

# THE WINNIPEG LABOUR COUNCIL

1894-1994:  
A CENTURY OF  
LABOUR  
EDUCATION,  
ORGANIZATION  
AND AGITATION



MANITOBA LABOUR HISTORY SERIES

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## Manitoba Labour History Series

The working people of Manitoba are the inspiration for this volume. The Committee on Manitoba's Labour History, a group of trade unionists and labour historians has supervised the selection and publication of illustrated books and booklets since 1985. Each title portrays a different aspect of Manitoba's labour history. It is the Committee's hope that these publications will make all Manitobans more aware of the vital contributions made to the life of this province by the women and men who worked on the farms and in the mines, mills, factories, cities, towns, homes and offices of Manitoba.

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# PREFACE

1994 marked the 75th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. In Manitoba the labour movement commemorated that event with a wide variety of events. However, it also marked the 100th anniversary of the Winnipeg Labour Council. The Council organized the strike, and nearly self-destructed after the strike was broken. This booklet was commissioned to remind Winnipeggers that the labour movement is no flash in the pan in this province's history. For over a century unions have been struggling to improve working conditions, and through organizations like the Council, to provide workers with a forum to debate issue of importance to labour and with, as one person quoted in this book commented, "a mighty arm" to bring about political and social change.

Many people helped bring this book together. They include Henry Trachtenberg, Chris Kotecki and Gerry Berkowski at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, professors Gerry Friesen, Jim Naylor and Nolan Reilly, and Heather Grant and the other members of the Labour Council executive who read and commented on the manuscript. I owe a debt to the historians listed at the back of the booklet, but special attention should be drawn to the work of David Hall and to Zenon Gawron, who prepared the Labour Council's holdings in the Manitoba Archives. I would to thank the past and present members of the Labour Council who I interviewed for this book.

Doug Smith  
Winnipeg, 1994

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United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners: 28  
Western Canada Pictorial Index: 6 (top), 12, 17, 18, 22 (left), 24, 27  
Winnipeg Labour Council: 11, 15, 16, 20, 22 (bottom), 23, 30

**ISBN 0-969-5258-4-2**  
**Manitoba Labour Education Centre**  
**206-275 Broadway**  
**Winnipeg, Manitoba**  
**R3C 4M6**

*Cover: The Journeyman Painters' float in the 1900 Labour Day Parade.*

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*International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers float in the 1911 Labour Day Parade.*

# LABOUR DAYS

They stare out at us, confident and defiant: the workers of turn of the century Winnipeg. In 1911 these bridge and iron workers were proud craft unionists. They are dressed in derbies, ties, and identical shirts, asserting their right to membership in respectable community. The Labour Day Parade these men were about to march in was organized by the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council. In 1896, on the occasion of the third Labour Day Parade, the Council gave this explanation of the importance of the parade and the Council:

Our aim should be to have our unions appear at their best, on all occasions, to the outside world. The more powerful we appear on all public demonstrations, the great chance we have for the diplomatic service of our Trades Council.

In 1894 the Federal government had decreed the first Monday in September to be Labour Day. This was the only recommendation of a Royal Commission on Canadian labour relations that the government bothered to implement, but it was embraced by the labour movement. That year a “monster industrial parade and picnic” was held at exhibition park. The parades were a focal point on the trade union social calendar. In 1895 a Moulder’s union resolution called on them to ride in hacks and have their pictures taken. Ten years later Moulders were urged to “turn out in full strength on Labour Day, wearing black overalls, peaked cap, white shirt, brown belt and black tie. Cost is estimated at \$2.00.” In 1902 civic labourers were given the day off without any loss in pay. Those who continued to work on labour’s day were made to feel as “small as a man in his neighbour’s cabbage patch before daylight.”

The parades ended with picnics, baseball tournaments, tug-of-wars and band concerts. A variety of awards were presented to the best floats. These parades, which attracted thousands of people every year, were a tribute to the place the Labour Council had claimed for itself in Winnipeg and of the sense of working class community the Council symbolized.

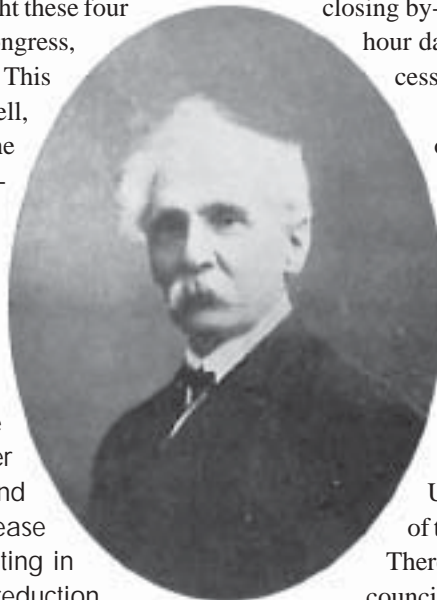
In July 1894, *The Voice*, the newspaper of the Winnipeg Labour Council ran a story lamenting the “Lethargy of Unions.” The article took the form of an advertisement:

Wanted: about 10 more delegates to take an active interest in the Affairs of the Trades and Labor Council. They will require to put in an appearance once in two weeks and to otherwise put themselves out for the good of their fellow men by performing committee work for which they will receive no remuneration other than the empty honour of being termed representative.

If the Labour Council had died for lack of interest, it would have been the third such Winnipeg council to meet an early demise. Unions had been in existence in Manitoba for nearly fifteen years when *The Voice* issued its plea for volunteers. Among the first unionists had been the building trades workers attracted to the prairie boom town in the early 1880s. They had been joined by the highly skilled printers and typographers, and the blacksmiths, boilermakers, and machinists who worked in the huge railway marshalling yards in the heart of the city. Most of these unions were based in the United States, and because they operated in Canada and the US were referred to as international unions.

It was not until the 1884 arrival of the Knights of Labor in Winnipeg that efforts were made to bring these union locals together into a single organization. The Knights were an American-based union which believed in organizing all workers, regardless of sex, skill or ethnicity. Until then all the unions in Manitoba sought to organize workers solely on the basis of their skill - and little effort was made to organize unskilled labourers. The Knights organized a Pioneer Assembly, which was open to all workers, along with three other locals which were devoted to specific crafts. In 1886 the Knights brought these four Manitoba assemblies together in a district congress, to which they invited other local unions. This labour council's first president was a T. Howell, while James Hooper, who later became the King's Printer, was secretary-treasurer. According to W.H. Reeve, who was the president of the Knights' carpenters assembly, and later a president of the Winnipeg Labour Council:

One of the first steps of the congress was to appoint a committee to promote organization of the several trades under their respective International bodies. And from that movement came a great increase of trade union activity in the city resulting in many concessions to the trades and a reduction in hours of labour.



W.H. Reeve

The council established a cooperative store, a labour newspaper, *The Industrial News*, and a building society. In 1886 Winnipeg labour collaborated with the national temperance movement to produce a joint platform for the provincial election. The Council was calling for payment of wages legislation, compulsory arbitration, workers' compensation, a provincial labour bureau, universal manhood suffrage, control of the liquor trades and better urban representation in the Manitoba legislature. Reeve noted:

Some of these planks were subsequently adopted by the Liberals, who however, did not give the labour interests credit for pioneering the reforms, but on the contrary assume all the honor of originating the legislation.

Politics and a national recession spelled the end for the Knights of Labor and the Labour Council. Union membership fell, and union leaders fell out with each other as the Knights were accused of using union support to further their political ambitions.

In the next years local unions were only able to get together to raise enough money to wipe out the General Hospital's debt as a tribute to Queen Victoria on the anniversary of her coronation. The initiative to re-establish the council fell to the local building trades, which had organized their own council in 1889. To advance a campaign for a shorter working day for shop clerks, the building trades council came together with the city's other unions in 1890 to create the Manitoba Trades Council. James Hooper was once again elected president and Reeve was the vice-president. On May 1, 1890, a “monster parade was held, followed by a mass meeting in Pioneer Hall” where speeches in favour of early store closing were made by the mayor. The campaign succeeded - the city adopted an early closing by-law and then granted civic workers the nine-hour day. The council did not survive its early successes and by 1893 it had disappeared.

In that year the Building Trades Council opened a reading room in the Clement Block. This room became a regular meeting place for unionists from both inside and outside the building trades. And so it was on March 3, 1894, that Winnipeg unionists got together to create the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council - the organization which continues to this day. W.J. Hodgins of the Bricklayers and Masons' union was the first president, H. Cowan of the Typographical Union was vice-president, and William White of the Carpenters Union was secretary-treasurer. There were at least ten unions involved in the council at the outset, ranging from the building trades, to butchers, bakers, and freight handlers. It was

affiliated to the national Trades and Labor Congress and by 1902 had at least 38 local affiliates.

The council met twice a month as did its six central committees. There was a legislative committee, a municipal committee, an education committee, an arbitration committee, an organizing committee, and a parliamentary committee. The legislative committee dealt with all legislative matters that might affect working people - particularly payment of wages, health and safety, and labour law (although there was little labour legislation at the time), while the parliamentary committee dealt with what came to be called political action. The Council described its mission in these terms:

It is a body of representative men banded together for mutual protection and educational purposes; a body at once in touch with every condition of the labour world, and a strong arm in case of a strike or trouble in the ranks.

In 1895 the Council helped create the Independent Labour Party of Winnipeg. The Council president that year was William Small, a railway carpenter and former Knight of Labor, who saw “the ballot box as the true remedy for the ills of labour.” Small was to become a leading member of the American Railway Union whose president was American socialist leader Eugene Debs. Small also served as the ILP’s first president. The party sought to create an economic system “based upon a just and equitable division of profit and loss between employer and employee.” It promoted what has come to be called a labourist political philosophy. The ILP and the WTLC platform included the end of overtime, child labour and piece work. It called for an eight hour day, work for the unemployed, equal pay for equal

work, and the nationalization of railways, telegraphs and telephones. In 1895 the ILP was successful in getting CPR employee Charles Hislop elected to city council. The ILP could not sustain its early success - for the rest of the century it won no more elections, and often let elections pass by without running candidates.

In 1900 the WTLC participated in the campaign that saw Winnipeg printer Arthur Puttee become the first labour representative elected to the House of Commons. Throughout the early twentieth century the leaders of WTLC participated in a variety of socialist, labour and reform political coalitions. They met with little success, but furthered their belief that class struggle would be won by “the ballot, not the strike.”

Politics also gave early rise to a staple of labour life, the denunciation of the turncoat. John Appleton had served three times as the WTLC president, but when he supported a Liberal candidate in 1899 he was expelled from the Labor Party. A printer by trade, he was hired by the *Free Press* to write a column on labour issues, under the by-line, John Labourson. In his column he described Puttee and his supporters as “assassins” and “revolutionists”. In return the socialists branded him a “political potwalloper” and a “disciple of Judas.”

One of the people who played a significant role in reviving the Winnipeg labour movement’s fortunes in the early twentieth century was Richard Rigg. He had started his working life at the age of 10 in a British cotton mill. After taking training as a Methodist preacher he came to Winnipeg in 1903 to work as a book binder. He became his union’s WTLC representative in 1909, and served on the executive from 1910 to 1916, including one year as president. Rigg was also the Council’s first paid organizer. He helped establish the Manitoba Labor Party which

## The People's Voice

The official organ of the Council was *The Voice*, or as it was known in its early years, *The People's Voice*. The first issue was printed on June 16, 1894. By the end of the month the paper had a circulation of 1,500. Published by International Typographical Union member C.C. Steuart with the Labor Council’s endorsement, the paper promised to “promote the union principle amongst all workers, of both sexes, and of all shades of opinion.” It could

claim to be one of the best labour papers of the period. It published a wide range of material: serialized installments of romance novels could be found cheek by jowl with reports from the Socialist Party of Canada, the Single Tax League, and testimonial advertisements for a wide variety



of quack medicines. In 1902 the paper published *The Great Tribulation*, a locally-written pot-boiler that mixed predictions of a coming Winnipeg general strike with hypnotism, love on the wrong side of the tracks, and a finale in which the heroine returns from the grave to marry her strike leader lover. While *The Voice* was supportive of the aims of labour, it was not above criticizing the Labour Council either for lack of activity or for what its editors perceived as recklessness.

operated in alliance with the newly created Social Democratic Party and he was elected to city council in 1913 and to the provincial legislature in 1915.

The first two decades of the labour council's life were spent supporting the labour movement's struggle to establish a foothold in Winnipeg life. No laws compelled employers to negotiate with unions and no laws prevented them from firing someone for union activity. The leaders of the city's business community were not prepared to accept unions without a fight. As a result the WTLC was constantly called upon for help in organizing, in supporting strikes and helping unions which were being taken to court by their employers.

Some of the biggest conflicts involved the Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern Railways. The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees took on these two corporations in an effort to win bargaining rights for unskilled workers. The 1902 strike against the CNR ended unsuccessfully when the skilled running trades workers agreed to go back to work before an agreement was reached for the unskilled workers. The WTLC branded this "the blackest day in the history of trade unionism in Manitoba." When the UBRE struck the CPR the Labour Council was able to bring out over 800 workers at a time for mass pickets. It called on the provincial government to force the railway to settle, but the premier could not even get the CPR to talk to the workers.

