable. And it is this feature which is the basis for the research study.

The strike involved eleven female members of Local 2107 of the Union of Bank Employees, directly chartered by the CLC in early 1986. They were employed by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC). The issues at stake were familiar to the banking industry³. An initial demand for a fifteen per cent wage increase was designed to focus attention upon the inequities of a pay structure which 'capped' workers arbitrarily by imposing ceilings in each salary category. At the same time, unilateral assessments by the bank manager determined whether the employee had demonstrated the necessary competencies to warrant consideration for an increase in remuneration. Another salary consideration concerned the attempt to develop pattern bargaining in line with other local financial institutions — particularly a local Credit Union — which were paying higher wages than the CIBC. Parity with those doing comparable work in Halifax was also seen as a key salary demand. Although these were the 'public' issues, the women were, in addition, generally disaffected by their working conditions. Job reallocation, time off from work, sex discrimination and seniority all served to increase their general sense of grievance.

From the outset, the strike was given extensive media coverage. The national news media, focussed on the rarity of such a conflict and the discrepancy between the \$88.4 billion dollars in assets held by the CIBC⁴, and the eleven women who at the start of the dispute had no strike fund, with the CLC paying just \$50 a week strike pay.

Further interest was created by the attendance of Shop Steward Marion MacDonald at the annual shareholder's meeting in Toronto where she confronted and outwitted the bank's chairman Donald Fullerton. This colorful «David and Goliath» episode served to capture the media's attention further. The story was covered extensively on the front page of the business section of the *Globe and Mail*, the CBC news magazine, *The Journal*, and by newspapers such as the *Montréal Gazette* and the *Miami Herald* which likened the whole affair to a Frank Capra movie with the small town «taking on the big bad corporation from the big city far away»⁵.

The effect of this media attention, a novel experience for the community, was to place much emphasis upon the support which the community was

3 For a detailed account of working conditions in the banking industry and management practices, see the Bank Book Collective, 1979.

4 CIBC Annual Report, 1987.

5 See *The Miami Herald*, 30 January 1988.

providing the strikers. Moreover the general media assumption was that community support would provide the necessary resources to wage a long campaign. Indeed, the media often expressed the opinion that the strikers and the community were indivisible.

If this was a true representation of events, then clearly the strike was a formative influence on the community and its values. In this regard the genesis of our study evolved around the average citizen's relationship with the strike.

STRIKES AND THE COMMUNITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Our review of the literature on strikes and the community is divided into two sections. First we look at the influence of the community on industrial relations and more specifically, patterns of conflict. Second we examine the implications of this review in terms of the Antigonish strike.

Figure 1 shows that the research thrust of this study reverses the traditional flow of reasoning in that the strike now becomes the critical independent variable in the study of the community. However, the orthodox approach is that the community is a critical variable which helps to explain strike causes, proneness, length and general character. Indeed, various industrial relations and industrial sociology researchers have pointed to the significance of the community⁶ when providing analysis of discrete industrial relations activities such as the propensity to organize (Gordon and Long, 1981; Lowe, 1979), participation in union activities (Form and Dansereau, 1957) impact on the negotiating process (Watkins, 1972) and finally for the overall influence of the community on labour relations (Derber, 1965; Dennis et al., 1957). This has led Krahn and Lowe to hypothesise, «that community characteristics are indeed considered formative in patterns of industrial relations» (1984, p. 94).

The main preoccupation, however, has been the study of community characteristics as predictors of strike frequency. In attempting to account for cross-national differences in strike propensity, Kerr and Siegel, in their classic study in the early 1950's develop the notion of 'community integration'. They argue that diversified communities in terms of cross-cultural experiences, (e.g. membership and participation in a variety of groups,

⁶ We refer here to the notion of the community as the structure of social relationships which specifically exhibit «moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity in time» (Nisbet, 1966, p. 47). In tangible, operational terms, «Community becomes the means of denoting legitimacy in associations as diverse as state, church, trade unions, revolutionary movement profession, and co-operative» (Nisbet, 1966, p. 47).

institutions and associations) generally fail to produce homogeneous workplace experiences. As a result, the opportunity for mass grievance to take root is impaired thus creating a negative correlation with strike activity. For Kerr and Siegel, the propensity to strike is more often linked to specific occupational groups which retain their sense of workplace identity above and beyond heterogeneous community experiences with their sense of collective grievance being buttressed by «their own codes, myths, heroes and social standards», (1954, p. 191) all developed within their own separate community. This ‘isolated mass theory’ would also seem to fit well in a Canadian and indeed a maritime context where strikes in the coal and steel industries in Cape Breton historically have been seen in terms of the ‘bosses’ against the community (MacEwan, 1976).

