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Canadian Railways and Unions in the Running Trades, 1865-1914

J.H. Tuck

This paper examines the history in Canada of the international unions for train and engine crews, from their entry into Canada until World War One. During this period, patterns of unionization and labour-management relations in this important sector of the Canadian railway industry were established which have persisted in large measure to the present.

The Canadian railway boom of the mid-nineteenth century added an important new occupational group to the work force of the fledgling dominion, the men in the running trades — the engineers, firemen, conductors and brakemen and others who operated the primitive trains of the day. By the mid-eighties, these men had become members of four large labour organizations which had their headquarters and most of their members in the United States. Aptly dubbed the 'railway brotherhoods' these international unions were the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, the Order of Railway Conductors and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen¹. Largely because the men in the running trades had experience and skills which made them difficult to replace in case of strike, the railway brotherhoods had both strength and a conservative 'bread and butter' approach to industrial relations. In addition, capable and energetic leadership was the norm. The brotherhoods represented a substantial proportion of the unionized work force in Canada for much of the half century before 1914, and as the largest, strongest and best-organized labour organizations on Canadian railways, could never be taken lightly by management. The history of the relations between Canadian railway companies and the railway brotherhoods is thus a significant aspect of Canada's most important industry in the years before World War One. Moreover, the pattern of unionization in the running trades which has prevailed almost to the present was established during this period.

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¹ The last-named union was originally founded in 1883 as the Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen. It became the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen in 1889. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen became the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen in 1907. For the sake of simplicity, however, the latter organization will be referred to throughout by the earlier name. Locals of the engineers' and conductors' unions were called "divisions", and locals of the firemen's and trainmen's unions were called "lodges". Presidents were usually "grand chiefs", and headquarters' executives were called "grand officers". This terminology reflected a conscious effort to stress the similarity to fraternal orders such as the Masons or Knights of Pythias. In 1969, the trainmen's, firemen's, and conductors' brotherhoods, together with the switchmen, amalgamated to form the United Transportation Union.

Uncertain Beginnings and the Crisis of the Seventies

The story falls into four more or less distinct phases. The first phase, between 1865 and 1880, was dominated by the efforts of the enginemen's unions, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF), to establish themselves in Canada. The BLE was the first of the railway brotherhoods to be formed, in Detroit, Michigan, in 1863. It had two basic functions, to provide accident and life insurance benefits to its members, and to engage in collective bargaining with management. The second function was as important as the first. The BLE was quite prepared to sanction strikes to protect its members, although this was done with reluctance. Almost from the beginning, the engineers' brotherhood preferred to stress the superior character and efficiency of its members, in hopes that "the employer would be so well pleased with their work that he would of his own free will provide better recognition of labor and higher pay." As a consequence, membership requirements were strict. Drunkenness, moral impropriety, and a variety of other offences against nineteenth-century standard of conduct were grounds for expulsion². The other brotherhoods adopter similar regulations when they were formed.

The early growth of the BLE was rapid, and it expanded into Canadian territory in late 1865, chartering local divisions at Toronto and London. Further expansion in Canada lagged for the remainder of the decade. The general organizing thrust of the brotherhood at this time was toward the east and south from its original centre in Michigan. Canada was not bypassed, but was on the fringe of the organizing drive. In 1870, the brotherhood had only 109 Canadian members, in three local divisions³. The onset of the depression in the early seventies, however, apparently encouraged further growth in Canada. By mid-1876, the BLE had eight Canadian divisions, with over 400 members, all in Ontario and Quebec, and represented ninety percent of the locomotive engineers in this part of the Dominion⁴.

Generally speaking, the managements of Canadian railways approved of the BLE in these early years, thanks to the organization's policy of upgrading the standards of the engineers' trade. The Great Western Railway was so impressed by the virtues of the brotherhood that it supplied London

² RICHARDSON, Reed C., *The Locomotive Engineer 1863-1963: A Century of Railway Labor Relations and Work Rules*, Ann Arbor, 1963, pp. 120-123.

³ Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, "Establishment Dates of Canadian Divisions Etc.", n.p., n.d. (photocopy courtesy of BLE headquarters, Cleveland, Ohio); *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal* (hereafter *Engineers' Journal*), January 1870; George J. STEVENSON, "The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and its Leaders, 1863-1920", (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1954), p. 42.

⁴ *Engineers' Journal*, September 1876, p. 413; *Toronto Globe*, 8 January 1877.

Division No. 68 with a fully furnished meeting hall in 1872. The occasion of the dedication of the hall was marked by a "grand festival" and dinner at the City Hall, and by a Ball accompanied by the music of the Seventh Battalion band which went on until "daylight in the morning". The mechanical superintendent of the Great Western took the opportunity to praise the brotherhood, and its "excellent motto... 'Sobriety, Justice, and Morality'," declaring that he encouraged "the engineers on the Western to become members..." Relations with the Northern Railway and the Canada Southern were also cordial, while in May 1875, Grand Trunk engineers at Brockville spoke "in the highest terms of the officers of that road and its management" to visiting Grand Chief P.M. Arthur⁵.

But relations with the Grand Trunk had already begun to sour by early 1875, and were soon to result in the only strike in which the BLE engaged in Canada before World War One⁶. The strike had its origins, like many strikes in North America in the nineteenth century, in the company's attempts to cut costs by reducing wages during a period of financial stringency⁷. The depression of the mid-seventies was just such a period, and in March 1875, Grand Trunk president Richard Potter announced a general ten percent wage reduction. The BLE grievance committee reacted immediately, summoning Grand Chief Arthur to company headquarters in Montreal. The young and forceful Arthur negotiated an agreement with the company which largely cancelled the wage reduction for engineers and firemen, clearly demonstrating the worth of unionization to the workingman, since the ten percent reduction still applied to the remainder of the Grand Trunk's employees. There things might have remained, if the company had kept its word.

The Grand Trunk management, however, almost immediately began to violate its agreement with the engineers in a variety of ways. The most important violation, from the union's point of view, was the creation of a new 'class' of engineers who received lower wages than other engineers. These men could be used to replace men in higher classes, who in turn could be given less work or even discharged. The union grievance committee complained, but was reluctant to press matters to the point of an open break. In October 1876, however, Sir Henry Tyler replaced Potter as company pre-

⁵ Engineers' Journal, June 1872, p. 258, November 1875, p. 596, May 1875, p. 257.

⁶ This discussion of the Grand Trunk strike of 1876-77 owes much to Shirley Ann AYER, "The Locomotive Engineers' Strike on the Grand Trunk Railway in 1876-1877" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1961), and Desmond MORTON, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, II, 1977, 5-34.

⁷ See Herbert G. GUTMAN, "Trouble on the Railroads in 1873-1874: Prelude to the 1877 Crisis?", *Labor History*, II, Spring 1961, 215-235, *passim*.

sident and, playing the part of the new broom, decided upon a showdown with the engineers' brotherhood. In mid-December, openly ignoring the agreement with the BLE, Tyler instituted another general reduction in wages, and laid off a number of employees, including all the members of the brotherhood grievance committee and a number of other prominent members of the union. Stand-by engineers were hired in the event of a strike, and an oath of allegiance to the company was required of all engineers still in service. The engineers' grievance committee sent General Manager Joseph Hickson an ultimatum on 29 December, and when he refused to accept it, struck at 9 p.m.

The strike lasted four and a half days, and almost from the beginning, the strikers had the upper hand. Extensive public dislike of the company and sympathy for the strikers were two reasons for this. Belligerent crowds made the operation of trains almost impossible, and civic authorities were reluctant to intervene to restore order to permit the trains to run. In the few places where the militia was called out, it was generally ineffective. Replacement engineers and firemen proved difficult to find. Hickson called upon Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie to intervene and declare a state of emergency, which would put the militia under central authority and bring in the permanent forces. The Prime Minister refused, maintaining that the national emergency required by law did not exist. It was not until 2 January that sufficient military force was mustered, on the authority of Premier Mowat of Ontario, to protect through trains. But by this time Hickson had decided to capitulate, fearing the company would be crippled financially if the strike went on much longer⁸. He accepted a union proposal to eliminate the new low class of engineers, to institute small increases in wages, and to re-hire all the strikers not guilty of acts of violence. The grievance committee, on their part, agreed to a twenty percent reduction in the operating staff, with seniority rules to be strictly applied, a meaningless concession for the time being because of the backlog of business built up during the strike. These terms were set down in a written agreement signed by union and company representatives — the first and for some years the only union contract on Canadian railways.