The Labor Council also reached out to other organizations. The Women's Labor League, for example, was affiliated with the Council, as was the Winnipeg Ministerial Association which was represented by J.S. Woodsworth. The ministers attempted, unsuccessfully, to end a lock out of workers at the Great West Saddlery Company. The company let the men go when they refused to swear that they would not join a union.

## Workers' Compensation

The legislative work of the WTLC can be observed in its efforts to obtain worker's compensation laws in Manitoba. At the turn of the century injured workers had to take their employer to court and sue for damages. Employers had a number of defenses available to them, the most effective being the argument that the worker had agreed to accept the risk when he or she took the job.

Starting in 1907 the WTLC mounted an intense campaign for a system which would provide assured benefits to those workers who were injured on the job. The Council proposed a bill which would pay no more than fifty per cent of a disabled worker's income and a lump sum payment of no more than three year's income in the case of death. In early 1908 the WTLC proposal was introduced to the legislature as a private member's bill. The CPR, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, the Manufacturers Association and the Builder's Exchange all opposed it. Thomas Deacon, the general manager of the Mani-



*Richard Rigg*

toba Iron Works, told the law amendments committee it "was promoted by the little bunch of agitators which was responsible for all the strikes in Winnipeg for some years past. Legislation of this kind would wipe out every industrial plant in Winnipeg." John McKenzie of the Vulcan Iron Works said the bill "would give rise to bogus claims and the extending of the time for recovery from accidents." WTLC lawyer E.J. Murray said there were "so many defences that could be set up in actions of the kind in question that only 12% of the claimants benefited from the former legislation." The government let the proposal die on the order paper.

The following year a bill drafted by the Labour Council was once again presented to the legislature. The Council made its case in these terms.

Under the present act now in force, a workman injured in the services of his employer, must prove the employer guilty of negligence before he can receive any compensation for injury received, and in the unequal struggle between capital and labor which is being carried on at the present time the case if decided against the employer in the lower court is carried higher and higher until the workman, unable to bear the enormous expense will lose what should be his by right.

The Council's bill provided only modest benefits, and none at all if the accident arose from willful misconduct on the employee's part. Despite this Premier Rodmond Roblin asked



*Arthur Puttee*

that the bill be withdrawn. When this was done he appointed Justice Corbet Locke to head a Royal Commission into Workmen's Compensation. His two fellow commissioners were Puttee and Deacon. The Commission held hearings in the fall of 1909.

The Locke report recommended a Workmen's Compensation Act which would apply to all employers with five or more workmen. Compensation would be paid by the employer and the workman would be obliged to give up his or her right to sue under common law when applying for compensation. The Commission was to pave the way for the introduction of the no-fault principle in workers' compensation. No longer would workers have to go to court to prove that their employer was negligent or that a co-worker was not responsible for the accident.

These principles were incorporated into the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1910. Following its passage Puttee wrote in that it was a tribute to the "persistence and good judgement of the Trades Council and the men and committees who have handled the campaign on its behalf." He tempered his praise for his own handiwork by noting that "it is exceedingly to be regretted that the legislature insisted on exempting farm laborers and domestics from the operation of the act. There would seem



to be no better reason for this exemption than that these classes do not amount to a voting force in the province.” In concluding, Puttee noted that if insurance companies could not offer lower rates than were offered in other provinces “it will soon be time to look for government insurance.”

By 1914 the Winnipeg Labour Council had finally established itself on a firm footing. There were over 62 locals, representing over 8,000 workers, affiliated to the council. It had elected politicians to city council, the provincial legislature and parliament. Winnipeg was one of the largest and most dynamic centres of trade union activity in the country. The coming war would thrust the Winnipeg Labour Council into international prominence as it organized the country’s largest general strike.

## War and the General Strike

The outbreak of the First World War presented Canadian society with a series of ongoing crises. The war brought an end to an economic recession - and in so doing provided the labour movement with a battery boost. By 1918 the 66 locals in the WTLC represented 10,500 workers - a jump of 25 per cent in four years. The revitalized labour movement fought with the federal government over how the war was to be paid for and who was to fight it. When the government tried to finance the war with interest paying bonds, which were often bought by the same industrialists who were selling the government shoddy goods, unionists protested. Nor was labour happy with the idea of conscription. The increasingly radical members of the labour movement felt that the war was being fought between a two sets of imperialist powers for imperialist goals.

Winnipeg railway machinist R.B. Russell, whose union career was just taking off, called the war an “insane commercial and capitalist rivalry.” The WTLC was a driving force in opposing conscription; Council president Harry Veitch refused to sign his registration card. *The Voice* predicted that conscription was a prelude to a new assault on the right to negotiate. In a WTLC sponsored referendum on the question, workers voted 1787 to 736 against forcing workers into the army.

Unions continued to face opposition from employers and government. Court injunctions were used to break wartime

strikes in the packing houses, the metal shops and the retail trade. The war brought to the fore a new generation of labour leaders like Russell, who wanted to move beyond narrow craft unionism. Inspired by the teachings of Marx, they advocated a more inclusive form of unionism that would include skilled and unskilled workers. Russell also recognized that new advances in technology threatened to make craft unionism obsolete anyhow. The times, he felt, demanded new and unified responses from labour.

In this highly charged atmosphere Labour Council meetings were often standing room only events. Not only were the delegates divided on questions such as the war, conscription, and the proper form of union organization, they also fought out their political battles on the council floor. The Winnipeg left had given rise to a number of different political parties. On the far left was the Socialist Party of Canada. Russell was the SPC’s champion at the labour council. The more moderate Social Democratic Party was represented by men such as carpentry teacher Fred Tipping, while former bricklayer and building trades business agent James Winning spoke for the even more moderate labourists. The events of 1918 saw the radicals come to the fore in the Council and set the stage for the General Strike of 1919.

In the spring of 1918 Winnipeg’s municipal workers went on strike, demanding a pay increase rather than the war bonus they had been offered. The conflict spread to the labour council when City Council rejected a proposed settlement and stripped civic workers of the right to strike. WTLC secretary Ernie Robinson vowed “Unionism will stand or fall by the civic employees. Sympathetic strikes will be called if necessary.” When the Council met to discuss the issue, there was little division - moderates like Council president Fred Tipping and radicals like machinist Dick Johns were in agreement that the time had come for a sympathetic strike. Over 17,000 workers from over 40 different union locals walked off the job in support of the striking civic workers. *The Voice* called the strike “a magnificent fight for the principle of the right to strike,” and it was not only a magnificent fight, it was a successful one. Following the intervention of the federal labour minister the strike was ended after three weeks with all of the strikers taken back on their terms.

The strike was also the last hurrah for Arthur Puttee, who as a city controller had opposed it. *The Voice* ceased publication and the Labour Council put out its own publication - the *Western Labor News*, edited by a former Methodist minister, William Ivens, who had been fired by his church for opposing the war.

No sooner had the municipal strike ended than the Metal Trades Council, a federation of craft unions in the city’s machine shops and bridge works, threatened strike action. In a move that was to split the WTLC, the federal government appointed Tipping to a royal commission that was to examine the dispute and attempt to head off the strike. They failed in this



Winnipeg sheetmetal workers in 1915.

task and the metalworkers struck. Spurred by the victory in the civic workers' strike the WTLC voted to hold a referendum on another sympathetic strike. Before that could happen the commission report, signed by Tipping, came out with a series of recommendations, most of which took the employers' side in the dispute. Demoralized, the metal workers began to return to work. Russell accused Tipping of betraying the strikers, and in response Tipping resigned as WTLC president.

The WTLC delegates were not prepared to embrace Russell. When the Council elections were held in December 1918 Russell was defeated in his bid for the presidency, while his fellow SPCer Dick Johns lost the election for secretary. But the events of 1918 had shown that the radical and militant politics that these men advocated appeared to offer a greater chance of success than pure and simple craft unionism. As a result the WTLC was on the verge of its greatest struggle and its greatest smash up.

## 1919

In the spring of 1919 radical trade unionists from across Western Canada arrived in Calgary for a convention that would launch a challenge to the established Canadian labour movement. The delegates to the Western Labour Conference were dissatisfied with the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada's support for conscription and its failure to protest a series of harsh government measures which had shut down a number of radical and foreign language newspapers. They also believed the days of craft unionism were coming to an end. The conference also represented a split between Eastern and Western Canadian labour: as one article in the *Western Labor News* put it, "The more effete East is burdensome to the West and the slavish subservience of parliament to the interests of vested wealth has filled the cup of the West to overflowing."

The policy committee chaired by Dick Johns recommended

that the unionists lead a secession from the TLC to create the One Big Union. R.B. Russell was elected to the central committee of the organization, which was to make a general strike to win the six-hour day a central point of its first organizing campaign. The delegates left Calgary having committed themselves to holding provincial referendums on whether workers wanted to join the OBU.

Russell and Johns arrived back in Winnipeg flushed with success. Before they could set about creating the OBU, they were caught up in more dramatic events. The Metal Trades Council was once more pressing for union recognition, and this time Russell was determined there would be no replay of the previous year's fiasco. At the same time the building trades unions were approaching a stalemate in their negotiations. Not only were they not making progress towards a settlement, they found that the builders were no longer willing to negotiate with their Building Trades Council. The very existence of these unions was under attack - and they looked to the WTLC for support. The Council in turn reached for the weapon which had worked so well the year before - the General Strike. On May 9, 1919, a referendum on whether to hold a General Strike received an overwhelming endorsement - by a margin of 20-to-1, Winnipeg unionists from over 50 union locals voted to support the strike call.

On May 15, 1919, the great confrontation began. The tale of how the employers and the government combined to crush the strike has been told elsewhere. For this story it is important to remember that the strike was a WTLC-organized and sponsored event. The initial strike committee was comprised of WTLC president Winning, former WTLC president Veitch, WTLC secretary Robinson, city councillor John Queen and Russell. These men played the central role in the running of the strike. Most of the leaders were not, and did not become, OBU supporters. Of the five, only Russell was a member of the



*The Winnipeg General Strike Committee.*

radical SPC. Despite the fact that most of the strike leaders were political moderates, they were acting in opposition to the dictates of the Trades and Labor Congress and its members, by even holding a general strike. TLC president Tom Moore attacked the strike, and accused the WTLC of usurping the power of the international unions.

When the government moved to break the strike, it arrested the more radical union leaders such as Russell and Queen, leaving Winning and Robinson free. The WTLC called on the Congress to organize a national general strike to protest the arrests. But when members of the strike committee met with Congress president Moore they were told that the Council did not recognize the strike committee and would provide no support until the WTLC repudiated the OBU. The strike reached its tragic climax when the Mounted Police fired on strikers who were protesting the arrest of their leaders, leaving two men dead. The great rebellion was over - the civil war was about to begin.

## The Twenties

If the Winnipeg General Strike was a demonstration of the tremendous unity that Winnipeg workers were capable of expressing, the decade that followed was characterized by division and dissent. It was the period of the Manitoba labour movement's civil war, as supporters of the One Big Union found themselves fighting against the government, employers, the Trades and Labor Congress unions, and even the newly created Communist Party. The opening shots in this struggle were fired in a battle for the control of the WTLC. Winnipeg was to go from having a single united labour council to one with a Trades and Labour Congress Council and a One Big Union Council; and before these splits were healed at least two more councils were crop up.

The General Strike may have been crushed, but Winnipeg unionists were, in the summer of 1919, still in a feisty mood. They were determined to create a new labour movement, one which would reflect the spirit of the General Strike. On July 15, 1919, at a special meeting of the Labour Council, the results of the Winnipeg referendum on the One Big Union were released. Winnipeg unionists had voted 8,841 to 705 in favour of joining the OBU. Despite this result Winning, Robinson and the rest of the WTLC executive recommended against affiliating with the OBU. R.A. Rigg, who had just been hired by the Trades and Labour Congress to stamp out the OBU in Winnipeg, argued that the Council should remain with the Congress. The majority of delegates chose to stick with the referendum results. The Council decided to return its charter to the

TLC and reorganize itself as the Winnipeg Central Labour Council of the OBU. R.B. Russell was the Council secretary. The first president was W.H. Logan, a CNR machinist who had chaired the General Strike Committee.

In Rigg, the OBU had a formidable opponent, and one who had the law on his side. He got a court order which allowed him to seize control of the WTLC's assets. He held a meeting of TLC supporters and reconstituted the WTLC. Ivens was fired as the editor of the *Western Labor News* for being too pro-OBU. As a result there were soon two labour papers in Winnipeg - the pro-TLC *Western Labour News* and the *OBU Bulletin*. Rigg was also not lacking in financial resources - the Brotherhood of Maintenance-of-Way Employees alone had contributed \$50,000 to a fund to fight the OBU. The government did its part when it sentenced Russell to two years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary for his role in the strike.