FIGURE 1
Research Approaches to the Study of
the Community and Strikes

<i>Research Approach</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>
Traditional Research Paradigm	The Community: - social - city - inter-city	Strikes: - cause, length - organizing - union involvement etc.
Research Paradigm of this Study	An Industrial Relations Conflict	Impact on Community — Attitudes and responses during and after strike

Stern approaches the association between strike frequency and the community from a different conceptual route, arguing that «community based research adds to an understanding of strike activity, which previously was largely based on inter-industry and total economy analyses» (1976, p. 233). Stern’s research shows that large scale metropolitan communities, with a substantial manufacturing base, are likely to be more strike prone than areas with a smaller population base. In contrast to Stern, Krahn and Lowe, in a study of community and union attitudes, add a further dimension of complexity by identifying the significance of social relationships in smaller urban centres. They reason that «the more personal social relations in smaller towns may also provide unionizing employees with support in the

face of opposition from management» (1984, p. 96). And it may be possible to interpret this uniqueness of industrial relations in smaller communities as similar to Kerr and Siegel's concept of occupational homogeneity.

Tannenbaum (1965), however, provides contrary evidence which suggests that small communities may be socially integrated between various institutional components or elements and that communities structured in this fashion are unlikely to inflict wounds which fracture the delicate equilibrium which has been established. Harbison and Coleman (1951) also argue that the inter-dependence of personal relationships in small communities fetters the development of union-management conflict such that co-operation and peaceful co-existence will prevail. Put simply, the prospect of conflict and inter-personal strife is too costly for community members who have an investment in preserving the established value system.

Nevertheless, if conflagrations do unavoidably erupt from time to time in such communities, attitudes and behaviour may quickly coalesce and become polarised. This phenomenon is conceptually parallel to the notion of a 'subordinate value system' — a meaning-system which can be adopted by lower-class subcultures as a way of justifying conflictual behaviour which appears to challenge the propriety of existing social and work relations. Thus, according to Parkin⁷, in a subordinate value system, «strong emphasis is given to social divisions and social conflict, as embodied in the conceptual categories of 'them' and 'us'» (1975, p. 88). It should be noted however, that such value systems need not be rooted in traditional trade union consciousness. Parkin argues that small communities may «generate a meaning-system which is of purely parochial significance, representing a design for living based upon localized social knowledge and face-to-face relationships» (1975, p. 90). If this is the case, we should be especially careful not to impute wider meaning to the notion of a community proffering its general support for strike activity. For example, support may be forthcoming in the form of personal sympathy and resource contributions may be seen as a form of charity. Community members may also construct a general sense of justice with accommodative rather than radical intent. Thus, the trade union 'struggle' dimension may well be a tertiary issue for

7 Our interest in Parkin's interpretation of the 'subordinate value system' arises from his attempts to redefine the traditional notion of working-class meaning systems which many commentators argue is an integral part of embryonic class consciousness (e.g. Dahrendorf, 1959; Newton, 1969). Parkin, who is, «rather skeptical of such political constructions» (1975, p. 89), argues that, «In so far as it is possible to characterize a complex set of normative arrangements by a single term, the subordinate value system could be said to be essentially *accommodative* [...] rather than either a full endorsement of, or opposition to, the *status quo*» (1975, p. 88).

some community members. In this way it may be possible to maintain some level of support for a strike without damaging or challenging the fabric of social integration within the community. Thus, community members may adopt «a general perspective which casts some doubt on the morality of the distributive system and the persistent inequities it generates» (Parkin, 1975, p. 88), while discounting the development of more radical political considerations which the strike might otherwise imply.

The Antigonish bank tellers strike exhibits a number of the features and dilemmas referenced above. On the one hand, the context of the strike, i.e. a small rural community, conforms with Kerr and Siegel's notion of a community with a largely homogeneous culture with limited social diversity. On the other hand, it is also self evident that bank tellers are unlikely to be regarded as prime examples of a homogeneous occupational culture in the tradition of miners, dockers and steel workers. Sterns' concept of community size is also unlikely to provide analytical coherence in a rural setting such as the one under review (see diagram 1). The concept of a subordinate value system may be applicable to small communities, yet as indicated above, assumptions concerning community support for strikes imposes judgments over the nature of the support that becomes manifest. If some of these phenomena are indeed at work, then undoubtedly, it is necessary to uncover community responses to strike situations.