A direct consequence of the strike was the entry of the recently-formed Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen into Canada. Canadian firemen had "heard considerable" about the BLF before the strike, but the engineers' victory convinced them of the positive advantages of organization. Firemen at various points in Southern Ontario got in touch with the BLF Grand Lodge in early 1877, and in March, Grand Secretary and Treasurer W.N.

⁸ "Correspondence Respecting Disturbances on the Line of the Grand Trunk Railway, January 1st, 1877", Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1877, No. 55, p. 30; MORTON, "Taking on the Grand Trunk", p. 27.

Sayre toured the province, setting up local lodges at Brockville, Belleville and Toronto. The railroad centre of Stratford was by-passed for the time being, because of the existence there of a local union of the almost moribund International Union of Locomotive Firemen, with which the BLF had been fighting a jurisdictional dispute since the BLF's founding in 1873. Instead, Western Ontario firemen were accommodated by the formation of a lodge just across the American border at Port Huron, Michigan⁹.

Up to this point, the depression of the seventies had done little harm to the two enginemen's brotherhoods, either in the United States or Canada. Their experience was thus in marked contrast with the rest of the North American labour movement during these years, as union after union disintegrated and disappeared¹⁰. Indeed, the two enginemen's organizations had grown steadily in both countries since the beginning of the depression in 1873. Yet this was not to last. Most railway workers were not protected by relatively strong unions as were the engineers and firemen. In July 1877, a massive general strike erupted spontaneously on eastern United States lines which soon tied up most railways in the region. Triggered off by extensive wage-cutting, the strike soon drew in the discontented and unemployed in large numbers, and assumed the proportions of a minor civil war. Hundreds were killed in the conflict, millions of dollars in damage was caused, and the revolt was finally put down only after the extensive use of local militia and federal troops. Neither the BLE or BLF had sanctioned the strike, but some of their members had become involved, and the two unions became the target of frightened American railway officials who had come to fear any form of collective action among their employees. Membership in both brotherhoods dropped severely, and they were threatened for a time with bankruptcy and dissolution¹¹.

The only effect of the 1877 crisis upon the operations of the engineers' brotherhood in Canada, however, was a slight decline in membership. This was largely because the triumph over the Grand Trunk earlier in the year had served to sustain morale and preserve discipline, and because the brotherhood's Canadian divisions were on a solidly organized footing.

⁹ *Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen's Magazine* (hereafter *Firemen's Magazine*), April 1877, pp. 139, 155-156, September 1898, 332-333. The International Union of Locomotive Firemen was founded in 1866. At its peak, it had over 80 local unions, but began to decline in the early seventies. It was absorbed by the BLF in 1878. *Engineers' Journal*, July 1867, p. 17, September 1867, p. 30; *Firemen's Magazine*, November 1878, p. 367, March 1923, pp. 112-114.

¹⁰ GROB, Gerals N., *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement 1865-1900*, Chicago, 1969, p. 34.

¹¹ BRUCE, Robert V., *1877: Year of Violence*, Chicago, 1970, *passim*; RICHARDSON, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 179, 184-185; *London Advertiser*, 21 July 1877.

With the exception of the Canada Southern Railway, moreover, Canadian railways had not been affected by the "Great Strike", and their officials had no major grievances with organized labour. Some of the membership losses which the BLE experienced in Canada in fact derived from the inability of some members to pay assessments for strike expenses incurred south of the border in several minor strikes before the eruption of the great strike¹². The firemen's brotherhood, however, all but disappeared in Canada in the wake of the 1877 crisis. By 1879, the brotherhood had only one lodge in working order in the Dominion, at Toronto. The newly-established lodges had simply not had time to become firmly rooted before the crisis, and had collapsed when the Grand Lodge's exclusive attention had to be devoted to survival in the United States¹³.

If it had not been for the great strike of 1877, the two enginemen's unions might have had little difficulty in weathering the depression of the seventies. The engineers' brotherhood, indeed, required only the return of prosperity to resume further growth. It had a vigorous leader in P.M. Arthur, and the crisis undoubtedly had pruned out dead wood. More drastic measures were required to re-invigorate the firemen's organization. In 1879, the brotherhood's annual convention attempted to solve the problem of management hostility by resolving "that this order of Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen ignore strikes, and that we hereafter settle our grievances with our employers by arbitration." In 1880, W.N. Sayre was ousted from office and replaced by Eugene V. Debs and, under his dynamic leadership, the brotherhood was out of debt within a year¹⁴. The first phase of the history of the brotherhoods in Canada was over. Events in the United States had played a key role in the story, although the victory over the Grand Trunk had been a substantial achievement for Canadian engineers. A pattern had thus been established, a mixture of Canadian and American elements, which was to persist in one fashion or another until World War One, and for many years after.

The Brotherhoods Become Firmly Established in the Eighties

The next decade, the eighties, represented the second phase of the history of the brotherhoods in Canada. In 1880 the Order of Railway Conductors (ORC) came into Canada, and was followed in 1885 by the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT). In structure and outlook these unions differed little from the two enginemen's organizations, and both had an of-

¹² *Engineer's Journal*, August 1879, pp. 366-369.

¹³ Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (hereafter *BLF Proceedings*), 1878, pp. 8, 21; *Firemen's Magazine*, January 1924, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Firemen's Magazine*, December 1923, pp. 262-263; Ray GINGER, *Eugene V. Debs: A Biography*, New York, 1966, p. 48.

ficial anti-strike policy similar to that of the firemen¹⁵. The decade was a period of buoyant growth for the four brotherhoods in the Dominion, and, by the 1890's, they were organized on all major Canadian railroads. Competition from indigenous Canadian unions was minimal. In early 1883, the ORC easily crushed a United Trainmen's Association which had been formed in St. Thomas, Ontario, the previous year. The tough-minded Grand Chief of the ORC simply told the members of the new association that he would use his influence with management to have them discharged from their jobs if they did not withdraw from the Canadian organization immediately¹⁶. In 1886, the trainmen's organization absorbed with little difficulty the much smaller Conductors' and Brakemen's Benevolent Association of Canada, giving one of the Association's officials a post in the international grand lodge¹⁷. Neither the BLE or the BLF faced any Canadian rivals during the decade.

There were two major disputes with management in the eighties. The first was the result of the expansion of the engineers' union into the Maritime Provinces, the first of the brotherhoods to do so. In early June 1882, P.M. Arthur instructed an organizer to establish a BLE division on the Intercolonial at Campbellton, New Brunswick. The formation of divisions at Truro and Moncton followed shortly after. The organizer made no attempt to conceal his activities, and expected no trouble¹⁸. But when the Intercolonial's chief superintendent, David Pottinger, learned of this attempt to unionize some of his employees, he reacted violently, and prepared at once "to get rid of the Brotherhood". A form renouncing the BLE was prepared for all engine drivers to sign, and foremen were instructed to dismiss all those who refused to sign it. Spare engineers were hired in case a substantial number of engineers persisted in their loyalty to the union. Pottinger apparently had little direct knowledge of the brotherhoods, since the Intercolonial was for the most part ununionized. He believed the BLE to be a dangerous and irresponsible organization with its "controlling power... situated in the Western States" which had "caused trouble wher-

15 ROBBINS, Edwin Clyde, *Railway Conductors: A Study in Organized Labor*, New York, 1914, pp. 109-111; Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (hereafter *BRT Proceedings*), 1885, p. 30.

16 *Engineers' Journal*, August 1888, p. 704; ROBBINS, *Railway Conductors*, p. 34.

17 For a more extended discussion of this episode, see Joseph Hugh TUCK, "Canadian Railways and the International Brotherhoods: Labour Relations in the Railway Running Trades in Canada, 1865-1914" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1975), pp. 87-94.

