

UNION ORGANIZING IN THE CANADIAN BANKING INDUSTRY, 1940–1980

A Dissertation Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY

Peterborough, Ontario, Canada

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Canadian Studies Ph.D. Graduate Program

May 2016

ABSTRACT

Dissertation Title: Union Organizing in the Canadian Banking Industry, 1940–1980

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Summary:

In this dissertation, I examine union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980. By demonstrating that bank workers consistently sought to unionize throughout the twentieth century, I challenge claims that bank employees and other private sector white-collar workers have low rates of unionization because they are not interested in unions or suffer from false consciousness. This research also suggests, however, that many bank workers saw themselves as different from blue-collar industrial workers; the lived reality of bank work as precarious, poorly paid, and rife with gender inequality intersected with ideas about professionalism and aspirations of advancing up the career ladder. Banks, unions, and workers drew on these ideas and experiences in their arguments for and against unionization.

I also look at why previous organizing efforts did not establish a strong union presence in the banking industry. Most of these attempts failed, I argue, due to several key issues, including the banks' anti-union activity, federal and provincial labour board decisions, and labour movement disputes over ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy. The banks consistently opposed unionization and used a variety of tactics to thwart union organizing, both overtly and covertly. The state, in the form of labour legislation and labour boards, provided unions and workers with some means by which to compel the

banks to recognize unions, negotiate contracts, and deal with employee grievances; however, state action and inaction more often worked to undermine union organizing. The attitudes and strategies of high-ranking labour movement officials also shaped the outcome of union drives in the banks. Between 1940 and 1980, the mostly male labour leadership repeatedly used top-down organizing strategies and appointed male organizers with no experience of bank work to oversee union drives in a sector with an increasingly feminized workforce; labour leaders' inability or unwillingness to reflect on this approach and to support grassroots campaigns and alternative strategies hindered bank union organizing. I thus highlight the intersection of gender and class and reveal how these factors have historically shaped the labour movement bureaucracy, union organizing, and the relationship between labour and the state.

Keywords: trade unions; banks; union organizing; white-collar workers; labour bureaucracy; gender; Canada

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge and thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the funding I received to complete this dissertation. I also thank SSHRC for awarding me a Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement that allowed me to spend a semester as a visiting scholar at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. As well, I am grateful for the funding I received from the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Program, the School of Graduate Studies at Trent University, the Symons Trust Fund, and the Frost Centre for Canadian Studies and Indigenous Studies.

Many colleagues and scholars assisted me during my doctoral studies. I thank the numerous Trent faculty members who offered support and encouragement, including Gillian Balfour, James Conolly, Chris Dummitt, Caroline Durand, Finis Dunaway, Michael Eamon, Julia Harrison, Marg Hobbs, John Milloy, Janet Miron, Jim Struthers, John Wadland, and Deborah White. Thanks also to my fellow graduate students and the staff in the Academic Skills Centre, Bata Library, Facilities Management, and the School of Graduate Studies. I would like to extend a special thank you to Erin Stewart Eves, who provided helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this dissertation, and to Jeannine Crowe and Cathy Schoel, who have made Kerr House a warm and welcoming place to study. Outside of Trent, I received assistance from the staff at Library and Archives Canada, Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of British Columbia Library, and Archives and Special Collections at the University of Ottawa Library. Wallace Clement shared his expertise on political economy. I am especially grateful to Robyn Alexander, for speaking with me about her experiences as a bank union organizer, and to François

Leduc and the members of le Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, for granting me access to the union's archives. As well, thank you to Joshua Freeman, David Harvey, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Ruth Milkman for their support during my semester in New York.

I am profoundly grateful to my examining committee. Dimitry Anastakis and Charles Smith were excellent examiners, and I appreciate their thoughtful comments on my work. Rosemary Warskett also offered helpful suggestions and generously shared her expertise and personal memories of bank union organizing. Bryan Palmer provided valuable insight and advice on my research throughout its development. Joan Sangster has been an exemplary supervisor. I have learned much from her about scholarship, history, feminism, politics, mentorship, and activism. I am grateful for her support and in awe of her knowledge and work ethic. It has been a privilege to work with her and to complete this project under her supervision.