The international unions followed suit and managed to claim the assets of most of the unions seeking to join the OBU. Two TLC organizers, including the former socialist Bill Hoop, were hired and many unions sent special organizers into Winnipeg to fight the OBU. Despite this the WTLC was down to 5,000 members by the end of 1919.

The TLC unions may not have had members, but most of them did have contracts with employers. These employers saw the OBU as a bigger threat than the international unions. In these circumstances anxious employers and defensive TLC unions quickly struck agreements that included the closed shop. To keep their jobs, OBU supporters found they had to join the very unions from which they were trying to break away. To their grief many discovered that open support of the OBU could lead to their being blacklisted through their industry.

The rail shops were central to the future of the OBU. Most of the leading members of the OBU, including Russell, Johns, Logan and Clancy, came from the shops. At one OBU labour council meeting in 1920, 27 of 40 delegates were rail workers.



R.B. Russell

To stop the loss of members, the TLC rail unions negotiated a national agreement which was never submitted to the membership for a vote. This new contract denied workers the right to have grievances processed unless they belonged to the international unions.

The same story was played out in the garment industry and the construction industry. The closed shop was used as a weapon of inter-union warfare. The OBU might have been able to fight for these workers by taking strike action, but the union was broke, its leaders were on trial for criminal sedition, and its members were still recovering financially from the General Strike. The OBU's major success came from the street car employees. This union

had a long history of militant action dating back to the strikes of 1906. The one thousand street car workers were to remain the backbone of the OBU in Winnipeg for the next four decades.

Aside from these attacks from the right, the OBU was also blind-sided from the left. In 1921 a group of Canadian socialists met in Ontario to found the **Communist Party of Canada**. The CPC affiliated to the Communist International, which was organized, and dominated, by the Russian Communist Party. The Comintern, as it was called, opposed the OBU as a dual or ultra-left union which would split the working class. Many OBU supporters, like Russell, were initially attracted to the Communist Party. They were forced to choose between the OBU and the CPC; Russell chose to stick with his union, but others chose the new party and attacked the OBU. In an early example of the political intolerance that has plagued the labour movement, the OBU banned Communists from union office. Labour politics creates truly strange bedfellows: in its battle against the OBU, the conservative American Federation of Labour hired Communist Party activist Leslie Morris to organize on behalf of the WTLC in 1923.

In 1927 the OBU realized it could not go it alone and joined with the Canadian Brotherhood of Rail Employees to create the All-Canadian Congress of Labour. The ACCL would be a nationalist and fiercely anti-Communist labour organization and the OBU served as its Winnipeg labour central.

Even if the OBU had been able to survive the attack from the TLC, business, government, and the Communists, it is doubtful it could have withstood the economic depression that hit Manitoba in 1920. Unemployment hit thousands of workers from the ranks of all unions and did not ease for six years. By then the OBU was much reduced in influence. In 1920 it had 4,971 members, by 1923 it was down to 1,755. The WTLC was hit by the same decline - from 5,000 members in 1920, it slumped to 3,822 members and 25 locals in 1925. Two years earlier the Council had been forced to stop publishing the *Western Labour News*.

While the OBU had lost most of its members, a look at the labour movement's political record during the 1920s suggests that when given a chance unionists preferred the OBU to the TLC. In the year following the strike the OBU and the international unions were able to cooperate politically, and as a result S.J. Farmer was elected mayor of Winnipeg and a number of strike leaders, including Queen, Ivens and Armstrong were elected to the legislature. But this unity was short-lived. The WTLC supported the Dominion Labour Party and shortly after the strike nominated Bill Hoop as a DLP candidate. Hoop made attacks on the OBU a central part of his campaign. When DLP leaders tried to force Hoop out of the party, the WTLC responded by threatening to end its involvement with the party. In one of the more unusual developments in Canadian politics, the party's leaders left their own party to create the Independent Labour Party. The DLP continued to receive the support of the WTLC, but trade unionists preferred to vote for ILP candidates. In 1920 WTLC secretary J.L. McBride referred to the ILP as

Fred "Dixon and his flock of freaks." A labour party without labour votes, the DLP eventually disappeared. The freaks on the other hand continued to win elections.

The ILP was never directly affiliated with the OBU, and in fact was often criticized by Russell, but the WTLC could not bring itself to endorse the city's most successful labour party. In 1924 the WTLC leadership expressed their conservatism by joining the Board of Trade. By the late 1920s there was an open split on the WTLC executive. A minority wished to support the CCF, but they were frustrated in this by a coalition of Conservatives and Communists, who preferred to see the Council remain officially aloof from politics rather than endorse the ILP. At one point a resolution endorsing the ILP was approved by the WTLC by a one vote margin, but the support was quickly withdrawn.

In 1928 the president and secretary of the WTLC both travelled to Ottawa to express their support for the private ownership and development of hydro-electric power on the Winnipeg River. Since this was in complete opposition to the policy of the WTLC, they said they were acting on their own, and not as WTLC representatives. The International Association of Machinists withdrew from the council in protest, and the WTLC reaffirmed its commitment to public ownership. The following year saw a back and forth battle for control of the council. At one meeting the Council would vote to pull out of the Board of Trade and attack the appointment of Conservative trade unionists to the Workmen's Compensation Board, while at the following meeting these positions would all be reversed. As late as 1933 the WTLC had membership on the Manitoba Industrial Board. In that year left-wing delegates succeeded in having the Council withdraw from the Board, claiming the Board only sought to attract low-wage industries to Manitoba, and had the effect of lowering, rather than raising living conditions.

For its part the OBU regularly criticized the ILP for cosying up to the WTLC. In 1931 Ivens appeared before a OBU Labour Council meeting to ask for \$5 a month to help sponsor a series of ILP broadcasts. He said he had wanted to invite OBU members to sit on the committee which wrote the scripts, but had been overruled by party leader S.J. Farmer who felt "things would not work very smoothly on this committee if it contained representatives from the AF of L and the OBU." One delegate attacked Ivens because the ILP never gave the OBU credit for supporting labour issues in briefs to the legislature. Another OBU member said

the OBU was out to keep its skirts clean and to carry the real message to the workers of this country - the abolition of the wage system - something which the Independent Labor Party did not agree with.

Ivens said he thought the OBU was just as much a reform organization as the ILP and pointed out that many of the men

who had been criticizing the party were in fact ILP members. The Council decided on a one time donation: Ivens thanked them and said it was the hardest work he had ever done for five dollars.

The diversity of views in the labour movement can be caught in the careers of two men who lead the council during this period. Fred Tipping, like Rigg and William Ivens, had received training as a Protestant minister. He was also a skilled carpenter, and taught at Lord Roberts school for 40 years. Tipping supported the Winnipeg General Strike and was reportedly the only teacher to participate in it. He travelled to Ottawa to put the strikers' case to Justice Minister Arthur Meighen. Following the strike he maintained his membership in the Carpenters Union and served on the WTLC executive until 1952.

J.L. McBride followed a far different trajectory. While he was a member of the General Strike Committee he was no socialist. At the time of the General Strike he had been the Winnipeg business agent for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers for nine years, a position he held until 1940. While he served on the executive board of the IBEW he found himself falling increasingly out of step with the Winnipeg labour movement. A strong opponent of both the OBU and the Communist Party, he had joined the Conservative Party by 1925 when he ran, unsuccessfully, against an ILP candidate for a seat on city council. In 1926 he and WTLC president W. Owens supported right-wing mayoral candidate Ralph Webb - a man who had said the only place for Reds was the Red River. One large union disaffiliated from the WTLC in protest while McBride and Owen were forced to resign their positions on the Council executive.

## The Thirties

A decade of political battling had left the OBU little more than a shell of an organization, while the WTLC, in battling the ILP and the OBU and looking out solely for skilled workers, had become increasingly narrow and parochial. The Winnipeg labour movement was in no way prepared for the Great Depression. Neither of the city's labour councils was able to fight even a rearguard action as a decade of unemployment and misery settled in on the province. The WTLC unions experienced wages cut and reductions in hours, while the building trades collapsed. It was the belief of the skilled crafts that no successful organizing could be carried out during an economic downturn and as a result very little organizing was attempted. Only the Communist-led Workers Unity League (which was in many ways exactly the sort of left-wing union that the Communists had accused the OBU of being) made any headway. The WUL had a small Winnipeg labour council of its own, which organized the majority of Winnipeg strikes during the first years of the Depression. It also played an important role in organizing the unemployed. In 1935, essentially in response to the rise of fascism in Europe the Soviet Union, instructed the League to wind up its operations and, wherever possible, merge with the

TLC unions.

In Winnipeg, the Labour Council enjoyed particularly conservative leadership at the start of the Depression. J.T. Williams of the Bricklayers and Masons Union was president, F. Macintosh secretary, and J.L. McBride was an executive member. Macintosh argued that immigration was one of the principal causes of unemployment - a position that would be harder to support once the government closed the gates to immigrants and the Depression continued unabated for another ten years. In the mid-30s Williams was still trying to get the Council to throw its support behind Mayor Webb. The right's lack of support for publicly-owned utilities led to a coup d'état in the fall of 1931: the entire executive was forced to resign. Former General Strike committee member and boiler maker McCutchan became secretary and a young typographer named Grant McLeod was



*Grant McLeod*

elected president. While they were more politically active than the old guard, they were unable to move the WTLC very far from its bread-and-butter approach to unionism. However, the Council did attempt to bring pressure on the government to speed up the start of public works, to raise the pay for the single unemployed who had been sent to work camps, and to improve the medical services in these camps.

When the Communist Party organized the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935, the WTLC's support was half-hearted. The Trek was the culmination of a strike by the men who had been sent to remote relief camps. The men were protesting the low pay and military discipline in the camps. Even though many of the Trek leaders were Communists, the march was supported by the more moderate Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. The WTLC said it supported the strikers' demands, but it refused to go beyond providing moral support. The Council declined to take part in a conference on the relief strike that was being organized by the CCF since in all likelihood there would be a number of Communist speakers present. One delegate said that "only by remaining free of Communist or any political influence had the Trades and Labor Council been able to gain the benefits of independence."

The struggle to preserve the Council's political independence figured in many council debates during this period. The craft unionist belief that unions should steer clear of political entanglements was strong and the council was particularly vigilant about developing close attachments. This issue resurfaced persistently after 1933, when a variety of farm, reform and socialist groups, including the Independent Labor Party, had merged to create the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the country's first nation-wide social democratic party. In 1935 the Council came close to refusing to meet with CCF-ILP members of the legislative assembly who wanted to discuss

what sort of labour laws they should be proposing. They only decided to do so after a lengthy discussion. Machinist Harry Kempster said the meeting would accomplish little since the CCF-ILP was not in power. Another opponent of this meeting was N. Teminson, a member of the Community Party. Long time council member and former president Thomas Ching carried the day when he said “the majority of labor unions voted for the ILP and should discuss any desired legislation with the Labor members before presenting it to the government.”

Teminson and Kempster were on opposite sides of the fence when a proposal came forward to send a delegate to a meeting of the Winnipeg Conference Against War and Fascism. According to Kempster it looked to him like “a Communist scheme to collect money.” While the Council had sent a delegate to previous Conference meetings, he said it was simply “coupling up with the Communist party which aims to destroy the international trade union movement.”

The Council did pass a number of resolutions lamenting the rise of Fascism in Europe and warning about the growing right-wing movement at home. Anti-communism, however, consumed much more of its energies. In 1934 AFL president William Green wrote to the WTLC calling for the expulsion of every known and proven Communist. Unions should “work out a careful plan to ferret out all Communistic members and all Communistic cells and to expel all such members of groups from the Association when it has been clearly established that such members are engaged in carrying on Communistic propaganda.”



*Relief camp strikers marching in Manitoba during On-to-Ottawa Trek.*

Green and Manitoba premier John Bracken were on the same wavelength. Members of the Winnipeg Labour Council were kept under surveillance by the Manitoba Provincial Police. A report made to Bracken in the early 1930s identified eight men as Communist delegates to the Labour Council. The two leaders were J. Pastuck and N. Teminson, both of whom worked for the CNR in Fort Rouge. Pastuck was a member of the Ukrainian Labor Temple and the Friends of the Soviet Union. Teminson had been active in the failed Russian Revolution of 1905. According to the police, “he has a strong influence in the Trades Council’s deliberations regarding the conduct of the City Council.” Teminson had been a driving force in opposing the provincial government’s two percent wage tax, but he dropped out of the movement claiming [rather perceptively it appears] “that he had information that Mr. Bracken had a member of the RCMP keeping track of him.”

It is apparent from the police reports that some of the WTLC delegates were making regular reports on Council meetings (where attendance was between 30 and 60 people) to the police. Despite the anti-Communism, Teminson was allowed to function as a regular WTLC delegate and often served on Council committees. For example he and ILPer Bob McCutchan sat on the legislative committee together. And in 1934 he prepared a report for the WTLC on sweatshops in Winnipeg. He said the conditions, particularly in the needle trades were “deplorable,” with some workers making as little as \$5.00 a week. Teminson was also more than willing to refight Communist battles with the OBU. When Dick Johns, who was then a shops teacher at St.

