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LABOUR AT
Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900-35
THE LAKEHEAD



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Abbreviations

ACCL	All-Canadian Congress of Labour
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AIU	Agricultural Industrial Unit (Industrial Workers of the World)
AMW of NS	Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia
CA	Canadian Administration (Industrial Workers of the World)
CBU	Canadian Bushmen's Union
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CDO	Canadian Defence Organization
CEB	Canadian Executive Branch (Industrial Workers of the World)
CEC	Central Executive Committee (Communist Party of Canada)
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CLC	Central Labour Council (One Big Union)
CLDL	Canadian Labour Defence League
CLP	Canadian Labour Party
CLU	Central Labour Union
CNR	Canadian Northern Railway
COD	Central Organization Department (Communist)
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
CRUA	Citizens' and Ratepayers' Unemployed Association
CSF	Canadian Socialist Federation
CSL	Canadian Socialist League
CTKL	<i>Canadian Teollisuusunionistinen Kannatus Liitto</i>
CUA	Citizens' Unemployed Association
FOC	Finnish Organization of Canada
FSOC	Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada
FUL	Farmers' Unity League
FWFF	Finnish Workers' and Farmers' Federation
GEB	General Executive Board (Industrial Workers of the World)

GRU	General Recruiting Union (Industrial Workers of the World)
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LAWIU	Lumber and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union of Canada
Lib-Lab	Liberal-Labour
LWIU	Lumber Workers Industrial Union (IWW, 1913-19; OBU, 1919-24)
LWIUC	Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada (Communist)
NUWA	National Unemployed Workers' Association
OBU	One Big Union (Canada)
OPP	Ontario Provincial Police
OSL	Ontario Socialist League
OSP	Ontario Socialist Party
PAUA	Port Arthur Unemployment Association
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCWU	Relief Camp Workers' Union (Communist)
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
RNWMP	Royal North-West Mounted Police
SDPC	Social Democratic Party of Canada
SPC	Socialist Party of Canada
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress of Canada
TUEL	Trade Union Educational League
UATC	Unemployed Association of the Twin Cities
UBRE	United Brotherhood of Railway Employees
ULFTA	Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association
UAPA	Unemployed Association of Port Arthur
UWPA	Unemployed Workers' Protective Association
UYR	<i>Uusi Yrtys Raittiusseura</i>
WBA	Workers' Benevolent Association
WLL	Women's Labour League
WPC	Workers' Party of Canada
WUL	Workers' Unity League
YCL	Young Communist League

LABOUR AT THE LAKEHEAD

Introduction

In Petrozavodsk, Russia, there stands a thirty-foot-tall statue of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin built by Canadians. Towering over the central square, with an eternal flame burning in remembrance of the victims of the Second World War, it is a constant reminder to the people of this vibrant Russian city of their past.¹ In the early 1930s, it stood as a tribute to the ideals and spirit of the October Revolution and the socialist utopia that the Finnish Canadians who built it had come to establish in what was then Soviet Karelia. Disillusioned by their lives in Canada and tired of endless persecution by Canadian authorities, thousands of Finnish Canadians left that country in the late 1920s and early 1930s to take part in Russia's great experiment. To them, as to many other socialists in Canada, it seemed that capitalism had finally gone bankrupt.

As intriguing as the story of Karelia is, what follows is not an examination of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and what other historians have described as a dark period in both Russian and Canadian socialist history.² Instead, what will unfold in this volume is the story of those socialists who remained in Canada. Many who contributed to the construction of Lenin's statue were from Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario (present-day City of Thunder Bay), collectively known as the Lakehead.³ The construction of the tribute to Lenin was possible because of the skills honed in the coal docks, railway yards, mines,

and lumber camps of Northern Ontario. The same conviction and belief that went into the tribute to Lenin and the zealous attack on capitalism it represented had been used for over thirty years at the Lakehead to construct the many labour halls and temples that dotted the two cities and to agitate for the recognition of workers and their voice within society.

Although the statue of Lenin built by Canadians may surprise people today, in the 1920s and 1930s its existence would have confirmed what local and national authorities believed about socialists at the Lakehead. As Port Arthur Member of Parliament F.H. Keefer argued in 1919, certain areas of the country such as the Lakehead should be dealt with severely, as they were “breeding places of revolution.”⁴ The nature of the economic activity in the region – based on resource extraction – lent itself to widespread participation by the Lakehead labouring class in such movements as the Industrial Workers of the World, the One Big Union, and the Communist Party. In fact and legend, Lakehead workers were in the midst of a revolt from 1900 to 1935, one that has placed them at the very centre of Canadian working-class and left history.

Located at the geographic centre of Canada, bridging the eastern and western halves of the country, Northwestern Ontario is a region that has no official political definition. Indeed, it is a region whose boundaries have been shifted constantly over time. Yet although there is no official definition, it is very much a distinct region in the minds of most people who live there. Often, it is a key part of the identity of its inhabitants. For much of its past, it has been composed of the three districts of Thunder Bay, Rainy River, and Kenora. As such, it is the largest region of Ontario, covering 526,000 square kilometres. Its western boundary is Manitoba, while its northern boundary is Ontario’s Hudson’s Bay coastline and the James Bay coastline north of the mouth of the Albany River. Its southern boundary is composed of the American border and the north shore of Lake Superior west of the Pukuskwa River. The eastern border runs just east of the communities of Manitouwadge and Caramat. In area, it is a region that is bigger than most countries in the world.⁵

One might ask, why the Lakehead, and why look to the Lakehead for a study of socialism in Canada? There is certainly no shortage of scholarship examining the history of the left in Canada.⁶ Few studies, however, have explored the relationship between ethnic groups, socialism, and the politics of labour in early twentieth-century Canada. Fewer still have focused their attention on the provincial norths.⁷ This study reveals how the relationship between individuals and organizations in the region with their comrades and opponents

elsewhere shaped the nature and characteristics of socialism both regionally and nationally. The twentieth-century Lakehead never lacked for a population of enthusiastic, energetic, and talented left-wingers, but throughout this period the movement never truly solidified and took hold. Socialist organizations, organizers, and organs came and went, leaving behind an enduring legacy, yet, paradoxically, the sum of their efforts came to less than the immense sacrifices and energies they had poured into them. During the first thirty-five years of the twentieth century, the region's working-class politics was shaped by the interaction of ideas drawn from the much larger North Atlantic socialist world with the particularities of Lakehead society and culture. International frameworks of analysis and activism were of necessity reshaped and revised in a local context in which ethnic divisions complicated and even undermined the class identities on which so many radical dreams and ambitions rested.