Last but certainly not least, I thank my friends and family for enriching my life in so many ways. A special thanks to my sister Lisa, who was a constant source of hope, inspiration, laughs, and commiseration as we completed our doctoral studies together. Finally, I would like to thank Sean, for everything.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTE	Association of Commercial and Technical Employees
AEBE	Association des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, Incorporée
AFL	American Federation of Labor
BC	British Columbia
BCGEU	British Columbia Government Employees' Union
BCN	Banque Canadienne Nationale
BEA	Bank Employees Association
C & D	Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal
CBEA	Canadian Bank Employees' Association
CBRE	Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees and Other Transport Workers
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labor
CCWU	Canadian Chemical Workers Union
CCYM	Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement
CIBC	Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CLRB	Canada Labour Relations Board
COPE	Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union

CSN	Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux
CUBE	Canadian Union of Bank Employees
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
FTQ	Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec
IBOA	Irish Bank Officials' Association
IRDIA	Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act
NWLB	National War Labour Board
OEIU	Office Employees International Union
ON	Ontario
OPEIU	Office and Professional Employees International Union
OPWOC	Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee
OTEU	Office and Technical Employees Union
OWW	Organized Working Women
PC	Privy Council Order
PSAC	Public Service Alliance of Canada
RBC	Royal Bank of Canada
RCIA	Retail Clerks' International Association
RWLB	Regional War Labour Board
SEB	Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal
SEBE 434	Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, Local 434
SEPB	Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau
SORWUC	Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada

SWOC	Steel Workers Organizing Committee
TD	Toronto-Dominion Bank
TLC	Trades and Labor Congress of Canada
UAWA	United Automobile, Aircraft, Agricultural Implement Workers of America
UBE	Union of Bank Employees
UBW	United Bank Workers, Local 2, SORWUC
US	United States
USWA	United Steelworkers of America

CHAPTER 1: BANK WORKERS, UNIONS, AND THE STATE

Introduction

In April 2013, news broke that one of Canada's Big Five banks, Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), had outsourced 45 information technology jobs in Toronto to iGate Corp., a multinational outsourcing firm from India.¹ The news sparked a public outrage. People posted hundreds of angry comments online and set up a Facebook group calling for a boycott of RBC; large labour unions and federations threatened to pull millions of dollars in investments out of the bank. Indeed, the anger over the RBC outsourcing was so intense and widespread that although the bank initially denied and then defended its decision, president and CEO Gord Nixon eventually issued a public apology and stated that anyone displaced would be offered a comparable position within the company. Furthermore, in light of the public outcry, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper promised to make changes to the government's Temporary Foreign Worker Program.²

The reaction to the RBC scandal took many people by surprise; commentators attempted to make sense of what one journalist described as "the public's visceral

¹ The "Big Five" refers to the five largest banks in the Canadian banking industry: Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), Toronto-Dominion Bank, Bank of Nova Scotia, Bank of Montreal, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce.

² The Canadian news media's extensive coverage of the RBC scandal and the public reaction to it put the government on the defensive. For more information on the scandal, see the many articles published in Canadian newspapers in April 2013.

response.”³ As several people pointed out, the widespread and vehement disapproval of RBC’s actions was surprising given that previous instances of large companies outsourcing jobs or using temporary foreign workers failed to elicit similar responses. According to economist Armine Yalnizyan, however, the difference between the public’s reaction to the hiring of temporary foreign workers by RBC and, for example, Tim Hortons and Air Canada, stemmed from middle-class anxieties in a post-industrial era of recession as well as common perceptions of the banking industry. Yalnizyan explained, “We’re told that the banks are the vaunted sector ... they look bulletproof, and then suddenly you see this older white guy saying, ‘I’m training my replacement who’s going to end up doing work in India’ and you think, ‘Oh my God. That could be me’.”⁴ A disjuncture exists between the view of the banking industry as a secure, white-collar form of employment and the reality that bank work, like other forms of private sector service, office, and retail work, is often precarious.⁵

A closer look at the history of bank employees and unionization belies the view of banking as a “vaunted sector” in which to work. In response to low wages and poor working conditions, over the course of the twentieth century bank workers in many countries joined labour unions or established their own, using the strength of collective

³ Sunny Freeman, “RBC Foreign Workers Controversy A Sign Of An Increasingly Anxious Middle Class,” *Huffington Post Canada*, April 12, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2013/04/12/rbc-foreign-workers-middle-class_n_3065554.html#slide=2327222 (accessed April 20, 2013).

⁴ Freeman, “RBC Foreign Workers,” original ellipses.

