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# A Tentative Framework for the Philosophy of the Canadian Labour Movement

## La philosophie du mouvement ouvrier canadien : un essai d'interprétation

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### Résumé de l'article

#### INTRODUCTION

Pour comprendre la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier, il faut se référer au contexte historique dans lequel il s'insère, puisque le syndicalisme ouvrier est une institution dynamique qui connaît diverses phases de développement. Pour découvrir la philosophie qui sous-tend le mouvement, on doit s'en tenir au modèle de croissance du syndicalisme. Cet article a pour but d'examiner la philosophie ouvrier qui correspond aux trois étapes de la croissance du mouvement.

#### PREMIÈRE PHASE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT - LA PÉRIODE DE FORMATION

Au cours des premières années de l'organisation ouvrière au Canada, le syndicat s'effrait comme un mécanisme de protestation contre des conditions de travail insatisfaisantes, des salaires inadéquats et une perte possible de statut due à l'évolution du caractère artisanal des tâches dans l'évolution industrielle; le syndicat se présentait aussi comme un mécanisme de pression pour l'obtention d'une législation ouvrière favorable. Au cours de ces premières années, l'action directe du groupement portait sur des grèves qui originellement du milieu même du travail. Le syndicat servait comme une arme collective de protestation contre ces conditions de travail.

De plus, les demandes des travailleurs pour le renforcement des grèves et l'élimination des frustrations tendaient aussi vers une promotion des valeurs humaines au sein de la classe ouvrière, au moment même où celle-ci ressentait l'influence d'un milieu technique en voie de transformation rapide. Cet esprit humanitaire du début s'exprimait dans un intérêt marqué pour la dignité de la valeur du travailleur individuel. Chefs et travailleurs du rang étaient imbus d'un idéalisme qui contenait une vision d'une vie meilleure, sans pour cela négliger la recherche de gains immédiats.

L'esprit de croisade et le zèle missionnaire qui régnaient dans les ateliers prenaient une allure émotivement et moralisatrice, lorsque les chefs et les syndiqués tentaient de faire partager leurs convictions par les non-syndiqués. Tout en identifiant leurs griefs à des injustices qu'on retrouvait au-delà de la situation immédiate du travail, tout en considérant le syndicalisme comme une cause, au même moment, ils croyaient qu'une amélioration des conditions ne pouvait s'obtenir que par l'action économique directe dans une industrie particulière et par des réformes législatives.

Mais, à cause de l'isolement de telles démarches, les grèves individuellement eurent le pas à la lutte pour la reconnaissance du groupe par les employeurs, la communauté et la société. La lutte pour la reconnaissance fit face à une amère résurgence et cette hostilité à l'endroit de l'action collective fit naître chez les membres un esprit militant, un esprit qui donna une vigueur au mouvement, mais qui créa aussi des dissensions entre les éléments radicaux et conservateurs au sein des unités.

Les facteurs radicaux considéraient le syndicalisme comme un véhicule pour la révolution sociale, tandis que l'aile conservatrice regardait le mouvement plutôt comme un moyen de réformer progressivement le système existant des salaires.

D'une façon générale, ce ne fut pas une conscience de classe de caractère marxiste qui devint la force dominante du mouvement ouvrier canadien durant cette période de formation; ce fut plutôt une conscience de classe de caractère réformiste. On en vint à croire fermement que la participation dans l'élaboration des décisions n'était possible que par le truchement du syndicalisme. C'est cette croyance qui a eu le plus d'influence sur la vie des travailleurs. C'est cette attitude à l'endroit des syndicats qui devint le principe dominant et qui influença la direction du développement futur du mouvement ouvrier canadien, quoiqu'on admette que cette généralisation n'implique pas que le mouvement ouvrier fut un mouvement « pur », et son mode de croissance indique qu'il a connu une série de divisions et de réajustements.

Au cours de ces années de formation, le caractère réformiste de la conscience de classe peut être attribué à l'influence du syndicalisme anglais sur les premières organisations de métier au Canada. La perspective anglaise a coloré les attitudes et les politiques des premières unions canadiennes à l'endroit d'une durée plus courte de la semaine de travail pour s'acheminer vers une vie meilleure par l'utilisation des loisirs, à l'endroit de l'assurance-santé, de l'égalité et des droits de l'homme.

L'accent sur la législation par la procédure parlementaire et sur le support des candidats favorables aux syndicats prenait son origine dans la tradition britannique. Malgré le voisinage des États-Unis et ses répercussions sur le mouvement ouvrier canadien, l'influence du syndicalisme anglais a laissé sa marque.

Aujourd'hui, on reproche au mouvement ouvrier canadien une absence d'idéologie et on considère le pragmatisme comme la philosophie qui modèla un mouvement social au Canada sans vitalité ni vision. Sans doute, on ne peut retrouver dans le syndicalisme canadien la fermeté d'orientation politique qui caractérisait plusieurs mouvements européens. Cependant, l'action politique n'est pas complètement absente et les syndicats ont montré non seulement le support de candidats favorables aux ouvriers mais aussi la formation d'un parti ouvrier canadien, et cela, même avant l'organisation sur une haute échelle des travailleurs de l'industrie. Chaque fois qu'on exprima une insatisfaction à l'endroit d'un projet de législation touchant les travailleurs, des recommandations pour l'organisation d'un parti ouvrier ouvrirent.

Contrairement à la politique de la Fédération américaine du Travail à l'égard des partis politiques, le congrès du CMTC en 1917 proposa la formation d'un parti politique indépendant au Canada. Peu d'années après, le CMTC reprit son rôle de groupe de pression à l'endroit de la législation, rôle qu'il a continué d'exercer jusqu'au moment de la fusion avec le CCF.

En acceptant une société de concurrence imparite et en utilisant ses énergies et ressources pour oeuvrer au sein du système capitaliste, le mouvement ouvrier survit en s'appuyant sur son rôle économique, au lieu de recourir à des dogmes politiques officieux. Alors, en rejetant l'affiliation politique jusqu'en 1940, les syndicats, comme institutions économiques, se transformèrent en une structure de pouvoir, qui prit une place importante dans l'économie.

C'est ce sens du réalisme et du pragmatisme qui attira l'attention du public sur la nature économique des syndicats. L'aphasie à l'égard de la politique de partis devint un trait plus dominant que l'intérêt sporadique à l'endroit de l'action politique, et surtout, après avoir gagné l'appui légal, les unions ouvrières se tournèrent définitivement vers la négociation collective pour atteindre leurs objectifs.

#### DEUXIÈME PHASE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT - LA CONSOLIDATION

Le cadre légal qui permet au syndicalisme d'oeuvrer au sein des structures sociales existantes a une importance considérable au cours de cette deuxième phase. Quoique le droit de former des syndicats ouvriers fut accordé aux travailleurs canadiens par le Trade Union Act de 1872 et les lois Anti-Combines amendées en 1892, une politique positive d'acceptation ne vint qu'avec la passion du « Wartime Labour Relations Regulations Act » de 1944.

Au cours de ce stage, les organisations ouvrières font encore face à l'hostilité et la résistance des dirigeants d'entreprises. Bien que des efforts soient déployés pour trouver une solution de compromis aux intérêts conflictuels par la négociation et la convention collective, cette période est caractérisée par une instabilité des relations syndical direction, jusqu'à ce qu'une période d'expérimentation. C'est d'autant plus vrai lorsqu'on assiste à une période de prospérité économique où les syndicats exigent une part toujours croissante de la richesse nationale.

L'élément de réforme qu'on retrouvait au cours de la première phase de développement n'est plus maintenant le facteur dominant, quoiqu'il ne fut jamais complètement absent au sein du mouvement ouvrier.

Le but, maintenant, est d'obtenir un faisceau de bénéfices, soit sous forme de salaires plus élevés, de règlements d'atelier ou d'avantages marginaux à un coût minimum pour les membres. C'est en ce sens que les syndicats assument la fonction dominante de « syndicalisme d'affaires », telle qu'analysée par Hoxie.

L'idéalisme des premières années est étouffé par le conservatisme qui adhère dans une mesure plus grande qu'auparavant à la forme modifiée du capitalisme actuel.