The Lakehead's economic opportunities (both real and anticipated) drew workers to the region during the first decades of the twentieth century. Located on the north shore of Lake Superior, it was believed by many to have the potential, like many regions of Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, for unlimited economic success. As the Port Arthur *Daily News* suggested in 1906: "The assets of Canada are stupendous, the country reeks with underdeveloped riches, agricultural soil, minerals, water power, navigable lakes and rivers, a healthy invigorating climate, in fact, everything that makes a country great, waiting only for capital and energy of a man to develop it."⁸ From the heyday of Fort William as the inland headquarters of the North West Company to the brink of the Great Depression in 1929, the Lakehead was seen as a region of untapped and limitless resources, capable of fuelling continuous progress and development.⁹ Jointly, the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William (both incorporated in 1907) acted as a metropole for a resource-rich hinterland. The dockyards, lumber mills, and railway yards of the two cities were also viewed as the hub of the Canadian nation, having become the central railway and shipping point for the transshipment of the west's staple products "in exchange for the manufacturing goods of the metropolitan centres" in the east.¹⁰

Thanks to the railway and the mining boom, the Lakehead was a prime destination for capital investment and for immigrants.¹¹ Both cities competed with each other for commerce and resources, and the working-class conflict was centred in different locations. In Port Arthur, the area around the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) coal docks and freight sheds, as well as the Finnish quarter on Bay Street, were the focal points of socialist activities. In Fort William,

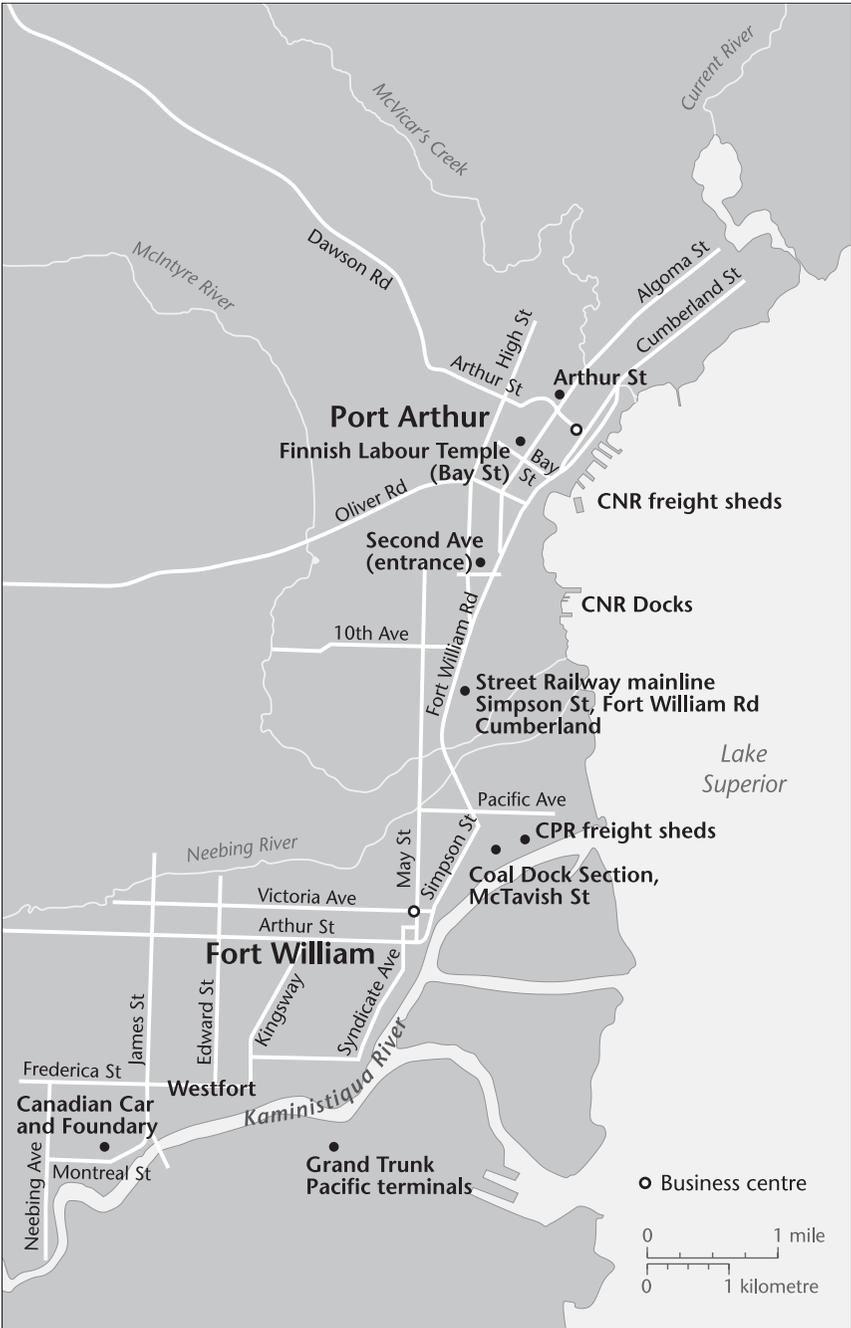


Figure 1 Map of Lakehead district.

the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) coal docks and freight sheds, and the area surrounding May Street, Miles Street, and Simpson Street were where much of the unrest of the period was expressed (see Figure 1). Much of the rivalry that has dominated the histories of the region was one produced, propagated, and used by the bourgeoisie of both cities, however.¹²

The two cities came to symbolize “the freedom, adventure, mystery and wealth of frontier America, the dime store novel Deadwood, Dodge or Carson City of Canada ... the village was described as the focal point of a mineral-rich region with unlimited potential.”¹³ Even following the collapse of the market for silver in the 1880s, with the CPR as the only significant object of development in the region, potential still existed. Besides assisting immigrants to settle in the western part of Canada, the CPR also acted as a conduit for “settlers” to transport their goods back to the eastern markets. The most prominent of these goods were wheat before 1913 and lumber after 1920. The Lakehead, as the central terminus for Canada, benefited immensely from the accompanying national expansion. Its fortunes increased with every bushel or cord transshipped.¹⁴

The wheat that flowed through the Lakehead was integral to the prosperity of the western world, the feeding of millions in Europe during the First World War, and the nourishment of the United Kingdom afterwards. Wood cut from the region helped build the cities of Central Canada during the industrial boom. The shipment of grain, wood, and other resources also led to the creation of a shipbuilding industry. Despite being over a thousand kilometres from the ocean, the Western Dry-dock in Fort William became the largest of its kind in Canada. Its existence epitomized the railway industry’s influence and the optimism that it generated in those living in the region.¹⁵ The emergence of the Lakehead as a major transshipment point in Canada and a demand for both skilled and unskilled labour in the region also led to its emergence as a destination for immigrant workers.¹⁶

As a central point in east-west communication, and combined with its ethnic diversity, the cities of Port Arthur and Fort William were storm centres in Canadian working-class history. In them, “eastern” and “western” socialists, trade unionists, and mainstream liberals fought, and frequently influenced, each other. The Lakehead thus interestingly complicates one of the major narratives of Canadian history – that of western exceptionalism – by raising the example of a region that was simultaneously *western* and *eastern*. Similarly, the Lakehead’s political, economic, and historic linkages to Minnesota and the midwestern United States ensured that political and ideological fomentations

to the south influenced many decisions to the north. In many respects, the Lakehead defies attempts to situate it within the canonical series of events that has been used to describe the progression of Canada from colony to nation, or, more appropriately, what has most recently been described as a process of liberal order.¹⁷

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, between 32 and 35 percent of the population in Port Arthur and Fort William were non-English-speaking immigrants.¹⁸ Although few Europeans had settled in the region by 1871, the construction of the CPR had spurred rapid growth by 1911. In 1900, the population of Port Arthur was 3,214 and that of Fort William was 3,997. By 1911, the combined population of both cities exceeded 27,000,¹⁹ and together they constituted Ontario's fifth-largest city.²⁰ The region accounted for barely 9 percent of Ontario's total population, however, and although the rest of Ontario was largely of British extraction by 1921, barely 50 percent of the population in Northern Ontario was.²¹ Even in 1921, after some immigrants had left the region, the "British" still made up only 62.2 percent of the region's population. The number of "British" residents in the region had declined to 54.8 percent by 1931,²² and this was reflected in the population of the twin cities, where close to 40 percent of the total population was of non-British origin by 1929. Although these populations were centred in neighbourhoods that were often treated like "ghettos" in the South end of Port Arthur and the East end and Westfort areas of Fort William, their influence on society extended well beyond such neighbourhoods.²³ For example, the city and region were home to the second-largest concentration of Finnish socialists outside of Finland, and they were not concentrated in just a few neighbourhoods.²⁴

Divisions and exclusion were an inherent part of this ethnic and political mix, but they were also a dynamic force in the evolution of the twin cities and its hinterland.²⁵ Crusades to uphold Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and ideals led to a working class that was "neither a homogeneous or static mass, but rather represented a multiplicity of sub-groupings sometimes paralleling, sometimes overlapping one another."²⁶ Ordinary people lived and breathed the political and ethnic tension of the period. Lakehead and Canadian leftists were hardly unique in their many ideological shifts, however. Ideological transformation was a common occurrence among socialists throughout the world during the early twentieth century.