John’s High School, appeared before the council to speak on “The crisis in education,” Teminson challenged his political bona fides. He said “the psychology of the teachers was entirely different from that of those in the labor movement and that the teachers were placing more emphasis on patriotism, chauvinism, loyalty than on the need for a new social order.”

The leading social democrat on the council during this period was McCutchan. Like Russell he was a skilled railway craftsman and in 1917 he was the Canadian vice-president of the Boilermakers Union. McCutchan had been born in Nebraska, and went to work at the age of 11 when

he had been orphaned. He claimed to have worked for 28 railways - and during his years on the tramp he joined the Industrial Workers of the World. He came to Winnipeg in 1911 and joined the Socialist Party of Canada, but was later expelled. While he remained a socialist, he did not support the OBU, and played an important part in breaking the OBU in the rail shops.

He left the BMU in 1930 and supported himself through the Depression by selling insurance. During this period he remained active in the labour council and did considerable volunteer union organizing. In 1938, after working briefly for the Garment Workers Union and the Upholsterers Union, he went to work for the Retail Clerks. He stayed there until his death in 1959. An intensely combative man, he and Grant McLeod continued to clash with those who wanted to shun politics.

McCutchan was also more open to innovative approaches to organizing. By the mid-thirties many in the North American labour movement were prepared to abandon craft unionism in favour of organizing all the skilled and unskilled workers in an individual plant. They were opposed by the leadership of the AFL. The tension reached a climax in 1935 when United Mineworkers of America president John L. Lewis slugged Carpenters president Bill Hutcherson and led a walkout from the AFL convention. Lewis soon found himself heading up the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which by 1937 was organizing in Canada as well as the United States.

The conflicts between craft and industrial unionism created tensions for the WTLC. By the late 1930s Russell was able to take some pleasure in the dissension that was plaguing the WTLC. At a 1938 WTLC meeting Carpenters Union leader J.B. Graham nominated a lawyer to a labour council appointment. When Grant McLeod ruled him out of order and threatened to expel him, Graham said he would be happy to take his union with him. At that point the Council's vice-president left the meeting in disgust. Nor did it end there. McCutchan announced the council had recently written to the CIO for advice on an organizing drive; an announcement which led an Machinist representative to say "My organization would immediately discontinue affiliation with anybody in communication with the CIO unions." In passing comment in the *OBU Bulletin* Russell noted:

From the foregoing our readers will see that the Winnipeg Trades Council AF of L is not only about to be smashed into smithereens, but that it has become senile in its acts by engaging itself in such childish blathering.

The Council did not collapse, but in 1940 Graham did temporarily pull the Carpenters out of the WTLC, claiming it was "dominated and influenced by the Communist Party."

While Russell may have gained some consolation from the conflicts plaguing the WTLC, the OBU barely limped through

the Depression. Transit workers were the union's mainstay while it maintained limited membership among bakery, restaurant and hotel workers. Despite the fact that it did not negotiate on their behalf many rail workers maintained their support for the OBU. The union was expelled from the ACCL in 1936 and soon joined the even smaller Canadian Federation of Labour. But after a short period the OBU's Winnipeg Labour Council was considering withdrawal from the CFL because it was not a "working-class organization" but a "company union controlled by big business." After three years in the CFL the OBU once more went its own way.

The OBU Council was not without its own political conflicts as Russell tried to steer the union on a course that might be described as a type of independent leftism which grew from his being at the same time a Marxist and a bitter critic of the Communist Party. At one meeting in the mid-thirties a delegate accused Russell of having made public statements which contributed to John Queen's defeat in a recent mayoral election. The exasperated delegate asked, "Does Russell believe in Communism? Does he believe in the CCF? Or what does he believe in?" Russell explained he had been "a member of the Marxian Socialist Party until its dissolution and that this Socialist Party of Canada was the only Marxian socialist party that had ever existed in Canada." And as much as anything else he believed in the legacy of the General Strike. For this reason he had been forced to publicly criticize an AFL fur workers union leader (who was also a Communist) for predicting that his union was going to call a general strike. Russell said he "refused to allow blatherers of this kind to exploit the glorious sentiment that had existed in the labour movement of Western Canada during the days of the 1919 strike."

While the 1930s were a low point in the WTLC's history, it is important not to pass over a number of the lobbying campaigns and conflicts that it engaged in. It provided financial support to a number of local strikes of men on relief. And it was understandably quick to seize on instance where skilled workers were "pressed into service" without pay on public work projects. The Council achieved a minor victory when, against the opposition of city retailers, Winnipeg Hydro opened up a retail and repair outlet on Portage Avenue. McCutchan called the opposition to the store "the continuation of 35 years' fight against public ownership." Teminson said it was only the beginning and the city should go into the coal and milk business.

But these were small victories. It would take another war, and the arrival of the CIO in Canada to bring Winnipeg labour to the point where it had been twenty years earlier.

## And then there were three: The Forties

When the OBU left the All Canadian Congress of Labour the ACCL established its own Winnipeg Council. It was a small operation with most of its members coming from the Canadian Brotherhood of Rail Employees. In addition to these workers the Council represented delivery truck drivers working for Eaton's and Hudson's Bay stores. The arrival of the CIO in Canada was to change all that. CIO unions signed their first contracts in 1937 and by 1940 they represented a big enough presence on the Canadian labour scene to warrant the establishment of the Canadian Congress of Labour. This body was brought into being by federating the new industrial unions such as the Steelworkers, the Packinghouse Workers, the Electrical Workers and the Autoworkers with the ACCL.

As a result the ACCL's Winnipeg Labour Council was transformed into the CCL's labour council. Early presidents included A.B. Thickson of the CBRE and Ed Bush. Despite its early promise the CCL was not a runaway success in Manitoba. The Congress had a full time Winnipeg organizer in 1941, but at the end of the year local CBRE leader Harry Chappell acknowledged that, despite Gil Borgford's best efforts, things had "not been all we would have desired." A year later things had not improved greatly. According to Council secretary-treasurer John McNabb:

ever since its inception it has been little more than an encumbrance or an excuse for a council, but in doing so it does not ignore the fact that for a number of years a number of over-worked members of the CBRE have sacrificed their time and energy in order to keep a semblance of a council alive in the hope and expectation that a day would arrive wherein their efforts would be justified.

He thought that day was fast approaching, but admitted that since there often was not enough business to justify a meeting the executive had "resorted to the expedient of introducing communications which would ordinarily be ditched."

It is usually thought that the

CCL was more politically active than the TLC was, and certainly in 1943 the CCL went so far as to endorse the CCF as the political arm of labour. But the CCL's national secretary Pat Conroy was never as excited about political action as the leaders of some Congress affiliates were. In the fall of 1942 Conroy wrote a worried letter to Harry Chappell, complaining that he had been informed by CCL vice-president Alex McAuslane that the Winnipeg Council

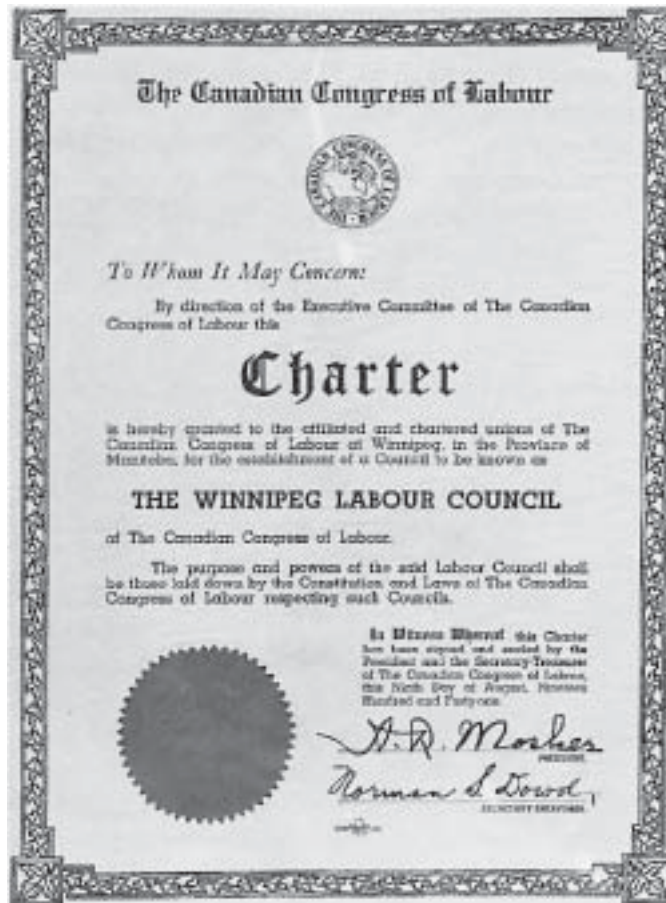
has concerned itself with everything in the line of political discussion, involving correspondence with the CCF, and the WEA [Workers Educational Association] to the Communist Party, and that everything except trade union matters has become a source of discussion in our Winnipeg Labour Council.

Conroy told Chappell that the WLC would be put on "a proper basis and that, so far as is possible, the Council concerns itself with trade union matters, such as organizational possibilities." The letter precipitated quite a storm when it was read out at a Council meeting. McNabb's response demonstrates that during this period the Trades and Labor Congress in Winnipeg was at least as politically active as the CCL and that the OBU had dropped some of its antipathy to the CCF. McNabb said that while the CCL Council did provide the CCF with a seat, but no

vote, at council meetings, the

Trades & Labour Council of the AFL does likewise, and God knows they are re-actionary enough on political questions. They have gone on record as favoring the electing of Stanley Knowles in the present by-election. The OBU did likewise, and we, have trailed behind by belatedly having our executive endorse a similar step.

The big breakthrough for the CCL was the arrival of packinghouse organizer Adam Borsk. The big three packing houses all had large-scale plants in Winnipeg and the energetic Borsk quickly succeeded in doing what a host of union organizers had failed to do, bring



*The charter of the Winnipeg labour council of the Canadian Congress of Labour.*



the packinghouse workers into a union and negotiate lasting agreements with the packers. At the same time the Steelworkers union began to make inroads into the city's bridge works and metal shops. By war's end each of these unions had about 5,000 members in Winnipeg.

Another important figure in the CCL Council was a young Danish immigrant named Chris Schubert. He worked as an



*Chris Schubert*

apartment block caretaker and in the course of this work he, like other janitors, collected scrap metal for the war effort. When a local brewery invited the city's janitors to a social evening to honour them for their salvage work, Schubert took the opportunity to lay the ground work for the Building Maintenance Union - which was the first of its kind in Canada. Schubert and two friends spent the next few months travelling across the city on bicycles signing up over 500 porters, elevator operators, cleaning women and janitors into their union. The union won these workers coverage under the compensation act, holidays with pay, and extra pay for extra jobs done on buildings. In 1946 the BMU merged with the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union, and Schubert became the union's Canadian vice-president. He was on the WLC executive from 1942 to 1956.

Because the CCL had grown up so quickly many of the WLC leaders had little union experience, and no history of relating to each other as Council members. As a result, Council battles were often bitter. In 1946 William White of the Canadian Bakery Workers Union resigned as WLC president because he felt his union was being subjected to "ruthless liquidation" - or in plainer terms a raid by another CCL union.

White was succeeded by Jimmy James of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. With one interruption, James was president of the WLC until 1956. He often found himself having to smooth out controversies that Borsk had created. As the Second World War drew to an end Borsk announced that the packinghouse workers were going to negotiate separate seniority clauses which would have the effect of making sure that married women were laid off before any other workers. This was designed to enhance the union's reputation among returning veterans. Since many married women had been drawn into the workforce during the war, other CCL unions found that Borsk's well-publicized commitment was slowing down their organizing drives.

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To counter this, the WLC issued a statement to the press pointing out that it was against CCL policy to discriminate on the basis of marital status. An incensed Borsk attempted to extract revenge. He packed the next meeting with sympathetic Packinghouse Workers and Steelworkers, and, correctly, accused the WLC leadership of trying to embarrass him. James said it was a shame that Borsk was attempting to introduce

clauses under which married women "would be the first to go." When it appeared that Borsk did not have the numbers to carry the day he staged a walk-out, and managed to rob the meeting of its quorum. The conflict ended in compromise - there was no apology, but a decision was made to hold weekly meetings of all CCL union representatives in order to head off such conflicts in the future.

During the early 1940s the WTLC, the Winnipeg Council of the Trades and Labor Congress, was led by Donovan Swailes. He was a trombonist who had played with symphony orchestras in Ireland and with Australian naval bands around the world before coming to Winnipeg and working his way up from movie theatre orchestras to the Winnipeg Symphony. He was active in both the musicians' union and the ILP, which he joined in 1925. During the 1940s he was the CCF's provincial secretary and became the first, and only, president of the short-lived Trades and Labour Congress Manitoba Federation of Labour in 1955.