La prospérité qu'a connue le travailleur canadien a diminué chez lui la conscience de classe. Des salaires plus élevés, des meilleures conditions de logement, un éventail plus grand des possibilités de voyager et de s'adonner à des activités culturelles incitent les travailleurs à s'identifier à la classe moyenne.

La philosophie du mouvement ouvrier reste dominée par une phase où le pragmatisme est la force motrice de l'institution. Cette phase de consolidation du syndicalisme se centre autour des campagnes d'organisation, du processus de négociation et d'une façon plus dramatique autour des grèves et lock-outs - à la suite des efforts de médiation et conciliation en vue d'apporter une solution aux conflits d'intérêts. Un idéal de réforme ne domine pas le mouvement ouvrier au cours de ce deuxième stage, puisque le processus de la négociation collective absorbe une grande partie des énergies. À mesure que leur force augmente en négociation, les unions se développent en formant des blocs qui manipulent une force économique tout en conservant leur potentiel pour une participation toujours plus grande sur le plan politique.

#### TROISIÈME PHASE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT - LA MATURETÉ

À ce stage de la croissance du mouvement ouvrier, on peut se demander s'il tend à accentuer son orientation politique. Quels indices d'un réveil idéologique peut-on remarquer chez le mouvement ouvrier canadien?

Nous avons vu quelle fut l'attitude des syndicats à l'endroit de la première phase du développement.

À son congrès de 1943, le CMTC décida d'appuyer le CCF comme arme politique des travailleurs au Canada et recommanda à ses syndicats affiliés de se joindre au parti. La fusion des deux centrales canadiennes donna naissance au Congrès du Travail du Canada. Ce dernier joua un rôle important dans la formation du Nouveau Parti Démocratique en 1961, et, depuis ce moment, en encourageant les syndicats à s'affilier à ce parti. Cependant, le Congrès du Travail du Canada n'est pas affilié au NDP, puisqu'il maintient sa position traditionnelle à l'effet qu'un mouvement ouvrier ne doit pas tomber sous la férule d'un seul parti, mais doit demeurer libre de critiquer ou de supporter n'importe quel parti.

Ce réveil idéologique est attendu par les opinions avec la formation du NDP n'a pas eu lieu. Dans une grande mesure, cela peut s'expliquer par le succès obtenu avec le mécanisme de la négociation collective libre ou par l'aphasie politique généralisée, ou par une déception de la part du mouvement ouvrier à s'adapter à une forme plus positive de planification économique.

Mais l'intérêt politique ou son absence n'est pas le seul facteur à influencer la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier au cours de cette troisième phase. À mesure que la taille des organisations s'accroît, une centralisation plus poussée et l'emploi d'experts ou de spécialistes sont nécessaires pour interpréter et solutionner les problèmes divers que soulève le mécanisme de la négociation collective. Jusqu'à un certain point, on peut affirmer que les relations syndical direction tendent vers une plus grande stabilité, de même qu'une attitude de coopération se développe chez les deux parties.

À mesure que les structures syndicales prennent de l'expansion, les relations sociales internes changent. Avec une centralisation plus poussée et un contrôle plus prononcé sur les politiques concernant les travailleurs du rang, le problème des droits de l'individu au sein d'un groupe prend une importance nouvelle, puisque le gigantisme syndical amène une dépersonnalisation des relations interpersonnelles tout comme le gigantisme industriel.

De plus, la mentalité du syndicalisme change. Le zèle qu'on a déployé à transformer de petits syndicats en de grandes structures de pouvoir et l'influence tend à diminuer. Les grandes déclarations chargées d'émotions cèdent la place à des exposés rationnels basés sur des études élaborées au sein des départements de recherche dans les grandes centrales. Les effectifs ouvriers ne sont plus attirés par des envolées stériles remplies de convictions sociales et morales. L'esprit du syndicalisme s'exprime dans la procédure de grèves ou dans des conflits qui dégénèrent en grèves.

À mesure que le pouvoir des syndicats s'accroît, les politiques étroites centrées sur la tâche sont maintenant élargies. La tendance vers une extension des « socialized wages » est un indice de l'importance des syndicats sur la participation dans l'élaboration des politiques qui affectent les intérêts immédiats des travailleurs organisés. C'est aussi l'indice d'un effort de la part des syndicats pour s'intégrer plus fermement dans la société en recherchant les intérêts des travailleurs en longue période.

Donc, la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier au cours de cette dernière phase de son développement est caractérisée par un pragmatisme profondément ancré, emprunté à la deuxième étape de sa croissance, et transformé au cours d'une troisième phase en une structure complexe de pouvoir.

# A Tentative Framework for the Philosophy of the Canadian Labour Movement\*

Aranka E. Kovacs

*The philosophy of the Canadian labour movement is examined in the light of the three stages which characterize the pattern of union growth. The author shows how youthful year's idealism gave way to a pragmatic philosophy over the last two decades.*

## I. Introduction

The philosophy of the labour movement cannot be examined in isolation without reference to its historical evolution for the labour movement is a dynamic institution which passes through various stages of development. Thus in order to discover the philosophy behind the movement it is necessary to look at the pattern of union growth. It must be appreciated at the outset that unionism is an institution which represents many complex and interrelated relationships resting not only on economic forces, but also on psychological, political and social motivations. As an institution in society the trade union organization alters with the changes occurring in a progressive nation, — altering and adapting while at the same time acting on the direction and evolution of the structure of society in which it exist and functions. That is, while the development of the trade union

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movement is effected by the social and political structure in which it is allowed to grow, as a social force it too is influential in shaping that environment, directly or indirectly, through its collective activities and policies.

The earliest attempts at union organization in Canada are found among the printers in Quebec City in the 1820's, among the stone-masons and shoemakers in the 1830's, and among other skilled crafts after 1850 in the industrial centres. These unions were still local in outlook until the 1870's, but the first systematic attempt to set up a central labour congress in Canada came in 1873 when the Canadian Labour Union was formed. Although it proved to be only an ephemeral body, its intentions and aims did become permanently established when the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada was formed in 1886, after an organizational meeting three years earlier. We can date the beginnings of a labour movement in Canada from the decade of the 1870's and 1880's when these first formal attempts at unity were made.<sup>1</sup>

Within the labour movement there are many trade union organizations consisting of large and small unions, independent, regional, national and international unions. At the beginning of 1963 the membership of labour organizations in Canada was close to one and a half million, with 74.5 per cent of the organized workers being affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress through their various trade unions. Approximately 7.6 per cent of union members were affiliated to the other central congress in Canada, the Confederation of National Trade Unions, which before 1960 was known as the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour. The remaining percentage of union membership was represented by independent organizations or by unions affiliated only with the AFL-CIO.<sup>2</sup> The total union membership of 1, 449,000 at the beginning of 1963 represented about 30 per cent of the estimated total number of non-agricultural paid workers in Canada.<sup>3</sup>

A point to recognize at the outset of the study is that international unionism is a unique feature of the labour movement in Canada. The

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(1) For histories of the Canadian labour movement see : Stuart Jamieson, *Industrial Relations in Canada*, (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1957) ; A.E. Kovacs, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill of Canada, 1961) ; H.A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada : Their Development and Functioning*, (Toronto, Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1948).

(2) Canada, Department of Labour, Economics and Research Branch, *Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1963, p. vii.

(3) *Ibid*, p. ix.

majority of the organized workers belong to unions which operate in both Canada and the United States, and in most cases the Canadian section represents a relatively small segment of the organization. At the beginning of 1963, 71.2 per cent of total membership belonged to international unions. The American influence has been strong and similarities in structure and organization are unavoidable; but there are important differences in policies and growth so that the trade union movement in Canada is not merely a carbon copy of the development of American unionism. Furthermore, while there are certain aspects of the American labour movement, as developed by Commons, Hoxie, Tannenbaum, and Perlman to explain American unions<sup>4</sup> which are applicable to Canadian unionism, the philosophy of the Canadian labour movement is coloured not only by these similarities, but also by the differences in tradition, in political structure, in economic development and in the history of the two countries.