18 *Engineers' Journal*, September 1882, p. 454; Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, "Establishment of Canadian Divisions Etc.", *op. cit.*

ever it has been started.” His fears of a labour war, however, proved groundless. Only a half dozen or so engineers had to be dismissed for refusing to leave their union, and within three or four days Pottinger reported, much to his satisfaction, that “the whole matter was ended¹⁹”.

He should have known better. His employer, the Dominion government, was controlled by men who had carefully cultivated a reputation for friendship with the labour movement. When the BLE despatched a delegation to Ottawa to protest Pottinger’s actions, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald did not hesitate to overrule the chief superintendent. Together with Minister of Railways Sir Charles Tupper he assured the delegation that the government had known nothing of the injustice perpetrated against the Intercolonial engineers. The subordinate officers of the road were the real culprits, he declared, and would be brought into line. The discharged men would be reinstated immediately, and the ban on the brotherhood would be lifted. Macdonald was as good as his word, and the discharged men were soon back to work²⁰. The Prime Minister’s political astuteness was confirmed shortly thereafter by an effusive letter of gratitude from the leader of the brotherhood delegation:

... I sincerely thank you and Sir Charles Tupper for the interest you have taken in the matter and if there is anything in the future I can do for either of you please let me know and I will see if I possibly can. I may also state that I feel certain that the Brotherhood will never give you cause to rue the action you have taken²¹.

This event set the tone for labour-management relations on the Intercolonial for the remainder of the pre-war period. Union difficulties with management were usually followed by appeals to the federal government, where unionists could count upon, at the very least, a sympathetic hearing.

The second major dispute of the eighties was a wildcat engineers’ strike on the CPR in 1883. A consequence of the collapse of the Winnipeg land boom in 1882, the strike was a hasty and ill-conceived attempt to maintain wages at boom-time levels. It was quickly disavowed by BLE Grand Chief Arthur, on the grounds that it had not been sanctioned by international headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, and the men went back to work. During

19 Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Intercolonial Railway Letterbooks, vol. 215, pp. 1041-1042, Pottinger to Robert Carr Harris, 31 August 1882; *Ibid.*, pp. 791-792, Pottinger to J.H. Moore, 24 August 1882. BLE headquarters were in the not very “western” state of Ohio. Pottinger’s ignorance of labour unions, however, was matched by the Moncton *Daily Times*, which accused the BLE on 26 August 1882 of fomenting “monstrous strikes” everywhere, and cited the strike on the Grand Trunk “a year or two ago [sic]” as an example.

20 Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 4 October 1882; Toronto *Daily Mail*, 6 October 1882; PAC, Canada, Department of Railways and Canals, Registers, vol. 55, pp. 5769, 5771.

21 PAC Macdonald Papers, Robert Pearson to Macdonald, 16 October 1882.

the early eighties, the railway brotherhoods were systematically organizing the CPR as it pushed its way mile by mile across the Canadian prairies. The defeat of the engineers' strike in 1883, and the emphasis which all four brotherhoods placed on benevolent activities during the eighties, persuaded the CPR management that there was little to fear from these unions²².

Formal signed contracts between the brotherhoods and management became fairly commonplace in the United States during this decade. The brotherhoods believed such agreements to be desirable because, among other things, they tended to "reduce the area of misunderstanding typically associated with verbal agreements which depended so much upon the memory of the individuals involved²³." Canada lagged behind the United States in this respect. Although it became fairly common practice for Canadian railways to issue formal schedules of wages and rules, the signed agreement which ended the 1876 Grand Trunk strike remained an anomaly in the eighties. The anti-strike policies of the brotherhoods were a partial reason for this, but so too were special circumstances on each individual Canadian railway: the defeat of the CPR engineers in 1883; a pragmatic recognition by Grand Trunk employees that the financially troubled railway could ill-afford an aggressive stance by labour organizations; and government paternalism on the Intercolonial. The result was a failure to resolve the whole question of union recognition in this decade. As the eighties wore on, however, the brotherhoods, in both the United States and Canada, began to move towards a more aggressive approach to relations with management. The depression of the mid-eighties, which brought short hours and wage reductions, was partly responsible for this, as was pressure from a rival industrial union, the Knights of Labor, whose railway locals showed no hesitation to strike²³. In 1886, the BLF abandoned its policy of 'ignoring' strikes, and was followed in this by the recently-formed trainmen's union in 1887²⁴. The ORC persisted in an anti-strike policy throughout the decade, but by 1888 this policy had become so unpopular with many conductors that a rival conductors' union was organized which did not oppose strikes. Supported by the other three railway brotherhoods, this pro-strike organization forced the ORC to abandon its anti-strike policy in 1890. The two conductors' organizations thereupon merged under the ORC banner²⁵. The

²² *Manitoba Free Press*, 12, 17 December 1883; PAC, W.C. Van Horne Papers, Letterbook 4, pp. 310-312, Van Horne to John M. Egan, 15 January 1884; *Ibid.*, Letterbook 27, pp. 253-254, Van Horne to Harry Abbott, 17 September 1888.

²³ RICHARDSON, *Locomotive Engineer*, pp. 196-197.

²⁴ *BRT Proceedings*, 1887, pp. 28, 59; Walter F. McCaleb, *The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen; With Special Reference to the Life of Alexander F. Whitney* (New York, 1936), pp. 53-54; Shelton STROMQUIST, "The Knights of Labor and Organized Railroad Men", paper presented to the Knights of Labor Centennial Symposium, Chicago, 1979, pp. 4-5.

²⁵ *Railway Conductors' Monthly* (hereafter *Conductors' Monthly*), November 1891, p. 560; ROBBINS, *Railway Conductors*, pp. 109-111.

BLE had never officially adopted an anti-strike policy. The great strike of 1877, however, had convinced Grand Chief Arthur and other engineers "that strikes were not good for their organization", and the BLE avoided strikes for the next ten years. When this policy was deliberately abandoned in 1888 with a strike on the Chicago, Burlington and Quinsey Railroad, the results were so disastrous that the engineers' brotherhood returned to a more conservative policy²⁶. The fact that the other three brotherhoods were moving towards a more aggressive labour relations policy as the eighties ended, however, was to have important consequences in Canada.

The 1892 CPR Strike Brings Union Recognition

The 1890's represented the third phase of the history of the railway brotherhoods in Canada. During this decade, the four brotherhoods achieved formal and permanent recognition by the managements of all three major Canadian railways. The key event in this development was a highly successful strike of the conductors and trainmen on the CPR in 1892. Fought specifically over the issue of union recognition, this triumph over the largest and wealthiest railway corporation in the Dominion and its strong-willed president W.C. Van Horne not only confirmed the position of the international brotherhoods as bargaining agents for their members on the CPR, but on other Canadian railways such as the Grand Trunk as well.

A significant feature of the CPR strike was the element of cooperation which prevailed between the four brotherhoods, especially the conductors and trainmen. This cooperation was not something new, nor was it confined to the Canadian wings of the four brotherhoods, but was the result of nearly a decade of experimentation with collective action, both on individual railway systems across North America, and at the highest executive levels of the brotherhoods. The brotherhoods' interest in cooperative action in the field of collective bargaining had begun in the mid-eighties, at the same time as the firemen's, the trainmen's and the conductors' brotherhoods were re-considering their anti-strike policies. Labour federation was in the air in these years. Samuel Gompers of the Cigar Makers, and other like-minded craft unionists, were putting together the American Federation of Labor, and Canadian unionists were completing their plans for the Dominion Trades and Labor Congress. Moreover, the AFL's rival federation, the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor, was reaching its peak. The brotherhoods took no part in the organization of these large federations, and did not af-

²⁶ McMURRY, Donald L., *The Great Burlington Strike of 1888; A Case History in Labor Relations*, Cambridge, Mass., 1956, pp. 271-272.

filiate with them in later years. The brotherhoods were afraid that cooperation with the less-skilled, or with workers in other industries, would weaken their strong position in their own industry. They were undoubtedly correct, but there was also a trace of snobbery in their outlook, most noticeable perhaps among conductors and engineers, towards the "lower orders of labor"²⁷. This exclusiveness, however, was no barrier to cooperation among themselves, and the brotherhoods began to move in this direction in the late eighties, spurred on by the powerful advocacy of Eugene Debs of the Firemen. A closely-knit federation, the Supreme Council of the United Orders of Railway Employees, was formed in 1889, but collapsed within three years, the victim of squabbles over job jurisdiction²⁸. The federation movement, however, left permanent traces. First, Debs became convinced that the brotherhoods had become outmoded and moved towards the formation of one big union for all railway employees, the American Railway Union²⁹. And second, the brotherhoods continued to cooperate closely on individual railway systems. The CPR strike thus saw the conductors and trainmen acting together almost as one organization, with the other two brotherhoods becoming significantly involved after the outbreak of the strike.

