

"The Large and Generous View" The Debate on Labour Affiliation in the Canadian Civil Service, 1918-1928

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“THE LARGE AND GENEROUS VIEW”:

The Debate on Labour Affiliation in the Canadian Civil Service, 1918-1928*

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I

The place of white-collar salaried employees in the class structure of advanced capitalist societies has been a long-standing theoretical problem. The creation of this sector was thoroughly rooted in the development of monopoly capitalism,¹ but it was not simply the culmination of a slow and peaceful evolutionary process. Rather the birth pangs of white-collar work have their source in the class struggle between the capitalist class and the industrial proletariat.

In the nineteenth century, skilled workers embodied absolute knowledge of the work process and maintained a substantial degree of control over production.² The introduction of a rigid specialization of

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¹See Nicos Poulantzas, “On Social Classes”, *New Left Review*, 78 (1973), pp. 27-54; also his *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London 1975); Erik Olin Wright, “Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies”, *New Left Review*, 98 (1976), pp. 3-41; and John Urry, “Towards a Structural Theory of the Middle Class”, *Acta Sociologica*, 16, (1973).

²See David Montgomery, “‘The New Unionism’ and the Transformation of Workers’ Consciousness in America, 1910-22”, *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974), pp. 509-529. For the Canadian context see Gregory S. Kealey, “‘The Honest Workingman’ and Workers’ Control: The Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892”, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976) pp. 32-68.

labour and mechanization precipitated an often violent class struggle as traditional knowledge and control was wrested from the workers³ and became the province of employees who were separated to varying degrees from the direct process of production. The result was not only the establishment of the economic basis for the subsequent proliferation of non-manual employment; the divorce of conception from execution also developed the conditions which made the distinction between mental and manual labour seemingly antagonistic. Within this "setting of antagonistic social relations, of alienated labor, hand and brain became not just separated, but divided and hostile."⁴

This new middle stratum — itself a diverse amalgam of clerical and service workers, technicians and professionals — was clearly distinct from those above them who wielded wealth and power, but was also distinguishable from manual workers. While the notions of white-collar employment and the separation of the office from the shop took on the aura of the capital-labour contradiction, they were nevertheless based on material differentials: non-manual workers possessed more highly developed symbolic skills, superior market and work situations, a superior status formally legitimated by educational institutions, a life-style which was separate and significantly distinct from the working class, and so on.⁵

It has been concluded by some that, since independent commodity producers have declined numerically to the point at which nearly ninety per cent of the Canadian labour force is comprised of employees, virtually everyone is working class.⁶ This has led to the

³See Montgomery "The New Unionism"; Katherine Stone, "The Origin of Job Structures in the Steel Industry", *Radical America*, 7 (1973), pp. 19-66; and Bryan Palmer, "Class, Conception and Class Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labor and the Working Class Rebellion, 1903-1922", *The Review of Radical Political Economics*, 7 (1975), pp. 31-49.

⁴Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, (New York 1974), p. 125. The printers in the Government Printing Bureau in Ottawa held a form of "producers' ideology" which drew a sharp distinction between the workers, and the clerical staff which the workers carried on their backs. The increase in number of these clerical workers was directly attributed to the intrusions of scientific management into the Bureau. *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 March 1919.

⁵See Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital*; David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness*, (London 1958).

⁶The classical statement is found in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth 1967), p. 80. See also Leo Johnson,

theory that the white collar sector has become proletarianized and that consequently proletarian revolution is imminent.

Alternatively, sociologists have advanced the argument that the divorce between mental and manual labour, and between control and execution, has led to the creation of a distinct class of non-manual employees. Capitalist development, then, has replaced the traditional petite bourgeoisie with a "new middle class".⁷

Harry Braverman, taking a socio-historical perspective, argued that we cannot conclude that there is a "new middle class" because the differentials between manual and mental labour have not persisted over time. Analysing the direction of change he concluded that the "apparent trend to a large nonproletarian middle class has resolved itself into the creation of a large proletariat in a new form".⁸ Mass employment transformed the privileged situation of the white-collar worker, who became equally subject to the vagaries of the capitalist labour market. The result was diminishing salaries, routinization of work and increasing unemployment.

Braverman develops, rather sketchily, a category ambiguously defined as the "middle layers of employment" which, historically, encompassed the clerical workers, and currently comprise the professional and scientific workers. Theoretically he identifies a stratum which is in an objectively intermediate position, between the bourgeoisie or petite bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁹ The question of class transformation becomes the analysis of the historical process by which those in intermediate positions come to approximate more closely the conditions of a specific class.

Besides the changes which take place in the objective situation of occupational groups, the second fundamental question of class transformation is the relationship between these changes and the

⁷"The Development of Class in Canada in the Twentieth Century", in Gary Teeple Ed. *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada* (Toronto 1972): 141-184. For the United States, see Francesca Freedman, "The Internal Structure of the Proletariat", *Socialist Revolution*, No. 26.

⁸See T. B. Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society* (New York 1966); Martin Nicolaus, "Proletariat and Middle Class in Marx: Hegelian Choreography and the Capitalist Dialectic", *Studies on the Left*, 7. (1967), pp. 22-49; John Urry, "Towards a Structural Theory of the Middle Class"; Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (London 1974); and C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Class* (New York 1956).

⁹Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 355.

⁹Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*; Wright, "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies".

development of class consciousness.¹⁰ While not carrying his analysis of the labour process into its subjective aspects, Braverman hinted at the implications following from his work. As the situation of the non-manual employee became less distinct from that of the manual worker, "the proletarian form began to assert itself and to impress itself upon the consciousness of these employees."¹¹ In other words, proletarianization of material conditions resulted in a changed consciousness. The growth of working class consciousness would be reflected in organizational development.

In general, by the growth of working class consciousness is meant the progressive adoption of elements of trade union ideology. While it is important to distinguish trade unionism from class consciousness, it is also necessary to make distinctions between types of trade unionism. For white-collar workers, at the most elementary level, trade union ideology implies a recognition of similar interests existing among workers in a particular stratum.

This rudimentary sense of collectivity, which does not go beyond a narrow conception confined to a particular class position, can be broadened in two directions: similar aims can be recognised with white-collar workers in the same position elsewhere, or with workers with more varied white-collar occupations. Organizations corresponding with these levels can be considered to be staff associations.

A higher level of trade union consciousness involves the question of affiliation with the trade union movement, which is mostly composed of unions of manual workers. The affiliation of a white-collar union can take at least two different forms: it can imply a class

¹⁰ That there is a relationship between the two is, of course, axiomatic. The nature of this relationship was the focus of a major debate. See L. Corey, *The Crisis of the Middle Class*, (New York 1935); H. Speier, "The Salaried Employee in Modern Society", in H. Speier, *Social Order and the Risks of War* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969); D. Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* (New York 1935). Klingender attributes both full proletarianization and false consciousness to the white-collar worker. C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, argues a more sophisticated form of the false consciousness thesis. David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* and R. M. Blackburn, *Union Character and Social Class* (London 1967), demonstrate a correlation between class position and union character. George Bain, David Coates and Valerie Ellis contend that, on the contrary, the relationship between class position, unionization and ideology is complex and not highly correlated. See *Social Stratification and Trade Unionism* (London 1973).