DIAGRAM 1

Trichotomy of Community Involvement in Strikes

<i>Model</i>	<i>Features</i>
ISOLATED MASS THEORY	Occupational Groups — Crafts, community identity
METRO/MANUFACTURING CENTRES	Community grievances common <i>across</i> industries
SMALL SCALE COMMUNITY VALUE SYSTEM	Defence of community members. Preservation of 'moral' justice

At a strictly descriptive level then, the first objective of this study aims to capture some of the key attitudes and behaviours which the community displayed during the Antigonish bank strike. An effective evaluation of the

relationship between the strike and the community will include an assessment of the level of knowledge concerning the strike; the extent to which the strike was actively followed, the relative level of support offered, the (multiple) reasons why support was forthcoming and the overt number of acts engaged in which denote passive/active support.

Moreover, as of yet, industrial relations scholars appear not to have developed a workable index which would enable us to assess and measure the extent, quality and character of community support for strikes. So this is a second aim — to develop a typology or classification system which enables us to pinpoint what different sectors of the community were doing during the strike, and why. This typology should provide the opportunity to identify groups and sub-groups together with their attendant demographic characteristics. The absence of such a typology is odd indeed, given that the case study literature on strikes is extensive. Abella (1974), Johnson (1978), Gouldner (1955), Lane and Roberts (1971) and Gilson (1987), amongst many other sociological studies, all provide to varying degrees, detailed histories of individual strikes. Most accounts make some reference to the significance of, and in many cases, the decisive role played by local communities in the outcomes of these strikes. The evidence for the relationship between the strike and the community is either through secondary sources such as newspaper articles and general media coverage, beliefs expressed by strikers, or by simple 'a priori' argument that the community is 'always important'.

Although such inductive reasoning may be appropriate and unavoidable in some settings, the argument against this form of methodology is that it remains largely *impressionistic*. Moreover, if scholars wish to employ the concept of the community to help predict strike frequency or duration, then it would seem appropriate to develop some index whereby casual empiricism is replaced with a more sophisticated measurement process along a number of attitude and behavioral dimensions. Thus, a third objective is to identify the existence of significant explanatory, intervening variables which help to explain the rationale for the behavior of the respondents. Our final objective is to determine, by way of a 'feed-back loop', (Craig, 1986, p. 3) if the experience of a strike in turn impacts on the way in which a community may change its overall attitudes to trade unions, and strikes in general. This is especially significant if the community in question appears to have undergone a significant event (such as a strike) which has caused it to re-assess its previously established norms of social integration.

METHODOLOGY

Using the most recent (1984) list of registered voters as the sampling frame a systematic sample of 500 adults (1 in every 23) was selected. The sample was comprised of 150 Town of Antigonish residents and 350 County of Antigonish (i.e. outside the town boundary) residents. Each respondent received a copy of the questionnaire with a cover letter personally signed by the research principals and a business reply envelope in which to return the completed questionnaire. The cover letter stressed that even if the respondent had not followed the strike closely, or had strong negative views of the strike, her/his completed questionnaire was important to the study.

By the cutoff date, 156 completed questionnaires had been returned. Following the cutoff date a further 25 questionnaires were received but analyzed manually only for their responses to open ended questions. Using known statistics on death rates, migration rates and intra-county moving rates it was estimated that 125 of the original 500 mailouts were undelivered.

Thus, the effective response rate was 42% (156 on 375) by the cutoff date and the total response rate including the late replies, was 48% (181 on 375). The 156 respondents matched the adult population of Antigonish Town and County closely with respect to age group and place of residence (i.e. town or county) but somewhat overrepresented females and union members. Given the less than 50% response rate and the somewhat skewed profile of respondents, generalizations to all Antigonish adults cannot be made with *complete* confidence. However, our overall assessment of the respondents, is that they adequately reflect the behaviours and beliefs of the community and that we can generate useful hypotheses about the impact of the strike on the community.

SURVEY RESULTS

Behaviour and Attitudes During the Strike

The survey of Antigonish Town and County adults, sought to establish the respondents' demographic characteristics; their trade union involvement; their strike-related attitudes and behaviour during the strike; the effect of the strike on their attitudes towards the bank and trade unions in general, and finally their propensity to show heightened interest in other strikes.