The work of Ian McKay has recently demonstrated that three distinct formations driven by specific ideological underpinnings drove socialists between

1900 and 1939.²⁷ As this book demonstrates, however, although members of various ethnic communities at the Lakehead often joined forces and fought for common goals, ideological and ethnic differences, whether perceived, invented, or real, ensure that pan-national generalizations about socialists and their organizations are problematic. None did so in “pure” form and each was significantly affected by the region’s unique cultural and economic characteristics.²⁸ The presence of so many Finnish, Ukrainian, and Italian workers added an “ethnic” dimension to the ever-changing nature and characteristic of socialism at the Lakehead.²⁹ In many respects, beneath the class conflict of the early twentieth century was a more pronounced interclass turmoil whose distinguishing feature was ethnic difference rather than material interests.³⁰

With such a wide variety of peoples from different parts of the world, many of whom were from different regions of the same nation-states, the experiences of the different groups at the Lakehead produced, defined, and gave language to the nature of their relationship with one another. In the twin cities, “ethnicity” was often tied to language usage, phenotypical appearance, and length of time in the country: the non-English-speaking, darker-looking, and more recently arrived “Finns” were considered to be radically different from, and in many ways inferior to, the English-speaking, fairer, and more settled “Anglo-Saxons.”³¹ Ethnicity arose from the interplay of such differences, arbitrary though they often were; and once a particular category was solidified – “the Finns,” “the Galicians,” “the Indians” – it was not easily questioned or replaced, even in the face of evidence that all such designated groups were internally differentiated, complexly demarcated, and fluid over time.³²

Ethnicity both strengthened and weakened the left. It strengthened it by creating the cultural conditions under which left-wing ideas could be brought to groups culturally marginalized within the hegemonic cultural order, with such ideas serving as ways to understand and reshape the oppressive conditions of everyday life. It enabled radical ideas to go beyond their working-class bases into different socioeconomic strata. Yet it also weakened the left, because each ethnic group, in the relative “privacy” of its language, was likely to develop its own distinctive vocabulary of socialism. Moreover, those with superior positions in the game of ethnicity were almost inevitably bound to defend their relative privileges against those who were marked out as inferior, at the cost of a more fully fledged solidarity.

The Lakehead legacy was one in which socialist solidarity was always both intensified and qualified by ethnicity. A sense of ethnic identification and protests

against ethnic discrimination fuelled many Lakehead leftists, particularly the region's many Finns and Ukrainians. Yet ethnic feelings also permeated the ranks of the Anglo-Saxon labour aristocracy, from which the Finns were largely excluded, and intensified its drive to circumvent radicalism with forms of conventional trade unionism or political centrism. As will become apparent, ethnicity both strengthened and weakened socialist organizations at the Lakehead. If working-class radicalism grew to almost unprecedented levels in the region – which became the epicentre of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) – it also caused unrivalled levels of frustration. In this sense, the statue of Lenin in Petrozavodsk, marginal to this story in one sense, stands as one of its central symbols in another. Many of the Finns who built the statue did so out of their heightened sense of revolutionary activism, yet they built it thousands of miles away from Canada because they had come to believe that left politics in Canada itself was a hopeless endeavour. Stymied by factional infighting, labour-aristocratic opposition, and police repression, among other things, such activists as Aate Pitkänen, a well-known member of the Port Arthur District Young Communist League, would see in Soviet Karelia their only chance to play an active role in a socialist society.

Socialist movements necessarily combine social, cultural, and political work. Intrinsicly committed to the fundamental restructuring of society, they recognize both the identities of individuals and those of the groups to which they belong. In a culturally heterogeneous terrain, a successful socialist movement will recognize the depth and tenacity of various forms of identity. It will struggle to articulate them to an overarching project, one that challenges the hierarchies and inequalities inherent in the capitalist system. In the early twentieth-century period covered in this book, the ideology of multiculturalism was unavailable as a way of thinking through such problems. In essence, the largely Anglo-Saxon-dominated labour movement, and even, paradoxically, a socialist movement made up disproportionately of recent immigrants, lacked the conceptual and political tools to address, let alone resolve, the problems raised by ethnic diversity and hierarchy. If at times this incapacity took the form of ethnic prejudice and exclusivism, at many others it simply assumed the unconscious, day-by-day repetition of the “commonsense” of the surrounding Canadian liberal order.³³ If any rigorous notion of “multiculturalism” requires (explicitly or implicitly) a “politics of recognition” – one that, philosopher Charles Taylor argues, must “recognize the equal value of different cultures” and not only allow them to survive “but acknowledge their *worth*” – the historian of Lakehead

leftism often confronts the systemic *mis*recognition of the Other in the region.³⁴ During the first three decades of the twentieth century, socialist organizations in fact depended on the support of those ethnic groups that under the liberal order had been unable to achieve recognition.

Ethnicity, Socialism, and the Politics of Labour is organized into three sections, each chronicling a distinct phase in the early history of socialism at the Lakehead. Part 1, “The Roots of Revolution?” consists of the first two chapters and explores the period between the establishment of the first socialist organizations in the region in 1902 and the depression that hit the Lakehead shortly before the First World War. This section takes to heart the observation that the history of labour at the Lakehead “is largely a history of conflict, not only with business and management but also within labour’s own ranks.”³⁵

Chapter 1 explores the period from the formation of the first known socialist party in the region to the internal split of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC). It also discusses the establishment of the Social Democratic Party of Canada (SDPC) and its relationship with Independent Labour Party politics shortly before the First World War. Surprisingly, although many works mention and even briefly discuss the SDPC, no monograph on the party exists. This chapter provides the regional history of the organization and explains the internal turmoil that gripped it. Chapter 2 outlines the challenges and changes that socialists faced during the war years. It begins with the onset of the First World War and ends shortly after the Russian Revolution. The events in Russia, as Ian McKay claims, irrevocably altered the socialist landscape at the Lakehead. This chapter examines how socialists navigated the war years and how their journey, in turn, began to alter the nature and characteristics of socialism in the region.

Part 2, “From Winnipeg to the Workers’ Unity League,” consists of Chapters 3 to 6 and bridges the period between the Russian Revolution and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. This period was marked by a profound change in the nature of socialism at the Lakehead. The evolutionary-based socialism that marked the period before the First World War was replaced by a more revolutionary brand inspired and, in many respects, dictated by the events in Russia following the October Revolution. As Ian McKay has suggested, however, when exploring this period “there is no point in looking for homogeneity.”