¹¹ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 408.

identification with the manual workers and a view that the distinction between mental and manual work is not significant, or affiliation can mean merely an alliance of a group in a relatively superior position with a numerically strong body of workers which implies no more than a pragmatic assessment that white-collar goals can be achieved with trade union support.

This paper attempts to explain the development of varying degrees of trade union ideology among "middle status"¹² civil servants at the close of the first world war, and argues that the response was directly related to concrete changes in work and market conditions. That is not to say that there is a completely automatic development of trade unionism with changing conditions, for the direction of ideological change is related to questions of past experience and tradition, and fundamentally to leadership. But the question of organization and consciousness is not a random process, and the forms that consciousness take historically have a specific relationship to material processes. To focus on the relationship between changing material conditions and the transformation of consciousness, the paper is concerned primarily with the ideological debate surrounding the movement for labour affiliation among civil servants in Ottawa between 1918 and 1924.

II

An unprecedented militancy among the working class in Canada erupted at the close of World War One. Within this context of confrontation, groups of public employees, which hitherto had seldom engaged in militant protest, came out on strike. Municipalities were faced with the prospect of strikes by police and firemen, as well as civic labourers, and there was even a strike of teachers in Victoria.¹³ In the federal civil service, postal workers conducted three illegal strikes between 1918 and 1924.

Postal workers were in the most obviously proletarian work situation in the federal civil service. The majority of the members of the Ottawa service, however, were more clearly white-collar workers in middle status, non-proletarian situations. Many of these were organized into staff associations which, while not formally recog-

¹²The use of "middle status" leaves open the question whether white-collar workers have consolidated into a middle class and also indicates that the paper is concerned with a wide range of occupational classifications in the civil service.

¹³The pattern of public employee strikes is similar to that of the workers' movement overall, until the 1930s when public employees failed to respond militantly.

nised by the government, were attempting to represent the interests of the civil servants to their employer. The general social radicalism did not leave these workers untouched, and they responded at the time by expanding the existing staff associations, by open-air protests demanding salary revisions, and by organizing new associations. In addition, a movement originated among the clerical staff in Ottawa, favouring the affiliation of the Civil Service Federation (C.S.F. — a federation of existing staff associations)¹⁴ with the Trades and Labor Congress (T.L.C.).

This sentiment was expressed initially in the columns of *The Civilian* — the official journal of the C.S.F. — which at first gave a more or less straight-forward presentation of the pro-union arguments without taking an explicit stand. Later it became the focal point for the movement to affiliate the C.S.F. with labour. By 1920 the attempt had failed and an alternative organization, the Associated Federal Employees of Ottawa (A.F.E.O.), was chartered by the T.L.C. While by the end of the year the new union reached a membership of fourteen hundred¹⁵ largely at the expense of the rival staff association, the Civil Service Association of Ottawa (C.S.A.O.), it dissolved four years later and the question of labour affiliation was shelved for several decades.

While in order to understand fully the origins of the movement, its development, and its subsequent decline, it would be necessary to place it in the national context, it is the intention of this paper to examine the question primarily in its internal manifestations. Rather than attempting to detail the history of the issue, then, the main question is to understand the process of ideological change particularly as it was affected by objective transformation. To begin it is necessary to look briefly at the situation civil servants faced at the close of the first world war.

During the war, pressure for an increased state role came from several directions,¹⁶ although it was recognised that the expanded

¹⁴The Civil Service Federation was an association of Civil Service Associations. It was not a single dues paying organization of civil servants. Its most important member association was the Civil Service Association of Ottawa (C.S.A.O.), and it was within this organization that the campaign against labour affiliation was strongest.

¹⁵*The Civilian*, December 1920, p. 4.

¹⁶Pressure to expand the economic role of the state, for example, came from influential Canadian businessmen who wanted the state to assist the expansion of the export trade, but who recognised that the existing state structure was unable to fulfill this function adequately. J. E. Hodgetts, William

state apparatus would have to be thoroughly rationalized.¹⁷ Between 1914 and 1920 the civil service doubled in size¹⁸ and the swelling of departments, already inefficiently organized, compounded the difficulties of administration. Within this context the government introduced scientific management principles into the civil service. The Civil Service Act of 1918 made provisions for classification and reorganization and embodied the merit principle of appointment.¹⁹

Unlike the situation in private employment, the idea of classification and reorganization was not imposed on completely recalcitrant employees. One aim of the Civil Service Federation prior to the war was to promote reform in the service — especially the merit principle, but also reclassification.²⁰ The character and content of any proposed changes were of vital interest to the civil servants who expected to provide some input.²¹

The initial employee response to the Act was enthusiastic. *The Civilian* — between 1917 and 1920 the official journal of the C.S.F. — expressed “satisfaction and warm appreciation” for the Act and congratulated the government.²² The task of classification was delegated to the Arthur Young Company, an American firm described by *The Civilian* as “the best assistance possible” and as having “undertaken and successfully accomplished many classification jobs.”²³ The journal reproduced an example of the printed cards which the

McCloskey, Reginald Whitaker, and V. Seymour Wilson, *The Biography of an Institution: The Civil Service Commission of Canada, 1908-1967*, (Montreal 1972), p. 46. The Economic Development Commission counselled that economic success would be in Canada's grasp if it were to reorganize both business and government on a rational and efficient basis; failing this Canadian domestic development would be retarded and other countries would appropriate our national wealth. Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), “Proposed Report of the Economic and Development Commission”, Borden Papers, Vol. 81.

¹⁷This view was expressed most clearly by William Foran, Secretary of the Civil Service Commission, in the *Civil Service Review*, May 1928, p. 15.

¹⁸Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book*, (Ottawa 1940).

¹⁹For a good account of both this process and the response of civil servants, see Hodgetts *et al*, *Biography of an Institution*, especially Chapter 4.

²⁰*The Civilian* (Special Edition 1916), p. 133.

²¹Bills on organization and superannuation had been introduced into the House of Commons in 1914. Both incorporated the view that the civil servants understood the service best and should have a voice in decisions. *Ibid.*

²²*The Civilian*, 10 May 1918, p. 30.

²³*Ibid.*, 16 August 1918.

civil servants would soon "have the opportunity" of filling out²⁴ — this, however, was to be the extent of their initial involvement in the classification.

The acceptance of the merit principle was motivated primarily by the desire of the Associations to eliminate patronage from the civil service. Theoretically, one effect of a developed system of patronage is to inhibit the development of employee organizations. Political appointments to the service create lines of individual dependency between the personnel and powerful figures in the administration which tend to undercut horizontal solidarity among the employees. But, if patronage inhibited to some extent the development of common employee interests, countervailing forces were also operative. Even if employment was secured through political influence, objective work conditions similar to those existing in private employment would motivate a collective response to improve these conditions. It appears that there is a logical connection between the growth of the state apparatus and the curtailment of political patronage at lower levels of the hierarchy.²⁵ Civil service organizations pre-dated the legal adoption of the merit principle in Canada. Once formed they vehemently opposed patronage and attempted to prevent the removal of any branch from the provisions of the Act.