While there is a great deal of diversity and autonomy among the policies and activities of the various labour organizations, in the aggregate these unions constitute the Canadian labour movement, embracing a philosophy which has motivated the movement in the past and which provides the generating force for the future course of the movement. It is this philosophy which this paper will attempt to examine. It should be recognized that the nature of the subject matter makes it necessary to form certain generalizations about the movement as a whole, for union philosophy is not given to us as a clearly articulated and academic formulation. In addition, the philosophy of trade unions appear to be mainly of the « grass roots » variety rather than intellectually conceived plans of an idealistic society. In the past the leaders of the movement have been enthusiastic, practical and outspoken men who have rebelled against certain injustices in the *work situation*, and not intellectuals who tend to rebel against injustices in *society*, and who

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(4) For theories of the American labour movement see: J.R. Commons, and others, *History of Labour in the United States*, (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1918), 2 Vols.; and J.R. Commons, and others, *Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, (Cleveland, The A.H. Clark Co., 1910-11), 10 Vols.; R.F. Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the United States*, (New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1917); Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labour Movement*, (New York, A.M. Kelley, 1949), Perlman's theory was first published in 1928. F. Tannenbaum, *A Philosophy of Labour*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1951). Tannenbaum first presented his theory of the labour movement in a study, *The Labour Movement: Its Conservative Functions and Social Consequences*, published in 1921. See also Paul K. Crosser, *Ideologies and American Labour*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1941), and Mark Perlman, *Labour Union Theories in America; Background and Development*, (Evanston, Row, Peterson & Co., 1958).

tend to look at labour in the abstract. Union leadership in the past have come up from the rank and file and in most instances what they lacked in formal education was made up by a keen awareness of practical issues. For this reason it often appears that labour organizations pursued their work-conscious policies pragmatically being content to have their idealism articulated through the broader base of the central congresses. Leadership throughout the history of the movement is an extremely important aspect in influencing the path of union development.

The problem in approaching this topic has been pointed out by a labour economist who stated:

« In considering the intellectual basis for broad social movements, the structures of precise scientific method must obviously be strained. Such resources as interpretative analysis and even insight, with the test of reasonableness, must necessarily be involved. »<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that the topic under discussion does not by its nature lend itself readily to the precision and rigour of theoretical economic analyses, and not laying claim to any brilliant insights, this paper will approach the study by examining the philosophy of the labour movement which corresponds to three stages of union development; first, the formative years when the unions were emerging; secondly, the establishment stage when the trade unions comprising the labour movement were legally allowed to function and collective bargaining became widespread; and finally, in the power stage when the labour organizations take on features of large scale enterprise with far reaching influences on society. We turn first to the early formative years of emerging unionism.

## II. Formative Stage

In the youthful stage of labour organization in Canada, the union was a vehicle for worker protest against unsatisfactory working conditions, against inadequate wages, against the impending loss of craft status in the industrial stream, as well as a protest vehicle pressing for more favourable labour legislation. In the early years direct action by the group focussed on grievances arising out of the immediate job en-

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(5) L. REED TRIPP, *Labour Problems and Processes*, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 57.

vironment, and the union emerged as a collective protest against these conditions associated with the work situation. As industrialization advanced the worker became more rigidly established in a complex mesh of organizational relationships binding him to the productive process. The rapidity of the rate of change of industrialism meant that the worker was caught up in the complex corporate form and industrial structure even before he was consciously aware of what was taking place. Little or no effort was made to help the labour force understand these changes that were taking place, — technological and organizational changes which had a direct effect on their working lives and which left a sharp impact on their personal existence.

Thus the demands of the labourers for redressing their grievances and frustrations also tended to symbolize a search for humanitarian values among working class lives, — lives which were feeling the impact of a rapidly changing mechanistic environment. This humanitarian spirit of early trade unionism was expressed by the concern for the dignity and worth of the individual worker. It was stressed that the union man enjoyed a status and security which the unorganized worker did not have and that the labourer through his union gained a sense of self-respect and individual worth which had been lost to him as industry became more mechanized.

This sense of social and psychological security, as Tannenbaum also observed,<sup>6</sup> was an important factor in the emergence of early trade unionism. While the union was a medium through which the rank and file workers could hope to satisfy their economic demands, it was also more than a mechanism for collective bargaining. Both leaders and rank and file tended to be imbued with an idealistic spirit not simply looking for immediate gains, but having a vision of a better life in the future. One labour leader expressed this idealism in this way:

« Underlying all trade union purposes is a great yearning to remove the causes of human injustice and to enable all to have a chance to develop and find satisfaction in living. »<sup>7</sup>

A strong element in the pioneering stage of unionism was the personal and voluntary loyalty to a cause. Before the union became an

(6) F. TANNENBAUM, *A Philosophy of Labour*, (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

(7) CHARLES DICKIE, Secretary-Treasurer of Division 4, Railway Employees, AFL, « Aims and Ideals of the Trade Union Movement », *Canadian Congress Journal*, (official journal of the T.L.C.), Vol. XI, No. 12, December, 1932.

established institution a great deal of voluntary and non-pecuniary activity on behalf of the organization was offered. This missionary zeal in the cause of unionism was an important aspect of the vitality and vigour which was displayed in the new organizing drives. The organizers themselves came up from the rank and file group and their social and economic status was similar to that of the group in whose interests they were fighting. Getting the unorganized workers over to the side of the union, and the collection of dues were the main tasks of the local leadership. The crusading spirit which pervaded the workshop environment was charged with emotional and moral tones as the leaders and union members attempted to spread their convictions to the unorganized. While identifying their grievances with injustices beyond the immediate job situation and regarding unionism as a cause, at the same time it was believed that improvements could only be gained through direct economic action in a particular trade or industry, and through legislative reforms.

But due to the lack of success in such endeavours, individual grievances gave way primarily to the struggle for recognition of the collective group by managements, the community and society. Whether this first stage of emergence was experienced by a craft group or by a group of unskilled industrial workers, the pressures for recognition and acceptance when support was not provided by the legal framework through certification and compulsory collective bargaining, — this striving for recognition occupied the forefront of the activities of the labour unions. The struggle for recognition met with bitter resistance and this hostility to collective action tended to force a militant spirit upon the membership, — a spirit which gave the movement its vigour but which also created cleavages between the radical and conservative elements within the unions. Thus in addition to external opposition from managements, communities and governments, the movement also experienced division and factionalism from within.

Among the radical factions the union was regarded as a vehicle for social revolution, while the more conservative elements recognized the movement as an evolutionary means for reforming the existing wage system. Thus the union became an avenue of gradual social reform for some, while for others it was a means for violent social revolution. However, it was the more right-wing elements which gave the movement its main direction. At the turn of the century, the T.L.C. President stated the position of the conservative group:

« We have no right to expect that our aims and objects should be brought about by revolution, for even revolutions have to be matured by an evolutionary process. Thus, I think the spirit of constant, and especially reasonable methods should be the desire of this National Congress. »<sup>8</sup>

Although we may generalize and note, when regarding unionism as a movement in Canada, that it did not adopt a revolutionary platform of policies, there were exceptions, such as the One Big Union and the Industrial Workers of the World. For example, the One Big Union which gained strength mainly west of Ontario in the 1920's, was founded on the basis of class conflict:

« Being firmly built upon the class struggle, the OBU seeks not only to organize the workers for the immediate struggle for wages and conditions, but it labours objectively to the end that the workers shall take over the industries of the country and administer them for the benefit of all who work. »<sup>9</sup>

In Western Canada, radicalism and left wing militancy was more pronounced than in other areas of Canada, and unions such as the O.B.U. and the I.W.W. took stronger hold. But generally speaking, the labour movement was preoccupied with working within the framework of the existing wage system and attempting to modify what appeared as injustices and inequities within the system rather than working towards the overthrow of the political structure. Adopting a broad social reform base, the labour movement strove for the advancement and improvement of the position of the working classes not only through economic means, but also through education, through the achievement of more leisure time and greater social and cultural activities, through the establishment of co-operatives and through the support of protective labour legislation.

It was not a Marxian class consciousness which became the dominating force behind the emergence of the union movement in Canada, it

(8) RALPH SMITH, President, Trades and Labour Congress, *17th Convention Proceedings*, 1901.