Table 1 presents a selection of key frequencies which provide a picture of the community response during the strike. Since we are unaware of similar research these frequencies serve as a basis for descriptive as opposed to comparative analysis. It is immediately apparent that the strike was widely followed by the respondents and that 89% felt that they had a good grasp of the issues. Only 7% failed to follow the strike at all and 11% claimed not to have understood what the issues were. There is little doubt then, that given the overall representativeness of the sample, the town as a whole was acutely aware of the strike. Interest in the strike, information seeking and perceived understanding of the issues were extensive. Moreover, we can see that support for the strike appeared to be overwhelming. Eighty three per cent of the respondents indicated that they supported the strikers to some degree. Only 4% supported the bank. Seven out of every 10 respondents engaged in one or more physical acts of support.

For those who supported the strikers, the most often cited reason was simply because they felt that the strikers 'were right' (70%). Now, in terms of the notion of the subordinate value system, referenced earlier, it could be argued that the small community in question here, elected to occupy the moral ground i.e. the general sense of injustice appears to be of greater significance in explaining support for the strike than any other reason — including the fact that this strike was 'touted' as a women's issue. Moreover, the whole question of the role of the trade union itself was ambiguous. Only a quarter of the respondents supported the strike because of their overall commitment to trade union struggles. And 75% of the responses to the open ended questions (base = 57) qualified their support for the strikers by indicating their dislike for unions in the more *general* sense. Or as one respondent expressed,

My main reason for interest in this strike was mostly personal. My friendship with people in town and with some of the people on staff at the bank was a consideration. They were right to strike and were very courageous to do so. Unions have very little to do with it.

Another respondent articulated a frequent sentiment, stating,

Although I supported the strike, the whole thing might have been avoided with better communications. Unions are too strong and price themselves out of business.

It would seem that community members were able to claim that they supported the strikers, without challenging the existing propriety of community/social integration. Indeed, in terms of those who were actively engaged in the operations of the strike, the frequencies drop off quite dramatically, with less than 9% joining the picket line at any time during the dispute. The 78% of CIBC customers who changed their banking habits may well have chosen to cross the picket lines less frequently or not at all, in

TABLE 1
Key Frequencies Indicating Community
Behaviour and Attitudes During the Strike

<i>Response</i>	<i>Key Measures</i>	<i>% Response Rate *</i>
Interest in the Strike	Followed the strike <i>very</i> actively	6
	Followed the strike <i>quite</i> actively	43
	Followed the strike a little bit	44
Information Search Activities Undertaken	Talked with friends about the strike	95
	Actively sought information from others	36
	Talked with the strikers themselves	35
	Talked with management of the CIBC	12
Understanding of the Issues	Discussed the strike in a public forum	5
	Understood all issues <i>very</i> well	26
	Understood all issues <i>fairly</i> well	63
Support for the Strike	Understood issues slightly or not at all	11
	Supported the strike actively	35
	Supported the strike somewhat	48
Rationale for Support	Neutral on the issue	13
	Supported the bank	4
	Because they were right	70
	Because I knew one of the strikers	34
	Because I support all union struggles	25
	Because I felt sorry for them	21
Supportive Activities Undertaken	Because they were women	21
	It was like other charitable causes	8
	Performed one or more acts of support	70
	Persuaded others to support the strike	49
	Contributed money	37
Banking habits of CIBC customers	Participated in strike rally	11
	Participated in strike support group	10
	Joined the picket line	9
	Contributed food	7
Banking habits of CIBC customers	Did not cross the picket line at all	34
	Visited the bank less often than usual	44
	Ignored the picket line	22

* Respondent base is 156 except for rationale for support (126) and banking habits of CIBC customers (50).

order to avoid personal/social turmoil rather than to show support in the traditional sense of trade union solidarity. Thus it would seem that many of those who supported the strike, maintained their distance from embracing more overt displays of behaviour which denote an acceptance or empathy with trade union values.

Bivariate analysis using the SPSSX software yielded limited results in terms of statistically significant ($p = .05$ or less) explanatory variables⁸. Demographic characteristics such as age, place of residence, sex, and employment status, all failed to show any statistical significance in terms of providing an explanation for respondents attitudes and behavior.

Surprisingly, we also found that on every behavioural and attitudinal dimension, union membership was not a statistically significant explanatory variable in the study. Conversely, respondents' prior attitudes to trade unions proved to be the single most important explanatory variable when cross tabulated with the response variables shown in Table 2. For all these variables, a positive attitude towards unions led to greater support for the strikers, better understanding and more specific actions in support of the strike. Thereafter, as respondents' prior attitudes to unions declined towards a negative view, so did their levels of support, understanding, actions and so on. It appears that irrespective of union membership, peoples' attitudes towards unions, positive or otherwise, largely determined whether they offered their support to strikers.