The clash on the CPR began in late 1891 when a conductors' and trainmen's joint committee on the company's Western Division³⁰ presented divisional superintendent William Whyte with a request for a new schedule of wages. The committee's aim was the revision of an unsatisfactory payment system based upon an agreement reached in 1888. Instead of increasing wages to meet its employees' demands after 1888, the company had instituted a system of monthly bonuses for faithful service and hard work. Since the bonuses could be reduced at the company's pleasure, or their withdrawal used as a disciplinary measure, the brotherhood committee wanted them eliminated and replaced by a straight increase in hourly rates³¹.

²⁷ POWDERLY, Terence V., *The Path I Trod*, New York, 1940, p. 164.

²⁸ The federation movement is fully discussed in Donald L. McMURRY, "Federation of the Railroad Brotherhoods, 1889-1894", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, VII, October 1953, pp. 73-92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁰ The CPR's Western Division took in all the company's main and branch lines between Fort William, Ontario, and Donald, British Columbia. It is unlikely that there was any terminological relationship between a railway company's "divisions" and the local "divisions" of the ORC and BLE. The latter term was probably borrowed from the fraternal societies, along with a good deal else, such as organizational structure, secret passwords, initiation rites, and so on.

³¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1892; Order of Railway Conductors, *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (hereafter *ORC Proceedings*), 1893, p. 20.

Whyte's response to the committee's request, however, was scarcely a model of tact. He told the committeemen to go back to their jobs until he had had an opportunity to consider their appeal, and, when they refused to do so, had them presented with notices from their respective supervisors to report for duty immediately or be fired. The committee thereupon telegraphed their international headquarters for assistance, and Grand Master S.E. Wilkinson of the BRT and Grand Chief E.E. Clark of the ORC went to Winnipeg to effect a settlement. Confronted by the Grand Chief, Whyte backpedalled furiously. He politely explained that only president Van Horne could grant all the committee's requests. Fortunately he was going to Head Office in Montreal shortly on other business and would take up the matter with Van Horne while he was there. The committee would be recalled immediately upon his return. He attempted to convince the two union leaders, moreover, that the committeemen had not in reality been threatened with dismissal, but that the notices to report for duty merely reflected a serious shortage of skilled manpower. The grand officers were sceptical, but decided to accept this explanation without argument, and advised the committee members to return to work and wait for Whyte's return from Montreal. At the same time, they "instructed" the committee to conduct a strike vote on the Western Division, "in case such tactics were again resorted to by the company³²."

The talks were renewed again at the beginning of March, when Whyte brought a new schedule from Montreal. Since the company's proposals involved reductions in wages for some categories of jobs, however, the committee immediately rejected them. On 4 March, negotiations broke down completely, and the committee again wired American headquarters for assistance. Whyte thereupon reopened negotiations with a new and better offer. He had apparently come to the conclusion that the alternative might well be a strike, since the grand officers would not be so conciliatory a second time. Whyte's new offer was accepted by the committee, and required only head office ratification³³. But this ratification was refused. CPR president Van Horne had become convinced that the negotiations were merely part of a plot against the railways of Canada hatched by a handful of union leaders from the United States. If given a choice, he believed, most western division conductors and trainmen would support the company. He decided to strike "the first blow". Whyte was instructed to require all these men "to pledge themselves to stand by the company in any emergency". Those who

³² *Railroad Trainman*, April 1892, pp. 239-240, May 1892, pp. 316-317; *Conductors' Monthly*, April 1892, p. 151.

³³ *Railroad Trainman*, April 1892, p. 240, May 1892, p. 317; *BRT Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report", p. 10.

refused were to be "at once dismissed"³⁴. The dispute had taken a new turn, and now involved the very survival of the two unions on the CPR.

As the 'man on the spot', Whyte must have greeted Van Horne's long-distance analysis of the situation with considerable annoyance, but he met the committee, as instructed, on 13 March, and demanded immediate acceptance of the company's original offer. He declared that the committee had not been negotiating in good faith, but were responsible for a "conspiracy" to bring about a strike. He then grilled the committee members one at a time, asking them if they would stand by the company in case of a strike. Several men were fired immediately for giving unsatisfactory answers, and the remainder given twenty-four hours to reconsider. At the same time, superintendents along the line began interviewing conductors and trainmen, asking them the same question Whyte had asked the committee men. By the 16th some one hundred men had been interviewed, and all but one or two had refused to abandon their unions and had been discharged. Grand Chief Wilkinson of the BRT and Second Grand Conductor A.B. Garretson of the ORC hurried to Winnipeg to see Whyte. They were told that Whyte had "orders" not to discuss matters with outsiders, and the brotherhoods prepared for a walk out. After a final ultimatum, the two unions struck the CPR's Western Division on 16 March at midnight³⁵. Contrary to Van Horne's expectations, all but a handful of the members of the two brotherhoods on Whyte's division went out when ordered — some 400 to 500 men in all. Moreover, a number of non-unionized CPR switchmen struck as well, purely as a gesture of sympathy with the trainmen. Company spokesmen charged that the strike had been fomented by "foreign emissaries", at a time "when it is likely to be productive of injury to the country"³⁶.

The position of the other CPR unions was of major importance to both the strikers and the company. Rumours began to spread almost immediately after the beginning of the strike that the firemen and engineers would go out in sympathy with their fellow workers. There was considerable substance to these rumours, in that the firemen had received instructions from American headquarters to give all possible assistance to the conductors and trainmen, even to the point of striking if necessary, "since there is a principle involved that interests all organizations." Grand Chief Arthur of the Engineers, on the other hand, while sympathetic to the strikers, was determined not to risk a strike at this time³⁷.

³⁴ PAC, MG28, T.G. Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 30, pp. 274-276, Shaughnessy to Thomas Tait, 6 March 1892, *Private*.

³⁵ *Railroad Trainman*, May 1892, pp. 317-318; *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 March 1892; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15, 17 March 1892.

³⁶ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 March 1892; *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 March 1892.

³⁷ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1892; *BLF Proceedings*, 1892, p. 77; *Engineers' Journal*, May 1892, p. 461.

The local engineers' grievance committee, however, was extremely anxious to see an end to the strike. Should the firemen go out, they would find themselves the only non-striking trainmen on the Western Division. As the *Winnipeg Tribune* put it, they would be "between the devil and deep water"³⁸. Moreover, the committee was receiving complaints from engineers about the loss of earnings the strike was causing. The committee therefore offered its services as mediators in the strike. The offer was accepted by Wilkinson and Garretson, but rejected by the company. At this point, company officials were still confident they could replace the strikers with new men. A new problem had arisen, however. The strike had now spread to the Pacific Division. Whyte therefore decided to buy off his engineers and firemen, and offered to compensate them for wages lost as a result of the strike by paying them the same wages for the current month that they had received the same month a year earlier. This offer was accepted, and no doubt had the "soothing effect" that Whyte desired³⁹.

The strike on the Pacific Division, just as on the Western Division, was the direct result of the interference of CPR headquarters in Montreal. Negotiations between the conductors and trainmen and CPR superintendent Harry Abbott in Vancouver had been going on concurrently with negotiations in Winnipeg, but much more smoothly. Indeed, a tentative agreement had been reached by mid-March, and had received approval from Montreal. But Montreal had added a stipulation to its approval. A loyalty oath similar to the one used on the Western Division must be administered to the Pacific Coast unionists. The *Vancouver Daily World* later reported that CPR officials in Vancouver were most unhappy about this interference from "overzealous officials east of the mountains". But the damage had been done, and the Pacific Division conductors and trainmen walked off their jobs to join their co-workers on the prairies⁴⁰.