Chapter 3 traces socialist activity from the end of the Winnipeg General Strike through the somewhat erratic existence of the One Big Union (OBU) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) at the Lakehead. In particular,

it explores the relationship of the two organizations with each other and with their memberships. The One Big Union, despite being a “flash in the pan,” was the first “national” organization to embrace both revolutionary socialism and industrial unionism. Its rise and fall marked a turning point in the formation of the left at the Lakehead and in Canada.³⁶ Chapters 4 to 6 explore the establishment and eventual predominance (although not complete leftist hegemony) of the CPC at the Lakehead during the 1920s. Each of these chapters seeks to complicate the argument that immigrants, through their unwillingness to assimilate into the Canadian mainstream, prevented the CPC from flourishing. In many ways, the evidence suggests that Lakehead Communism flourished precisely because of the Finnish factor – with the Finns taking the lead not only in party building but also in participating in the many other fronts of Communist activity, from union building to cultural struggles. Yet it also suggests that, in part because of entrenched if unacknowledged Anglo-centrism, and in larger part because of the internal political dynamics of the international Communist movement, it was difficult to work such achievements into a more generalized, consistent, and persistent radical movement. In some respects, the Communists developed a massive base at the Lakehead, but lacked the theoretical or political tools with which to build on, or even to safeguard, it. As Chapter 6 reveals, they were also challenged within this base by other forms of revolutionary socialism, especially those associated with syndicalism, which severely tested the organizational capacities and ideological suppleness of the CPC.

The final part of this study, “The Great Depression and the Third Period,” consists of Chapters 7 and 8 and examines the first five years of what is commonly referred to today as the Great Depression.³⁷ These chapters document the extreme difficulties engendered by the party’s implementation of Stalin’s “Bolshevization” plan. The CPC underwent another change, from favouring cooperation and a “united front” to organizing revolutionary unions of its own in keeping with the Communist International’s declaration that capitalism had entered the Third Period and revolutionary change was imminent. These chapters demonstrate that despite massive demonstrations and the outward appearance of growing solidarity, the Communist movement became fractured along ethnic lines, and tensions between organizations, particularly between the CPC and IWW, hampered the organization and mobilization of workers.³⁸

This book concludes with a brief overview of the events of 1935. The election of 1935 was a pivotal moment in the history of Canada, the Lakehead, and the Canadian left. Internationally, the Communist International adopted that year

a strategy known as the Popular Front. By doing so, it decided to “drop its harsh critique of social democrats” and instead “build alliances with them (and other parties)” in an attempt to stem the spread of fascism.³⁹ Nationally, the election swept into power William Lyon Mackenzie King’s Liberals and ushered in a new era in federal politics. While the Liberals swept both the ridings encompassing Port Arthur and Fort William, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), in its first federal election, drew support away from candidates supporting the CPC. From this point forward, none of the socialist organizations in the region would again threaten the CCF on the left for political prominence.⁴⁰ The year 1935 was also a turning point because of the establishment of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the end of the Workers’ Unity League (WUL).⁴¹ The formation of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union to replace the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada (LWIUC) and the near collapse of the IWW Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) ended the existence of powerful revolutionary unions in the region.

The primary focus of this book is on institutions, especially parties and unions, with close attention to the ideas and principles championed by these organizations and the ways in which they challenged or confirmed underlying social and cultural patterns. Many fascinating cultural topics and personal biographies lie outside its scope. This somewhat traditional focus can be justified with particular force in the case of the Lakehead, because no other study has sought to bring this institutional history together, and also because only on the basis of such a solid framework can more wide-ranging theoretical and ideological analyses be successfully undertaken. Much more work still needs to be done in the years to come, but, just as the work of Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton on the labour revolt in the Maritimes between 1919 and 1920 attempts to bring it back into the collective memory of that region, so this study of socialist organization at the Lakehead between 1900 and 1935 aims to remember its contested and complicated legacy for the benefit of a new generation of activists and scholars.⁴²

PART 1
THE ROOTS OF REVOLUTION?

1

Early Socialist Organizations at the Lakehead

1900-14

At the turn of the twentieth century, many middle-class men and women in Port Arthur and Fort William imagined their communities to be forward-looking towns, perhaps even the future metropolises of a booming North.¹ Their impressions were understandable. The twin cities were growing. They were at the centre of the transshipment of goods in and out of the North. The export of the rapidly expanding wheat harvest depended on them, and their industries and businesses were expanding. In addition, with this economic growth came a social transformation, as thousands of immigrants came to the Lakehead. The twin cities acquired all the accoutrements of North American modernity – a growing culture of consumption, an urban cityscape, up-to-date utilities. One might also have predicted the emergence of a strong and unified labour movement. Here, however, there were regional peculiarities that told against any such development.

Some have seen the roots of the division that existed within the Lakehead labour movement as a conflict between traditional craft unions and a growing socialist element more at home among the unskilled workers and immigrants – one, that is, of “Labourism vs. Socialism.”² The former first participated in politics either as part of the Liberal Party’s “left wing” or within “a semi-independent Liberal-Labour, or ‘Lib-Lab,’ position.” The latter generated new

movements and parties that sought to rally workers against such class alliances, and led to a flourishing of a “multiplicity of radical sects competing for the labour vote and official endorsement of organized labour.”³ Any examination of the relationship between labourites and socialists at the Lakehead between 1900 and 1914 demonstrates, however, that added to this classic tension between skilled trades and other workers was the unavoidable question of ethnic differences. The Finns in particular challenged the contours of the Lakehead left. As one Finnish socialist observed about the socialist organizations in his community, “the name and direction was changed several times, always according to advancements made in the labour movement. An attempt was made, as is often said, to stay abreast of the times.”⁴ As in the rest of Canada, many organizations claiming to be socialist in nature appeared and disappeared. Each of these organizations claimed to understand Marx better than their competition, and each had a platform from which its members proselytized to any who would listen. Those that lasted longer than a few months, the typical lifespan for most organizations, even had notions of pan-national grandeur.

Although the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William may have been undergoing an economic expansion, when American Federation of Labor (AFL) organizer Harry Bryan arrived at the Lakehead in 1902, he found a region practically devoid of labour and socialist organizations. True, the employees of the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had branches of their national bodies in Port Arthur and Fort William and local Finnish carpenters had established a union, but these largely looked after their own and concerned themselves little with the larger social questions. As a result, “industrial unionism remained an ideal for progressive-minded labour leaders, as did the goal of organizing the unskilled.”⁵

Bryan exemplified an era that would see the creation of a vibrant and diverse socialist culture in the region.⁶ Enamoured by the philosophy behind the Knights of Labor, he acted as an organizer for them during the late 1870s and 1880s in St. Thomas, Ontario.⁷ Bryan’s activities with the Knights of Labor ultimately anticipated what would be called the Social Gospel Movement, in harmony with his strong Methodist upbringing and radical ideology. It was these characteristics that put Bryan considerably to the left of mainstream Canadian society and Canadian Methodism. He left for the United States in the early 1880s and soon befriended Samuel Gompers and Eugene Debs. By the turn of the twentieth century, he had been a successful organizer for the AFL in the US.⁸ Bryan’s position as a union leader and his role in a number of

prominent strikes in Cleveland eventually led to his being blacklisted by most employers, and he and his family had no choice but to leave. With no other prospects, he was convinced by the AFL leadership to return to Canada to organize workers at the Lakehead.

Bryan was drawn by the region's extraordinary growth rates at the turn of the century. Its location at the head of Lake Superior, combined with nearby natural resources and the phenomenal expansion of the Canadian wheat economy, made Lakehead a magnet for immigrants. Within the cities, the railway yards, coal docks, grain elevators, and shipbuilding yards that hugged the shore of Lake Superior provided the bulk of the employment for labourers (both skilled and unskilled) and were the driving force of the regional economy until the 1920s, when pulp and paper mills would join the mix.⁹ When Bryan arrived, the vast majority of workers in these occupations belonged to no union.