In order to test this finding further, we developed a typology of respondent strike involvement. Taking those measures which denoted support, commitment and activity, we classified respondents into three groups⁹:

Hard-Core Activists	20%
Passive Supporters	65%
Neutrals and Detractors	15%
	100%

As shown in Table 3, Hard-core Activists (HCA's) were much more likely to come from a background where family members were active in trade unions. Interestingly however, we also found that amongst the HCA's, their stated reasons for supporting the strike did not conform with

⁸ All of the results noted below are statistically significant at or below the $p = .05$ level unless otherwise stated.

⁹ We combined the responses to the measure of perceived level of support with six measures of actual support (See Table 1) to create a comprehensive 'level of support' scale. Inspection of the frequency distribution of responses on the comprehensive scale suggested a natural grouping of respondents into three categories.

their trade union background. Table 3 also shows that their reasons for supporting the strike were more based on their sense of injustice, the fact that they knew the strikers, and finally, because the strikers were women. And even though the results did not achieve an acceptable level of statistical significance, the Passive Supporters were proportionately more likely to support the strikers because they supported all trade union struggles. Put simply, HCA's coming from trade union backgrounds and with positive views of unions (and a surprising 37% had neutral or negative views), chose to follow and support the strikers for distinctly non-trade union reasons.

TABLE 2
The Association Between Prior Attitudes
To Trade Unions and Selected Dependent Variables

<i>Significant Response Variables</i>	<i>Prior Attitudes to Trade Unions*</i>			<i>P-Value</i>
	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Positive</i>	
<i>Overall understanding of and support for the strike</i>				
Understood issues well	24	21	30	(0,033)
Talked with friends	84	97	100	(0,001)
Supported the strikers	19	36	45	(0,002)
<i>Reasons for supporting the strike</i>				
Supported the strikers because they were right	59	65	75	(0,279)
I support all trade union struggles	0	18	35	(0,002)
<i>Actions in support of the strike</i>				
Contributed money	5	41	38	(0,001)
Joined the picket line	0	5	13	(0,050)
Participated in rally	0	10	14	(0,060)
Tried to persuade others to support	22	36	56	(0,002)
Engaged in two or more activities	8	33	35	(0,000)

* This was originally a 10 point scale now reduced to the three categories indicated above. The initial distribution was skewed slightly towards positive attitudes towards unions in that 58% of the respondents signified their support as being between 6 and 10 on the scale.

TABLE 3
**The Association Between Strike Involvement
 and Trade Union Background**

<i>Background Characteristic</i>	<i>Hard Core Activists (20%)</i>	<i>All Others (80%)</i>	<i>Total Sample (100%)</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
Has union member in family	57	36	40	(0,013)
Attitudes towards unions				
Negative	10	29	25	(0,000)
Neutral	27	26	26	
Positive	63	44	48	
<i>Reasons for supporting the strike*</i>				
Because the strikers were right	83	65	69	(0,086)
Knew one of the strikers	43	31	34	(0,318)
Support all union struggles	17	26	24	(0,419)
Because they were women	33	17	21	(0,087)

* Analysis performed only on the 126 supporters of the strikers.

We can offer no explanation which accounts for this discrepancy other than the assumption that 'community activists' also happen to have a tradition of family involvement in trade union affairs. We may also hypothesize that these activists tend to identify with causes and issues as opposed to the institutions which supposedly express them. A rejection of 'trade union bureaucracy' or organizational cynicism may also be apparent.

Based on the preceding analysis, there can be little doubt that during the strike the community appeared to provide considerable support for the strikers. At the same time however we know that the support was largely based upon reasons which did not wholly embrace trade union principles. Paradoxically, the data also shows that peoples' willingness to offer active support was dependent upon their prior disposition to unions in general. And despite coming from trade union backgrounds, those who were assessed as hard-core activists, appeared not to identify with trade unions. Rather that the cause itself was seen as independent from the organization which was pursuing it.

A final note of interest concerning behavior and attitudes during the strike, is the significance of the respondents' sex. In terms of their overall understanding of the strike, 18% of the women respondents felt that they

understood the issues very well. Conversely, a perhaps predictably inflated 40% of the men fell into this category. Women were more prepared to support the strike because women were involved 26% as against 3% for men. And women were also more likely to have been influenced by the strike in terms of greater awareness of strikes in general i.e. 47% women, against 35% for men. Finally, women were also less likely to support the strikers for trade union reasons 16% against 29% for men.