These events coincided with the arrival in the West of the first contingent of strike-breakers from eastern Canada. The company had not been able to find enough unemployed railroaders in the west to keep the trains moving, and Montreal provided a large pool of unemployed labour. The CPR was recruiting strike-breakers in the Maritimes as well, but the Montrealers were the first to arrive in the west. Many of these replacements were not of top quality. Some, in fact, had merely signed up with the CPR to get free transportation west. Others were entirely mercenary, and went to union headquarters as soon as they reached Winnipeg, hoping to sell out to the

³⁸ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21 March 1892.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 March 1892; *ORC Proceedings*, 1893, pp. 21-22; Shaughnessy Papers, Letterbook 30, pp. 489-491, Whyte to Van Horne, 21 March 1892.

⁴⁰ *Vancouver Daily World*, 15, 21 March 1892; *Firemen's Magazine*, May 1892, p. 440.

strikers for cash. These men were scornfully turned down by the strike leaders, and Clark declared that "I wouldn't give... fifty cents apiece for them⁴¹."

The company also went to great lengths to employ special police to guard company property during the strike. In almost every major centre serviced by the CPR the company had auxiliary police sworn in by cooperative police magistrates. In Toronto, on the 23rd, for example, Police Magistrate Denison swore in fifty men at once, each equipped with a revolver or other firearm and "several hundred rounds of ball cartridges, batons, handcuffs, and other accessories." These men were to accompany four trains headed west loaded with settlers and their effects. Auxiliary police were also sworn in at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa and Montreal. A further service was provided by the Mayor of Montreal, who supplied vice-president Shaughnessy with thirty regular Montreal policemen, plus some officers, to be sent west immediately. The company also hired forty-five operatives from the Canadian Secret Service Detective Agency, who were described as "having been selected for their fighting qualities." Finally, the resources of the civil power were made fully available to the company. Detachments of the NWMP were sent to all CPR divisional points west of the Manitoba border and detachments of the Canadian Militia were authorized for points in northern Ontario. As it happened, this motley array of heavily armed men had little to do: the strike was notably free from violence of any kind. This, of course, could not have been predicted in advance. Yet the sheer magnitude of the company's reaction to the threat of disorder is a measure of the real fear which nineteenth-century businessmen had of strikes and strikers⁴².

The CPR management, however, had no particular fear of its customers' reactions to the strike. By 21 March, business in Winnipeg was reported to be "paralysed", but company officials still spoke of fighting the strike to a successful conclusion⁴³. Indeed, on 21 March, Van Horne and Shaughnessy raised the stakes, and ordered that a loyalty oath be administered on the company's Eastern Division, which ran from the Lakehead to Chalk River, Ontario. The two executives were probably influenced by reports that the brotherhoods were conducting a strike vote on the Eastern Division, but since the men on the division had no prior grievance against the company, there was no way of knowing how this vote might have turned

41 *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 March 1892; *Railroad Trainman*, June 1892, p. 453.

42 *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18, 23 March 1892; *Toronto Globe*, 23 March 1892; "Report of the Commissioner of the North West Mount Police 1892", Canada, *Sessional Papers*, 1892, No. 15, p. 108.

43 *Winnipeg Tribune*, 19, 21 March 1892.

out. The men might well have voted not to strike. The loyalty oath, however, clarified matters for the men in northern Ontario, and on 22 March company officials awakened to find another 752 miles of track tied up. Moreover, the men on the company's southern Ontario lines were reported ready to go out when ordered, and strike leaders were confidently talking of tying up the entire CPR system, from Atlantic to Pacific⁴⁴.

The result was immediate capitulation by the company. With the engineers' committee acting as mediators, an agreement was reached between Whyte and the two Grand Officers of the brotherhoods, and ratified by Van Horne by 11:15 a.m. on the 23rd. Pragmatic as ever, Van Horne clearly believed that further resistance would be drawn-out and costly. The terms of the settlement indicate the extent of the union victory. First, all strikers, unionized or otherwise, and all strike sympathizers who had been discharged, were to be reinstated immediately without prejudice. All strike-breakers were to be discharged. Second, the terms of the formal contract were to be decided by a committee of arbitration. This committee was to consist of the BLE committee which had acted as mediators in the dispute, and their decision was to be binding on both parties. Third, the new Western Division rates were to apply to the Pacific Division as well. The engineers' committee unveiled the new schedule on 25 March. All classes of conductors and brakemen received increases in wages, train crews were to be paid for all the time spent on the road, regardless of delays, and overtime rates (at straight time) were to be paid for any day's service exceeding eleven hours. These terms would be renegotiated after one year, and took the form of a written agreement signed for the company by White, and by Clark, Wilkinson and the chairman of the brotherhood joint committee, for the strikers. Van Horne had intended to destroy the conductors' and trainmen's organizations on the CPR. Instead, he had been forced to grant them formal recognition and an signed contract, the first on the CPR⁴⁵.

The decision of the company to leave the settlement of the strike to a committee of its own employees, themselves members of a labour organization was, as the *Montreal Witness* said, "absolutely unique⁴⁶." CPR officials put as good a face upon this development as they could. Shaughnessy declared that the engineers' actions were an indication of "their friendship towards the road", and added that "they are our own employees and can be trusted to secure the best interests of the road⁴⁷." Yet the whole episode

⁴⁴ *Conductors' Monthly*, April 1892, p. 151; *Winnipeg Tribune*, 21, 22 March 1892; *Toronto Daily Mail*, 22 March 1892.

⁴⁵ *ORC Proceedings*, 1893, p. 22; *BRT Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report", p. 11; *Engineers' Journal*, May 1892, p. 461. The agreement is reproduced in the *Railroad Trainman*, May 1892, pp. 320-321.

⁴⁶ Quoted in *Vancouver Daily News-Advertiser*, 25 March 1892.

⁴⁷ *Toronto Globe*, 24 March 1892.

represented a flagrant violation of the principle subscribed to almost universally by nineteenth-century businessmen that employees had no right to make decisions which affected company operations. The brotherhoods fully understood what the strikers had achieved. A correspondent to the *Railroad Trainman* declared,

Well done my heroes. You have beaten the wealthiest corporation in Canada. You have whipped the strongest enemy that ever faced the great Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen... You have compelled the great enemy of organized labor to swallow the bitter pill of humiliation, and you have done it gracefully. He is crushed⁴⁸.

In 1893, when the contract came up for re-negotiation, the brotherhood joint committee negotiated a four-year agreement which included further wage increases and other benefits. And in the same year, the engineers and firemen received their share of the spoils of victory, obtaining a contract from the CPR essentially similar to the one just negotiated by the conductors and trainmen⁴⁹.

The strike also resulted in the formal recognition of the brotherhoods by Canada's other major privately-owned railway, the Grand Trunk. The conductors and trainmen had been negotiating with the Grand Trunk during the CPR dispute. Grand Trunk officials had rejected demands for higher wages and, even worse, had refused to recognize the right of brotherhood grand officers to take part in the negotiations. Much to the dismay of the grand officers, however, the company's conductors voted against a strike, but before the significance of this became clear to company officials, the CPR strike broke out. In panic, company officials made a new and better offer which was accepted by the union grand officers with considerable relief⁵⁰. This did not, of course, constitute union recognition, but the victory over the CPR caused a further softening of Grand Trunk attitudes. In late 1892, the Grand Trunk conceded a two-year contract with the firemen's Joint Protective Board, which amounted to formal recognition of the BLF, and by 1896, Grand Trunk officials were negotiating contracts routinely with officials of the conductors' and trainmen's organizations, something the company had refused to do before the 1892 dispute⁵¹.

The victory over the CPR also served to push the door open slightly for other railway unions. In 1896, the Order of Railway Telegraphers fought a successful strike against the CPR, winning recognition and a contract similar to those already in force for the brotherhoods. In this strike, said the

⁴⁸ *Railroad Trainman*, May 1892, p. 365.