Bryan's declaration to the editor of the Fort William *Daily Times-Journal* in 1903 that he was going to organize all the trades and workers into the AFL was more than bluster. The region presented him with the type of challenge he craved.¹⁰ "The year 1903," according to Jean Morrison, "would herald many other firsts for labour: the first strikes organized and settled locally, a publicly acclaimed first Labour Day parade, and the first labour council, a Central Labour Union, affiliated to the American Federation of Labor."¹¹ Utilizing all the skills acquired in working for the American labour movement, in a few short years Bryan established perhaps as many as twenty-two unions in Port Arthur and Fort William.¹²

Bryan's dedication to the political movement was as important as the unions he helped establish. Ideologically, he did not blame capitalists for the plight of workers. He believed the system needed to be changed and warned local workers that the capitalists were as much victims as workers. For this reason, he argued, as long as capitalists were willing to change, they should be given a chance to cooperate.¹³ This manifested itself in a belief in municipal ownership of public services and utilities, a battle that manifested itself in a referendum during the 1902 civic election that pitted municipal control against Bell Telephone.¹⁴ The extent of municipal ownership in Port Arthur was virtually unequalled (with perhaps the exception of Fort William) in North America.¹⁵ Municipally controlled telephone systems carried the day, but Bryan was blacklisted and forced to leave the city after he publicly humiliated Bell by exposing its collusion with local businesses and politicians to undermine the referendum.¹⁶

The success of the 1902 referendum on municipally controlled telephone systems did not reflect a working-class victory, however.¹⁷ Conservative Dr. T.S.T. Smellie's electoral success, for instance, demonstrated that the citizens of Fort William and Port Arthur were willing to vote in favour of public ownership of the telephone system but had not embraced the working-class candidates.¹⁸ Within the twin cities, residents, while constantly extracting what they could from the metropolis, had adopted "the tactic of voting, in the main, for the party in power at both the federal and provincial levels." G.R. Weller points out that this was in stark contrast to the "conventional wisdom about the reaction of voters in many provincial and supraprovincial hinterland regions, who are normally regarded as likely to vote for opposition or third parties as a means of remedying their lot."¹⁹

Harry Bryan's treatment incensed many of those in Port Arthur and Fort William who, already dissatisfied with how politicians and local labour leaders in the twin cities had handled the telephone scandal, had begun to search for an alternative. Under the guidance of E.C. Jordan, a branch of the Canadian Socialist League (CSL) was formed in Port Arthur shortly before the provincial election was called in 1904. While scholars differ in their opinion about the nature of the CSL, it combined middle-of-the-road liberals and Christian socialists with up-and-coming Marxists. The Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) grew out of the CSL, as many Marxist militants could already be found within the latter's ranks.²⁰

In Ontario, the CSL became the Ontario Socialist League (OSL) in 1902 and then the Ontario Socialist Party (OSP) in 1903, to better reflect the group's intention of contesting elections.²¹ Its 1903 convention drew delegates from across the province, with Jordan representing socialists in both Port Arthur and Fort William. As Martin Robin notes, those in attendance decided on a platform accepting, as "democratic" and therefore "socialist," "the reform measures of direct legislation, proportional representation, and public ownership of public utilities but recognized the fact that 'when administered by a capitalist government they cannot be but palliatives.'"²²

The OSP found a sympathetic audience in the region. The October convention itself called for delegates to be "rigidly against any fusion or alliance with any independent or so-called reform party advocating any or all these or other demands that does not include the aims and purposes" of the OSP.²³ This automatically put them in conflict with those candidates in Port Arthur and Fort William who were running under the Independent Labour Party (ILP) banner

and who were supported publicly by Bryan and the newly established Central Labour Union (CLU).

In fact, organized labour had sought to cultivate an alliance with the business community during the federal election of 1904. With backing from the CLU, railway unions, and Bryan, local Liberal Louis Peltier was selected as the ILP candidate for the riding of Thunder Bay and Rainy River, an area covering half of Northwestern Ontario.²⁴ Peltier advocated “labour’s entry into electoral politics on its own behalf, a policy endorsed by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada but denounced by the American Federation of Labor.”²⁵ The key plank of his ten-point platform remained municipal ownership and the protection and preservation of the right of workers to organize.²⁶ Although not elected, he did receive 14 percent of the final vote, representing organized labour’s entry into direct politics.²⁷

The loose coalition of unions backing Peltier and organized by Bryan under the CLU for the federal election was at best unstable.²⁸ Despite ties to local labour and the vote of confidence he received from Bryan, Peltier’s close association with the Liberal Party did not endear him to all. His close relationship with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Clifford Sifton, and railway magnates Lord Shaughnessy and James Stephenson, in particular, concerned the more radical elements in Port Arthur and Fort William. His candidacy did not elicit support from all unions in the riding and, of the nineteen listed in his manifesto, “all were from the railways with the exception of the Fort William Central Labour Union, the Teamsters, the Bartenders, and the Iron Workers.” Many opposed to Peltier reasoned that his participation in the election merely meant that two Liberal candidates were in the running. Perhaps because of this, Bryan’s name was noticeably absent from the ILP platform despite his being a prominent figure at Peltier’s nomination.²⁹

By this point, others in the region had also begun to think like Jordan, who, speaking to the CLU in June 1904, argued that “the worker must capture political power [directly].”³⁰ Despite fielding no candidate, the OSP attacked Peltier and the ILP during the federal election of 1904 for what it perceived as an unholy “class alliance.”³¹ The public condemnation by the OSP did have an effect on Bryan, as, shortly after the election, he and many other likeminded workers became active members. Considering his past experiences in the US, his growing disputes with many in the ILP over AFL policy, his admiration for the thoughts and ideas of Eugene Debs, and his past involvement with the Socialist Party of America, Bryan’s break with the ILP is not surprising.³²

The OSP's positions on issues such as wages, working conditions, and class would have appealed to him. The OSP also appeared to espouse another tenet of Marxism that, in practice, was not reflected in the organizations found in Port Arthur and Fort William. Unlike the craft unions and the Anglo-oriented ILP, the OSP sought to more fully unite and integrate all socialists in the region, regardless of ethnic background. Bryan had previously convinced the fledgling Finnish carpenters' union to join with the AFL Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners branch in 1902. In approaching the Finnish Workingmen's Association of Port Arthur, established in 1903 and the largest workers' organization in Northwestern Ontario, Bryan brought together with the Finns other ethnic workers to discuss the issues facing all workers in the region.³³

While Greek, Italian, Ukrainian, and Finnish workers all participated in the labour unrest and organization of unions in Fort William and Port Arthur, only the Finns had initially sought to establish workingmen's organizations of their own. True, all ethnic groups at the Lakehead formed some type of community organization, but, aside from the Italians, none was large enough or inclined to go beyond its ethnic boundary. Finnish immigrants were also much more steeped in the socialist thought spreading across Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Industrialization, Russification campaigns, and the commercialization of agriculture had led to a surging popularity of social democratic movements in Finland.³⁴

According to the available statistics, Finns who came to the Lakehead preferred Port Arthur to Fort William; the population of the latter city remained stable at approximately 3.2 to 3.7 percent of the total population, although hundreds more could be found in the surrounding countryside.³⁵ Finns in Port Arthur could be found living in a number of "ethnic" neighbourhoods, but the primary areas were those streets in the immediate area surrounding Bay Street, where, in 1910, the Finnish Labour Temple would be constructed.³⁶ The Finnish community generally consisted of Church Finns, Lutheran in denomination, and socialist Finns. These categories were hardly exclusive, as both groups shared similar positions on many issues, temperance being one during the first years of the twentieth century.³⁷

On their arrival in Canada, most Finnish workers did not have common cause with the existing Anglo-dominated trade unions organized under the American Federation of Labor and later the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. The TLC in fact advertised itself locally as the only organization in the region capable of protecting workers from "cheap, foreign-born labour."³⁸