Implicit in the call for civil service reform was the acceptance by the Associations of the policy of laying-off those defined as superfluous or inefficient. The Civil Service Association of Ottawa (C.S.A.O.) agreed that over-manning of the service was "the supreme evil",²⁶ and hoped that the new Act would prevent the retention of "unworthy or useless persons".²⁷ The acceptance of this view, so fully in accord with the government's own position, rested on a blockage of upward mobility within the government departments. According to J. E. Hodgetts, the meritorious advancement of a career in the service was a "millennial concept" and one civil service commentator was quoted as asserting that: "Nothing short of the chief clerk's being stricken by paralysis every three or four years would create any hope for the scores that were submerged in the lower

²⁴*Ibid.* According to R. M. Dawson, the civil servants availed themselves of the opportunity to write at length about their value to the service and the country. *The Civil Service of Canada*. (London 1929), p. 95.

²⁵Hodgetts *et al* have recently suggested that the amount and seriousness of patronage has been seriously overestimated. See *Biography of an Institution*, pp. 10-16.

²⁶*Civil Service News*, 21 August 1920.

²⁷*The Civilian*, 26 April 1918, p.22.

classes."²⁸ Since many capable men were being held down "to small salaries and subordinate rank",²⁹ the adoption of efficient business practices would eliminate superfluous workers, and the merit principle would open up senior positions to ambitious subordinates. The civil servants' demand for superannuation served both present and long-range interests.

Within nine months the American experts had devised a detailed and carefully specified classification with 1700 different classes.³⁰ The reaction was both immediate and negative. Traditional distinctions and disparities were ignored, positions were eliminated or reclassified downward, office hierarchies were disrupted, and long established procedures were condemned. The rigid specification of prerequisites for each 'class' made the hierarchy appear to be even more rigid, and to preclude easy promotion from one grade to another.³¹ The salary levels, which civil servants had hoped would reflect the new inflationary reality, had been determined in accordance with pre-war figures on the assumption that conditions would return to this normal base.³² When prices continued to rise in the immediate post-war period, the credibility of the experts was destroyed.

In 1920 the Civil Service Commission pressed forward with its campaign to rationalize the civil service, and the firm of Griffenhagen (one of Arthur Young's experts) and Associates was hired to begin the reorganization of some departments. The direct application of scientific management techniques, on top of the dissatisfaction already aroused, inflamed feelings and elicited the predictable employee responses: antagonism to being watched, passive resistance, and active opposition.³³

The procedures adopted by the classifiers and organizers violated one of the original concerns advanced by the staff association: there was virtually no service control over the process. It was thought

²⁸J.L. Payne, "The Civil Servant", quoted in Hodgetts, *et al*, *Biography of an Institution*, p.33.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

³¹As Dawson explained, an employee would enter the service with a grade school education and find that in order to attain promotions "he must acquire in odd moments a university education with perhaps graduate work in certain subjects." *The Civil Service in Canada*, quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

³²Hodgetts, *et al*, *Biography of an Institution*, p. 70.

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 71, 80. P.A.C. Memorandum, G. D. Robertson to Buskard, 7 October 1921, Meighen Papers, Vol. 19.

that the real experts on the service — the employees themselves — had not been given a voice.³⁴ The Associations advanced two related arguments, demanding first the cancellation of the Griffenhagen contract, and secondly requesting that a permanent system be devised to allow employee representatives a greater voice in decisions affecting the service.³⁵

The application of scientific management ideology, and the transformation of the civil service in the direction of a mass employment industry, affected the work situation of federal employees. The process had two distinct facets; on the one hand it emphasized the distinction between the lower and higher grades particularly in relation to power. Large numbers of clerical workers were placed in classified positions where they were subject to power far more than they exercised it. On the other hand the tendency towards collective response which such a situation could engender was counter-acted by the range of intermediate positions which, given substantial mobility, masked the polarization. There was a contradiction between the objective rationalization of the work situation experienced by the lower civil servants and the bureaucratic structure developed in part to counter the implications following from the rationalization.³⁶

While the distinction between the work situations of white-collar and manual workers was to a small degree objectively eroded in this period, the superior market situation of salaried workers was similarly under some pressure. World War One brought a rapid rate of inflation causing prices to virtually double in a few years. In periods of inflation the differential between wages and salaries decreases in favour of wages. For example, total clerical earnings stood a full twenty percent higher than the average earnings in manufacturing in Canada in 1901; by 1921 male clerical earnings stood at only six percent, and total clerical earnings only three percent higher.³⁷ The

³⁴The C.S.C. made provisions to hear class and then individual appeals by setting up a Board of Hearing and Recommendation in July 1919. The net effect was to air grievances and add an additional 200 classifications. P.A.C. Patterson to Meighen, 15 December 1920, Meighen Papers, Vol. 18; P.A.C. Board of Hearing to Patterson, n.d., Meighen Papers, Vol. 18.

³⁵Trade and Labor Congress, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention*, 1920, p. 74.

³⁶For a good account of a similar process in the U.S. steel industry, see Katherine Stone, "The Origins of Job Structures in the Steel Industry", *Radical America*, 6 (1975), pp. 19-66.

³⁷Graham Lowe, "Changes in the Clerical Sector of the Canadian Labour Force" (Unpublished paper, n.d.).

perception among some civil servants was that the wages of manual workers were actually out-stripping their salaries.³⁸ Not only was there some objective narrowing of the income gap, but civil servants perceived even a greater degree than in fact occurred. These processes which undermined some of the differentials between the market and work situations of mental and manual workers were not slow and steady but were, on the contrary, relatively precipitous, occurring in the space of a few years.

The most pervasive effect related to this development was the intensification of collective consciousness among federal employees, although the specific effects of the changes and the responses elicited varied between the different strata within the service. For some elements within the leadership of the C.S.F., it appeared that the new situation fundamentally altered the traditional distinction between salaried workers and manual labour. Consequently they began an attempt to popularize trade unionism in an effort to transform the C.S.F. into a union affiliated with other workers.

As expressed in *The Civilian*, the ideology of the most radical pro-union element in Ottawa combined a more or less populist rhetoric with a vision of working class electoral politics. Early in 1918 civil servants had been advised to refrain from affiliating with labour until the new Civil Service Act had been granted a trial. Nevertheless — to provide an example of the most fully-blown rhetoric — civil servants were advised to become familiar with the labour movement so they would be able to understand "the cause of the impending social upheaval in many countries which will be a preliminary skirmish to the Battle of all battles, in which the Monarch of all monarchs — King Capital — will be banished forever."³⁹

The view of the social structure propagated by the self-styled progressives in the service distinguished between a capitalist elite and the working people. Only those with social connections or a "friend in the capitalist class" were likely to get a hearing while the rest suffered the penalty of their penury.⁴⁰ A definite link was drawn between the rich capitalist class and the government — a link which in

³⁸The feeling was expressed by some salaried civil servants that "the position of those having to depend on fixed salaries was far [worse than] those who, owing to the special demands for their services, were able to command an increased wage commensurate with the increase in prices." See the *Labour Gazette*, 18 (1918), p. 783.