⁴⁹ *Railroad Trainman*, May 1893, p. 417.

⁵⁰ *BRT Proceedings*, 1893, "Grand Master's Report", p. 34.

⁵¹ *Firemen's Magazine*, January 1893, p. 92; *Railroad Trainman*, January 1897, p. 71.

Winnipeg Tribune, the knowledge that “the trainmen won all the points contested for” in 1892 tended “to stiffen the backs” of the strikers⁵². In 1899, the International Association of Machinists earned recognition on the CPR after a ten-day strike. During the strike, Whyte claimed that the machinists should be denied recognition because, unlike the men who ran the trains, they could obtain jobs outside the railway industry, and thus did not require the security provided by the railway brotherhoods. This interesting distinction was abandoned when the CPR capitulated⁵³. Finally, in 1901, the CPR trackmen gained recognition after an exceedingly bitter three-month strike. In this case, the strike was ended by the personal intervention as mediator by BRT Grand Master P.M. Morrissey, and the trackmen were granted union recognition⁵⁴. The bitterness of this last strike indicated that the CPR management had not ‘gone soft’ on unions during the previous decade. But the union victory also indicated that the company had come to accept the general principle that union recognition might be the lesser of several evils. This paralleled the pragmatic view of Charles M. Hays, general manager of the Grand Trunk since 1896: the brotherhoods (and a few other unions) would be tolerated because it might be inconvenient or costly not to do so⁵⁵. In 1898, for example, Hays gave in to the well-organized telegraphers’ union without a strike⁵⁶.

This general acknowledgement of the strength of organized labour meant that Canadian railway executives were reluctant to reduce the wages of their unionized employees during the depression of the nineties. This was just as true of the penurious Grand Trunk as it was of the more affluent CPR. The *Conductors’ Monthly* noted in July 1894 that Grand Trunk officials were afraid to cut wages “because of the present strength of the labor unions”, and commented that this was “evidence that... the good effects of the victory won by the conductors and brakemen on the Canadian Pacific have not as yet worn away⁵⁷.” The experience of the brotherhoods in Canada during the nineties was thus in sharp contrast with their experience in the United States. A series of strikes by the brotherhoods in the United States between 1891 and the onset of the depression met with very indifferent success. The Lehigh Valley strike of 1893, which involved all four of the brotherhoods plus the telegraphers, was probably the bitterest of these

52 *Winnipeg Tribune*, 29 September 1896; *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 8 October 1896.

53 *Winnipeg Tribune*, 5, 14 October 1899.

54 The best contemporary source on this strike is John T. WILSON, *The Calcium Light Turned On By a Railway Trackman*, St. Louis, Mo., 1902.

55 See *Firemen’s Magazine*, August 1896, p. 155.

56 *Firemen’s Magazine*, March 1899, p. 326; Archibald M. McISAAC, *The Order of Railroad Telegraphers; A Study in Trade Unionism and Collective Bargaining*, Princeton, 1933, p. 118.

57 *Conductors’ Monthly*, July 1894, p. 357.

strikes, being marked by violence and disorder, and was only a partial success at best⁵⁸. After the onset of the depression, the brotherhoods found themselves faced by wage reductions on a number of American roads which they were unable to prevent. The initial enthusiasm of American railroaders for Deb's American Railway Union stemmed in large part from these wage reductions. The American Railway Union succeeded in establishing seventeen locals in Canada, most of them in the West, but these locals remained singularly inactive, even during the great Pullman Strike of 1894, and disappeared almost without a trace not long thereafter⁵⁹. In mid-1892, moreover, Canadian trackmen had formed a union of their own, directly inspired by the CPR strike, and this was probably a factor in the failure of the Pullman boycott to cross the Ontario border from Michigan in 1894⁶⁰. To be sure, the fact that many American railways were bankrupt, in contrast with Canadian railways, was an important reason for the difficulties of the brotherhoods in the United States during the depression. Yet cutting wages had long been a standard method of dealing with depressions in Canada, just as in the United States, and had been used by the Grand Trunk in the mid-eighties.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this, therefore, is that the CPR strike of 1892 not only helped to cushion the effects of the depression for Canadian railway workers, but also established the brotherhood model in their minds as the most desirable type of union organization. The fact that this type of organization was usually international was not regarded as a drawback, but rather as a source of strength. The larger international unions could win strikes; smaller Canadian ones might not. The Grand Trunk's defeat of its trackmen in 1899 seemed to prove this point. The defeated union was an all-Canadian organization, and disintegrated after 1899. Its members were absorbed by the Brotherhood of Railway Trackmen of America, and it was this international union which successfully challenged the CPR in 1901⁶¹. By this time, the concept of internationalism was so firmly entrenched among Canadian railway workers that an attempt to form a Canadian Order of Railway Men, consisting of members of the running trades in Canada, attracted no more than a handful of adherents, and was easily crushed by the international brotherhoods⁶².

58 ROBBINS, *Railway Conductors*, p. 176; McISAAC, *Railroad Telegraphers*, p. 9.

59 *Railway Times*, 1 September 1894.

60 *Railroad Trainman*, June 1897, p. 552.

61 BURKE, James T., *Report of Dominion of Canada Legislative Representative, 1899*, Stratford, 1900, p. 8; London *Industrial Banner*, April 1901.

62 *Railroad Trainman*, November 1901, pp. 937-939; January 1902, pp. 42-43; *Labour Gazette*, II, December 1901, p. 331.

Collective Bargaining and Labour Disputes after 1900

In January 1900, the trainmen's grievance committee on the Canada Eastern Railway conferred with the owner of the road, a Mr. Gibson, and presented him with a request for a new contract. As the "President's Report" of the brotherhood for 1901 put it, Mr. Gibson "treated the committee rudely, and to use a popular expression, 'fired them out', making a kick at the chairman as they went". The matter was later straightened out by the intervention of a union vice-president, and an increase in wages and payment for overtime was granted⁶³. This episode, while of minor importance, typifies the relations between the brotherhoods and Canadian railways in the years between 1900 and 1914, the fourth and final phase in the history of the brotherhoods in Canada before World War One. On the one hand, management had no great love for the brotherhoods, although few managers vented their ire in so direct a fashion as did Mr. Gibson of the Canada Eastern. On the other hand, the brotherhoods could not be 'fired out', and kept out. They were there to stay, and could apply real pressure upon management. Recognition was rarely a problem after 1900, although management might at times make face-saving pronouncements on the subject. This was illustrated by events on the new and expanding Canadian Northern Railway in 1902. After prolonged negotiations with the railway's management, and after a near-crisis as the result of the actions of a reincarnation of the American Railway Union called the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees, the four brotherhoods, plus the telegraphers, received a written contract from company vice-president Donald Mann. Yet while this contract had been negotiated by two international vice-presidents of the brotherhoods and gave full union recognition, the Canadian Northern management persisted in maintaining throughout the remainder of the company's existence that it never negotiated with unions, but only unions, but only with committees of its own employees⁶⁴. Actions, however, spoke louder than words on the Canadian Northern, as on other Canadian railways. The recognition of the brotherhoods was real enough after 1900, if not always *de jure*.

A major change in the collective bargaining process after 1900 resulted from growing pressure upon the federal government to do something about labour problems, especially strikes, and was manifested in federal legislation designed to regulate labour disputes and prevent strikes. A Conciliation Act of 1900 did little more than offer formal mediation of a labour dispute

⁶³ *BRT Proceedings*, 1901, "Report of Grand Master", p. 8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1903, "Report of Grand Master", p. 6; T.D. REGEHR, *The Canadian Northern Railway; Pioneer Road of the Northern Prairies 1895-1918*, Toronto, 1976, p. 465.

if both sides wanted it. In 1903, however, the Railway Labour Disputes Act permitted the federal government to compel mediation and investigation of railway disputes. Finally, in 1907, the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act provided for the compulsory investigation of labour disputes in general, and also provided for a 'cooling off' period by forbidding a strike until an investigation had taken place⁶⁵. The brotherhoods had no quarrel with compulsory investigation. It was decidedly better than federal legislation proposed in 1902 which would have outlawed railway strikes completely in favour of compulsory binding arbitration. The brotherhoods had been instrumental in killing the 1902 legislation and putting the 1903 Act in its place⁶⁶. The four unions most strenuously objected, however, to the 'cooling off' provision in the 1907 Act. An investigation might take months, a brotherhood official pointed out, and meanwhile the company would have "ample time to put themselves in a position to defeat the object of their employees in case they attempted to enforce their demands by striking". What was even more galling was that while the brotherhoods were given the right to use the 1903 Act if they wished, the 'cooling off' period was retroactively made part of that Act as well⁶⁷.

