

Some Problems of the Canadian Labour Congress

William Dodge

Volume 17, numéro 1, janvier 1962

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1021661ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1021661ar>

[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 ce document

Dodge, W. (1962). Some Problems of the Canadian Labour Congress. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 17(1), 86–90.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1021661ar>

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS *

WILLIAM DODGE

I sometimes think the members of our affiliated unions do not fully realize the scope and complexity of the activities of the Congress. This is most unfortunate, because it is evident that some of them are under the impression that the sole function of the Congress is to protect their jurisdiction or defend them against raids. They feel that if they don't get such protection on their own terms, that is, protection of their own idea of their jurisdictions, they are paying per capita tax for nothing.

It is difficult to understand how, after the century of struggle through which the Canadian Labour movement has passed, and after the years of effort to produce a united labour movement, anyone could today have such a narrow conception of the functions and purposes of the Canadian Labour Congress.

Perhaps we should consider for a moment or two the role of the Congress in promoting the welfare of labour in Canada.

Over 1,000,000 Canadian workers are affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress. These men and women have a great community of interest and purpose. They cannot express that interest and purpose except through an organization such as the Canadian Labour Congress. If the CLC were to disband tomorrow, before a week had passed Union Representatives would be gathering together to re-establish a central body of some kind. The Unions would quickly realize that the lack of any type of Congress could very well result in a general weakening of the whole union structure, if not its veritable destruction.

SERVICES RENDERED BY THE CLC

How does unity through the Canadian Labour Congress promote the welfare of its affiliated unions? You have only to examine the departmental structure of the Congress to realize the many services rendered and the ways in which the central body gives an effective voice to Canadian labour.

We have 10 departments in the CLC. They are the departments of Public Relations, International Affairs, Federations and Labour Councils, Research, Legislation, Government Employees, Organization, Political Education, Community Services and Education. Through them the Congress serves its members in a thousand ways.

It corrects the distorted image of labour presented by antagonistic business and political interests and the press, and informs the public of labour's economic and social policies.

It provides a great informal university — teaching a constant stream of union members the history, the ethics and the aims of trade unionism and giving them the knowledge and training to fulfill their role, not only in the day to day administration of their unions, but also in advancing the moral, economic and social welfare of all the people.

* From an address given by the executive vice-president of the CLC to the 5th Convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour, Windsor, Nov. 7, 1961.

It exercises day by day vigilance in the field of legislation, opposing bad laws and proposing good ones. Through its political education program it teaches the value of our democratic rights and liberties and how to use them to promote the welfare of all.

It assists its affiliated organizations to grow in size and influence to the end that they may more effectively serve the workers in the industries they cover. It makes possible, through the organization of provincial federations and local labour councils, the translation of labour's broad aims into practical projects and the provincial and municipal levels of government.

It gives to Canadian workers a voice, which they have so far had through no other medium, in the realm of international affairs, and a constructive role to play in the great struggle now taking place to establish a lasting foundation for peace in the world.

THE CLC AND JURISDICTIONAL DISPUTES

It is true, of course, that it is also the function of the Congress to endeavour to regulate the relations, jurisdictional and otherwise, among its affiliated unions. To do this with complete success would demand the wisdom of a hundred Solomons and I readily confess we do not possess that much wisdom. But to regard the successful settlement of all jurisdictional disputes (the settlement is just if *you* win) as the main function of the Congress is a confession of ignorance of the entire history and fundamental ideals of trade unionism from its very inception.

Some unions have taken the narrow view on one issue or another within the Congress. Some have pursued that point of view so single-mindedly as either to disaffiliate or to become suspended from the Congress. By this course, they have cut themselves off completely from participation in the entire program of united labour activity promoted through the central body. They have, consciously or unconsciously, weakened, or at any rate slowed down, the growth of the labour movement, thus creating greater difficulty for themselves. They have given aid and comfort to the external forces attacking the trade unions. They have joined the ranks of the outcast organizations — those which are *weak*, those which have *submitted to the domination of employers*, those which have become *the puppets of reactionary governments*, those which are *sectarian*, those which are *selfish and greedy*, those which are *corrupt*.