³⁹*The Civilian*, 18 January 1918, p. 422.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 15 February 1918, p. 459.

Britain, it was declared, had driven civil servants into the ranks of the Labour Party.⁴¹

Along with its condemnation of the greedy and tyrannical capitalist elite went the view which defined everyone else as working class. Adopting a wide conception of the meaning of labour, the essential point of connection between public and private workers was not conceived to be the separation from the ownership of the means of production, since small producers were included as well, but rather their subjugation to a "capitalistic regime". Those who toiled by their hands were united by the harsh competition facing small producers in the capitalist market, the spread of scientific management from the plant to the office, and the separation of ownership from direct control in the large corporations.

The means to achieve social change were expected to be the parliamentary road to "greater democracy and the further evolution of human ideals", and the agent to bring this change was the Labour Party in Canada.⁴² The institutions of the state were not criticized, but by drawing the connection between the government and the capitalist class the traditional governing parties were delegitimized. The Postal Clerks' Association most explicitly supported a Labour Party in Canada which they saw as a workers' party seeking "social justice" and the "square deal". Post-war reconstruction was to be the prerogative of the people, the majority of whom, whether artisans, professionals or "knights of the pen", were workers. By electing men of their own class to parliament, the interests of this majority would be protected and advanced.⁴³ *The Civilian* even foresaw the election of a labour Prime Minister in Canada.⁴⁴

The attitude promoted by the trade unions was that civil servants had always had an inflated view of their own self-importance, but had finally been brought to realize that they were neither more nor less than workers. In an editorial entitled "Enter the Clericals", the *Canadian Labor Press* argued that the formation of the new union dispelled the obsolete idea that clerical workers belonged in a separate category and concluded that whether the mode of rendering service to the nation was the pick or the pen, all workers were made from the "same clay".⁴⁵

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*The Postal Journal*, 15 February 1918 cited in *Ibid.*, p. 439.

⁴⁴*The Civilian*, October 1918, pp. 284-285.

⁴⁵The A.F.E.O. was not the first clerical union local in the T.L.C. — insurance clerks in Montreal, as well as provincial civil servants in British

The question of labour affiliation resolved itself ideologically into a middle class — working class debate overlain by the crucial complicating issue of public service employment. The radical pro-union argument constituted a denial of any significant differences between mental and manual work, with both the man in overalls and the man sitting behind the desk being equally labourers. This identity of interests remained irrespective of whether the worker was an employee of a private company or a government department.⁴⁶

The successful propagation of this view was essential if the inherited middle class prejudices were to be broken down and trade union consciousness developed. Those who resisted unionization were said to be attempting to preserve their dignity at the expense of their bread and butter.⁴⁷

In its weekly column in the *Canadian Labor Press*, the A.F.E.O. claimed that civil servants had been blind to their real position and had continued to assume a superiority when living and working conditions had declined. The article asked rhetorically whether there were still those in the service who considered themselves "gentlemen" who had "by force of circumstances... been compelled to 'accept a government position' carrying with it a certain 'honorarium' but separated by a gulf both wide and deep from 'earning a living' or accepting 'wages' and looking with disdain upon the humble worker."⁴⁸ By "compelled to accept" the union did not mean to connote compelled by economic necessity; on the contrary, employment by a private firm was still the white-collar norm and expectation and the idea persisted, especially during the war, that accepting a government post retained the aura of serving the country. But the days when civil servants could consider themselves a species apart and reject out of hand even the idea of joining an organization were declared to be over. Based on the general belief among trade unionists that civil servants were simply "poorly paid fellow workers" labour affiliation would mean that civil servants would cease being "a class apart, a white-collar crowd" and become instead "brothers in arms".⁴⁹

The A.F.E.O. recognized that, ideologically, the conception that civil servants were in a superior class relative to manual workers

Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan had been granted charters previously. *Canadian Labor Press*, 24 July 1920.

⁴⁶*The Civilian*, October 1918, pp. 284-285; *Ibid.*, December 1918, p. 31.

⁴⁷*Canadian Labor Press*, 14 August 1920.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 25 September 1920.

⁴⁹*The Civilian*, December 1920, p. 9.

was a powerful weapon in the arsenal of the anti-union group. The opponents of labour affiliation, they said, played on the civil servants' middle class consciousness, on their "self-conscious snobbery"; they harped on the "dignity" and "respectability" of a government post in order to undermine any sense of identification with workers that might be developing.

The most consistent source of the direct reproduction of this middle class ideology in the civil service (apart from the traditional superiority of a clerical position alluded to above) was the class position of the higher echelon of civil servants. As the government expanded its social and economic roles, increasing numbers of scientific and technical workers had been recruited into the public service. Simultaneously, the overall economic expansion demanded an even more rapid escalation of the numbers of such employees in the private sector. The status of the professionals and technical workers in public employment consequently suffered in relative terms, and their demands for higher compensation were matched by numerous desertions from the service for more lucrative employment.⁵⁰ Government efforts at rationalization also affected the higher levels of the civil service and the classification of these positions was especially problematic because of the individualized nature of their work.⁵¹ It is not surprising that this sector appealed to the Board of Hearing with a frequency disproportionate to its numbers.

One immediate outcome of the difficulties experienced by the professionals was the development of a collective consciousness, and in February 1920, the Professional Institute of the Civil Service of Canada was formed.⁵² The choice of the term institute was consistent with the practice in England; more significantly, it reflected the view that an association was too closely linked with trade union. More than any other category of civil servants, with the exception of higher administrators, the scientific and professional workers conceived themselves to be members of a middle, salaried class. In practice, they even refused to affiliate with the lower clericals through the

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, October 1920, p. 436; *Civil Service News*, 28 August 1920, p. 2.

⁵¹In the British Civil Service, the departments were given a certain amount of autonomy to reclassify positions if necessary — an option which was most frequently used by scientific and technical workers. See Leonard D. White, et al., *Civil Service Abroad: Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany*, (New York 1935).

⁵²Saul Frankel, *Staff Relations in the Civil Service: The Canadian Experience* (Montreal 1962).