In the years before World War One, however, only two major disputes involving the brotherhoods were investigated under the provisions of this federal legislation. Both were in 1910, on the Grand Trunk and the CPR. The results were not impressive, in that the legislation failed to prevent a strike on the Grand Trunk⁶⁸. The disputes were both connected with a general wage movement conducted on a number of railways in eastern North America by the Eastern Association, an organization consisting of the various grievance committees of the ORC and BRT in the region. The Association's model contract involved wage increases on both the CPR and Grand Trunk, and was rejected by the managements of both roads. The

⁶⁵ ANTON, F.R., *The Role of Government in the Settlement of Industrial Disputes in Canada*, Don Mills, 1962, pp. 61-78; R.C. BROWN and R. COOK, *Canada 1896-1921; A Nation Transformed*, Toronto, 1974, pp. 119-123.

⁶⁶ Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1903, pp. 2538-2539.

⁶⁷ *BRT Proceedings*, 1907, "Grand Master's Report", pp. 94-95; R. MacGregor DAWSON, *William Lyon Mackenzie King; A Political Biography*, Vol. I, 1874-1923, Toronto, 1958, p. 140 f.

⁶⁸ The Grand Trunk strike is discussed in some detail in J.H. TUCK, "Union Authority, Corporate Obstinacy, and the Grand Trunk Strike of 1910", Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1976. In 1914, a dispute between the CPR and the conductors and trainmen was investigated under the terms of the 1907 act. An award was handed down by the board in early August 1914, but as a consequence of the outbreak of the European war, the matter was left in abeyance, and not considered again until 1916. *Minutes*. Joint General Committees ORC and BRT Western Lines, Canadian Pacific Railway, 6 September to 29 November, 1916, pp. 47-48. Glenbow Alberta Institute, BL .B874A, Box 1, File No. 4.

brotherhoods thereupon invoked the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. After several months, the board investigating the CPR dispute made recommendations which provided the basis for a settlement on that road, although the resulting agreement differed in some respects from the original Eastern Association contract. The story on the Grand Trunk, however, was different.

A major cause of the strike was the low wages the company had been paying for some years. The Eastern Association contract in 1910 called for an average wage increase of over forty percent. A less tangible but equally important cause of friction between the brotherhood and the company, however, was the fact that company president Hays was a clumsy and untrustworthy labour negotiator. Indeed, Hays' actions during the dispute were singularly inconsistent and headstrong⁶⁹. His offers to the brotherhood committee in early summer 1910, after the completion of the government investigation, varied so much from time to time that the committee finally decided upon a strike, having lost all faith in Hays' sincerity. The strike itself lasted only two weeks, and was settled after the intervention of the international presidents of the brotherhoods, with the federal minister of labour, Mackenzie King, acting as mediator. The terms were not generous to the strikers, but did include that *sine qua non* of all brotherhood settlements, the return to work of all strikers not guilty of violence or other unlawful acts.

The reinstatement of 'disloyal' strikers, however, was most distasteful to President Hays, and had been the principal stumbling block to the settlement. Hays had accepted reinstatement, in fact, only after King had promised that the government would give employment to 'loyal' strike-breakers displaced to make way for the returned men. This feature of the settlement was embodied in a separate written agreement between the company and the federal cabinet. Hays' strong feelings on the question, however, guaranteed trouble after the strike, and trouble there was: reinstatement was to be a highly controversial public issue for the next two years. A deadline of three months had been set for reinstatement. But the men were taken back slowly, and, after the deadline, several hundred men were still out of work: according to company officials, these men would never be re-hired. This was undoubtedly a deliberate action on Hays' part. The number of men involved was significant enough to be noticeable, but was also small enough to be absorbed easily into the Grand Trunk's total

⁶⁹ Perhaps Hays "was not himself" because of overwork. At least, this was the explanation for his behaviour offered to Mackenzie King by a company vice president after a particularly heated argument during the strike. PAC, Laurier Papers, Vol. 638, King to Laurier, 4 August 1910.

work force if Hays wished. Moreover, an investigation of the reinstatement situation by a reasonably objective investigator in 1911 revealed that very few of the unreturned men had, in fact, been guilty of violence or other illegal acts during the strike, the only grounds for non-reinstatement mentioned in the strike settlement⁷⁰. Hays kept his motives to himself, but he seems to have been bent upon teaching his employees a lesson.

Firm government action to get the men back to work might have made a difference, since the government had a right to expect the company to live up to its agreement with the cabinet. Prime Minister Laurier, however, refused to push the issue too far, and rejected suggestions from Mackenzie King and others to put pressure upon the company by withholding funds for the completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific, or by setting up a royal commission. Labour minister King, on his part, was not anxious to displease Laurier by insisting upon a firm stand. This obvious government inactivity may have contributed to King's defeat in the 1911 federal election. It may have contributed, indeed, to the defeat of the Laurier government⁷¹. In any case, the new Conservative minister of labour, Thomas W. Crothers, attempted to put real pressure upon Hays in early 1912 by blocking a Grand Trunk money bill. It was now too late, however. Hays' intransigence had so demoralized the brotherhood committee on the Grand Trunk by this time that they were persuaded by company representatives to tell Prime Minister Borden they were quite satisfied with their current agreements with the company. It was thus not until after Hays' death on the *Titanic* in April 1912 that all the strikers of 1910 were taken back by the company.

The Grand Trunk strike was a significant event in Canadian history, directly affecting the fortunes of the president of a major corporation, Charles M. Hays, two prime ministers, Laurier and Borden, and several cabinet ministers, including a future prime minister, Mackenzie King. The personal misfortunes of the strikers, while less historically significant, perhaps, were even more real and more demoralizing. The company took away the pension rights of the strikers at the beginning of the strike, for ex-

⁷⁰ The investigation was conducted by Judge John A. Barron, of Stratford, an experienced labour negotiator, and former Liberal Member of Parliament.

⁷¹ See Terence A. CROWLEY, "Mackenzie King and the 1911 Election", *Ontario History*, LXI, December 1969, pp. 181-196; *Industrial Banner*, October 1911. The importance of the 1910 strike in this connection is emphasized in H.S. FERNS and B. OSTRY, *The Age of Mackenzie King; The Rise of the Leader*, London, 1955, pp. 99-145. There are, however, factual inaccuracies in this last work.

ample, and these were not restored until 1922⁷². Company officials, moreover, took advantage of the strike to weed out old or disabled employees. One employee with forty years' service was refused reinstatement because he had severe rheumatism and was blind in one eye. He was told by the General Manager that "he would not reinstate any man that he would not hire⁷³." As far as the brotherhoods themselves were concerned, however, the strike was much less important than the 1892 CPR strike. It is true that Hays' actions after the 1910 strike ultimately served to reduce the effectiveness of the conductors' and trainmen's grievance committee on the Grand Trunk. But the basic question of union recognition was not involved, as it had been in 1892, nor did the strike affect the position of the international brotherhoods on other Canadian railways, either positively or negatively.

A Concluding Overview

By the time of the First World War, in fact, the international brotherhoods were firmly established on all major Canadian railways, on many smaller lines, and on several American lines with trackage or running rights in Canada. They had over 25,000 Canadian members in over 300 local branches. In numerical terms, they no longer represented anything close to a majority of unionized Canadian workers as they had for a time in the nineties, but this was entirely the consequence of the growth of the rest of the Canadian labour movement since 1900. The brotherhoods themselves had grown at a steady rate in Canada ever since the end of the depression of the 1890's⁷⁴. Management opinions, however, were another matter. On the one hand, the overt and unrealistic hostility of the Hays' variety was probably exceptional. Yet it is doubtful that the brotherhoods enjoyed more than a grudging acceptance by Canadian railway managers in 1914, given the prevailing views of most Canadian businessmen on the rights of property and property-managers. The brotherhoods had contracts because they were strong, not because they were liked.