The workers of this and other nations are confronted with many serious problems. The solution of domestic problems such as unemployment, trade, declining farm income, housing and the development of our resources, and international problems such as disarmament, the promotion of world peace, and the feeding of the world's millions of underprivileged people, may well depend upon the initiative and drive of organized labour's forces throughout the world. This is the time for unity on the big issues — not division on the small issues. Any union or association of workers which is not a part of the united labour movement is deserting the fight, is contracting out of the great and historic struggle of labour to achieve economic and political democracy for all human beings.

FRENCH CANADIANS AND CONFEDERATION

I am going to venture into an unusual area of current controversy, the discussion that is taking place on the attitude of the French-speaking Canadians to Confederation. You may wonder why I should refer to a matter of this kind in a speech to the Ontario Federation of Labour. Well, I think those of us who have some knowledge and understanding of the thinking of the people of the Province of Quebec should be prepared to act as interpreters to our English-speaking compatriots.

French-speaking Canadians are very conscious that the rights granted to them as part of the treaty with the British conquerors and the pact of Confederation are today still grudgingly conceded by English-speaking Canadians. We cannot understand their interest in preserving provincial rights from encroachment by the federal power. Some people have taken the position that the French version of Confederation, as being a pact between two nations, is untenable. They have attacked the New Democratic Party for having accepted that fact.

The French-speaking proportion of the population of Canada has remained fairly stable, whereas the proportion of purely English or Anglo-Saxon population has tended to diminish. It is not entirely inconceivable that at some time in the future a majority of the seats in the Canadian House of Commons might be occupied by French-speaking Canadians. If that day ever arrives and the English-speaking Canadians find that Canada is governed by a House of Commons in which a majority of the members are French-speaking, who will then depend upon provincial rights to defend their culture? Then the defenders of provincial rights will be the English-speaking Canadians. And I am quite sure they will be just as vigorous in defence of provincial rights as the safeguard of their language and religious rights as the French-Canadians have ever been. And for the same reason — they will not trust a House of Commons containing a majority of members of another language and race to give proper consideration to their rights. If you will consider this for a moment you will have some idea of the feeling which exists at the present time within the Province of Quebec. It is because the French-speaking Canadians do not feel their language rights are fully respected, and I may say from my own observations that I think they are to some extent correct in this, that there has come into being a fresh wave of nationalism, and to some, separatism.

SEPARATISM

I do not think there is any danger that the separatist movement will gain more than a foothold among the Canadians of the French language. I think that they, in common with English-Canadians have developed a strong sense of Canadianism. I do not think they lack a sense of responsibility about the economic destiny of this country, nor to the many Canadians of French descent who are scattered across Canada in the other provinces. But the feeling which does exist in French Canada must be understood and we must be alive to its consequences in terms of political unity, of the growth and development of such institutions as the trade union movement, and in relation to the economic well-being of the people of all parts of Canada.

A RECOGNITION TO EQUALITY OF STATUS

My point in raising this here is that it is not only the French-Canadians who must demonstrate a sense of responsibility. If we wish to preserve a united Canada, and within it a united labour movement, then we must be prepared to give recognition to equality of status for the English and French cultures. It was because those who participated in the building of the program and the constitution of the New Democratic Party believed this that they were prepared to incorporate into those documents what might be termed a gesture of good faith. Vincent Massey once remarked that it is not at all unreasonable to expect that in the future every Canadian child should be completely bilingual. I am sure that very few French-Canadians expect all Canadians to become bilingual overnight. But they do expect that the progressive thinking Canadians will be prepared to recognize the need for a change of attitude and to incorporate into their political programs and constitutions tangible evidence of this recognition. There is no good reason why a post office should be called both a post office and a bureau de poste in Quebec City, but only a post office in Vancouver. There is no good reason why a French-speaking Canadian elected to the Legislature of the Province of Ontario should not be able to speak before that body in his native language if he so desires with assurance that all other members will understand him, either because they are bilingual or because there is simultaneous translation in the Ontario Legislature.