(9) *One Big Union Bulletin*, October 26, 1926, p. 4. The important difference between the philosophy of the OBU and the IWW was that, while both movements played up « class conflict », the former relied on economic means through organized strike action to achieve a labouristic society in which workers would control industry ; and the latter adhered to international communism and emphasized political revolution as the instrument to achieve a new society. (The O.B.U. Bulletin is available on microfilm at the Department of Labour Library, Ottawa.)



was rather a reforming class consciousness. It was based not on the view that unions were the instruments of social revolution in which the workers were unconsciously caught up in the class conflict of a capitalist system. Rather, the formative stage was based on a class consciousness in which the unions were regarded as reform organizations through which a gradual improvement in the working conditions of labour could be achieved within the system. It became a strong belief that only through unionism could workers participate in the decision-making areas of industry which had the greatest impact on workingmen's lives. It was this attitude regarding trade unions which became the dominating principle and which influenced the direction of the future development of the Canadian labour movement. It is again pointed out that this generalization does not imply that the labour movement was a « pure » movement. Its historical development and growth pattern has been far from simple and it indicates that the movement has experienced a series of complex divisions, splits and realignments. Not only has the main path of the Canadian labour movement diverged into radicalism occasionally, but the movement also comprises the Confederation of National Trade Unions, founded on the social doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The CNUT established in the province of Quebec, represents 7.6 per cent of total union membership in Canada.<sup>10</sup>

Why did the development of the labour movement in Canada take the more conservative direction? Perlman's thesis with reference to the United States is that individualism and private property as foundations of the American system have erased the class consciousness one might expect in the trade union movement.<sup>11</sup> These fundamental values apply equally to the Canadian nation, but in the formative years, it was the radicalism of class conflict which was rejected in Canada and not the consciousness of a working class. This reforming class consciousness was to a large extent a heritage of the British connection. It has been pointed out that the British artisans emigrating to Canada, while conscious of their craft status, were « a settled generation that eschewed the radicalism of their fathers, and accepted the industrial society in

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(10) See article by S.H. Barnes, « The Evolution of Christian Trade Unionism in Quebec », *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, July, 1959; and reprinted in A.F. Kovacs, ed., *Reading in Canadian Labour Economics*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill of Canada, 1961).

(11) SELIG PERLMAN, *A Theory of the Labour Movement*, (New York, A.M. Kelley, 1949). (Perlman's theory was first published in 1928.)

which they had been raised.»<sup>12</sup> This class consciousness does wane in the second stage of union growth when organized labour functions in an environment of relatively full employment and a rising standard of living, and in an environment in which trade union demands are met through the formal structure of collective bargaining. In the later stages of union development, too, a greater influence is exerted from the United States through international unionism, and labour as a « class » gives way to labour as a « power bloc » in the economy.

However in the formative years of union development in Canada a reforming class consciousness permeates the movement. As mentioned above, in the pioneering stage this consciousness may be attributed to the influence of the British trade unions on the early craft organizations in Canada. In the 1880's the British new model unions, such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners established locals in Canada,<sup>13</sup> and even earlier, the first indigeneous locals or labour circles in the 1830's and 40's were under the influence and leadership of British trade unionists who emigrated to Canada. The attitudes and policies of the early Canadian unions on such matters as the movement for shorter hours to provide a better life through greater leisure, social health and medical insurance, equality and human rights, were coloured by the British outlook. The emphasis on legislation through the parliamentary procedure and the stress on supporting labour candidates came from British tradition. Although the proximity of the United States and the tendency to cast its shadow soon had its repercussions on the Canadian movement, the early influence of British unionism left its mark.

Daniel J. O'Donoghue, referring to the labour movement in Canada in the late Nineteenth century made the acute observation that:

« The predominant idea of British trade unionism governs but modified so as to embody the chief principles governing the American Federation of Labour. Nevertheless there is a smattering of moderate

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(12) H.C. PENTLAND, «The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada », *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXV, No. 4, Nov. 1959; and reprinted in A.E. Kovacs, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill of Canada Ltd., 1961), p. 14.

(13) H.A. LOGAN, *Trade Unions in Canada*, (Toronto, The Macmillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1948), Ch. I. See also Claude Jodoin, « The Influence of International Unions on the Canadian Labour Movement », *Business Quarterly*, University of Western Ontario, Fall issue, 1959.

socialism interwoven in the Canadian labour movement,... which asserts itself occasionally, as opportunity offers. »<sup>14</sup>

Today the observation is often made, almost accusingly, that the Canadian labour movement is devoid of ideology and their pragmatism is viewed as a philosophy which molded a social movement in Canada without vitality and vision. It is not disputed that when the history of the labour movement of the last century is examined, a strong political orientation such as characterizes many European labour movements, is not discernible in Canadian unionism. However, political activity has not been completely absent and unions have urged not only the support of labour candidates but intermittently the formation of an independent labour party in Canada even before the widespread organization of industrial workers. Whenever dissatisfaction was voiced with the progress of legislation on behalf of labour, recommendation for the organization of a labour party followed.

The view was expressed in the 1880's at the annual conventions of the Trades and Labour Congress that a third party on a labour platform be formed for the working classes should be represented in Parliament. But in a realistic fashion and reminiscent of the Gomper's line, the Convention also urged that;

« where no labour candidates are nominated all labour organizations be advised to act unitedly in support of the candidate who pledges himself to vote for most planks of the platform of the Congress. »<sup>15</sup>

The first union member to be elected to a provincial legislature was Daniel J. O'Donoghue in 1874, representing Ottawa. Other labour candidates were elected in the 1880's and the 1890's, and in these two decades labour candidates in various industrial centres were put in the running, although not always successful in elections, by the Toronto District Trades and Labour Council, by the Montreal Trades and Labour Council, the Knights of Labour, the Provincial Workmen's Association of Nova Scotia, and the B.C. and Winnipeg labour unions.<sup>16</sup> In

(14) D.J. O'DONOGHUE, « Canadian Labour Interests and Movements », *Encyclopedia of Canada*, 1900. (A photostat copy of the article was made by the T.L.C. and this is now to be found in the library of the Canadian Labour Congress, Ottawa.)

(15) Canadian Trades and Labour Congress, *2nd Convention Proceedings*, 1886.

(16) *The Trades and Labour Congress of Canada: An Historical Review, 1873-1955*; (Ottawa, Trades and Labour Congress, 1955), now in the library of the Canadian Labour Congress, Ottawa.

1900 the first labour candidate from Winnipeg was elected to the Federal House of Commons.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the AFL policy regarding political parties, in 1917 the TLC convention urged the formation of an Independent Labour Party of Canada and called for a conference to organize provincial labour parties. Although a small number of labour candidates were successful in getting seats in legislatures during these years of active interest in politics, a labour party of any significance was not formed. The TLC then at its 1923 Convention reconsidered its stand on political action. While advocating the need for labour representation in Parliament in order to secure the passage of favourable legislation on behalf of labour, the Convention passed the resolution that the Congress « continue to act the legislative mouthpiece for organized labour in Canada independent of any political organization . . . »<sup>18</sup> Thus the TLC reverted to its role as a legislative pressure group which it held until the merger with the CCL in 1956.

This ability of the labour movement to adapt to the realities of the situation by abandoning a platform impossible of fulfillment we tend to label « opportunism. » The adaptations of the labour movement in Canada and the United States to political and economic opportunities clearly reflect its basic ideology, an ideology which, although not clearly articulated, is not in conflict or incompatible with the society in which it has been allowed to develop. This was expressed by one union leader as the philosophy of democracy. He stated:

« Thus the trade union movement being the vehicle of expression of the ideals of the worker must play an ever-increasing part in all that tends to regulate his conditions of life. The aims and aspirations of our labour movement are not useless verbiage and declarations, but the real ideal and highest conception of what human life should be. Labour's philosophy is the philosophy of democracy. »<sup>19</sup>

By accepting an imperfectly competitive society and using its energies and resources to work within the capitalist system, the labour movement relied on its economic nature for survival, as opposed to the

(17) *Ibid*, pp. 18-19. A.W. Puttie of the Winnipeg Typographical Union was the first labour candidate to the Federal House.

(18) *Ibid*, p. 19.