Under this direction the WTLC responded to the CCL's presence by hiring a full-time organizer in 1941. Some of the council delegates were critical of the union leadership for not doing more organizing, to which Carmen's union representative said "if there had been less unwarranted criticism and smearing of leaders of the international labor unions of the AF of L ... there would have been better results accomplished."

## The new regime

Just as the First World War had revitalized the Canadian labour movement, the struggle of 1939 to 1945 created new opportunities for Canadian unionism. Workers joined unions in record numbers, and they struck in record numbers. And this time unions were able to place these gains on more secure footing. In 1944 the Liberal government of Mackenzie King issued PC 1003, an order-in-council obliging employers to negotiate with certified unions, and outlawing - without defining - unfair labour practices. As wartime legislation it was to apply in federal and provincial jurisdictions.

The province's labour councils began to agitate for a progressive provincial labour code before PC 1003 expired. In 1946 the CCL council, which by then represented over 12,000 Manitoba workers, presented a brief to the provincial government calling for a post-war program of expanded employment and social security. The war had taught Canadians what their society could accomplish when it confronted fascism abroad; WLC secretary Chris Schubert said workers were asking themselves "why we cannot have a similar overwhelming purpose in peacetime; the conquest of insecurity, poverty and fear."

The struggle for a labour code also brought all three councils together. In 1946 they presented a joint brief to the Manitoba government. In it they said the province's employers were like the Bourbon kings who were restored to power after the French Revolution - they had learned nothing and they had forgotten nothing. Unless the labour code proposed by the councils was accepted, the unions could see nothing in the future but conflict



*Andy Murphy*

with unscrupulous employers.

This united front fell apart in 1948 when the government finally hurried a labour code through the legislature. The CCL and OBU thought the bill was a step back from the provisions of PC 1003. They believed the bill failed to deal effectively with company unions, union security and unfair labour practices. Borgford called it a “vicious piece of legislation which will act as a detriment to

organized labour.” The WTLC commended the province on bringing the legislation forward and council president Andrew Murphy said the WTLC would not be participating in any joint labour review of the bill since “this would be contrary to the adopted policy of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada.

## Education

The Great Depression and the Second World War had robbed thousands of Canadians of educational opportunities. Many working-class Winnipeggers had been forced to drop out of school to help contribute to their families, and post-secondary education was something they dared not even dream about. As a part of their social vision the CCL and the One Big Union placed a considerable emphasis on adult education. They worked with the Ontario-based Workers Education Association to provide a variety of courses to their members. An important development came in 1948 when the CCL WLC held a two day educational conference to launch the Manitoba Union Institute. The weekend school was held at the University of Manitoba, attracting 200 people to what was billed as the “first of its kind in Western Canada.” Co-sponsored by the U of M, it offered courses in how to make unions more valuable to their membership, grievance procedure, labour’s aims and objectives (taught by future senator Eugene Forsey) and cooperatives and credit unions. Three years later Donovan Swailes was calling for the establishment of an industrial relations division at the University of Manitoba. By the mid-1950s the WTLC was supporting programs run by the Manitoba Labour Institute. Courses in public speaking, law, English, leadership, philosophy, economics and history were co-sponsored by the Department of Education and the U of M.

## Amalgamation

When WTLC president Robert Holmes prepared his annual report for 1950 he focused on the need for labour unity. He acknowledged that those with long years of experience in the union movement had heard a great deal about the need for unity



*Robert Holmes*

and “are prone to brush it off as a question that is worn and threadbare by talk, and not action.” The price of disunity was paid by workers whose unions battled with each other for jurisdiction, while the “Boss sits back and enjoys the sorry spectacle.” Holmes thought that unity could be achieved - and he gave two reasons for his hope. The first was the way the province’s unions had come together during the 1950 Winnipeg flood. A joint labour committee had been established, and numerous national and international unions made significant contributions - the largest being \$50,000 from the Carpenters. And the other ray of hope came from the way “a small number of our top leaders are making an honest effort to bring about a unity of understanding on those big political questions that are haunting the minds of the people, particularly the question of Communist aggression.”

The creation of the Canadian Labour Congress from the TLC, the CCL and the OBU in 1956 helped bring to an end a period of Winnipeg labour history that had opened in 1919 with the creation of the OBU. The divisions between the three councils were no longer particularly meaningful - the CCL was organized on the sorts of industrial lines that the OBU had once envisioned and the political and organizational differences between the CCL and the TLC were often more apparent than real. On all the councils there were, for example, delegates who followed CCF, Communist and far more moderate political lines. There was considerable support for amalgamation in Manitoba. In 1953 McCutchan, disgusted by the level of inter-union raiding, asked the delegates to a TLC convention “Have you got to wait for the boss to drive you together?” In Winnipeg strikes of a different sort led the way to unity - in 1955 the WLC invited the WTLC to join its bowling league. But as McCutchan noted, the merger in Canada could not take place until the AFL and CIO had ended their 20 year feud. When they merged in 1955 the path was cleared for the creation of the CLC.

In Winnipeg the merger was further complicated by the existence of the One Big Union. While Russell would have preferred to see the OBU retain its identity, unions in both CCL and the TLC would have none of it. A Unity Committee made up of representatives of the three Winnipeg labour councils was able to arrange a compromise. The OBU was allowed to maintain its independence for two years - after that its members were obliged to join existing unions. The largest OBU union, the street railway employees, opted to join the Amalgamated Transit Union. Russell was to become the new Winnipeg and District Labour Council’s executive secretary - a part-time job that he supplemented by becoming a member of the provincial labour board. Grant McLeod was the first president, Jimmy James was vice-president and Art Coulter of the CCL secretary-treasurer. James also became the president of the newly created Manitoba Federation of Labour. The new council claimed over 150 locals with a membership of 40,000 - 20,000 of whom came from the TLC, 15,000 from the CCL and 5,000 from the OBU.

The Council soon tried to flex its muscle in the market place.

The strategy was to threaten retail merchants who refused to sell only union-made goods with a boycott. James said, "If enough trade unionists in this city refuse to purchase other than union-made goods, the retailers will bow to their demands and request union-made goods from the manufacturers." It was hoped this would lessen employer opposition to organizing campaigns, since unionization could promise higher sales. The campaign was a public relations disaster, and the Council was soon fending off charges of trying to blackmail retailers into what they should stock. A *Free Press* reporter generated considerable embarrassment when he revealed that fewer than half of the WLC executive members were wearing union label jackets. The following year the Council tried, unsuccessfully, to put together a buyer's guide that would help consumers buy union.

## Battling the Reds

The late 1940s and early 1950s were a period of heightened anti-Communism in North America that has often been called the Cold War. During this period the labour movement fought a new civil war, as numerous unions were expelled from both the TLC and the CCL. The unions that were purged usually had Communist leadership - and the initiative for throwing them out usually came from the United States, which had passed laws which effectively prohibited Communists from holding union office.

The expulsions had a local impact. Muni Taub, a Communist with the Fur and Leather Workers Union, brought a motion to the CCL council in 1949 asking the Congress to reconsider the expulsion of the United Electrical Workers. One delegate said "I can't see why so many workers have been plastered with the Red label because some of the leaders were branded Communists." While the motion was defeated, the vote was close: 28-20.

Art Coulter recalls that much of the life of the CCL Council was taken up with battles between CCFers and Communists. He became WLC secretary-treasurer in an election that many CCFers feared might be won by Taub. When his union fell victim to the witch hunts, Taub was forced to leave Winnipeg. When National Union of Public Employees delegate Charlie Watson tried to get support for expelled Mine-Mill Union, he was told by Tom Rhys of the Retail Clerks that "If these unions Mr. Watson refers to get rid of their commie leaders, they can come back any time they want."

Unions were obliged to publicly demonstrate that they were taking a hard line against Communism, for fear that if they didn't governments would step in and do it for them. In 1953 the Canadian Manufacturers Association's Manitoba branch called on the province to de-certify Communist dominated unions. In opposing this move former WLC president W.T. White said "no organization has more realistically or effectively cleaned the Communists from its midst - and had a good reason to do so - than the American Federation of Labour and its counterpart in Canada, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada."

With the merger of the TLC and the CCL, anti-Communism was institutionalized in the labour movement. While the newly created Congress did not directly endorse the CCF, its constitution required Congress officers to take an oath denying membership in, or support of, any totalitarian organizations, and the Communist Party was seen as one such organization. Provincial labour federations and civic labour councils included similar requirements in their constitutions. In 1957 a WLC delegate from the Carpenters Union attempted to have this broadened even further by requiring all labour council delegates to take such an oath. The motion was defeated, mainly because delegates thought it would be impracticable to enforce. Its sponsor said "council should take every effort to keep Reds off important committees. Their only purpose is to cause dissension." Ironically, fifteen years later a delegate from the Carpenters Union, Romeo Platschick, tried, without success, to get the oath removed in its entirety. "It's true," he said, "that fascism is a totalitarian force that works for the capitalists. But the Communist movement in the world is the only political force fighting for the working class." His motion was also defeated.

## New parties and old fights

Anti-communism may have brought a measure of unity to the leadership of the labour movement, but partisan politics remained a source of considerable tension within the Labour Council. The CCL's decision to endorse the CCF as the political arm of labour in 1943 set it apart from the TLC, which sought to stay politically independent. If the two congresses were to merge, one of them would have to abandon its approach to politics. In 1955 the CCL leaders decided to compromise: the newly-created Canadian Labour Congress would have no direct link to the CCF. But individual unions were free to affiliate with the Federation, and more significantly, the Congress committed itself to working with other groups in society with the view of creating a new political party. In 1961 this resulted in the CLC's playing midwife at the birth of the New Democratic Party.

In Winnipeg the issues were even more complicated, for there were many activists in the local TLC unions who believed that unions should endorse a labour party - perhaps the most obvious



*Among these delegates to the 1966 NDP Convention is Donovan Swailles (standing).*

were TLC labour council president Grant McLeod and vice-president Donovan Swailes. Swailes, for example, was a CCF MLA, and the party's labour critic. Bob McCutchan was another staunch TLCer and supporter of labour political action. Over at the CCL Council, Brotherhood of Express Employees delegate Howard Bastable was a vocal opponent of any endorsement of the CCF. He said 75 percent of local unions would refuse to support the CCF because of its "wooly-headed fellow-travellers." He said these people were more dangerous to the party than the Communists. When a proposal came before the Council to have member unions pledge a dollar a member to a Political Action fund, even CCF supporter Jimmy James doubted that the members were ready to make such a commitment.

Following the merger, Art Coulter recalls that the CCF supporters decided to soft-pedal the political issue, transforming political action committees into political education committees. In 1956 when the Council endorsed six candidates in municipal elections, it endorsed them as "TRADE UNION CANDIDATES", and indeed all of them were trade unionists as well as members of the CCF. McLeod, Coulter and Len Stevens of the Steelworkers were all elected to municipal office as CCF candidates in the 1950s. They received Council endorsement, but the seal of approval had to be applied for at each election.

In 1957 Winnipeg labour leaders publicly debated the desirability of a blanket endorsement of the CCF. At one extreme, Allan Denton, a Machinist and CCF member, proposed that labour refrain from granting any sort of endorsement. McLeod, who said he quit the CCF in 1955, when it "ceased to be a socialist party," called this idea "idiotic". The Steelworkers and Packinghouse Workers were calling for a full-time CCF endorsement, while the Carpenters' Jimmie Graham predicted it would split the labour movement.

In 1958, former WTLC president Mike Capri wondered aloud if it would not be best for labour to support the Conservative party in the upcoming provincial election. He said the

governing Liberals had not paid attention to labour's needs and while the CCF had labour's "interests in mind, it is not powerful enough to be effective and likely will not win a provincial election." When the WLC endorsed a number of CCF candidates in 1959, another former TLC WLC president, Frank Armstrong, lamented that "this council now finds itself part of a political party - it has been the policy of the TLC in the past to let members endorse whatever party they wished." This was straying a bit from the truth since in the 1940s the WTLC had regularly endorsed the CCF. In marshalling support for the winning side, Coulter said the Council was not endorsing the CCF, but was only supporting it in the upcoming election.

One person who kept his own council throughout this debate was R.B. Russell. By the 1950s he was describing himself as an "armchair Marxist", who expressed his disdain for the moderate policies of the CCF only in private conversation. During one contentious debate on whether the Council should endorse the CCF or the soon-to-be created New Democratic Party, Russell noted that much controversy could be avoided if the matter was left to the discretion of local unions.

The correspondence from Machinist Chester King to Russell in the summer of 1960 provides some sense of what these old-line socialists thought of the emerging New Party. King was reporting to Russell on the decision of the Political Education Committee to support "Labour endorsed CCF candidates in the forthcoming municipal election." King would have preferred to run "CCF and Labour" candidates, since this would allow the Council to support candidates even if, like Russell, they were not members of the CCF. King said his position was defeated because other committee members felt "large numbers of the middle and professional class are becoming interested in the CCF while shying away from Organized Labor. As a personal comment, I would say that, by the way they have prostituted Jimmie Woodsworth's ideas and principles, they have pretty well seized control of the movement."