C.S.F., on the grounds of its alleged trade unionism.⁵³

This perception of their superior status even within the salaried class as a whole was clearly expressed in one of their letters to Prime Minister Meighen, protesting the grave injustice meted out to them. These men had undergone the sacrifice of attending university in order, first, "to contribute more to the ideals of civilization", and second to provide themselves salaries above those possible with a high school education. Despite their obvious standing, the government had handled their numerous appeals in a discourteous and unconscionable manner. They declared themselves, in training and ideals, to be colleagues of the Prime Minister, with whom they constituted the class which was the backbone of civilization. The salaried class — which of late had been "crushed between the upper and neither millstones of capital and labor" — was responsible for maintaining the "morals and religion" of the country.⁵⁴

Professional and scientific workers, who sometimes occupied positions of authority as well as prestige, consciously distinguished themselves from the lower clericals as well as from labour. In origin, the middle class ideology had a substantial base; but the evolution of the objective position of the lower clericals provided both the material base for the continuation of this ideology, as well as the conditions for its erosion among some sectors and individuals. The attitude of some lower clericals became increasingly ambivalent as their position became more ambiguous.

The anti-labour ideology, however, usually rested only implicitly on the distinct and formulated middle class consciousness of the higher professionals. Of much more ideological significance in the civil service was the notion of public service which rested on the view that the government was above class and served the national interest; an ideology the most radical labour advocates had repudiated in their conception of working class social change. In the ideology of public service⁵⁵ the mental/manual distinction was declared to be less fun-

⁵³*Canadian Civil Servant*, July 1955, p. 3.

⁵⁴*The Civilian*, October 1920, pp. 436-437.

⁵⁵According to Ralph Miliband, the ideology that the state is "neutral", that it is "classless" and served the nation as a whole, is especially prevalent among higher civil servants. See *The State in Capitalist Society* (London 1966), p. 119. Nicos Poulantzas suggests that this ideology affects civil servants in lower class positions because they all belong to a "social category" which presents an ideological unity of its own and permits the civil service as a whole to serve class interests different from the interests of the civil servants themselves, and the class to which they belong. See "On Social Classes", *New Left Review*, 78 (1973), 122, pp. 40-41.

damental than the contradiction between private and public employment. As had been the case for the overt distinction between a salaried class and a working class, the view of the transcending nature of public service was most clearly articulated by the Professional Institute,⁶⁶ from which it percolated throughout the lower levels of federal employment to shape actively the consciousness of clerical employees as well.⁶⁷

The essence of this view emerges from a letter by A. C. Campbell, a prominent member of the C.S.A.O., to *The Civilian*. Without denying private employees the rights to organize and strike, Campbell placed public employees in a separate category. While they could and should form associations, they were the servants of all of the people of Canada, and therefore ought not ally themselves with any private, sectional interests, be they manufacturers, traders or workers. Since civil servants could not serve "two masters" (a peculiar view of labour affiliation) they were to give whole-hearted devotion to the entire public.⁶⁸ Civil servants were counselled not to be "selfish" but to have "the large and generous view".⁶⁹ This loyalty to the people as a whole was to be expressed by loyalty to their legitimate elected representatives in the Parliament of Canada — the government of the day. The radical sector, however, had abandoned the conception of the government as neutral, and had delegitimized it as the pawn of powerful capitalist interests. The identification with labour had progressive overtones because it postulated not only a link between workers and public employees, but also conceptually united the capitalist employers and the government.⁶⁹ Whether the move-

⁶⁶Like other associations of professionals, the Institute defined one of its major goals to be the education of its members. Since it was composed of numerous disciplines linked by federal employment, the educative function consisted of a formulation of the public service ethic which placed civil servants in a unique position.

⁶⁷It is interesting to note in this connection that the printers employed by the Government Printing Office did not express any notion that their particular employer somehow placed them in distinct positions from other workers. In general, then, there was a definite link between class position and the ideology of public service, with the lower clericals in an ambiguous objective position, but being compelled by circumstances to question their own class identification.

⁶⁸*The Civilian*, February 1920, p. 116.

⁶⁹*Civil Service News*, January 1928, p. 3.

⁶⁹The use of "government" rather than "state" implies that what was losing legitimacy in the eyes of some civil servants were the political parties — the conservatives and the liberals — rather than state institutions. Social change

ment, in its most radical manifestations, adequately addressed the prevailing understanding and class identification of the majority of civil servants is a second question.

All indications point to the growth of a consciousness of collectivity among federal employees in the post-war years. Considerable numbers of civil servants went beyond this most rudimentary form of trade union consciousness. A C.S.A.O. sponsored referendum in Ottawa on whether the existing organization should affiliate with the T.L.C. resulted in a thousand vote margin in favour of affiliation.⁶¹ Consequently the opponents of labour had to appeal to this consciousness while undermining its radical implications. This was accomplished by appealing for the unity of all class positions within the service as a whole as opposed to unity with the labour movement.⁶² Organizational unity was to be forged among all civil servants whether in low, middle or high classifications on the basis of national service and the neutral state, rather than affiliating with labour and splitting the lower from the higher civil servants. The service ethic, then, was promoted at the expense of trade unionism.

The view that the essential interests of manual and non-manual workers were similar was conceded in part, but it was declared to be overshadowed by an even more profound cleavage. The *Civil Service News* argued that pick and shovel workers and branch heads had similar interests — because they were public servants. In other words, a labourer was to unite with his supervisor and remain apart from other labourers on the grounds that distinctions within the service were less profound than the distinction between private and public employment.⁶³ This view was effective in reinforcing any

and "real democracy" were postulated to be realized through the election of a labour party which would use its legislative power to curb the power of the monopolies. Stripped of its radical labour party tinge, this view may logically have led to support for Mackenzie King who, with a stretch of the imagination, could have been seen as a representative of the interests of labour. He was most closely connected with progressivism in Canada, and many civil servants did in fact support him.

⁶¹*The Civilian*, November 1920.

⁶²Within the organizations opposed to labour affiliation, there were two separate conceptions of unity — the federation principle (C.S.F.) and the principle of one association (C.S.A.O.). The debate between the two is interesting and has formed the theme of earlier studies of the civil service. The two were similar, however, in distinguishing civil servants from other workers.

⁶³*Civil Service News*, 4 September 1920, p. 2.

identification of clerical workers with the higher salaried public servants, and can be considered one form of middle class consciousness found in the civil service.

At first the C.S.A.O. carried on sharp polemics with what they called the new "union" and engaged in some red-baiting.⁶⁴ The question of the ultimate success of the A.F.E.O., however, depended primarily on what the organization was able to achieve in practice relative to the staff association. If civil servants were to abandon some of their claims to a superior status, they required some concrete benefits to make the sacrifice worthwhile. Both the leaders of the union and Tom Moore, President of the T.L.C., publicly emphasized the bread and butter economic benefits to be attained through affiliation, and these benefits required substantiation.

We must not be led to conclude that the most radical ideological expressions appearing in *The Civilian* adequately describe the views of the 3500 civil servants who voted for labour affiliation. While representing a clear alternative to the staff associations, this ideology was not reflected in the formal organizational principles of the A.F.E.O. As institutionalized in the Associated Federal Employees the extent to which the union formed, in practice, a real alternative to the associations can be questioned. This may be reasonably attributed to the tactical requirements of establishing a viable alternative organization, thereby reflecting the essential absence of trade union consciousness among most rank and file civil servants. This is, however, not meant to negate either the initial steps to form staff associations which civil servants were in general taking, or to deny that some federal employees developed beyond this stage of collective consciousness.