(19) DICKIE, *op. cit.*

adoption of a conflicting political dogma. In the formative years the Trades and Labour Congress did not go as far as the Canadian Congress of Labour in the 1940's in committing itself to any political party. Even in the midst of an era of lively political interest the President of the TLC stated in 1896 that « practical reform is far superior to theoretic, » and he called on the convention delegates to « avoid as much as possible those questions whose object is purely speculative or experimental. »<sup>20</sup> The practical reformist nature of the movement is also illustrated by the view of the next TLC President three years later (who was also an MPP in the B.C. legislature) when he remarked:

« It is easy for us to be prophets of future Utopias, and whilst high ideals are of great value, impossible and extravagant ones are of doubtful utility ; our strength increases proportionately to the abandonment of impossible things... »<sup>21</sup>

Thus, rejecting political affiliation until the 1940's, the unions as economic institutions grew into an important power bloc in the economy. Even as late as 1935 the executive board of the all-Canadian Congress of Labour (which merged with the Canadian CIO Committee to form the CCL in 1940), stressed that the prime objective of unionism was the improvement of the living standards of labour in a developing country, and in order to achieve that goal there was « no need of adherence to any fine-spun theory of government or social organization, » and furthermore, « Unions which are but the instruments of political doctrines are incapable of serving the workers in the industrial struggle. »<sup>22</sup>

It was this sense of realism and pragmatism which tended to bring the economic nature of unions to the attention of the public. The apathy towards party politics became more dominant than the intermittent interest in political action and especially after legal support was won, the labour unions became engrossed in collective bargaining to achieve their objectives. The pioneering stage gave way gradually to the period of establishment in which idealism fades before the pressures of collective bargaining which is a time-and effort-consuming business in terms of negotiations, policing the collective agreement and maintain-

(20) D.A. CAREY, President, TLC, *12th Convention Proceedings*, 1896.

(21) RALPH SMITH, President TLC, *15th Convention Proceedings*, 1899.

(22) Executive Board Report, *Convention Proceedings*, of All-Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935.

ing a sympathetic image before the public. We look then at the establishment stage of the growth pattern of unionism.

### III. Establishment Stage

The legal framework permitting the trade unions to operate within the existing structure of society has a tremendously important bearing on the establishment stage of union growth. Although the right to form trade union organizations was given to Canadian workers under the Trade Union Act of 1872 and the amended Combines Act of 1892, a positive policy of acceptance did not come until the enactment of P.C. 1003, the Wartime Labour Relations Regulations of 1944. These Regulations provided for a formal certification process, for compulsory collective bargaining, and for the continuation of the principle of compulsory conciliation which dominated dispute settlement legislation since the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>23</sup> In the subsequent years following the cessation of World War II, the labour movement in Canada grew in terms of membership and financial strength. According to the Dominion Department of Labour report, from 711,000 members in 1945, total union membership increased to 1,454,000 by 1958.<sup>24</sup>

In the establishment stage of development, union organizations still face resistance and hostility from management, and although efforts are made to compromise and settle conflicting interests through negotiations and collective bargaining, the period is characterized by instability in industrial relations. This is especially true when the environment is one of economic prosperity for unions demand an increasing share of such wealth and progress. The establishment stage is also a period of experimentation in industrial relations for both individual managements and individual trade unions. While legally the areas of conflict are narrowed by being removed from the realm of collective bargaining yet strikes and lockouts are not infrequent weapons of the disputants. Recognition dispute are removed from the area of conflict since legal certification is provided by the labour relations statutes. The immediate discontent which might arise from the workshop environment is now formally channelled through the grievance procedure which is an integral part of the collective agreement. Under Federal legislation in

(23) The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907 first contained the principle of compulsory conciliation which is embodied in present legislation.

(24) Canada, Department of Labour, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

Canada, the present Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act, makes it mandatory that every contract contain provisions for the settlement of differences concerning the interpretation and violation of the agreement.

The grievance procedure with the arbitration clause as the final step provides for settlement of such differences without the occurrence of a work stoppage during the life of the agreement. Similarly this provision is required by some of the provincial statutes. Thus strikes or lockouts are resorted to legally when differences occur in negotiations over the terms and conditions of the contract, and a settlement is not reached. The time period through which the parties pass in the compulsory conciliation process, puts a restraint on the strike or lockout, but does not legally prohibit such action. Although there is a narrowing of the area of conflict which reduces some of the causes of tension,<sup>25</sup> the period of establishment is still characterized by industrial unrest since actual recognition is grudgingly conceded. But now interest disputes dominate the industrial relations fields as management and labour work out their operational relationship. Open external resistance by management or community is not as evident and once the union gains certification, the occupation with the immediate day-to-day problems encountered through labour-management relations becomes the normal condition of the growth of unionism.

However, a narrowing of the philosophical foundations of the trade union movement appears as the membership become more and more engrossed in the union as their agent for securing increased demands through the mechanism of collective bargaining. The position and status of the unions as protest and fighting organizations have changed and thus its character has changed. Its philosophy now becomes more closely aligned with the new role which society is allowing or permitting it to assume.

The reform element which was present so strongly in the early formative stage is now not the dominant factor, although it is not wholly absent in the labour movement, as Chamberlain has pointed out.<sup>26</sup>

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(25) H.D. WOODS, « Canadian Collective Bargaining and Dispute Settlement Policy : An Appraisal, *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, Nov. 1955, and reprinted in A.E. Kovacs, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics*, (Toronto, McGraw-Hill of Canada, 1961).

(26) NEIL W. CHAMBERLAIN, *Labour*, (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1958), p. 40.

Instead, the effectiveness of collective bargaining in winning immediate demands has turned the centre of emphasis on bargaining strength as the means of survival for the union. The aim is to secure a maximum bundle of benefits, be that in the form of higher wages, workshop rules or welfare fringes, at the least cost to the membership. It is in this sense that labour organizations take up the dominant function of « business unionism, » which was analyzed by Hoxie.<sup>27</sup> A security-mindedness prevails among organized labour and extreme emphasis is placed on gaining for its membership provisions for seniority, unemployment benefits, pensions, health and accident benefits. To a great extent this search for security merely reflects the anxieties created by the upheavals of wars and the instability of employment due to economic fluctuations, and can be traced as well to the impact of rapid technological advances of this century.

The improved standard of living which has accompanied the economic development of Canada has given to the workers a material affluence which is transmitted to union philosophy. The turbulence and idealism of the formative years is held in check by a conservatism which adheres, to a much greater extent than in former years, to the existing modified form of capitalism. There is little scrutiny about the direction the system is taking. In the establishment stage, the labour movement's interest in political parties extended to an endorsement of the C.C.F. as « the political arm of labour » by the Canadian Congress of Labour and this policy was adhered to « through thick and thin, mainly thin, » as Dr. Forsey points out, in the years from 1943 to 1956.<sup>28</sup> Although this was the official Congress stand the party did not get the working class votes in elections. Furthermore, there is little soul-searching with regard to the ultimate role of the labour movement in that modified competitive system. No doubt, this inarticulate attitude reflects the Canadian nation's inability to make expressible and more definite the nature and extent of the goals of a rapidly changing social and economic structure. The prosperous era provided the opportunity for unions to develop an aggressive demanding quality which becomes formalized through the bargaining process. There is also a start in this period of an exten-

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(27) R.F. HOXIE, *Trade Unionism in the United States*, (New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1917).

(28) E. FORSEY, « The Movement Towards Labour Unity in Canada : History and Implications », *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, Feb. 1958, and reprinted in A.E. Kovacs, ed., *Readings in Canadian Labour Economics*, (Toronto, Mc-Graw-Hill of Canada, 1961), p. 83.



sion of the scope of the union into decision-making areas formerly designated as the exclusive rights of management. This expansion of the scope of unionism is given social sympathy in the public image as a venture into « industrial democracy. »

The prosperity enjoyed by Canadian labour has also made the union worker less class conscious than in the formative years. Higher wages, better housing, more leisure and comforts, greater opportunities for travel and cultural activities, tend to make the workers identify themselves with middle class aspirations. Even if the workers sees no immediate change for himself in his present occupational status, he certainly expects and strives to give his children, especially through education, an opportunity for moving up in the social stratum. These aspirations, are associated with the success of a job-orientated union philosophy but it goes beyond the economic aspect of work interest for it is transmitted to the sociological realm of living. Although workers might remain quite immobile in particular occupational classifications due to lack of adequate or further training and education, due to seniority and pension provisions on the job, the economic gains, improved standard of living, and the sociological status symbols gives them a sense of social fluidity.