Figure 2 Labour Day gathering of Finnish people, 1907. *Courtesy of Lakehead University Library Archives*

As a result, Finns formed their own workers' associations, based on the same principles that had guided the Finnish cooperative movement in the late nineteenth century. The Port Arthur Finnish Workingmen's Association, *Imatra* #9 (formed in 1903), was one such organization.³⁹

An affiliate of the Brooklyn-based *Amerikan Suomalainen Työväenliitto Imatra* (the Finnish-American Workers' League), it drew its membership from those Finns dissatisfied with the social and political discussions in the local churches and temperance associations.⁴⁰ The expressed goal of the *Amerikan Suomalainen Työväenliitto Imatra* was to disseminate socialism by taking an active role in cultural, educational, and political activities.⁴¹ The Finnish socialists thus sought to compete with the *Pohjankukka*, the Fort William Temperance Society, by building an all-encompassing organization for the Finns in both cities.⁴²

The *Amerikan Suomalainen Työväenliitto Imatra* also embodied one of the defining characteristics of Finnish Canadian socialism in the early twentieth century – its borderless nature. Consisting of thirty-two workingmen's associations in both the United States and Canada, from its establishment *Imatra* #9

was involved in supporting Finnish workers' efforts throughout the US. Internationally, *Imatra #9* helped raise funds for the Finnish franchise movement and various strikes held by workers in various Finnish cities and towns against Russian oppression. Within its first year of existence, the association established its own hall and claimed a membership of over 130, of whom thirty were women. By 1906, this number had increased to 164.⁴³ Although discussions over the construction of a joint hall were held with the much larger temperance society, *Uusi Yritys Raittiusseura* (UYR), throughout 1905, nothing materialized.⁴⁴

A similar course of events unfolded in Fort William, but with some differences. By 1905, Finns in that city had also established their own reading room. As the population of the community continued to grow and the influence of the *Pohjankukka* decreased, Finnish socialists in Fort William began to explore establishing their own organization. In 1907, they separated and formed their own branch of it with the blessing of *Imatra #9*. Nothing exists to indicate the relationship between the two organizations and, because most of the branch's membership also belonged to the *Pohjankukka*, it was "comparatively ineffectual in the community" as socialists did not have their own home, meetings were sporadic, and membership fees (which decreased as membership dwindled) formed the only source of funds.⁴⁵ As in Port Arthur, with the collapse of the local temperance society in 1908, the Fort William *Imatra* merged with the remaining members of the temperance organization and took control of their hall, which they had been using since its establishment.

Recognizing the growing strength of Finnish socialists in the region, local union organizers in both cities began in 1904 to approach *Imatra #9* for its support during strikes. In 1905, the recently returned Harry Bryan, along with the OSP's representative, E.C. Jordan, actively promoted the party to Finnish socialists in both cities and in the outlying region. It appears that Bryan and Jordan went so far as to propose the creation of a joint Finnish-English socialist newspaper at the Lakehead – an enterprise evidently doomed by the small number of Anglo socialists.⁴⁶ Although no paper came into being, the *Imatra #9* executive decided to allow non-Finnish socialists to attend meetings and, in 1906, accepted Jordan "as a member even though he was not a Finn."⁴⁷ It appears that the membership of *Imatra #9* had discussed the possibility of joining the newly formed Socialist Party of Canada in October 1904.⁴⁸

These positions placed Finnish socialists at odds with many in their community and with their American parent organization. As reconstructed by such historians as Varpu Lindström and Donald Wilson, the Finnish experience of

emigration to Canada combined relatively small numbers (only about 21,494 in 1921, according to the Census of Canada) with high levels of politicization. Finland gained its independence from Russia as late as 6 December 1917. Before that, and for most of the previous century, the Finns were part of the autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. In essence, Finns were fighting a national liberation struggle against Russia in the early twentieth century – a struggle that split the country into Reds and Whites and eventually plunged it into a civil war whose repercussions, as we shall see in later chapters, were felt strongly at the Lakehead.⁴⁹ The introduction of universal suffrage in 1906 – with Finnish women becoming the first in Europe to win the vote – created a massive base for the Social Democrats, which became the strongest social democratic party in Europe, paradoxically still under the tutelage of the Tsar, the “Grand Duke” of Finland. Finnish leftists at the Lakehead, a beleaguered minority in some senses, could also legitimately feel themselves to be emissaries from a land in which the socialist movement was far more developed than in Canada. From early in the twentieth century, in the temperance societies, then in the socialist halls, and then in the halls attached to the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada (FSOC), Finnish Canadian socialism was unusually influenced by social and cultural activities centred on the halls. No matter what the state of play among rival parties and groups on the left was, this “hall socialism” remained a powerful force.⁵⁰

Dissatisfied, however, with the lack of political action undertaken by the parent organization, Finnish socialists in Port Arthur and Fort William began actively pushing it to play a greater role in politics and unions where Finnish populations existed. *Imatra #9* even publicly criticized the parent organization’s newspaper, *Pohjantahi*, after it attacked the Finnish American socialist paper *Työmies*.⁵¹ Whether by coincidence or in part because of Bryan’s and Jordan’s persuasiveness, *Imatra #9* broke from the *Amerikan Suomalainen Työväenliitto Imatra* in 1905 and acted as an independent organization for the next two years.

These changes within the Finnish socialist community occurred just as the Port Arthur branch of the OSP was established due to the formation of the Socialist Party of Canada resulting from the merger of the CSL with the Socialist Party of British Columbia, the Revolutionary Socialist Party of British Columbia, and other smaller organizations in 1904.⁵² In reality, the joining of these organizations meant little to members of the OSP. Unlike its counterpart in British Columbia, the OSP had been ineffectual politically and unable to garner support

from the Independent Labour Party. It remains unclear how many locals joined the SPC automatically, but neither Port Arthur nor Fort William was initially among them.⁵³ The official SPC position – one that was contradicted by many an SPC trade union leader – was that trade unionism at best offered palliatives to wage slavery. And SPCers were also identified with the “single-plank” platform, which precluded their cooperation or sharing of platforms with members of other political parties, even those claiming labour and left credentials.⁵⁴

Inspired by the creation of the SPC, Harry Bryan invited Leo T. English, one of the Socialist Party’s leading theoreticians, to the region to speak.⁵⁵ English, a well-known opponent of organizations structured along the lines of the British Labour Party, found a receptive audience.⁵⁶ Although attempts to integrate with the Finns failed, English, Bryan, and another worker named John McKiernan nonetheless were able to establish an English-language branch of the SPC in April 1906. They joined the three other Ontario English-language locals operating in Hamilton, Toronto, and Berlin. It appears, though, that this first branch of the SPC was short-lived, as the *Western Clarion* would later report, in September 1908, the creation of Port Arthur’s only English-language branch.⁵⁷

Long blocked from political involvement and frustrated by the English orientation of trade unions, local Finnish workers also established a branch of the SPC in Port Arthur in 1906.⁵⁸ The SPC provided a natural home for those Finnish Canadian socialists who had left the *Imatra* league and who were looking to take a more active political role within Canada.⁵⁹ As with the OSP, however, Jordan and Bryan convinced Finnish socialists in the region to join by November 1907 and create the Port Arthur Finnish Socialist Local #6 (*Suomalainen Sosialisti Osasto*).⁶⁰ A newly established Fort William Workingmen’s Association, in the midst of consolidating its membership, followed suit a year later and formed the Fort William Socialist Local #25 with seventy members, a significant number compared with other well-established locals in the country.⁶¹

Like the Toronto locals, the decision to join appeared to rest on the idea that Finnish socialists could revolutionize Canadian society only by engaging in mainstream Canadian socialist activities.⁶² The decision to directly affiliate with a non-Finnish Canadian party also resulted from a lack of widespread linkages between the existing Finnish Canadian associations. The decision to join the SPC resulted from a desire on the part of Finnish Canadian socialists to be part of the Canadian working-class and labour movement. By 1909, the Finnish members constituted the largest ethnic group in the SPC after the English and Ukrainians. According to Varpu Lindström, Finnish socialists

accounted for up to two-thirds of the local membership.⁶³ She has also argued that historians such as A. Ross McCormack, who have suggested that the SPC resulted in Anglo-Saxon radicals' organizing of "European immigrants," are not correct. "The SPC did not 'organize' the Finns," Lindström observes; "rather, it was the Finns who 'organized' a significant section of the Socialist Party of Canada."⁶⁴ Nowhere was this truer than at the Lakehead.