*1959 officers of the Winnipeg and District Labour Council. Left to right (seated): William Rayner, warden; Grant McLeod, president; Art Coulter, secretary-treasurer; (standing) Don Swailes, CLC vice-president; R. B. Russell, executive-secretary; George Stapleton, vice-president; William Gilbey, statistician; and Jimmy James, first vice-president.*

During the 1963 civic election Coulter called Winnipeg Mayor Stephen Juba's administration a "failure" and soon found himself in the middle of a controversy. The rail workers launched a campaign to have him removed as Council secretary for trying to "influence union men as to how they should vote." They failed initially, but in a subsequent election Transit Union delegate Harry Munro narrowly defeated Coulter. Shortly thereafter Coulter was hired by the Council to replace the ailing R.B. Russell as executive-secretary.

By the end of 1963 the Labour Council had cemented its commitment to the NDP. In its annual publication Council vice-president Sam Goodman, who was soon to become the Manitoba NDP's first provincial secretary, wrote in the Labour Annual that:

To meet a brother with the badge [of the NDP] in his lapel engenders the feeling of fellowship that no money can buy and no force can destroy. A great many brothers wear their union button and their party button side by side. For just as the union is the social product of men brought together in brotherhood, so the party button is

the symbol of brothers brought together in nationhood. All those who display this know the feeling of satisfaction and achievement unknown to any others.

## Council life in the 1950s

Arnold Sealey was a Bakery and Confectionery Workers International Union delegate to the Winnipeg Labour Council for two decades. A dough room worker at Canada Bread, he was elected his union's Winnipeg business agent in 1956, a position he held for 16 years. The Council was then attended by virtually all the city's full-time union staff. As such it provided people with a broad overview of what was going on in the labour movement. It was also the best place to go to start a boycott.

In those days, every time you went on strike people were replaced immediately by scabs. They would bring in foremen from all across the country. So you went to the Labour Council and made your plea. And you got good support. In those days it seems to be that as soon as people got the pamphlets, they would say "Well, I don't like the taste of this bread or this kind of a soft drink."

While the 1956 merger strengthened and expanded the Council, it also marked the beginning of its loss of influence. This was inevitable as Manitoba continued to industrialize and unionism spread to Northern resource communities and smaller towns and cities such as Selkirk, Portage and Brandon. The Winnipeg Labour Council ceased to be the voice of labour in Manitoba, and was slowly overtaken by the Manitoba Federation of Labour. Harvey Patterson, who was WLC president in the early 1970s and later its executive director said that "Once the Federation came into being the leadership of the unions sort of floated away into the Federation." He said people like the Steelworkers' Len Stevens and the Packinghouse Workers' Joe Wilford simply stopped attending the meetings. And it became apparent that on many issues the MFL, rather than the WLC, would play the lead role. It was a slow process, however, and did not play itself out in full until the end of the 1960s.

Sealey also recalls how the Council's organizing committee used to meet every Friday morning. "You may be too busy to assist somebody during the day or the evening, but all this required was getting up at five o'clock in the morning and going down and passing out pamphlets at the factory door. You had time for that." In those days the council generated a real feeling of solidarity. During a Teamsters strike Council delegates went and picketed every morning after an anti-picketing injunction had been granted. "Those are the things that I liked about the unity of the trade union movement. Even though at that time the teamsters had been expelled, it was a question of what was going on, if it was done to them, it affected everybody else."

## The search for respectability

When R.B. Russell retired in 1962 he was replaced by Art Coulter. Coulter had gone to work for Canada Malting in 1937

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## Farewell to Bob Russell

In 1962 the 73-year-old Russell resigned as executive secretary of the WDLC, bringing 50 years of union activism to an end. He died two years after retirement, just weeks after the Manitoba government had presented him with an "address of appreciation." It was the first time the province had conferred such an honour on a unionist. Russell, who always referred to the initiation rites of the craft unions as so many "monkey shines" did not reveal how he felt about being honoured by a government which had once locked him up. He had been on good behaviour during his tenure with the WDLC. Art Coulter recalls him as being far less radical than he had expected, while Arnold Sealey says that no matter their political stripe unionists made a point of seeking out Russell's advice when they were in a scrape. While the WLC drifted to increasingly moderate positions Russell generally refrained from comment - but the comments he did make revealed that he had not parted company with this political beliefs. In a brief article on the growth of monopolies he noted, "If the above is the definition of the so-called Free Enterprise system then once again we say, as we have said before it is neither Free nor Enterprising." A bigger stir was created when in a off-hand moment he referred to chambers of commerce and manufacturers associations as "nothing but a bunch of racketeers."

when he was 21 and was elected to the WTLC two years later. He came out of Winnipeg's Weston district, a railway union community near Winnipeg's CPR yards, with a strong commitment to the United Church and the CCF. After serving in the air force during the war he went back to Canada Malting and became active in the Brewery Workers Union, which had switched from the TLC to the CCL. He turned down a job as an international union representative, instead he became a power engineer at Canada Malting and the secretary of the CCL Labour Council.

Coulter saw political education as the CCL contribution to the new council. "We did a heck of a lot in getting the members of local unions involved in the political issues of the day. In February each year, we would highlight an issue and run it for a month." In the 1950s and 1960s Coulter was elected as a CCF representative to both Winnipeg City Council and the Metropolitan Winnipeg Council.

He also served as a sort of labour ambassador to the broader community, sitting on a host of community boards and organizations. As such he played a leading role in establishing the United Way in Winnipeg. The combined charity drive was a response to the growing number of conflicting fund-raising drives that were being undertaken in the early 1960s. The Community Chest, the United Way's predecessor, was proving

ineffective at meeting its fund-raising goals or keeping the number of competing drives to a minimum. At Coulter's instigation the WLC established a special committee to work with the Chamber of Commerce on the creation of the United Way in 1963. It was not greeted with universal enthusiasm by labour. The president of an Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers local wrote to Coulter that,

It is our opinion that charity at anytime is no good, it was not good 50 years ago and it is still no good. If any of our people need help for health or any other reasons, it should come from the governments that are in office, that is why they are elected, all monies should come from Tax on the ability to pay.

Coulter was also on the board of directors of the Manitoba Medical Services. This was a health insurance plan which had originally been established by physicians to ensure payment. Over half a million Manitobans covered by MMS received the bulk of their medical services at no-cost. Doctors were paid 75 cents on the dollar by MMS; the payments were lower than they might otherwise be, but they were guaranteed. The premium schedule reflected the user's income and provided for a measure of social equality. Coulter noted at the time that high income

## Mary Jordan

There was probably never a more unlikely candidate as a mainstay of the Canadian labour movement than Mary Jordan. She came from a devout Roman Catholic family - her sister became the principal of St. Mary's Academy and her brother became a priest. She wrote a number of religious romance novels which were selected by the Catholic Book of the Month Club. One of her most successful, *Now and Forever*, told the story of a nun who leaves her order to marry an atheist doctor. Yet for 38 years Mary Jordan was the secretary to R.B. Russell.

In 1924 she was working, unhappily in Eaton's department store. She in mentioned her dissatisfaction to a



Mary Jordan

family friend who worked as a boilermaker in the CNR shops. He was also active in the OBU, and suggested she see Russell about a job. To her parent's horror she was hired.

And she came to hold a different view of Russell than the court which had sentenced him to two years imprisonment as a dangerous revolutionary. "Mr. Russell was wonderful. Although he was a confirmed agnostic, he knew how I felt about the church, and whenever anyone would come into the office to discuss or criticize religion, Mr. Russell would take them into another room and close the door so I wouldn't have to listen."

Following the 1956 merger Jordan became the secretary of the Winnipeg Labour Council. For many years she was involved in writing and preparing the Council's annual publication. She also made her own small bit of labour history: as a member of the Office and Professional Employees Union International she was the only female delegate from Winnipeg to CLC convention in 1960. She retired in 1964. Fifteen years earlier a reporter asked why she had spent so much of her life working for unions.

I think it is because the possibilities for giving service to humanity are so great in such an organization, which gives you something more in your work than the daily routine of pounding a typewriter or taking dictation.

earners were far more likely to make extensive use of the medical system than working people. As a result he recommended that a government health care system be funded on the basis of a one per cent tax on all personal income.

When the Liberal government moved, at the prompting of NDP members of parliament, to establish Medicare in the 1960s, the Winnipeg Labour Council found itself at the heart of a controversy. Coulter felt that in the run up to the introduction of Medicare doctors were attempting to jack up their fees and accused them of misleading the public. At Coulter's prompting MMS did not raise its rates as quickly as Manitoba Medical Association fees were rising. Coulter was also able to get MMS to oppose an MMA-backed deterrent fee. At the time printers union representative John Raines said, "These co-insurance deterrent fees are evil and we need militant action against them. Labour has a mighty arm and it should use that arm in this cause." The Council organized a large-scale March for Medicare in the spring of 1968. Unionists were particularly disturbed at the prospect of extra-billing under the new scheme. The Council urged people not to pay extra bills. Coulter said "If you

advise me I will take these cases right to the Manitoba Medical Association, the MMS and indeed to the Canadian College of Physicians and Surgeons." By the fall of 1968 it had taken up the cause of at least one Winnipegger whose doctor had set bill collectors on him.

Coulter also brought the Labour Council together with the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber had invited the WLC to participate in a discussion of economic issues. The Council initially rejected the proposal. For once Jimmy James and Charlie Watson were in agreement; with James seeing it as a scheme by business to "use the brains of labour." Coulter felt there were "plenty of chamber of commerce people who are susceptible to new ideas. I would like to know what they are thinking. The more we meet and study the better chance we have to finding solutions to our own problems and to challenge their ideas." Coulter succeeded in having the rejection reversed at the next meeting, and for a brief period the WLC and the Chamber exchanged delegates. Coulter believes this exchange was successful in getting the Chamber to reject a national anti-union campaign that was being piloted by the national Chamber of Commerce.

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## Publish and be banned

When today's labour leaders complain about the media, they often focus on the fact that unions receive very little press coverage. They might mention that there are no full-time labour reporters in Winnipeg. But for much of this century both the *Free Press* and the *Tribune* had labour reporters - and for much of that period there was ongoing debate on whether or not the press should be banned from the Council.

It's a bad habit that can be dated back to at least 1938 when a number of delegates, who realized that the evening's meeting was taking a farcical turn. As a result they told reporters they risked being banned if they reported on the fracas.

In 1960 WLC executive member Sam Goodman was arguing for a ban, as was Jimmy James. They were opposed by McLeod and Donovan Swailes. Bernard Christophe favoured banning the media after IGA successfully sued the Retail Clerks for organizing a secondary boycott. During the trial a labour reporter had been forced to testify against the union.

When he was MFL president in 1963 A.A. Franklin said "When I come here I have to show my credentials and knock on the door to be let in. The press men affiliate to nobody and they walk in here unhindered. They write up anything they want to suit their advertisers who are big business and certainly no friends of labour and to suit the

political parties sponsoring the individual papers." Despite the high-powered opposition - at one point the executive favoured a ban - the members voted in overwhelming numbers to let the press in.

Like many WLC debates this one would not go away. In the early 1970s there were motions to ban the *Free Press* for its treatment of the Schreyer government, for its treatment of postal workers, and for the treatment of its own workers; in the 1970s the *Free Press* management succeeded in beating off an organizing campaign launched by the Newspaper Guild. Delegates like John Tooth continued to oppose the ban, even though they agreed the *Free Press* was a "rag, tag and bobtail sort of paper with the facts."

In 1976 *Free Press* labour reporter Cecil Rosner announced he was going to participate in the Day of Protest that was organized in opposition to wage and price controls. For this he was taken off the labour beat. In a flight of fancy, the WLC responded by withdrawing its "recognition of the *Winnipeg Free Press* as a newspaper." The following year the *Free Press* was actually banned from the Council for its anti-labour practices, a move which was made over the opposition of Council executive secretary Harry Munro who claimed the "stupid" resolution amounted to "cutting off our noses to spite our faces." The ban was reversed, but damage was done. By the 1980s the only journalists attending labour council meetings were from left-wing newspapers - and they too soon found their presence was subject to debate.

He also was involved in the establishment of the Three Year University Certificate Course at the University of Manitoba. The course was intended to provide labour leaders “with a working perspective of the community.” Students took two



*Art Coulter*

subjects a year and received a certificate from the Manitoba Federation of Labour. It was felt that previous extension courses did “no more than whet the appetite and frustrate the participant’s understanding of his more complex community problems.” Coulter was a member of the program’s first graduating class. Another initiative of Coulter and Chris Schubert was the Religion-Labour-Business and Professional Council of Winnipeg. The Council was established in 1962 and held a conference on the Community’s Responsibility for Maximum Employment.

Through these activities Coulter believed the labour movement established its credibility and its respectability. “People understood that labour had some positive ideas on how things should be run.” He felt that this growing respectability was one of the reasons Ed Schreyer and the NDP won the 1969 provincial election.