While economists and some labour leaders<sup>29</sup> alike have pointed out that not union pressures but economic forces have been responsible for increasing the real income of the wage earning group, unionized labour holds the view that the improvements which they have gained have been won by direct collective bargaining, through their unions. Thus the philosophy of the labour movement is dominated by a phase in which pragmatism is the motivating force of the institution. The establishment stage of unionism centres around the organizing campaigns preparing for certification, around the process of negotiations and more dramatically, around the conflicts of strikes or lockout when interest disputes are not settled after attempts at conciliation and mediation. The labour movement in this stage of growth is not dominated by the reforming zeal, for it is submerged by the expanding and demanding business of the collective bargaining process. As they gain in bargaining

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(29) See Milton Friedman's article, « Some Comments on the Significance of Labour Unions for Economic Policy », in *The Impact of the Labour Union*, edited by David McCord Wright, (New York, Kelley and Millman, Inc., 1956), Ch. X, p. 204. A similar view was also expressed by Dr. Eugene Forsey, Research Director, Canadian Labour Congress, as reported in the *Globe and Mail*, April 22, 1962.

strength the unions grow into powerful blocs wielding economic force and containing the potential for greater political participation as a labour bloc.

#### IV. Power Stage (or Stage of Maturity)

We might ask the question in looking at the third stage of union development whether the labour movement tends to become more actively political-orientated in the power stage or stage of maturity. What indications, if any, are there in the Canadian labour movement of an ideological awakening? Historically, the labour movement in Canada has experienced numerous divisions and rifts based on political differences, but generally, organized workers in Canada have been unsympathetic toward and unenthusiastic about ideas of radical social transformation, and left-wing unions have not been popular.<sup>30</sup>

Historically, as early as 1880's the first central congress endorsed political action by encouraging labour representation in the legislatures. As we noticed, the Trades and Labour Congress followed this policy of encouraging labour candidates, and the 1917 convention even went on record as recommending the formation of an independent labour party for Canada. But in the subsequent years the Executive Council of the Trades and Labour Congress warned of the danger of political domination which might submerge and destroy the existing trade union movement. As a result, in 1923, the TLC convention endorsed the policy that the Congress remain independent of any political party, but that it continue to press for legislative reforms on behalf of organized labour. Its Political Action Committee was simply to provide information to members about political candidates and legislatures but the Congress would not directly affiliate with or endorse any political party.

It was not until the 1940's when the Canadian Congress of Labour was formed that Congress at its 1943 convention endorsed « the CCF as the political arm of labour in Canada », and recommended its affiliated and chartered unions to affiliate with the party. However, this policy stirred some internal controversy and the outcome was the formation of a CCL Political Action Committee which outlined its own programme supporting such policies as full employment, social security,

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(30) In the 1940's a number of Communist-led affiliates were expelled from the Central Congresses.

public ownership of insurance, war plants, coal mines and transportation. The CCL Programme was then submitted to the various political parties and it was the CCF party which gave assurance that such a programme would be adopted in its own platform. As Professor Logan points out:

« Having found it difficult to get the membership to agree on politics and parties, it seemed better to lay down the conditions and have the parties choose the Congress. »<sup>31</sup>

The CCL continued to endorse the CCF as the political arm of labour until the merger in 1956. After the union of the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour, the newly formed Canadian Labour Congress played an important role in the formation of the New Democratic Party in 1961, and since then political affiliation of union members is encouraged. The C.L.C., however, as the central Congress, is not affiliated to the N.D.P. for it maintains its traditional stand that the labour movement must not be politically dominated by a single party and must be free to criticize or support any political party.

Indications are, however, that organized labour does not deliver the votes needed to ensure a successful future for the N.D.P. While labour leaders might encourage and urge greater political awareness, union members continue to be politically apathetic and while leaders point out that:

« A labour movement that is without interest in political matters is a labour movement that is evading one of the most fundamental responsibilities. »<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless the rank and file favours the traditional economic approach of achievement through collective bargaining and the strike weapon, rather than through direct party action. The view that « It is the economic function which keeps the union alive »,<sup>33</sup> is now so engrained as a philosophy of unionism that for greater political involvement to become a reality would require re-education of organized workers towards an awareness of the vastness of certain problems incapable

(31) H.A. LOGAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 560.

(32) C. JOUIN, « The CLC and Politics », *Canadian Labour*, Vol. 6, No. 9, Septembre, 1961, p. 5.

(33) ANDY ANDRAS, *Labour Unions in Canada, How They Work and What They Seek*, (Ottawa, Woodsworth House Publishers, 1948).

of solution through collective bargaining. Not unless organized labour comes to accept the view, as one prominent Canadian labour economist pointed out, that « more could be done for the working class as a whole through national planning than by means of collective bargaining »<sup>34</sup> will keener political activity be forthcoming.

Any ideological awakening on the part of labour which was expected by optimists with the formation of the N.D.P. has not appeared. To a large extent this is due to the general success in working within the process of free collective bargaining; it may reflect as well, national political apathy; and perhaps some disillusionment with the party platform itself; as well as an unwillingness and unpreparedness, except vocally, on the part of the labour movement to adjust to a more positive form of national planning.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, social and economic problems such as unemployment or the effects of automation, while creating sharp and serious impacts on sectors of the economy, tend to be localized or regionalized, and have not caused nation-wide distress. Thus the issues do not seem to be great enough to rouse political sentiment and the social sensitivity of labour turns to vague pronouncements about security and egalitarianism at a time when the whole western world is uncertain of the nature of its destiny. Since there are great diversities in the labour movement and every trade union organization has its own history and is influenced by its own experiences and industrial environment, the future role of politics in the labour movement is very difficult to predict.

For political interest of lack of it, is not the only factor influencing the philosophy of the labour movement in the third stage of union development. As the unions increase their bargaining strength there is a tendency for central control to expand and the top leadership to assume more administrative positions. As the organizations grow in size greater centralization and larger staffs of specialists and experts are required to interpret and solve the various problems which arise in the collective bargaining process. In some respects industrial relations tend to become more stable as both parties grow to understand and even to tolerate the position of the other through a longer history of bargaining. Compromise and a more co-operative attitude on both sides develops and

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(34) JOHN CRISPO, University of Toronto, Paper delivered to the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Charlottetown, 1964.

(35) *Ibid.*

joint councils and committees are often formed to discuss certain production or industrial problems. The two parties may also participate in joint committees with government representatives since through bargaining strength unions have become important blocs in the power structure of society. As the state expands its activities into the social and economic spheres, labour is invited to represent workers' interests on government boards and commissions.

But as the unions grow in size, internal relationships also change. As in any large scale organization, the contact between membership and the top leadership becomes more distant and impersonal. With greater centralization in some unions and greater control over policy affecting the rank and file, the problem of the rights of the individual within the group takes on a new importance, since a large bureaucratic union can become quite as impersonal as large corporate managements. It has been pointed out:

« Where social justice once meant economic and political opportunity for the group, it has come to mean democracy and civil rights for the individual within the movement. »<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, there is a change also in the spirit of unionism. The converting zeal which created small trade unions into great movements of power and influence has diminished. Emotional oratory is now replaced by more reasoned presentations often based on extensive studies in the research departments of the big unions. The membership are no longer stirred by a visionary element or oratorical flights of moral and social convictions. The spirit of unionism is expressed through the grievance procedure or in disputes which flare into a strike.

As the unions grow in power, the narrow job-centered policies which gave the organization its strength, are now broadened. The trend towards an extension of « socialized wages »<sup>37</sup> that is, not simply higher wages, but more complex and extensive fringe benefits orientated towards long-run security, — this trend is an indication of the union's insistence on participation in policy affecting the immediate job-inter-

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(36) MARK PERLMAN, « Labour Movement Theories : Past, Present and Future », *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, April, 1960.