We can isolate a more dominant ideological expression that favoured conditional affiliation with labour, but only within the context of employer-employee co-operation. The employing class was castigated by *The Civilian* for having failed to develop any social philosophy to replace the out-moded conception of economic *laissez-faire*. The condemnation of the "traditional ethics of property, profit and employment" — ethics which were "no longer tolerable to the moral sense" — had originated, *The Civilian* noted, among

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 1 (1920), p. 5. The *Montreal Star* also made reference to the attacks of *The Civilian* claiming that the paper "consists of an arraignment of Canada's system of government which might have come from the pen of Lenin or Trotsky" and yet was sent freely through the mails. In its rejoinder *The Civilian* explained that, on the contrary, the journal paid regular postage: no reference was made to the other attack. February 1919, p. 104.

wage-earners, from whom it had spread transforming "the general middle class attitude to these questions".⁶⁵

If the critique of the "traditional ethics" had its origins within the working class, the conception of the new economic system to arise from the ashes of the war had much more in common with the progressive movement in the United States. The decline in production being experienced at the time (May 1919) was blamed on the hopeless and embittered conditions of the workers. With government intervention to curtail capital — at least large capital — social justice would result and the moral spirit would revive, leading to increased production and the assurance of a higher standard of living. By reviving production and more equitably distributing the product, the material base would be realized for mutual good-will between labour and capital and result in the end of class warfare. The implicit view of these civil servants was that the working class would eventually become more like themselves: "in proportion as labour is admitted to knowledge" they declared, "it will acquire responsibility" from which class harmony and the unity of the "national heart and effort" would follow.⁶⁶ Far from representing an identification with workers, this view reiterated the traditional superiority, but condescended to recognize the middle class burden of civilizing the lower classes.

When *The Civilian* advocated "a society with equal opportunity for all and special privilege for none" it did not contemplate a movement towards abolishing the existence of positions of privilege and scarce rewards, but rather wanted to democratize access to these inequalities. Similarly it is important not to exaggerate the meaning of an affiliation with the T.L.C. The leadership of the Congress was equally committed to the existing social structure and sought merely to influence to some extent the share of the product going to labour, within an ideology that declared the interests of capital and labour in principle reconcilable.

This view of the foundation of the movement for labour affiliation is significant in attempting to explain the character of the union founded. The radical conception of working class electoral politics found no institutionalized expression. In its place was the familiar litany that the aim of the A.F.E.O. was to promote "mutual sympathy between the employees of the Canadian government and their employers" and thereby bring about "greater contentment and loyalty" among civil servants and maximum efficiency.⁶⁷ The union, along

⁶⁵*The Civilian*, May 1919, p. 218.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷*Labour Organization in Canada* (1922), p. 45.

with the staff associations, abdicated the demand for the right to strike, not because a strike would be illegal (they said) but because they recognized the crucial importance of their function in the community.⁶⁸ The C.S.A.O. charged that this made the union a "blank cartridge"; since it could offer labour no benefit, it should expect no benefit in return.⁶⁹

With the exception of an appeal for the moral support of the union movement, the means adopted by the A.F.E.O. differed from the staff associations only in the degree of application. The union perceived the T.L.C. to have the clout necessary for winning concessions from the government, and had an exaggerated sense of what the labour movement was able to accomplish through its legislative proposals. For the civil servants who supported it, labour affiliation expressed less a consciousness of the unity of a working class, than an alliance with a powerful sectional interest which would support their demands. Affiliation was an *alliance* of separate groups for common purposes. According to the popular image, the connection with labour would "improve the hand" that the employees "held" when they "sat in the game" with the government to "play at modern business".⁷⁰

The direct material benefits civil servants could expect to gain with the help of labour was first put to the test in 1920 at the T.L.C. convention. Resolutions proposed by the A.F.E.O. were not accepted by the committee in their proposed form: the resolution for a superannuation scheme for civil servants was dropped,⁷¹ and the request for a salary increase whittled down to twenty-five percent. The Civil Service Association was able to gain much credibility from this by charging that the union had sold out the interests of the civil servants. Labour did not want to see high salaries in the civil service,

⁶⁸*Civil Service News*, 27 October 1920, p. 4; *The Civilian*, October 1920, p. 422.

⁶⁹*Civil Service News*, 27 October 1920, p. 4. The emphasis on labour-management cooperation was not only a growing phenomenon but was rife in the Ottawa Trades and Labor Council, judging from the content of the *Canadian Labor Press*, its journal. As one might assume, the majority of civil servants who favoured labour affiliation adopted the most conservative views in the labour movement.

⁷⁰*The Civilian*, December 1918, p. 31.

⁷¹The T.L.C. was opposed to private pension schemes because they were advocating pension rights for all employees administered through the state. The A.F.E.O. resolution conflicted with this policy. *The Civilian*, December 1920, p. 10.

they declared, because it had "advanced itself until even the unskilled worker is better off than the once comparatively opulent civil servant. Labor likes the advantages of this new relationship and does not wish the Civil Service to be restored to its old relative position."⁷² Only the C.S.A.O. could effectively advance civil service claims because it was not being dictated to by anyone, including the T.L.C.⁷³ On this note the Association launched its own educational campaign to prove, in a "reasonable and mature" fashion, that the service deserved an eighty percent increase.⁷⁴

The rapid growth of the A.F.E.O. initially occurred largely at the expense of the staff association. However, within a few months in 1921, *significant defections from the union had taken place, both at the rank-and-file and leadership levels.* By February the union was seeking some common ground for uniting with the staff associations around concrete representations to the government, and was proposing that, underneath the differences, the various organizations were sincerely working for the betterment of the service.⁷⁵ The union surrendered its charter in 1924 and its demise symbolized the defeat of the movement for labour affiliation in the federal civil service.⁷⁶ The major debate within the civil service came to centre around two alternative organizational principles: federation and amalgamation. Amalgamation was favoured mostly by postal workers and lower clericals in the West, and, relative to federation, was more progressive since it attempted to unite all class positions in one association. In general, civil servants seldom could unite, even with one another.

While the failure of the A.F.E.O. can be attributed to such

⁷²*Civil Service News*, 25 September 1920, p. 2.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 27 October 1920, p. 4.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁵*The Civilian*, March 1921, p. 122.

⁷⁶The A.F.E.O., in an effort to expand its potential base, changed its name to the Associated Federal Employees of Canada and was given Dominion-wide jurisdiction. Altogether there were three locals chartered: the original No. 66, a separate Ottawa local, No. 67, for Office Cleaners, most of whom were female, and No. 68, employees at the Lachine Canal. There is some evidence that civil servants in more proletarian-like work situations tended to join the unions. The vote on affiliation was broken down by *The Civilian* into departments and those with more proletarian content or contact tended to favour the connection with labour. Following the dissolution of the A.F.E.O., the office cleaners continued to exist as a local and were directly chartered by the T.L.C.; members of Federal Union No. 66 most likely returned to the C.S.A.O.

factors as the wide diversity of classifications and lack of unity in the civil service, the traditional attitudes of superiority felt by many civil servants, possible mistakes or idiosyncracies of the leadership, and so on, a social science interpretation must locate major social factors which shape events. We can discuss the failure of the union in the same way with which we accounted for its development. By the mid-1920s labour affiliation was a dead issue, and we can isolate several important events which shaped a conservative swing in the Canadian civil service.