By 1906, the ILP no longer existed, the trade unions Bryan had established had become pawns of Lib-Labs, and new tensions had appeared within the working class at the Lakehead. Part of the explanation lay in the experiences of the unorganized workers. These workers were largely Italian, Greek, Finnish, and Ukrainian in origin and could be found employed as freight handlers for the CPR in Fort William and the CNR in Port Arthur. Many also lived in the coal dock sections of the two cities, a region located in the southern portion of Fort William hugging the outskirts of the industrial area, and notorious for substandard living conditions and overcrowding. The work was hard, heavy, and sporadic, and paid lower than the national average for unskilled labour. Not surprisingly, this area was also the centre of most of the labour unrest between 1906 and 1914. For example, a full-fledged gunfight erupted when authorities imported four train cars full of strikebreakers to break a Fort William freight handlers' strike in 1906.⁶⁵

Local newspapers, disregarding the Anglo-Saxon identities of the strike's leaders, focused relentlessly on the theme of "British citizens" struggling with "foreigners." For the Port Arthur *Daily News*, the very eruption of the strike had constituted an insult to the community, which it defined in very nativist terms: "For a community of British citizens to have to submit to the insult and armed defiance from a disorganized horde of ignorant and low-down mongrel swash bucklers and peanut vendors is making a demand upon national pride which has no excuse."⁶⁶ Likewise, when the CPR refused to hire Greek or Italian workers on account of their role in the previous year's strikes, British and Northern European workers, two groups deemed to have been moderate during the strikes, were hired as they were thought to be "more than a match for [the] Greeks" should trouble arise.⁶⁷ It was into this strife-ridden situation that the SPC was relaunched in 1908.

At the same time, while the more radical English-language socialists were organizing themselves, Frederick Urry formed the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council in April 1908.⁶⁸ Much like Bryan in his first days in the region, Urry was an admirer of the British labour movement. Before his arrival in

Canada, he had been a member of the British Independent Labour Party.⁶⁹ Between his arrival and his death in October 1927, Urry would play a prominent role in all aspects of the labour movement, continually working, one biography argues, “for a community of interests between Christians, socialists and trade unionists.”⁷⁰ Conscious of the relationship needed between trade unionists, the social gospel, socialism, and local politics, Urry launched himself more directly than previous socialists into the ideological debate facing the left in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1908 he became the regional representative to the Presbyterian Church of Canada’s Board of Social and Moral Reform and later its representative to Canadian labour. Urry was also one of three from Port Arthur who attended the founding of the SPC’s Ontario section as official delegates, and who attended the TLC’s annual meeting in Halifax on behalf of the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council. As Morrison justifiably suggests, “his participation in these conferences symbolizes his attempt to use and unite trade unionism, socialism and the social gospel” to further his vision of a “co-operative commonwealth based on social and class harmony.”⁷¹

Urry’s position met with hostility from some in the region. No incident better illustrates this than the founding meeting of the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council in 1908. Invited by Urry to the event was the national chairman of the Board of Social and Moral Reform, the Reverend J.G. Shearer; Mayor J.J. Carrick, perennial Conservative candidate; the Reverend Dr. S.C. Murray of St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church; and F.B. Allen, publisher of the Port Arthur *News-Chronicle* and a prominent member of the Liberal Party.⁷² Representing the Fort William Trades and Labour Council was a member of the International Typographical Union, Leo T. English. Speaking on behalf of the SPC, English expressed his disgust, remarking: “I have come to the meeting hoping to hear a workingman’s story, but instead I have heard a couple of politicians and a couple of ministers.”⁷³ He attacked Shearer, declaring to all those present that “human advancement is not made by making laws. It is made by breaking laws.”⁷⁴

With the strike of 1906 and the law’s failure to protect workers still fresh in the minds of workers, many shared this sentiment. Urry’s response was quick and just as provocative. In his capacity as president and secretary of the labour council, he declared that English’s tactics would “bring discredit to the Labor movement.” The Port Arthur *Daily News*, backed by Conservative J.J. Carrick, declared English to be a student of “the anarchistic school being propagated in Canada by ‘the Appeal to Reason,’ which does all but openly advocate murder.”⁷⁵

The newspaper also linked English to F.B. Allen, the Liberal candidate and editor of the *Chronicle*. It was a brazen attempt, as Jean Morrison argues, “to break the seemingly close relationship between organized labour and the Liberals.”⁷⁶

Local Liberals and Conservatives, already conscious of the growing strength of organized labour and the SPC, further assisted in widening the growing gap between moderate and radical socialists in the region. Despite the *Daily News*’ gleeful denunciation of English and the SPC for the incident at the first meeting of the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council, the paper reversed its position during the provincial election campaign of June 1908. Fearing a Conservative victory due to a split in the labour vote, the Liberals withdrew their candidates in favour of “independent” ones. At a nomination meeting organized by the recently resigned Liberal candidate, F.B. Allen, George Mooring was chosen as the Independent Labour candidate. For even the most reform-minded SPC supporters in the region, Mooring’s candidacy would have been unacceptable, as he was a well-known timber contractor.

Not surprisingly, the SPC in the region was the first to speak out against Mooring and what it perceived as an emergent class alliance.⁷⁷ The day after Mooring’s nomination, the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council voted in a new permanent council with Frederick Urry as secretary and James Brooker as president. With support from John T. Mortimer, former president of the Trades and Labour Congress of Manitoba, the council’s first action was to withdraw its support from Mooring and place it behind the SPC’s candidate, English.⁷⁸ This support was mixed, however.

Unsure about the local SPC and cautious about its Anglo-Saxon and trade-union-dominated executive, many Finns opted to run their own candidates in the municipal election of 1908. Despite the community’s relatively small size and its candidates’ remote chances of winning, many in Port Arthur and Fort William became alarmed and viewed the situation as a “serious danger” to the region.⁷⁹ Both Conservatives and Liberals increasingly characterized the Finns, and all those associated with publications such as *Appeal to Reason*, as “socialistic” and “anarchistic.”⁸⁰

The salience of this journal in the region suggested some of its underlying patterns of leftism. Although isolated and marginalized in one sense, the Lakehead was tightly integrated into North American patterns of Finnish and Ukrainian settlement and wide open to currents of radicalism south of the border. Thus, although the English-language branch of the SPC may have become inactive shortly after its creation, those drawn to socialism were not left

without sources of information and inspiration. The Kansas-based *Appeal to Reason* became the focus of the ire of those against socialism. Local authorities were so concerned that they banned the paper, along with the satirical Finnish socialist paper *Väkäleuka*, in April 1908.⁸¹ Although the move appealed to some Finns who worried that Finnish radicalism threatened the community's image of respectability, it was so draconian that even mainstream local newspapers found it excessive.⁸²