(37) This term used by Dr. Eugene Forsey in « Trade Union Policy Under Full Employment », *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XII, August, 1946.

ests of organized labour, and it is also an indication of the union's push to integrate more solidly into society through the long-run interests of the workers. While no apparent or distinct ideology from the prevailing values of society emerges, it is not insignificant to interpret such policy as reflecting a drive or power motivation to gradual and greater control or voice in the distribution of the benefits of progress.

But that the future growth and strength of the labour movement will make this possible of fulfillment is difficult to assume. In the first place, one might ask whether the labour movement will be able to sustain and increase its bargaining strength in the light of a slowing down in the rate of growth of union membership, which in Canada, since 1958, has reached a relatively stable plateau.<sup>38</sup> The primary cause of the diminution of the growth of labour movement may be attributed to the qualitative and quantitative changes in the manpower resources of the nation. Very significant shifts have occurred in the composition and participation rate of the labour force in this century, structural and occupational shifts which have greatly increased the white collar, skilled and technical groups, areas which remain unorganized offering new scope to the labour movement. But internal and external difficulties present themselves in organizing these groups. The labour movement, while staffing its organizations with larger numbers of administrators and specialists, is not producing enough capable and vigorous organizers able to win over those who remain unorganized. Organizing campaigns, and techniques must change with the requirements of the times. The character of the labour force has altered tremendously in the last 3 or 4 decades and the methods which were used in the 19th and 20th centuries to organize the craft and industrial unions are outmoded for organizing the unorganized in the latter part of the 20th Century.

In addition, although unionism has gained power and status in society, and a class structure interpretation of the labour movement is considered outmoded even by the workers themselves, yet, in the public

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(38) Union membership in Canada : (in thousands)

1958	—	1,454
1959	—	1,459
1960	—	1,459
1961	—	1,447
1962	—	1,423
1963	—	1,449

Source: Canada, Department of Labour, *Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1963, p. xi.

image the union worker is still associated with a certain social status which, though it may be glossed over on the surface by the material well-being and conspicuous spending of the workers, is nevertheless made prominent by noticeable differences in cultural interests and social habits and customs. The union, as portrayed by the present image, makes little appeal to the white collar group, and the new labour force, which was given birth by the effects of automation, are not readily attracted to the established institutions. Thus unless the present labour leadership meets the situation with a fresh approach and imaginative drive in appealing to the automation-impact, will seriously effect the labour movement. An important new development in the labour movement is the emphasis on higher education for the active union member. While educational programmes have been important in most union policies, concentration in the past has been mainly on training in union techniques and methods. The recent establishment of the Labour College in conjunction with university support may create those first stirrings of intellectualism which have been so noticeably absent in the Canadian and American labour movements. If this would be the case, a more formally educated leadership might be able to make closer contacts with the new labour force and arouse greater interest in organization. If further speculation is permitted, one might ask whether the labour movement of the future in effect would change radically in tone, structure and philosophy if organization of such groups became widespread.

Thus the philosophy of the labour movement in the third stage of union development is characterized by a deeply engrained pragmatism carried over from the establishment stage, and nurtured by power and complexity. Whether the reforming consciousness will appear as a vitalizing force in the future course of the labour movement is difficult to surmise; and whether idealism will become infused in the social consciousness of the labour force remains equally unpredictable. The transformation of society through the automation-impact, while liberating mankind from the burden of labouring, must also bring a sense of worth to the human condition. This search for « being » might prove to be the resurrecting force for future movements.

## LA PHILOSOPHIE DU MOUVEMENT OUVRIER CANADIEN : UN ESSAI D'INTERPRÉTATION

### INTRODUCTION

Pour comprendre la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier, il faut se référer au contexte historique dans lequel il s'insère, puisque le syndicalisme ouvrier est une institution dynamique qui connaît diverses phases de développement. Pour découvrir la philosophie qui sous-tend le mouvement, on doit s'en tenir au modèle de croissance du syndicalisme. Cet article a pour but d'examiner la philosophie ouvrière qui correspond aux trois étapes de la croissance du mouvement.

### PREMIÈRE PHASE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT : LA PÉRIODE DE FORMATION

Au cours des premières années de l'organisation ouvrière au Canada, le syndicat s'offrait comme un mécanisme de protestation contre des conditions de travail insatisfaisantes, des salaires inadéquats et une perte possible de statuts due à l'effritement du caractère artisanal des tâches dans l'évolution industrielle ; le syndicat se présentait aussi comme un mécanisme de pression pour l'obtention d'une législation ouvrière favorable. Au cours de ces premières années, l'action directe du groupement portait sur des griefs qui originaient du milieu même du travail. Le syndicat surgit comme une arme collective de protestation contre ces conditions de travail.

De plus, les demandes des travailleurs pour le redressement des griefs et l'élimination des frustrations tendaient aussi vers une promotion des valeurs humaines au sein de la classe ouvrière, au moment même où celle-ci ressentait l'influence d'un milieu technique en voie de transformation rapide. Cet esprit humanitaire du début s'exprimait dans un intérêt marqué pour la dignité et la valeur du travailleur individuel. Chefs et travailleurs du rang étaient imbus d'un idéalisme qui contenait une vision d'une vie meilleure, sans pour cela négliger la recherche de gains immédiats.

L'esprit de croisade et le zèle missionnaire qui régnaient dans les ateliers prenaient une allure émotionnelle et moralisante, lorsque les chefs et les syndiqués tentaient de faire partager leurs convictions par les non-syndiqués. Tout en identifiant leurs griefs à des injustices qu'on retrouvait au-delà de la situation immédiate du travail, tout en considérant le syndicalisme comme une cause, au même moment, ils croyaient qu'une amélioration des conditions ne pouvait s'obtenir que par l'action économique directe dans une industrie particulière et par des réformes législatives.

Mais, à cause de l'insuccès de telles démarches, les griefs individuels cédèrent le pas à la lutte pour la reconnaissance du groupe par les employeurs, la communauté et la société. La lutte pour la reconnaissance fit face à une amère résistance et cette hostilité à l'endroit de l'action collective fit naître chez les membres un esprit militant, un esprit qui donna une vigueur au mouvement, mais qui créa aussi des dissensions entre les éléments radicaux et conservateurs au sein des unions.



Les factions radicales considéraient le syndicalisme comme un véhicule pour la révolution sociale, tandis que l'aile conservatrice regardait le mouvement plutôt comme un moyen de réformer progressivement le système existant des salaires.

D'une façon générale, ce ne fut pas une conscience de classe de caractère marxiste qui devint la force dominante du mouvement ouvrier canadien durant cette période de formation; ce fut plutôt une conscience de classe de caractère réformiste. On en vint à croire fermement que la participation dans l'élaboration des décisions n'était possible que par le truchement du syndicalisme. C'est cette croyance qui a eu le plus d'influence sur la vie des travailleurs. C'est cette attitude à l'endroit des syndicats qui devint le principe dominant et qui influença la direction du développement futur du mouvement ouvrier canadien, quoiqu'on admette que cette généralisation n'implique pas que le mouvement ouvrier fut un mouvement « pur », et son mode de croissance indique qu'il a connu une série de divisions et de réalignements.

Au cours de ces années de formation, le caractère réformiste de la conscience de classe peut être attribué à l'influence du syndicalisme anglais sur les premières organisations de métier au Canada. La perspective anglaise a coloré les attitudes et les politiques des premières unions canadiennes à l'endroit d'une durée plus courte de la semaine de travail pour s'acheminer vers une vie meilleure par l'utilisation des loisirs, à l'endroit de l'assurance-santé, de l'égalité et des droits de l'homme.

L'accent sur la législation par la procédure parlementaire et sur le support des candidats favorables aux syndicats prenait son origine dans la tradition britannique. Malgré le voisinage des Etats-Unis et ses répercussions sur le mouvement ouvrier canadien, l'influence du syndicalisme anglais a laissé sa marque.

Aujourd'hui, on reproche au mouvement ouvrier canadien une absence d'idéologie et on considère le pragmatisme comme la philosophie qui modela un mouvement social au Canada sans vitalité ni vision. Sans doute, on ne peut retrouver dans le syndicalisme canadien la forte orientation politique qui caractérise plusieurs mouvements ouvriers européens. Cependant, l'action politique n'est pas complètement absente et les syndicats ont moussé non seulement le support de candidats favorables aux ouvriers mais aussi la formation d'un parti ouvrier canadien, et cela, même avant l'organisation sur une haute échelle des travailleurs de l'industrie. Chaque fois qu'on exprima une insatisfaction à l'endroit d'un projet de législation touchant les travailleurs, des recommandations pour l'organisation d'un parti ouvrier suivirent.