The early 1920s were, in Canada, a period of retrenchment and repression. Unions were smashed, and techniques for handling the labour problem developed. Just as the rise of the union sentiment was connected to a period of heightened labour militancy, so the decline of the A.F.E.O. was related to these difficult times. Again, however, it is necessary to look particularly at objective processes internal to the civil service.

One event which helped precipitate this response in the last half of the decade was the defeat of the 1924 postal strike. The postal workers — both letter carriers and clerks — were the most militant in the civil service and they struck in 1924 over a proposal by the Civil Service Commission which amounted to a reduction of salaries.⁷⁷ If the postal workers, through militant trade union methods, had won substantial benefits at the time, then not only would the pressure be overwhelming to generalize the new rates to the service as a whole, but legitimacy would be granted to illegal public employee strikes. The mistake which the government made in 1918, when the postal strikers were not only successful in obtaining their demands, but had actually been paid for the time they were on strike, would have to be corrected. Consequently the Liberal, and presumably pro-labour government of Mackenzie King adopted the tactics developed by the Conservative government of Meighen to deal with the postal workers in Winnipeg in 1919. The adoption of means defined as illegitimate would have to be confronted and defeated, and other civil servants would then draw the appropriate conclusions. In 1924 the government refused to make any concessions, dismissed the strikers from the service, and once the workers agreed to return — as postal helpers — repudiated in practice any verbal promises of fair treatment. Militancy was crushed and not until the second world war did postal unrest again become even potentially disruptive.

⁷⁷See Anthony Thomson, "Government Employee Unionism and the Ideology of Public Service in Canada, 1911-1939", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977), especially Chapters four and six.

The other government tactic, which accompanied the hard line against "illegitimate protest" was a process of concessions for requests brought by what were defined as legitimate means. Above all, the opportunity to reward a moderate and reformist approach rested on the economic basis provided by the restoration of prosperity in the 1920s. The C.S.A.O. and the C.S.F. were able to attain some successes in their "mature representations" at the highest levels, which eliminated the need for active intervention by civil servants themselves. With the government's ability to slowly compromise with the requests of the staff associations during the relatively opulent late 1920s, the superior objective situation of federal employees was in general restored. Coupled with the failure at the T.L.C. Convention, the attempt to unionize was undermined.

During the 1920s, "patronage was largely eliminated, some of the previously prevailing chaos disappeared, [and] an orderly classification of positions was installed".⁷⁸ Once established, the classification system provided a hierarchy of positions with annual salary increments. A graduated series of promotions helped dispel the view that advancement was a "millennial concept", and induced feelings of accomplishment and individual achievement. Minute job gradations created a myriad of invidious distinctions which divided workers from each other and individualized their career patterns.

In 1924, through the efforts of the staff associations, civil servants were granted a superannuation scheme to which the employees and the government paid equally, a system in advance of pension plans being developed in private industry.⁷⁹ By retiring employees who had "outlived their usefulness", opportunities were opened for a flow of promotions rendering employees upwardly mobile.⁸⁰ Even if the achieved benefits and actual chances for social mobility were lower in practice than expected, the belief that it was possible to achieve rewards by individual effort and merit would reinforce the ideology of careerism at the expense of trade unionism.

Perhaps most significantly, the staff associations were able to secure salary readjustments. One major salary revision took place in 1924-25, and in 1927 the government agreed to a second revision providing an across the board increase.⁸¹ These adjustments went far

⁷⁸Hodgetts, *et al.*, *Biography of an Institution*, p. 115.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁸⁰Civil Service Commission, *Annual Report*, 1922, p. xiv, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁸¹Hodgetts, *et al.*, *Biography of an Institution*, pp. 128-129.

towards bettering the position of civil servants relative to the private employees in the country as a whole.⁶²

In short, between 1924 and 1928, not only had the differential between civil service salaries and private wages been to a degree restored, but new differentials had been developed. These objective changes in the relative position of civil servants tended to reinforce their status as a salaried intermediate grouping and undermined the conception of an alliance with the working class which some white-collar civil servants had begun to develop at the end of the war. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of the authority structure, and the corresponding classification of lower civil servants into a mass employment in which lower clericals increasingly dealt with the public via the medium of pieces of paper, transformed their work situation. This change was reflected in the strength of the staff associations which continued to organize a fairly high percentage of civil servants.⁶³

The staff associations adopted a policy of employer-employee cooperation within which they advised the government on civil service matters, and were available for consultation. The government monopolized the direct decision-making power and continued to resist the establishment of Joint Councils which, if formed, might have granted more control to the civil service associations.

Accompanying the objective transformation was the ascendancy in the realm of ideology, of the "service ethic". Some references continued to be made to the "class spirit" which, in the specific context, implied only the development of an *esprit de corps* which would unite civil servants with their superiors and separate them from other employees. Writing in the first edition of the *Civil Service Review*, A. C. Campbell apologised for talking about class and proceeded to demonstrate the meaning he attached to the term: "When Smith & Co. Ltd. try to unite their employees in loyalty to the concern, the effect, if successful, is to make those employees a class and to make them class conscious."⁶⁴

More commonly, however, by the middle and late 1920s the "service ethic" was being promoted less as the unity of all civil service classifications for collective organization, but rather was

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶³With the exception of 1925 and 1926, when the figure dropped below sixty percent, between 1924 and 1939 between seventy and eighty percent of civil servants were organized. *Canada Year Book*, 1940; *Labour Organization in Canada, 1924-1939*.

⁶⁴*Civil Service Review*, May 1928, p. 31.

individualized, with the crucial link being that between the individual civil servant and the public, his or her clientele. The Professional Institute counselled its members to curtail waste and to put more than merely their time into a full day's work; the civil servant should "study a little more about usefulness and aims of his department and be able to justify to the public the part which he is playing in the developing of his country."⁸⁵ United only by their rendering of individual service to the public, the associations, more in keeping with the usual conception of white-collar employment, stressed the individual's application to his work.

By 1927 the staff associations had accepted the classifications and made the claim that any dissatisfaction could only be an individual matter. The solution to such dissatisfaction was also individualized: by performing the most menial tasks with zeal and enthusiasm, promotion, with accompanying salary increases, would be the inevitable reward.⁸⁶ According to the *Civil Service News* the world's prizes, honours and best pay went to the class of individuals who demonstrated the most initiative, while the lowest class was composed of those who were constantly unemployed and received the contempt they deserved.⁸⁷ The man who could lose himself in his work would surely be the one to succeed best.⁸⁸ Genius was "only the power of making continuous efforts. . . . There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat except from within, no really insurmountable barrier save our own inherent weakness of purpose."⁸⁹ Middle class ethics, then, held clear ideological hegemony in the civil service associations by the late 1920s.