The way in which the brotherhoods were viewed by management thus has undergone a considerable change since the 1870's and 1880's. In the ear-

⁷² Pensions were not mentioned in the strike settlement, and the complaints of the would-be pensioners were largely ignored until picked up as a political issue before the 1921 federal election. Mackenzie King had sanctioned the omission of the pension question in the 1910 agreement, and only became anxious to correct "this wrong of twelve years' standing" (as his official biographer put it) after he became leader of the Liberal Party in 1919. PAC, King Papers, Series J4, Vol. C13, file 81, C9160-9175, memorandum (unsigned, but clearly by King), 28-30 July 1910; Norman McLEOD ROGERS, *Mackenzie King*, Toronto, 1935, p. 44.

⁷³ *ORC Proceedings*, 1911, p. 723. Fortunately, the brotherhoods extended strike benefits to all of the Grand Trunk strikers until they were re-hired — or dead from old age.

⁷⁴ *Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1914*, Ottawa, 1915, pp. 191-192; Eugene A. FORSEY, *The Canadian Labour Movement 1812-1902*, Ottawa, 1974, p. 7.

ly years, Pottinger apart perhaps, railway executives tended to be ambivalent about the brotherhoods. As fraternal orders which were dedicated to uplift and which provided insurance to their members, the brotherhoods could be seen as useful and even desirable, but as labour unions, they were acceptable only so long as they were 'responsible' and avoided strikes⁷⁵. After the nineties, however, and especially after the 1892 CPR strike, the brotherhoods could only be viewed as pure and simple trade unions, acceptable solely because it would be difficult to defeat them, and because there were worse alternatives, radical organizations like the American Railway Union and the Industrial Workers of the World, which all right-thinking businessmen viewed with horror.

By 1914, the brotherhoods had become mature, stable organizations. The outbreak of war was to usher in a new era in labour relations in Canada, as the Canadian government and Canadian businessmen struggled to cope with massive problems of war production, manpower mobilization, and railway nationalization. That the railway brotherhoods were able to weather the difficulties of the war, and even benefit from them, was testimony to the organizational strength built up in earlier years⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ A Grand Trunk superintendent told members of the BRT in 1888 that he was "in sympathy with their organization so long as its objects were legitimate and for the moral, physical and mental development of those enrolled." Robert Larmour, quoted in *London Advertiser*, 16 July 1888. But were strikes "legitimate"? See the same Robert LARMOUR's *A Critical Review of the Recent Trainmen's Strike on the G.T.R. by a Railway Veteran*, Stratford, 1910, which suggests they were not. Hays authorized the purchase of 200 copies of this pamphlet for free distribution to Grand Trunk supervisors and foremen. PAC, RG30, p. 691, Hays to William Wainwright, 12 January 1912.

⁷⁶ On the wartime problems of Canadian businessmen, see Michael BLISS, *A Canadian Millionaire; The Life and Business Times of Sir Joseph Flavelle, Bart. 1858-1939*, Toronto, 1978, Chapters 10-15. For a brief discussion of the brotherhoods and the war, see Maxwell FLOOD, *Payment Systems and their Development in the Railway Running Trades*, Ottawa, 1968, pp. 45-64.

Les chemins de fer canadiens et les fraternités de cheminots (1865-1914)

Cet article traite des relations entre la direction des chemins de fer canadiens et les syndicats du personnel itinérant: ingénieurs, chauffeurs, chefs de train et serre-freins, depuis l'avènement du premier syndicat au Canada en 1865 jusqu'à la déclaration de la première guerre mondiale. Ces syndicats émanaient du syndicalisme américain et, pendant la plus grande partie de cette période, ils constituaient les associations syndicales les plus répandues et les plus puissantes au Canada. De plus, ce fut au cours de cette période également que le modèle de syndicalisation du personnel itinérant s'implanta dans notre pays où il s'est maintenu presque inchangé jusqu'à nos jours.

L'histoire de ces syndicats comprend quatre phases plus ou moins distinctes. La première, qui s'échelonne de 1865 à 1880, fut dominée par les efforts de la Fraternité des ingénieurs de locomotives et la Fraternité des chauffeurs de locomotives pour s'établir au Canada. Fondée en 1863 aux États-Unis, la Fraternité des ingénieurs de locomotives s'implanta au Canada en 1865. À la fin de 1876, elle était assez puissante pour l'emporter dans une grève contre le *Grand Tronc*. Cette victoire eut pour résultat la signature d'une première convention collective dans l'industrie ferroviaire canadienne et fut l'occasion de la fondation de la première section locale de la Fraternité des ingénieurs de locomotives au début de 1877. Des grèves importantes survinrent un peu plus tard en 1877 aux États-Unis et seule la Fraternité des ingénieurs réussit à se maintenir jusqu'à la fin de la décennie.

La phase capitale fut celle de la décennie 1880 alors qu'on assista à une expansion soutenue des fraternités d'employés de chemins de fer au Canada. L'Ordre des agents de train pénétra au Canada en 1880 et elle fut suivie de la Fraternité des serre-freins en 1885. Vers 1890, les quatre fraternités avaient réussi à établir de l'Atlantique au Pacifique des sections locales qui groupaient le personnel de toutes les sociétés ferroviaires importantes. Elles n'eurent d'ailleurs qu'à affronter peu de concurrence de la part de syndicats spécifiquement canadiens et il n'y eut à l'époque que deux conflits majeurs avec la direction des compagnies de chemins de fer. À l'occasion de l'un de ces conflits, la Fraternité des ingénieurs eut recours à la pression sur le gouvernement pour triompher de l'hostilité de l'*Intercolonial* et une grève sauvage des mécaniciens du réseau du *Pacifique canadien* fit peu de tort au syndicat, parce qu'elle fut désavouée par les quartiers généraux du syndicat.

La troisième phase, soit celle qui couvre les derniers dix ans du XIX^e siècle, marque l'obtention de la reconnaissance formelle des syndicats. L'élément clé fut la grève de l'Ordre des agents de train et de la Fraternité des serre-freins contre le *Pacifique canadien* en 1892. Déclarée spécifiquement afin d'obtenir la reconnaissance des syndicats, cette victoire ouvrit la porte à cette reconnaissance par les autres sociétés de chemins de fer pour les quatre associations du personnel itinérant.

La quatrième phase va de 1900 à 1914. Elle se caractérise par l'intervention accrue du gouvernement dans le domaine des relations de travail. En 1903, ce fut l'adoption de l'Acte d'arbitrage des chemins de fer qui fut suivi en 1907 de la Loi sur les enquêtes en matière de différends industriels. Pour les syndicats, l'événement le plus marquant de cette période fut la grève fortement controversée de l'Ordre des agents de train et de la Fraternité des serre-freins contre le *Grand Tronc* en 1910. Cette grève n'apporta que peu d'avantages aux employés et les gains du règlement de grève furent réduits presque à néant par la direction au cours des deux années suivantes. Néanmoins, l'existence des fraternités ne fut pas menacée comme cela avait été le cas lors de la grève au *Pacifique canadien* en 1892. La puissance qui avait été acquise au cours des décennies précédentes apporta aux employés itinérants des chemins de fer la garantie que les fraternités étaient désormais en mesure d'obtenir leur reconnaissance des chemins de fer canadiens.

Pour conclure, l'on peut dire que, en 1914, les fraternités de cheminots étaient devenues des organisations stables qui avaient atteint la maturation, des associations assez fortes pour s'assurer le respect sinon l'admiration empressée des dirigeants de chemins de fer. Elles étaient bien placées pour affronter avec succès les difficultés de la première guerre mondiale et même en tirer les avantages que celle-ci pouvait leur offrir.