Contrairement à la politique de la Fédération américaine du Travail à l'égard des partis politiques, le congrès du CMTC en 1917 proposa la formation d'un parti politique indépendant au Canada. Peu d'années après, le CMTC reprit son rôle de groupe de pression à l'endroit de la législation, rôle qu'il a continué d'exercer jusqu'au moment de la fusion avec le CCT.

En acceptant une société de concurrence imparfaite et en utilisant ses énergies et ressources pour oeuvrer au sein du système capitaliste, le mouvement ouvrier survit en s'appuyant sur son rôle économique, au lieu de recourir à des dogmes politiques conflictuels. Alors, en rejetant l'affiliation politique jusqu'en 1940, les

syndicats, comme institutions économiques, se transformèrent en une structure de pouvoir, qui prit une place importante dans l'économie.

Ce fut ce sens du réalisme et du pragmatisme qui attira l'attention du public sur la nature économique des syndicats. L'apathie à l'égard de la politique de partis devint un trait plus dominant que l'intérêt sporadique à l'endroit de l'action politique, et surtout, après avoir gagné l'appui légal, les unions ouvrières se tournèrent définitivement vers la négociation collective pour réaliser leurs objectifs.

#### DEUXIÈME PHASE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT : LA CONSOLIDATION

Le cadre légal qui permet au syndicalisme d'oeuvrer au sein des structures sociales existantes a une importance considérable au cours de cette deuxième phase. Quoique le droit de former des syndicats ouvriers fût accordé aux travailleurs canadiens par le Trade Union Act de 1872 et les lois Anti-Combines amendées en 1892, une politique positive d'acceptation ne vint qu'avec la passation du « Wartime Labour Relations Regulations Act » de 1944.

Au cours de ce stage, les organisations ouvrières font encore face à l'hostilité et la résistance des dirigeants d'entreprises. Bien que des efforts soient déployés pour trouver une solution de compromis aux intérêts conflictuels par la négociation et la convention collectives, cette période est caractérisée par une instabilité des relations syndicat-direction, puisqu'elle est une période d'expérimentation. C'est d'autant plus vrai lorsqu'on assiste à une période de prospérité économique où les syndicats exigent une part toujours croissante de la richesse nationale.

L'élément de réforme qu'on retrouvait au cours de la première phase de développement n'est plus maintenant le facteur dominant, quoiqu'il ne fut jamais complètement absent au sein du mouvement ouvrier.

Le but, maintenant, est d'obtenir un faisceau de bénéfices, soit sous forme de salaires plus élevés, de règlements d'atelier ou d'avantages marginaux à un coût minimum pour les membres. C'est en ce sens que les syndicats assument la fonction dominante de « syndicalisme d'affaires », telle qu'analysée par Hoxie.

L'idéalisme des premières années est étouffé par le conservatisme qui adhère dans une mesure plus grande qu'auparavant à la forme modifiée du capitalisme actuel.

La prospérité qu'a connu le travailleur canadien a diminué chez lui la conscience de classe. Des salaires plus élevés, des meilleures conditions de logement, un éventail plus grand des possibilités de voyager et de s'adonner à des activités culturelles incitèrent les travailleurs à s'identifier à la classe moyenne.

La philosophie du mouvement ouvrier reste dominée par une phase où le pragmatisme est la force motrice de l'institution. Cette phase de consolidation du syndicalisme se centre autour des campagnes d'organisation, du processus de négociation et d'une façon plus dramatique autour des grèves et « lockouts » à la suite des efforts de médiation et conciliation en vue d'apporter une solution aux conflits d'intérêts. Un idéal de réforme ne domine pas le mouvement ouvrier au cours de

ce deuxième stage, puisque le processus de la négociation collective absorbe une grande partie des énergies. A mesure que leur force augmente en négociation, les unions se développent en formant des blocs qui manipulent une force économique tout en conservant leur potentiel pour une participation toujours plus grande sur le plan politique.

### TROISIÈME PHASE DU DÉVELOPPEMENT : LA MATURITÉ

A ce stage de la croissance du mouvement ouvrier, on peut se demander s'il tend à accentuer son orientation politique. Quels indices d'un réveil idéologique peut-on remarquer chez le mouvement ouvrier canadien?

Nous avons vu quelle fut l'attitude des syndicats à l'endroit de l'action politique au cours de la première phase du développement.

A son congrès de 1943, le CMTC décida d'appuyer le CCF comme arme politique des travailleurs au Canada et recommanda à ses syndicats affiliés de se joindre au parti. La fusion des deux centrales canadiennes donna naissance au Congrès du Travail du Canada. Ce dernier joua un rôle important dans la formation du Nouveau Parti Démocratique en 1961, et, depuis ce moment, on encourage les syndiqués à s'affilier à ce parti. Cependant, le Congrès du Travail du Canada n'est pas affilié au NPD, puisqu'il maintient sa position traditionnelle à l'effet qu'un mouvement ouvrier ne doit pas tomber sous la férule d'un seul parti, mais doit demeurer libre de critiquer ou de supporter n'importe quel parti.

Ce réveil idéologique tant attendu par les optimistes avec la formation du NPD n'a pas eu lieu. Dans une grande mesure, cela peut s'expliquer par le succès obtenu avec le mécanisme de la négociation collective libre ou par l'apathie politique généralisée, ou par une déception de la politique du parti, ou encore par une difficulté de la part du mouvement ouvrier à s'adapter à une forme plus positive de planification économique.

Mais l'intérêt politique ou son absence n'est pas le seul facteur à influencer la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier au cours de cette troisième phase. A mesure que la taille des organisations s'accroît, une centralisation plus poussée et l'emploi d'experts ou de spécialistes sont nécessaires pour interpréter et solutionner les problèmes divers que soulève le mécanisme de la négociation collective. Jusqu'à un certain point, on peut affirmer que les relations syndicat-direction tendent vers une plus grande stabilité, de même qu'une attitude de coopération se développe chez les deux parties.

A mesure que les structures syndicales prennent de l'envergure, les relations sociales internes changent. Avec une centralisation plus poussée et un contrôle plus prononcé sur les politiques concernant les travailleurs du rang, le problème des droits de l'individu au sein d'un groupe prend une importance nouvelle, puisque le gigantisme syndical amène une dépersonnalisation des relations interpersonnelles tout comme le gigantisme industriel.

De plus, la mentalité du syndicalisme change. Le zèle qu'on a déployé à transformer de petits syndicats en de grandes structures de pouvoir et d'influence tend

à diminuer. Les grandes déclarations chargées d'émotions cèdent la place à des exposés rationnels basés sur des études élaborées au sein des départements de recherche dans les grandes centrales. Les effectifs ouvriers ne sont plus aiguillonnés par des envolées oratoires remplies de convictions sociales et morales. L'esprit du syndicalisme s'exprime dans la procédure de griefs ou dans des conflits qui dégénèrent en grèves.

A mesure que le pouvoir des syndicats s'accroît, les politiques étroites centrées sur la tâche sont maintenant élargies. La tendance vers une extension des « socialized wages » est un indice de l'insistance des syndicats sur la participation dans l'élaboration des politiques qui affectent les intérêts immédiats des travailleurs organisés. C'est aussi l'indice d'un effort de la part des syndicats pour s'intégrer plus fermement dans la société en recherchant les intérêts des travailleurs en longue période.

Donc, la philosophie du mouvement ouvrier au cours de cette dernière phase de son développement est caractérisée par un pragmatisme profondément ancré, emprunté à la deuxième étape de sa croissance, et transformé au cours d'une troisième phase en une structure complexe de pouvoir.

**20ième Congrès des relations industrielles  
de Laval**

**LE NOUVEAU CODE DU TRAVAIL  
DU QUÉBEC**

**les 26 - 27 avril 1965**

**Château Frontenac**

**Québec**