Attitude Changes as a Result of the Strike

Within the total sample, most respondents indicated negative attitude changes towards the bank (88%) and positive changes towards labour unions, (78%) as a result of the strike. There is also some evidence that the experience generated heightened interest in industrial relations in that 43% of the respondents now have a significantly greater interest in following strikes which are in the news.

Table 4 reveals that the propensity towards change in attitudes was much greater in the group of Hard-core Activists. This is particularly evident along the dimension of greater interest in 'strikes in the news', where the HCA's were 4 times more likely to display this attitude change. Since the bank strike was the first major conflagration in the town's history the experience itself may well be responsible for increasing knowledge, interest and awareness of such matters. We may also hypothesize that should future strikes occur in the area, then the HCA's may offer their support for more distinctly trade unions reasons than was the case in the present strike under review. Along with the increase in positive attitudes towards trade unions in general, it could be argued that the overall effect of the strike has been to encourage a greater acceptance and support for trade unions. This phenomena is buttressed by the 'us' versus 'them' syndrome which can be seen in terms of the overwhelming negative attitudes towards the bank, i.e. all categories show close to 90% negative response rates. Thus the development of a more 'radical' subordinate value system, through the 'demonstration effect' (Ponak, 1982, p. 349) has the potential to emerge. The evidence for such social change may be in the form of further industrial conflict, an increase in union membership in the region and perhaps even a shift in the political terrain.

Such hypotheses are at variance with the assumptions expressed earlier, namely that subordinate value systems in small communities may reflect not radical, but accommodative intent. This contention was to some degree borne out by the survey results in that the respondents often expressed the reasons for their support in non-union terms — and at the same time sought

to distance their support from a wider acceptance of trade unions. There is substantial evidence however, that the experience of the strike has subsequently altered the perceptions of many of the respondents towards trade unions. Accounting for more positive attitudes in this regard, begs further exploration of the complex value systems which operate in small communities. Support for unions may be contingent upon these highly localised circumstances. A small group of women against a mighty bank is emotive for even the most hardened anti-unionist. Part of the rationale which we think we have uncovered is that the community could not ignore the fact that the trade union was acting as the guardian of the community, defending community centric interests, against an *external* organization, i.e. the bank. Nevertheless, there is also substantial evidence, in terms of changes in post strike attitudes that such contingent support may yet translate into higher forms of institutional (trade union) recognition.

TABLE 4
Impact of the Strike on Attitudes to Strikes
the Bank and Trade Unions

<i>Perceived Attitudes changes Changes</i>	<i>Hard-core Activists (20%)</i>	<i>All Others (80%)</i>	<i>Total Sample (100%)</i>	<i>P. Value</i>
<i>Strikes in the News</i>				
Much greater interest	37	9	15	(0,0009)
Somewhat greater interest	27	28	28	
Only slightly more interested	13	25	22	
No greater interest	23	37	35	
<i>Attitudes towards the bank</i>				
The strike had some effect	97	70	75	(0,0000)
The effect was:				
Much more negative	59	35	41	(0,0022)
Somewhat more negative	31	52	47	
Somewhat more positive	10	13	12	
<i>Attitudes towards trade unions</i>				
The strike had some effect	77	59	63	(0,1980)
The effect was:				
Much more negative	0	8	7	(0,0000)
Somewhat more negative	8	17	15	
Somewhat more positive	67	61	63	
Much more positive	25	12	15	

DISCUSSION

The relationship between a strike and its surrounding community, large or small will vary considerably. For example, the social mosaic of a community, and its attitudes towards unions, as Krahn and Lowe (1984) discovered, will vary significantly between towns. Indeed, in parallel with their findings, this study has also established that prior attitudes to unions helps to determine the extent of community support for strikes. Support for striking workers is also naturally dependent on other factors such as the type of issue involved, the union and the employer. For example, it is not hard to conceive of strikes which would fail to generate even a fraction of the support that was clearly evident in the Antigonish bank strike.

Ultimately however, the interests of industrial relations researchers inevitably focus upon the extent to which community factors help to account for strike frequency and duration. A prior step towards this accomplishment is an appreciation of the impact that strikes have on the community. Only then will it be possible to assess whether community support was sufficient to prolong the strike in question or otherwise. And it is an examination and measurement of this dimension which hitherto has not been factored into the equation.