⁸⁵*Civil Service News*, January 1928, p. 3.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, April 1927, p. 11.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, February 1929, p. 1.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, March 1929, p. 1.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, April 1929, p. 1. With the onset of the Depression, these front page homilies disappeared — perhaps it was clear that some things were outside the province of individual men. Despite forced retirements and a ten percent salary reduction in the early 1930s, no significant militant opposition appears to have developed among employees. Lay-offs tended to be confined to older civil servants who were superannuated and, relative to the private employee, civil servants continued to have greater job security and a lower unemployment rate, and the economic differentials widened despite the wage cut. By the later 1930s the militant trade unionism in the mass industries was not reflected by public employees at any level in Canada. The beginnings of the implementation of welfare state measures placed civil servants in an expanding industry and as a group they stood to gain from the adoption of Keynesian policies by the state.

By 1928, then, the civil service had again reached a relatively harmonious stage. The lot of civil servants had been improved through the ability of the staff associations to use successfully the conservative channels — these reforms being dependent on the return of economic prosperity generally. Within this objective context, the "ethic of public service" dominated, and the staff association's promotion of middle class individualism went unchallenged.⁹⁰

III

This investigation of the early history of public employee militancy posits a direct relationship between objective changes in the work and market situation of 'middle status' public employees and their level of trade union consciousness. A decline in their position relative to private manual workers provided the basis for development of types of trade union consciousness.

Both the material aspects of the class structure, and the ideology reproduced, were affected by the recurrent trend in the political economy toward periodic crises caused by the irrationality of the capital accumulation process.

The specific effects of the crisis, and the subsequent character of the employee response, varied according to the specifics of each grouping. The extent of trade union consciousness, while it developed to a degree in all classifications, varied between these sectors, with employees in high status positions coming to recognize a collectivity at least among themselves, while public employees in more proletarian work situations engaged in several illegal strikes. There appears to have been a direct correlation between market and work situations, employee responses and organizational characteristics. The exception appears to arise when we consider the case of the lower clericals in Ottawa who were split between a staff association and a trade union. The source of the development of trade union consciousness was located in the material decline of some of the relative privileges of the clerical grouping; nevertheless, it is apparent that the actual working out of the class struggle depends on ideological criteria as well as material economic differences. This is not to agree completely with Poulantzas who suggests that generalizations

⁹⁰The exception was the Amalgamated Civil Servants of Canada which was the voice of opposition in the middle and late 1920s and 1930s. The Amalgamated was a western-based union (it attempted, unsuccessfully to affiliate with the T.L.C.) composed chiefly of postal workers, prevailing rates' employees and lower clericals. The Eastern postal workers — the letter carriers and postal clerks — affiliated with the C.S.F.

connecting the two are simply *arbitrary*;⁹¹ while ideology is important, it must relate to existing material conditions — and tradition in this sense can be seen as an objective and partially determining condition.

The ideology of middle status public employees, which posited a middle *class* of salaried workers, had its origins in a process which established the white-collar worker in a clearly intermediate position. The promotion of the values and ethics which had more in common with petite bourgeoisie ideology was a reflection of the similarity of position of these two groupings as intermediate between labour and capital, and the individualized nature of the work performed (at least traditionally). A study of the trade union ideology among middle status public employees suggests that an objective decline in position can provide the basis for ideological transformation. The direction which this transformation takes is not determined solely by economic conditions, but is mediated by other circumstances. Other forms of consciousness besides trade unionism have developed among white-collar workers during difficult periods. Two additional things need to be added, however. First, ideology, to an extent, has an autonomy of its own and tradition can contribute to a shaping of consciousness when the material base which gave rise to the ideology has largely disappeared. More importantly, the continued survival of ideological manifestations requires some material support for its reproduction. That is, while false consciousness — an ideology out of keeping with reality — may theoretically exist even as a mass phenomenon, in most cases it is not simply false but is dependent upon material processes.

The most consistent source for the reproduction of middle class ideology in the civil servants was the class position of the higher civil service grades, but the acceptance of this ideology by lower clericals was based not only on their tradition of superiority, but the actual maintenance of many aspects of their relatively privileged position, despite the effects of the crisis.⁹² The full resumption of this individualistic ideology was directly related to the reestablishment of the general basis for this superiority. Nevertheless, a long range tendency to narrowing can be perceived, since the position regained was not the equivalent of that lost; and the rationalization of the work

⁹¹See Poulantzas, "On Social Classes".

⁹²Job security was one crucial area in which service workers in general, and civil servants in particular, maintained a concrete advantage. According to the 1931 *Census of Canada*, only 2.83 percent of federal and provincial employees were reported to be without a job or laid off in that year.

situation was permanent and influenced the maintenance of early collective consciousness.

To address the question of class determination of specific groupings, it is necessary to go beyond any formal definition based solely on relations to the means of production. Rather than being fixed entities, class relationships are dynamic processes which must be seen in their movement. The trend to a large middle stratum was clearly rooted in the dynamics of the capital accumulation process; but crises lay the foundation for the objective and subjective proletarianization of the "middle layers of employment" and the revival of militancy among these employees.⁹³

Speaking historically, we ought not to view proletarianization as an either/or process. Consistent with the intermediate position of salaried workers, class transformation should be discussed as a process of relative proletarianization. This denotes the view that we can conceive proletarian to be an ideal type approximating the model of the 19th century factory worker in mass industry.⁹⁴ Salaried workers can, therefore, gain a significant number of the attributes of the proletarian condition without actually merging with the traditional proletariat. This suggests that important material distinctions were maintained which were manifest in ideological ambivalence. As the objective process of relative proletarianization proceeds, opportunity for alliances between the salaried workers and the proletariat increases, although this is equally dependent upon the development of degrees of working class consciousness. Eventually the manual/mental distinction will be erased, both objectively and subjectively; until it is, it will provide support for varieties of petit bourgeois ideology consistent with economic conditions.

Middle class ideology in the civil service takes, as well, the peculiar form associated with public service which has been termed the "service ethic". This ethic was interpreted to have profoundly conservative implications when associated with the legitimation of the state as being neutral in the class struggle. It remains possible that the view that a public servant's duty is to the *public* may have progressive possibilities when the government is not seen as the legitimate representative of the society, but rather viewed as serving class interests

⁹³Crises not only open up the possibilities for the development of spontaneous trade union militancy and radicalism, but also increase the probability of successfully conducting socialist propaganda.

⁹⁴See Stanislaw Ossowski, *Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*, (London 1963).

opposed to those of the working class, ultimately including civil servants themselves.⁹⁵

⁹⁵We must avoid, in the present, both the view that virtually everyone is proletarian, as well as the theoretical view that the contradiction between mental and manual labour is in principle antagonistic, and hence the equivalent of the contradiction implied by the private ownership and control of the means of production. While the latter is irreconcilable, the contradiction based on skill differentials is in principle reconcilable.