I am glad that the New Democratic Party has taken a stand on this issue and to note that the English-speaking members across Canada have for the most part warmly endorsed it. In the relationship which must exist in future years between English and French-speaking Canadians there will have to be many adjustments. There must be some patient explanation of points of view by each group to the other. Above all, there must be a willingness to work towards an understanding and an appreciation of the value of a dual culture in this country for future generations. I believe that if there is any one aspect of the Canadian culture which has preserved us from being completely swamped by Americanism it is the existence of the French culture in Canada. We owe them something for that. And as for our two languages and cultures, I like it that way, and I hope that we shall be prepared to take what steps be necessary to preserve it.

COMMUNISM

While we are all concerned in this country with our internal problems, problems to which I have referred in my earlier remarks, a great shadow lies across the face of this land and across the face of the world at this time.

Those of us who have always believed in the democratic way of life have continually warned that the system of communism is devoid of any sense of human brotherhood. That the clear objective of the Soviet Union is to seize control of the universe no matter what the cost in human lives. Since the war and during the Eichmann trial we learned of the terrible atrocities committed by the Nazis. Surely most of us must have thought that such madness and beastiality could only occur once in recorded human history.

And yet now we seem to be on the verge of witnessing even greater crimes against humanity, as without reason the Soviet leaders deliberately set out to poison humanity, and set the stage for the holocaust we have dreaded since the bombing of Hiroshima. While the people of the world are filled with dread and terror, Khrushchev tries to justify his actions by arguing that the Soviet Union is under threat of attack from his enemies. No one in the wide world believes anyone is threatening the Soviet Union with attack, not even Khrushchev.

In this country, and in all democratic countries, there has been a campaign of propaganda designed to acquaint people with the dangers of atomic war and the effects of radiation. Organizations like the Canadian Committee to Combat Radiation Hazards have made available to the people full information of the causes and effects of radiation. It is perfectly clear that no such democratic discussion has been permitted to take place in the Soviet Union, and the people in that nation are blissfully unaware of the destruction being sown across their own land and the rest of the world by the actions of their own leaders. It is impossible to image a war of the future and therefore impossible to imagine a future Nuremberg Trial, but if such a possibility exists there can be no doubt that among the prisoners at the bar will be Comrade Khrushchev.

This country, and all the countries of the world, must use the United Nations as the instrument and forum through which to let the Soviet Union understand that their actions in this instance are regarded across the world as a measure of the political ideals for which they stand. Not only do their leaders stand condemned before mankind, but the political system they espouse is on trial with them. International communism has no place in a democratic world of free peoples. Whatever other wars it may win, the Soviet Union has lost the war of ideas.

RECENSIONS

La situation syndicale au Royaume-Uni.
Rapport d'une mission du Bureau international du travail. Genève, 1961.
202, rue Queen, Ottawa, 141 pages.
\$.1.25.

Comme dans toutes les autres enquêtes entreprises par le B.I.T., la mission chargée d'étudier le cas de la Grande-Bretagne, en 1960, s'est arrêtée à deux questions principales: savoir si les travailleurs sont libres de constituer des syndicats ou de s'y affilier et si les syndicats ont toute liberté d'exercer leurs fonctions.

Le rapport est d'autant plus intéressant et plus important que c'est dans ce pays qu'est né le mouvement syndical tel qu'on le connaît aujourd'hui à travers le monde. Celui-ci n'a donc pas

pu prendre modèle sur aucun autre mouvement national. « Sa naissance n'a suivi aucun plan, et les syndicats n'ont pas été organisés en vue de s'inscrire dans un cadre préétabli ». Il n'est pas surprenant, non plus, qu'encore aujourd'hui il conserve les traces d'une certaine incohérence qui font son originalité et parfois aussi sa faiblesse. Aussi, les enquêteurs n'ont pas eu la besogne facile pour présenter une synthèse qui donne une image complète de la situation.

Ils ont divisé leur rapport en six chapitres: le mouvement syndical britannique (histoire, effectifs et organisation); la gestion des syndicats et la démocratie syndicale; participation des syndicats à la détermination des conditions de travail; participation des syndicats au règlement des différends du travail; par-