In our view, further research into the relationship between strikes and the community is best suited to help account for strike duration, since this is the aspect which the community undoubtedly influences directly — one way or another. For research along these lines to be useful it may be necessary to undertake some complex modelling which transcends the traditional scope of industrial relations lines of enquiry. Sociological concepts of the community naturally appear to lend themselves to this end. Moreover, it will be necessary to undertake research initiatives which escape the specificity of exploratory surveys such as this one. Smallness of sample size and the inherent difficulties in generalizing, should also be taken into account in terms of the validity of this approach. Nevertheless, verification of the findings here with respect to the typology of community activists and the relative significance of prior attitudes to unions will be a positive step towards factoring in the impact of the community into the study of strikes and industrial conflict.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABELLA, I., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949*, Toronto, Lewis and Samuel, 1974.
- THE BANK BOOK COLLECTIVE, *An Account to Settle*, Vancouver, Press Gang Publishers, 1979.
- CRAIG, A.W.J., *The System of Industrial Relations in Canada*, Scarborough, Prentice-Hall, 1986.
- DAHRENDORF, R., *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, London, RKP, 1959.
- DENNIS, H. et al., *Coal is Our Life*, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957.
- DERBER, M., «A Small Community's Impact on Labour Relations», *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 4, 1965.
- FORM, W.H. and H.K. DANSEREAU, «Union Membership Orientations and Patterns of Social Integration», *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 11, 1957.
- GILSON, C.H.J., *Strikes: Industrial Relations in Nova Scotia 1957-1987*, Hantsport, Lancelot Press, 1987.
- GORDON, M.E. and L.N. LONG, «Demographic and Attitudinal Correlates of Union Joining», *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 20, 1981.
- GOULDNER, A.W., *Wildcat Strike*, London, Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1955.
- HARBISON, F.H. and J.R. COLEMAN, *Goals and Strategy in Collective Bargaining*, New York, Harper, 1951.
- JOHNSON, W., *The Trade Unions and the State*, Montréal, Black Rose Books, 1978.
- KERR, C. and A. SIEGEL, «The Interindustry Propensity to Strike — an International Comparison», in A. Kornhauser, et al. (eds.), *Industrial Conflict*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1954.
- KRAHN, H. and G.S. LOWE, «Community Influences on Attitudes Towards Unions», *Relations Industrielles*, Québec, PUL, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1984.
- Labour Organizations in Nova Scotia 1986*, Department of Labour, Nova Scotia, Research Division.
- LANE, T. and K. ROBERTS, *Strike at Pilkingtons*, London, Fontana, 1971.
- LOWE, G.S., «The Canadian Union of Bank Employees: A Case Study», *Working Paper 7805*, Centre for Industrial Relations, University of Toronto, 1979.
- MACEWAN, P., *Miners and Steelworkers of Cape Breton*, Toronto, Hakkert and Company, 1976.
- MAGUN, S. et al., *Open Borders: An Assessment of the Canada — U.S. Free Trade Agreement*, Discussion Paper No. 344, Economic Council of Canada, April 1988.

- NEWTON, K., *The Sociology of British Communism*, London, 1969.
- PARKIN, F., *Class Inequality and Political Order*, London, Paladin, 1971.
- PONAK, A., «Public Sector Collective Bargaining», in *Union-Management Relations in Canada*, ed. J. Anderson and M. Gunderson, Don Mills, Addison-Wesley, 1982.
- STERN, R., «Intermetropolitan Patterns of Strike Frequency», *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 25, 1976.
- TANNENBAUM, A., «Union», in J.G. March (ed.), *Handbook of Organization*, (Vol. 2) Chicago, Rand McNally, 1965.
- NISBET, R.A., *The Sociological Tradition*, New York, Basic Books, 1966.
- WATKINS, T., «The Effects of Community Environment on Negotiations», *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector*, Vol. 1, 1972.

L'impact d'une grève sur le comportement d'une communauté rurale

Cet article a pour objet de reconsidérer, dans une perspective nouvelle, le rôle et la signification d'une grève en milieu rural. Celle-ci touchait onze employés d'une succursale bancaire à Antigonish en Nouvelle-Écosse. Jusqu'ici, les spécialistes ont tenté d'expliquer ses effets dans la communauté par des variables abstraites reliées au domaine des relations professionnelles: prédisposition à la grève, désir du syndicat, penchant à formuler des griefs, etc. La présente étude tend plutôt à inverser la méthode traditionnelle en ce sens que les données auxquelles on s'intéresse visent à mesurer l'impact d'une grève sur la collectivité locale. Aussi, un des aspects importants abordés dans cette enquête consiste-t-il à se rendre compte jusqu'à quel point la population de la ville a donné son appui aux grévistes et, ce qui est encore plus fondamental, à se demander si la grève a eu quelque influence sur l'attitude des gens postérieurement à l'arrêt de travail. Afin de comprendre ce point ainsi que d'autres aspects de l'engagement de la communauté dans cette grève, on a distribué au hasard (à partir des relevés du recensement) un questionnaire à un certain nombre d'habitants de la ville et du comité d'Antigonish de façon à connaître leurs réactions devant cet événement.