At the Ontario convention of the SPC that year, delegates from the Lakehead joined the fifteen locals and 500 to 600 members. Despite impressive election results in Toronto, however, Ontario locals saw their numbers gradually decrease because of internal divisions rooted in regional peculiarities, incompatible personalities, and disagreements over the SPC's role in municipal politics.⁸³ For SPC supporters at the Lakehead such as Bryan and English, the various elections and the collusion of labour politicians against workers was proof that class alliances benefited only the master class.⁸⁴

The SPC and the Port Arthur and Fort William Trades and Labour Councils did unite during the 1908 federal election to endorse Frederick Urry's nomination for the riding of Thunder Bay–Rainy River. Despite the growing divisions between labourites and socialists, Urry appears to have been the only jointly sponsored SPC and organized-labour candidate in the country.⁸⁵ What his joint candidacy reveals is still open to speculation. Clearly, the position of SPCers was much more heterogeneous than the previous literature on the SPC has suggested. Urry's willingness to represent a community of interest both helped and dampened his appeal. Although the labour and SPC candidate, he had only "mixed support" from the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council because of his connections to socialists.⁸⁶ Urry's experiment in bridging the socialist/labourite division was, unsurprisingly, short-lived – it did not even outlive the election itself.

It certainly did not help that the local newspapers (which publicly supported either the Liberal or the Conservative candidate) denigrated both him and his candidacy for associating with Finnish socialists who allegedly practised "free love."⁸⁷ Perhaps local newspapers made these claims in the hope that voters would draw comparisons to the recent attention given to the activities in Canada of Emma Goldman and the Industrial Workers of the World.⁸⁸ They were also responding to actual instances of Finnish socialists defying convention and forming conjugal partnerships without benefit of clergy, as a manifestation of their critique of religion and, at least for some, patriarchal conventions.⁸⁹

Despite receiving a respectable 752 votes out of a total of 4,562, the SPC denounced Urry following the election for his support of a pension scheme based on “sane’ principles, and equal wage for women and men when engaged in the same work, and a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work.”⁹⁰ The *Western Clarion*, an SPC organ, described his position as “sickly sentimental reforms” and, despite his significant showing in the election, labelled Urry a “half-baked socialist” and “another example of a distorted and disordered imagination suggestive [of] Keir Hardie Labor-Socialism – a concoction noted for its inspired nothings.”⁹¹ Not surprisingly, Urry resigned from the SPC soon after, chastised local socialists for their “delight in abusing the workers,” and declared that the SPC could not be the Socialist Party of Canada until it abandoned such tactics and focused instead on enlisting workers.⁹²

The growing rift between labourites and socialists by 1909 was nowhere more apparent than in the Fort William freight handlers’ strike at the docks and encompassing the southern part of the city that began on 12 August 1909.⁹³ The strike was over wages and working conditions, and the *Industrial Banner* would later argue that “the poor, exploited foreigners had good cause for revolt.”⁹⁴ *Cotton’s Weekly* categorized the strikers as “martyrs since, through them and their deeds, the conditions of wage slavery of their comrades have been discovered.”⁹⁵ Negotiations brokered by the mayor of Fort William, Louis Peltier, were proceeding until, under the cover of night, the CPR brought in enough constables, the railway’s chief security agent told local newspapers, “to compete with a company of soldiers, let alone foreigners.”⁹⁶ Tensions continued to mount the next day when Peltier, only recently elected on the labour ticket, “succumbed to pressure,” read the Riot Act to strikers, mobilized the local militia, and asked that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police be brought in from Winnipeg.⁹⁷ In Peltier’s view, the decision to subdue the strikers was justified as he had “done everything possible to bring about a peaceable settlement.” As he declared in the local newspapers: “I am through. The men who have brought on this trouble must take consequences. The law of the land must be protected.”⁹⁸ For their part, the local police, militia, and legendary Mountie Sam Steele viewed force as necessary “owing to the very great number of foreigners in the two cities.”⁹⁹

Both the strikers and workers sympathetic to their cause rioted after attempts by railway police to forcefully remove those impeding strikebreakers. The armed confrontation resulted in a running gunfight that left eight strikers dead and four police officers, two bystanders, and thirty strikers wounded. The *Industrial Banner* described the incident as “probably the bloodiest labor riot

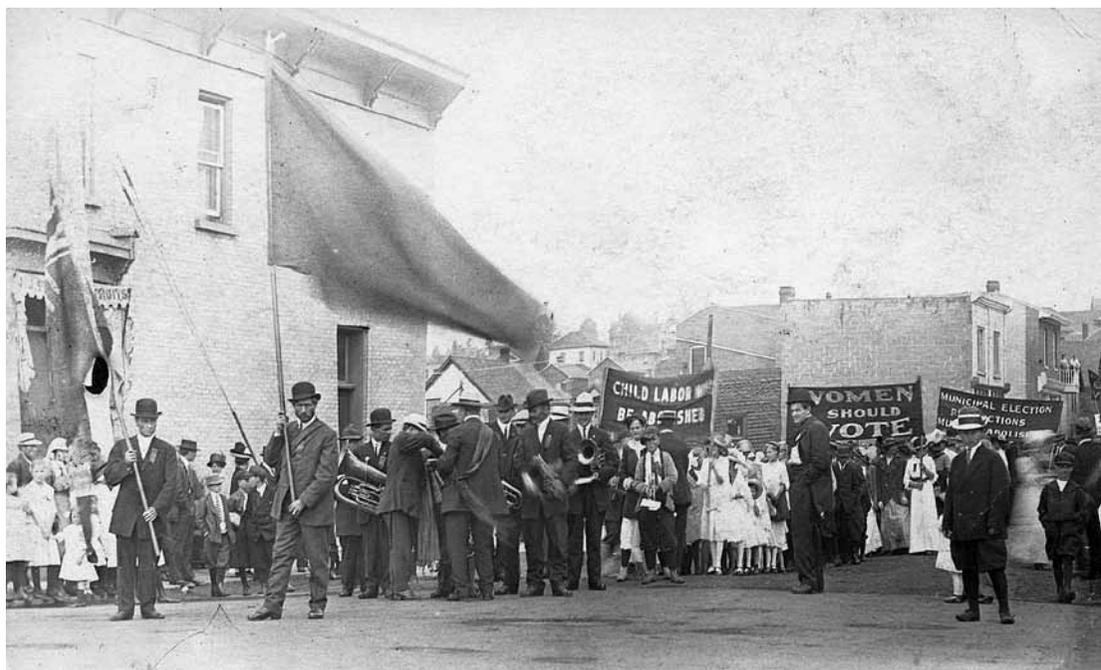


Figure 3 1912 or 1914 Parade on Bay Street Port Arthur. Courtesy of Lakehead University Library Archives

ever in Canada.”¹⁰⁰ The incident ended only when Peltier convinced the strikers to submit their case to a conciliation board.¹⁰¹ For his part, Urry struggled to mobilize public opinion against official violence. He rallied the Port Arthur Trades and Labour Council “to denounce the use of the local militia.” He also sought to resolve the conflict through the mediation of the federal Department of Labour.¹⁰² With respect to the Anglo-Saxon workers and mainstream opinion in the twin cities, the damage to the immigrants’ image was difficult to repair, even for so capable and determined a fence mender. The *Fort William Daily Times-Journal* compared the recent events to the Haymarket Riot in the United States, which, it pointed out, had concluded with the hanging of foreign anarchists. A composite image of the “dangerous foreigner” was taking hold.¹⁰³

Understandably, the events of 1909 created a certain amount of animosity within the remaining socialist organizations. Peltier’s stance alienated the strikers. His position as a local union leader and ILP activist also drove another wedge between non-Anglo socialists, trade unions, and the local establishment.

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