Coulter left the WLC in 1968 to become the first full-time

MFL executive secretary. That year also saw a changing of the guard at the political level of the council as well. Grant McLeod had served as president since 1956 and also was elected to two terms on Winnipeg city council as an NDPer. But he was regularly challenged: in 1966 he beat back Chester King and John Raines, and the following year he defeated Alf Walker of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen by three votes. In 1968 Walker tried again and succeeded, and the 68-year-old McLeod, who had served his first term as labour council president in 1931, retired. He told the press he had hoped for one more term of office since 1969 would mark his fiftieth year as a union member. In the fall of 1970 Walker took a job with the provincial compensation board and was replaced by 46-year-old Harvey Patterson. He told the *Free Press* “I have three aims in my outside activities. I want to work in the community, I want to help the worker who is less capable of helping himself and I want to work towards better labor-management relations.”



*Harvey Patterson*

### From respectability to conservatism

Harry Munro took over from Coulter as WLC executive secretary in 1968. A bus driver, Munro had been a member of the OBU prior to the merger and had worked for Canada Packers during the Depression. His first union experience came in 1929 when he joined the Carpenters union as a 17-year-old apprentice. Wages were so low the union did not require him to pay dues.

During this period the Council often took fairly conservative positions on a number of social issues. In 1967 the Council protested the teaching of French in public schools. The Council was also opposed to increased levels of immigration to Canada. There were signs that the WLC was also on the wrong side of



*Members of the Religion-Labour-Business and Professional Council of Winnipeg*



the generation gap. In 1971 the MFL was recommending that the former Grace or Victoria Hospitals be used as summer youth hostels. Abe Ruben of the printers union told a WLC meeting "If you are travelling as I do, and see what stands at the side of the road, it makes you wonder what the future of this country is going to be like." John Raines echoed his sentiment saying that after attending a conference with young people he "was worried about coming down with some disease from these young people. Some of them were absolutely filthy." Only an unnamed delegate spoke in favour the hostel, reminding the Council that "The only solution the establishment offered me in 1939 when I was a transient was to go out and kill my fellow brother by creating a war."

Some people also began to wonder whether the council was being caught up in trivial issues. In 1969 the Council was conducting correspondence with various groups to determine whether plastic milk jugs were a public health hazard. In October 1970, when the federal government proclaimed the draconian War Measures Act, the Labour Council was debating the speed limit on Metro route 20, a two-cent increase in the price of bread, and whether or not there should be traffic lights

at Goulet and Traverse streets. At the end of the year the Winnipeg Tribune noted that after discussing milk containers at nearly every meeting for the preceding two years, the council was going to shelve the issue.

But the Council continued to concern itself with everything under the sun - in 1972 Munro was instructed to write a letter to the provincial government complaining that local theatres had doubled the admission fees for the only family movie playing in town during the Easter Holiday.

The trivial should not be allowed to overshadow the work the Council did in a number of socially significant areas. Council was one of the most persistent voices in the community calling for improved fire safety regulations for rooming houses. From the mid-sixties onwards Chester King and then Harry Munro made numerous presentations to Winnipeg City Council on the issue. The WLC was particularly insistent on the need for third floor fire-escapes, smoke and heat detectors and sprinkler systems for rooming houses. When it appeared that they were going to win some significant changes the rooming house owners put enough pressure on council to have the proposals watered down.

## Sisterhood comes slowly

The Winnipeg Labour Council was a men's club for most of its history. It was not that the Council was opposed to the aspirations of working women. As early as 1899 the Council was providing moral and economic support to striking female garment workers. In addition the Women's Labor League, under the leadership of radicals like Helen Armstrong, was affiliated with the Council during the First World War. But women were not seen as likely union members, and even when women were organized, the elected union officials were almost invariably male.

In 1957 when WDLC president Grant McLeod said he thought women held the key to the union movement's future, he was not talking about organizing female workers, but about organizing the wives of union members into Ladies Auxiliaries so they would be sure to look for the union label

when they went shopping.

In 1961 the council opposed an amendment to the provincial liquor act that would have allowed women to serve alcoholic beverages. Harry Duhamel of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders' Union said "When the women come it means that wages will tend to go down and that a lot of men will be put out of work."

One of the first women to play an active role in the life of the Council was Jean Borys of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. A union member since 1956 she became the first woman to serve on the WDLC executive in 1968 when she became statistician. In 1973 she was elected first vice-president, the highest position a woman held in the Council until Heather Grant became president a decade later. At the time Borys said, "I feel that recognition for women in the field of labour councils is coming to the forefront." She was a shop steward and executive member in her own union. On behalf of the WDLC she regularly attended Winnipeg City Council meetings, and prepared reports on civic business for the Council. She also ran, unsuccessfully, for school board as an NDP candidate.



*Jean Borys*

# Labour Day, again

In June 1963 the Labour Council held its first Labour Day Parade in over 40 years. It attracted over 60 floats and marked the beginning of Union Label Week. The first baby born on labour day also received a supply of union-made goods. In announcing the parade Art Coulter said “we want to make the public aware of the extent of union organization in the production and service fields.” As part of the parade the Iron Workers union planned to erect structural steel on a flat car. Local 35 of the Newspaper Pressman’s Union ran afoul of police regulations when members passed out paper Pressman’s hats to children.

When the NDP asked for permission to have its civic candidates participate in the 1971 parade, the party was turned down. It was felt “the parade would take on the concept of a political parade rather than a labour parade to the detriment of both the party and labor, it was also pointed out that some of the participating unions would have problems in relation to their constitutions re political affiliations.”



By 1973 the parades were killed by poor turnouts. Instead the WLC sponsored church services close to Thanksgiving at Holy Trinity Church, but this practice was abandoned by 1977. In 1978 and 1979 the MFL sponsored a May Day rally, but events on that date have always been politically controversial. The Jubilee Lodge

of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen said that “The members that march on May One were branded as Communist by the public and also by Union members. It seems that May 1st is uppermost in the peoples’ minds as a Red Day, which corresponds with the parade in Moscow.” On May 1st, 1994, however thousands of Winnipeg unionists took part in a march commemorating the start of the Winnipeg General Strike.



*Top: Participants in the annual Labour Day parade sponsored by the Winnipeg and District Labor Council in 1964.*

*Bottom: The 1968 Labour Day parade had a pro-medicare theme.*

In 1974 Munro appeared before city council after an apartment fire claimed nine lives. Five months later Munro was back before council. He said that if his previous opening remarks were made “with regret and a deep feeling of frustration,” in the wake of three more deaths in an apartment fire “the words ‘disgust and sorrow’ must be added, in view of the apparent lack of interest or the shirking of responsibility by the elected representatives of the citizens of Winnipeg.” Munro asked:

How long are the citizens of the City of Winnipeg going to wait for the legislation that will protect them from the greedy and unscrupulous landlords.

While union membership was growing during the 1960s, particularly with the expansion of public sector unions, labour council membership was decreasing. In 1969 the WLC claimed to represent 37,000 workers - or 3,000 fewer than in 1956. By 1970 attendance at council meetings was down to 60 people.

When he resigned after a decade in the job, Munro was disillusioned with the labour movement. He spoke of how some unions had forgotten about servicing their members. He felt that was why some large unions saw some of their locals leave the CLC to join the then independent Canadian Association of Industrial Mechanical and Allied Workers. During the late 1960s and early 1970s Council members were often involved in bitter membership battles with CAIMAW. There were numerous Labour Council battles as to whether the WLC should support CAIMAW strikes. When it declined, some affiliates, such as the postal workers, ceased their involvement in the Council. Munro was critical of other unions for not doing enough to make their workers productive, while other unionized workers were, in his opinion, simply overpaid. In an interview after his retirement he said

The way things have changed in the past year or two, I’m not disappointed that I’m out of it. There were some things going on within the labour movement that I wasn’t happy with - different trends and theories that belong to the younger generation.

The days of the old unions and their methods have got to change. The day of the strike is limited. I think the usefulness of the strike is fast disappearing. Whereas strikes were the only weapons the unions ever had, I think we’re seeing a day where

there’ll be more cooperation between labour, government and management. Management has got to accept its responsibility to the working people, to their employees. They have a social and moral responsibility to do so. Up until a few years ago they’ve never accepted that - labour was always just a commodity, to be bought and sold and shuffled around. Now, some of the bigger companies are accepting their responsibility to their employees, employees’ families and society as a whole.

Munro’s parting shots were picked up by railworker Doug Weaver, who served as the WLC president in 1978. That year’s *Labour Annual* had a picture of Weaver and Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce president Paul Herriot shaking hands at the corner of Portage and Main. In many ways the 1978 publication represented the high water mark of the Council’s rightward drift. Weaver wrote

“Consultation Not Confrontation” is the motto that must become meaningful in the very near future if our contemporary society is to survive and prosper. ... It must be said that we all have something to gain from industrial peace and much to lose from frequent conflict. ... We must not expect over-night miracles and agreement will not always be the order of the day: however, with the well-being of our society in mind, mature people acting in a responsible manner should provide a setting that will



*Labour and management and Portage and Main: Paul Herriot and Doug Weaver*

lead to situations of mutual benefit. ... In attempting to maintain current standards and forge on to new and high levels of economic status, it must be pointed out to the labour sector that these new goals must be worked for and attained through higher productivity.

Instead the Labour Council was about to enter an era of polarization and economic recession.

### Politics, politics, politics

Paul Moist was working as a gardener for the City of Winnipeg when he was elected as a delegate to the Winnipeg Labour Council in the late 1970s. As a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees he was part of the growing number of unionized public sector workers. And as someone in his twenties rather than his sixties he was part of a belated changing of the guard at the Council.

He says the Council's spring labour school that year was one of the things that sparked his interest in trade unionism. The Labour and City Government course was facilitated by NDP councillor Alf Skowron and Communist Councillor Joe Zuken. Zuken's presence at a Labour Council school was just one sign that the winds of change were starting to blow - just three years earlier the Council had denied Zuken the opportunity to speak to it on the city's role in the controversial Trizec development.

The original focus of the course was the nuts and bolts of how city government worked. After a few hours the students made it clear that they did not want to talk about administration, they

wanted to talk politics. "I will never forget Zuken changing the agenda to devote the whole Sunday morning to talking about politics at city hall, the politics of Unicity and the ICEC. We had quite an engaging political discussion, which was my first labour council

school."

The Labour Council schools, held the third weekend in March, had by then become one of the focal points of WLC activity. The schools had originally offered strictly trade union courses - bargaining, compensation, grievance procedure and so forth. They were set up in a way that would allow unionists to complete a course of studies in a six year period. During the sixties and seventies they were held at Tec Voc school **and** attracted over 200 students. In the 1980s the program, which had been expanded to include courses on stress management, income tax preparation, and computers, moved to the University of Winnipeg, where it attracted over 600 students a year.

According to Moist the biweekly labour council meetings were the best possible political education a young trade unionist could get. The council he was elected to was one of the most intensely polarized in the WLC's history. The divisions were both generational and political; many people such as Harvey Patterson (who became executive secretary in 1978 following Munro's retirement), Arnie Makinson and Fred Malashewski, had put in decades of service to their unions. They came from the traditional industrial and craft unions, and were usually NDP supporters who were hostile towards the Communist Party. They regularly clashed with a grouping of younger unionists who had been influenced by the New Left of the 1960s. While some of them were members of the New Democratic Party, others supported a variety of smaller left-wing political parties including the Communist Party, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) and the Revolutionary Workers League. While many of these groups had strong differences amongst themselves, at the Labour Council they constituted a Left which challenged the Old Guard.

Moist, who was elected president of CUPE Local 500 in 1993, said "It was quite interesting for a young trade unionist wanting to learn about things outside his or her own union. I had never quite been in a setting where economics, and government and political matters were discussed that vociferously and that openly." For his first year he just sat and listened, discovering the full range of labour views that could exist on just about any issue: from Cruise missile testing to the municipal budget.

By the early 1980s the left was often winning the day. One of its most successful initiatives, and one which it received Old Guard support for, was the Strike Support Committee. Postal worker Lew Udow convened the committee's first meeting in the fall of 1980. It was created in response to a large number of bitter strikes that had been broken or undermined by the use of replacement workers in the preceding three years. Udow was succeeded by Leslie Spillett, a representative of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. The committee drew up lists of union members willing to participate in mass pickets and other forms of strike support. In its first year it gave support to the Energy and Chemical Workers, the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, the Manitoba Paramedical Association, the ILGWU, the United Autoworkers, the



Paul Moist





The TLC Council had a potential of 135 delegates, but averaged 55 a meeting. The merger of 1956 did little to improve the situation: in 1958 delegate William Rayner looked out at a crowd of 58 delegates and complained "Soon we will be talking about empty chairs - soon we will out of business." Bob Russell said the Council could hardly expect to get press coverage when Council members did not show up for meetings. However, a proposal to move to Sunday meetings was roundly defeated.

The attendance problem was linked to

a tension over the amount of input rank-and-file union members had into the operation of the Council compared to the union business agents. In 1958 a railway delegate won a long and loud round applause for saying the Council needed "younger labor delegates and not business agents on our committees." Grant McLeod noted this was a fine sentiment, but he argued that many of the rank-and-filers simply did not have the time to participate. To prove his case he pointed out that most committees had no report to make to the Council because they had not had time to meet. Russell added, "And there are no business agents on these committees."