La révision des écrits sur la question laisse voir que les petites communautés, par le jeu d'un système de valeurs fondé sur la subordination, peuvent apporter un soutien notable à certains travailleurs en conflit avec de grandes entreprises dont le siège social se trouve à l'extérieur. On estime que ce soutien peut exister pour des salariés qui ne relèvent pas de la théorie de «la masse isolée» conformément à la pensée de Kerr et Siegel. Aussi, Lowe a-t-il suggéré que ces collectivités peuvent être à l'avant-garde de campagnes de syndicalisation, principalement dans des secteurs de services comme les banques. Au contraire, d'autres soutiennent qu'elles se présenteront comme «un système intégré» où l'appui à une grève s'enchaînera naturellement.

Les études théoriques révèlent une lacune surprenante en ce qu'on a fait peu d'efforts pour mettre au point une méthode de mesure capable d'indiquer l'ampleur du support accordé à une grève. En conséquence, le troisième objet de l'article est-il d'élaborer une typologie du degré d'engagement de la communauté qui puisse remplacer des évaluations du militantisme communautaire qui sont, en grande partie, restées subjectives.

Le résultat des fréquences qu'on retrouve au tableau 1 de l'article indique que, en général, le soutien aux grévistes était très élevé et qu'une majorité des répondants posèrent au moins un geste concret en leur faveur. D'un autre côté, le nombre de personnes qui ont participé aux activités de grève était très faible. De plus, les raisons invoquées pour ce faire ne permettaient nullement d'y déceler un ardent support aux «luttres syndicales». Les répondants soutenaient fondamentalement la grève pour des motifs de «justice naturelle». Par conséquent, la communauté appuyait l'arrêt de travail sans que son comportement ne remette en cause la structure et la convenance du système de valeurs existant. En d'autres mots, on ne voyait aucune déviance dans ce soutien à une grève.

Considérée en tant qu'analyse statistique à double variable, la variable qui explique le mieux l'appui de la collectivité consistait dans des attitudes antécédentes à la fondation du syndicat. Pour vérifier davantage cette constatation, les auteurs ont établi une classification du degré de participation de la population, ce qui a révélé que les gens les plus favorables à la grève agissaient pour des motifs n'ayant rien à voir avec le syndicalisme. Le tableau 3 démontre que leur appui se référait au fait que les grévistes avaient «moralement raison», qu'ils les connaissaient personnellement et qu'ils étaient de sexe féminin.

Les auteurs ont trouvé rien d'autre pour expliquer cette contradiction que l'hypothèse selon laquelle il existe dans les familles une tradition favorable aux syndicats. Nous pouvons aussi penser que ces militants ont tendance à s'identifier aux causes et aux débats pour manifester leur opposition aux institutions qui, possiblement, les expriment. On peut aussi y voir le rejet de «la bureaucratie syndicale» ou du cynisme en matière d'organisation.

Enfin, les répondants ont indiqué que l'expérience d'une grève dans une banque à Antigonish les avait rendus beaucoup plus conscients des conflits de travail et qu'il sont maintenant en mesure de soutenir les grévistes pour les motifs syndicaux traditionnels. De cette façon, de par «l'effet de démonstration», nous en déduisons que les grèves en milieu rural, comme celle dont il est question dans cet article, peuvent aider à augmenter la conscientisation des habitants et, par conséquent, engendre une plus grande participation à l'action syndicale.

Dans la section de l'article consacrée à la discussion du sujet, on note que les recherchistes en relations professionnelles se sont enfin intéressés au milieu et à son impact sur des questions comme la fréquence et la durée des grèves. Une démarche antérieure à cet objectif réside dans l'appréciation de l'influence que les grèves peuvent avoir sur une collectivité. C'est alors seulement qu'il sera possible d'établir si l'appui de la communauté est suffisant ou non pour prolonger la durée d'un conflit de travail. Mais l'on n'a pas mis jusqu'ici en équation l'examen et la mesure de ce phénomène.