In 1964 there was a brief effort made to switch to monthly meetings, since it was felt that this would give committees a greater opportunity to meet and to make progress on their assignments. This was seen as an effort to stifle debate and was beaten back. But the reports on apathy - and the belief that in the past council chambers were always filled to the brim continued: in 1970 veteran carpenter John Tooth could barely disguise his disgust at the sight of only 40 people turning out for a labour council meeting. After all he said, "10 or 15 years ago the council hall was filled."

*The Labour Council meeting room in the Winnipeg Labour Temple.*

## “This room used to be filled”

In looking back on his years with the Winnipeg Labour Council Paul Moist noted "There is so much competition for people's time that structures such as meetings are difficult to preserve. With the rise of single parent families and two-job families there are more pressures than existed on people's time. We are finding a problem in motivating people to come to meetings."

He is right about the new pressures on people's time; but the fact is that there has never been a time when Labour Council officials were not worrying about poor turnouts.

In the 1940s OBU labour council delegates were discussing the "lack of interest shown by certain Units and delegates in the work of the Council." The executive has not been able to meet for two months due to a failure to achieve a quorum.

In 1950 WTLC president Robert Holmes took comfort in the thought that "What we may have lacked in attendance has been made up in enthusiasm at the reports of our various committees." This was cold comfort though, and in 1953 both the CIO and TLC councils decided to set up committees to examine the reasons for low attendance.



Lew Udow

number of strikes due to the use of strikebreakers, the committee urged unionists to “harass their members of the legislature until they bring such an act into being.” In 1982 Spillett, who was by then a Council vice-president told reporters it was workers, not the Great West Life Assurance Company that had elected the NDP, and the government ought to protect their strike rights.

As a part of this new turn to politics the Council sponsored a number of policy conferences in the mid-1980s. At the 1983 conference a resolution was passed banning “red-baiting” at Council meetings. The resolution was introduced in the wake of a particularly acrimonious debate that fell over whether the Council should condemn the Soviet Union for the shooting down of a South Korean airliner. Delegates who had voted against the motion had been accused of being Communists. The anti-red-baiting resolution was narrowly adopted, but it stirred up much antagonism. Fred Malashewski said “You’re damn right there’s been red baiting. But there have also been people bringing up political issues. If we pass this, we’ll be like being behind the Iron curtain and in Nazi Germany.” Railworker Abe Rosner supported the resolution saying red-baiting was the practice of making the political affiliation of Communists the issue, rather than debating issues on their merits.

When Arnie Makinson announced in 1983 that he would not be seeking re-election as Council president, Moist who was by then a CUPE national representative, was approached by representatives of both the Old Guard and the Left. They indicated that despite some reservations, they could live with him as president. As a result, he was elected president of the deeply split council by acclamation.

Moist was quickly forced to learn how to referee a debate. And he often found himself in conflict with the MFL and CLC leadership as he attempted to fulfill the direction he received from the Council. This was often the result of the Council straying onto MFL turf. For example in 1984 Moist received a letter from MFL president Dick Martin taking exception to the Council writing to a provincial cabinet minister regarding a provincial issue, “in this case, banning canned beer.” On a more substantive, if far-flung question, Moist got his knuckles rapped for allowing a striking British coal miner to address the Council: the miner’s tour of Canada was not sanctioned by the CLC. When the proposal to invite the miner came before the delegates, the vote was 48-to-48. As the tie-breaker Moist voted to invite the miner, but added the proviso that any funds raised at the meeting be given to the CLC to pass on the British mine-workers union. After taking flak from the MFL and the CLC, Moist chaired a meeting of over a 100 people, and “a rip-roaring debate” followed the speaker’s presentation. According to Moist “It was not unusual in those days for the labor council to

do something like that and get chastised for it, for not falling in line with labour policy. That was the hallmark of the council, it was full of folks bucking the trend.”

Moist stressed the fact that Council allowed rank-and-file unionists the opportunity on a regular basis to speak out on union issues and to talk back to their leaders. Most unions and federations only have annual meetings, but at the labour council he said, “if you want to talk about something you only had to wait two weeks.”

But Moist had reservations about some of the talk that went on. “I think the right legitimately criticized the left for using the labour council for purposes other than what the labour council ought to be. We were embroiled in international affairs to the point of fault.” No matter how valid the Left’s analysis of Reaganomics he wondered “if it was appropriate that the labour council spend so much time on so many issues that were so far removed from greater Winnipeg.” He also despaired of the Council’s tendency to get caught up in trivial issues. As a result he thought the Council did not pay enough attention to civic government. “Maybe I am biased because I come from a civic union. I think the quality of life is impacted by civic government and I don’t think the labour council presented a broad point of view on civic issues.” The extreme polarization at the Council also led to a situation where it was not taken seriously by many labour leaders and officials - and they stopped showing up. The Manitoba Food and Commercial Workers, the province’s largest private sector union, even withdrew from the Council. Moist concluded “If a decision is made on any issue that has not been formed by a broad cross-section of the labour movement it is not going to have that broad relevance.”

When Harvey Patterson announced his intention to retire as Council executive secretary, Moist, who was not interested in the job on a full-time basis, took the opportunity to change the structure of the council. The executive secretary position was eliminated, while the office of president was made into a full-time job. If politics was to govern the Council, it was best that an elected official oversee its daily operations.

## The contemporary era

The 1985 presidential election should have been a struggle between the Left and the Old Guard for control of the Council. That was definitely an element in the campaign, but it also turned into a break with the past. Almost all of the preceding generation of leaders in the Winnipeg Labour Council had been male and middle-aged, veterans of both the Second World War and private sector unions. Their left-wing opponents were younger, but in many ways they were just as committed as the old guard to a continual refighting of the Cold War every two weeks. The Council’s first full-time president was in many ways removed from the ideological concerns of both these groups: when Heather Grant was elected Council president in the fall of 1985 she was just 22 years old.

A member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, she

had started working at a Winnipeg nursing home when she was 16 years old. She became involved in the union in response to the unjust treatment of many of the immigrant women working there. At her first union meeting she was elected to the local's executive.

When she became a WLC delegate in 1982 she found that it greatly expanded her sense of the local labour movement.

There is a tendency to stay internal, whatever was going on in CUPE was fine, but you did not see the rest of the movement and had no connection to it.

When she received the announcement that an election for a full-time president was going to be held, Grant paid little attention to it. The Winnipeg CLC representative encouraged her to run. Given her youth she was doubtful of her chances, but in a four-way election she defeated Lew Udow, the main left-wing candidate. While she did not see herself as a right-wing candidate - and had often voted with the Left in the past - she did have the Old Guard's support.

One of her major goals was to lessen the degree of polarization on the council. To do this she wanted to reduce the time spent on international issues and increase the focus on local questions. "At that time you have to remember the council was dealing with countries that, quite frankly, I had not even heard of and they were not dealing with many local issues." In addition, she wanted to provide delegates with more opportunity to run the affairs of council. "I wanted to allow them to expand within the labour council, to sit on the committees, to chair the committees, to write their briefs, to have the freedom and flexibility to be able to move as delegates and do some of that work."

To do this she spear-headed a move from two meetings a month to one meeting, a move which angered partisans of the left and the right. According to Grant, "The Council was a forum to fight. It was not a forum to make anything better, it was not a forum to do anything, you never had a chance to do anything, you went from one meeting to another without being able to do some of the groundwork."

Delegates who wanted to raise international issues were urged to take these questions to their local union first. When they were dealt with by the Council they were generally referred to the CLC. Many of the actors retired or moved onto other forums, either in their own unions or in other social movements.

The debate over political affilia-

tion took a strange turn. After decades of debating whether or not to support the CCF and the NDP in municipal elections, by the early 1980s the WLC was strongly committed to the party. But the NDP was on the verge of throwing in the towel municipally. In 1983 the party put forward a strong slate of candidates, including Udow, only to see most of them defeated in a backlash against the provincial NDP government. When the party did no better in 1986, largely for the same reason, the NDP decided to abandon municipal politics.

As a result, the Council was forced to look for a political horse to back. It became involved in Winnipeg into the Nineties, a coalition of NDPers, Liberals and community activists. In 1989 WIN managed to elect a near majority on city council and in the following civic election WIN mayoral candidate Greg Selinger almost took a shoestring campaign to victory. In both elections the Council provided support to various WIN candidates and a number of independents.

The Council was also involved with school politics. In 1989 the Council tried to distribute a labour colouring book to Winnipeg schools and nearly got expelled from class. It was a rough beginning but the Council did manage to get its foot in the door: since then the Council has been involved in developing a labour curriculum for grade nine.

Shortly after her election Grant became caught in a political crossfire. A provincial government study on labour law had recommended that, as a substitute for anti-strikebreaker legislation, the government bring in some form of Final Offer Selection. Under FOS, union and management would submit their final offer to an arbitrator, who would then select one of the two proposals as the union contract. The proposal got a mixed reception from the labour movement. Unions such as the MFCW and Steelworkers favoured it, while others such as CUPE and the ILGWU were opposed. It was supported in principle by the MFL, but the WLC came out against it. The

government shelved the proposal, but in 1987 it was revived and introduced to the legislature.

The debate over FOS led to an open split in the Manitoba labour movement as CUPE representatives on the MFL executive resigned to fight the legislation. While the MFL continued to support FOS, the WLC's opposition to the proposal remained on the books. Heather Grant came under pressure from major affiliates, the MFL and the CLC to back off on the issue. Grant told them if they did not like the Council position they should work through their delegates to change it. "No motion ever came to our council to support FOS." In the end,



*Heather Grant*



faced with a threat of being removed from the MFL executive, Grant appeared at a Federation press conference supporting FOS. "Then I had to go back and face the Council delegates," Grant recalled, wincing. "I still have the scars from that." In retrospect, Grant says her inexperience hurt her on this issue. "If I had it to do over again I would have said the policy of this council is to oppose FOS, and according to the MFL's constitution we have a right to be here, I am the WLC's designate being president, you have no authority to remove me."

More successfully Grant worked to strengthen and restructure the Council's relationship with the United Way. "By 1986 it was just a token partnership. They came to us for dollars at campaign time and pretty much left us alone after that." Grant won the right to sit on the campaign cabinet. United Way policy statements have been rewritten to reflect labour's concerns with crossing picket lines and dealing with struck employers. During a recent CUPW strike the United Way worked together with striking postal workers to have literature delivered on a volunteer basis. "Five years ago they would have used the postal service and never even thought they might be doing anything that was wrong."

A United Way labour co-ordinator, Sylvia Farley works out of the WLC office. As a result of these changes more recognition is given to employees who contribute to United Way campaigns. There was also more of a grassroots emphasis in the Council's community work. Where once the Council might raise several thousand dollars selling raffle tickets and donate the money to a medical research institute, it developed links to inner city agencies such as Rossbrook House, Winnipeg Harvest, and the Community Unemployed Help Centre. Grant and other WLC delegates also sat on the boards of these agencies.

Strike support remained an important issue for the Council. The 1987 strike at Supervalu was the scene of a WLC organized mass picket. On a smaller scale the council has taken the families of striking families to amusement parks and supplied them with Christmas hampers. The Council does not have an organizing committee, largely because of rivalry between affiliated members, but it does provide support to organizing campaigns. Grant said she has on occasion signed up locals over a weekend and then let the CLC determine which union is to get jurisdiction.

The last decade has also seen a reversal of the Council's membership problems. By 1994 there were over 45,000 members, up from the 32,000 the WLC could claim in 1985. The UFCW, which in 1982 had been calling for the end of labour councils, was convinced to rejoin. In addition units of the Manitoba Government Employees' Union and the Public Service Alliance of Canada have joined. Grant said many unions had simply never been asked to affiliate. MGEU delegate June Lee credited Grant for the Council's growth in membership, stressing her willingness to work with new delegates.

By 1994 the Council enjoyed the largest membership it had had for years and attracted close to 100 delegates to its monthly

meetings. But it was hobbled by the CLC's reluctance to accept a task force recommendation to make labour council affiliation mandatory. Grant said the Council needed the participation far more than it needed the additional finances such affiliation would bring. Often Congress affiliates receive various forms of support from the WLC during strikes and public campaigns without ever thinking of joining the Council.

So just as it did when it started a century ago, the Council is looking for delegates prepared to put themselves out for the good of their fellow workers for nothing more than "the empty honour of being termed representative." It can be expected to be a place where the lefts and the rights of the future lock horns, where delegates bemoan low turnouts compared to the glory days, where the press will be abominated, where unionists receive their first exposure to a wide range of educational programs, and where they learn how to express a point of view, and to do it without a text because, in the words of Paul Moist, "you never knew what was coming next." And it will continue to serve as a crucial forum in which unionists develop a broad understanding of the challenges facing Winnipeg workers, and the importance solidarity can play in meeting those challenges.



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