⁵ Elizabeth Anne Lautard points out that the bank tellers she interviewed expressed a similar sentiment; they “described how bank telling is perceived to be more prestigious than it actually is.” Elizabeth Anne Lautard, “Bank Tellers: Eight Women on the Financial Front Lines” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1999), iii.

action to improve their living and working conditions.⁶ In contrast, in Canada repeated efforts to establish bank employee unions have met with limited success. Rather, in most instances a combination of adverse factors, including hostile employers, state intervention, and labour movement politics, thwarted unionization completely or swiftly annulled any advances. In sum, when it comes to unionization, breaking the banks has proven to be extremely difficult in Canada, and the labour movement continues to struggle with this task today.⁷

In this dissertation, I provide an historical analysis of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980, a period of union growth and increased state intervention in relations between labour and capital. The history of bank union organizing is a useful case study of how changes in the relationship between labour, capital, and the state help or hinder unionization in unorganized industries – areas with limited or non-existent levels of unionization and often predominantly female and racialized labour forces. Although new federal and provincial legislation passed during and immediately after World War II aided unionization in some sectors and ushered in a new era of labour relations, scholars have recently begun to re-evaluate conventional

⁶ Unions established in the twentieth century to represent bank workers include the National Union of Bank Employees (est. 1946) in the United Kingdom; All India Bank Employees Association (1946); Singapore Bank Employees' Union (1954); Cyprus Union of Bank Employees (1955); National Union of Bank Employees (1958) in Malaysia; Bank Employees Union (1974) and Bank and General Workers Union (1974) in Trinidad and Tobago; Australian Bank Employees Union (1978); Central Bank Union (1980) in Botswana; Bank Association (Asociación Bancaria) in Argentina (1982); and the Bank Employees Federation of India (1982).

⁷ For example, in 2008, just three years after joining the United Steelworkers, 100 TD Canada Trust employees in Sudbury, Ontario voted to decertify. See Harold Carmichael, "TD Bank Workers Toss out Union," *Sudbury Star*, December 31, 2008, <http://www.thesudburystar.com/2008/12/31/td-bank-workers-toss-out-union-comment-on-this-story> (accessed March 28, 2013). For discussion of the persistence of low unionization rates amongst bank workers, see Julie White, "Patterns of Unionization," in *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy*, eds. Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 191–206; Dale Clark and Rosemary Warskett, "Labour Fragmentation and New Forms of Organizing and Bargaining in the Service Sector," in *Interrogating the New Economy: Restructuring Work in the 21st Century*, eds. Norene J. Pupo and Mark P. Thomas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 235–255.

ideas about this “Fordist accord.” In particular, they have challenged the notions that all workers benefited equally from these legislative changes and that the state and capital came to accept unions as a fundamental part of post-war labour relations.⁸ Scholars of industrial relations and labour law have examined union organizing in the post-war period; however, we still need more in-depth historical analyses that connect union activity to the complex historical relationship between labour legislation and unionization, as well as the broader literature on the history of race, class, gender, and worker organizing, especially in particular economic sectors. I address this problem directly through an historical examination of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980. By combining labour and working-class history with a study of labour movement politics and the political economy of labour relations in one of the largest unorganized sectors in Canada, I make an important contribution to the interdisciplinary literature on union organizing.

I offer several important insights in this dissertation. By examining the history of union organizing in the banking industry over a forty-year period, I demonstrate that Canadian bank workers consistently sought to unionize throughout the twentieth century. I thus challenge claims that bank employees and other private sector white-collar workers in Canada and the United States have low rates of unionization because they are not interested in unions or suffer from false consciousness. Yet my research also suggests that many bank workers saw themselves as different from blue-collar industrial workers;

⁸ See, for example, Joan Sangster, “‘We No Longer Respect the Law’: The Tilco Strike, Labour Injunctions, and the State,” *Labour/Le Travail* 53 (Spring 2004): 47–88; Charles W. Smith, “The Politics of the Ontario Labour Relations Act: Business, Labour, and Government in the Consolidation of Post-War Industrial Relations, 1949–1961,” *Labour/Le Travail* 62 (Fall 2008): 109–151; Carmela Patrias, “Employers’ Anti-Unionism in Niagara, 1942–1965: Questioning the Postwar Compromise,” *Labour/Le Travail* 76 (Fall 2015): 37–77.

the lived reality of bank work as precarious, poorly paid, and rife with gender inequality intersected with ideas about professionalism and aspirations of advancing up the career ladder. Banks, unions, and workers drew on these ideas and experiences in their arguments for and against unionization.

I also provide a much-needed historical analysis of previous organizing efforts. My central argument is that most of these attempts failed to establish a strong union presence in the banking industry due to several key issues, including the banks' anti-union activity, federal and provincial labour board decisions, and labour movement disputes over ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy. The banks consistently opposed unionization and used a variety of tactics to thwart union organizing, both overtly and covertly. The state, in the form of labour legislation and labour boards, provided unions and workers with some means by which to compel banks to recognize unions, negotiate contracts, and deal with employee grievances; however, state action and inaction more often worked to undermine union organizing. The attitudes and strategies of high-ranking labour movement officials also shaped the outcome of union drives. Between 1940 and 1980, the mostly male labour leadership repeatedly used top-down organizing strategies and appointed male organizers with no experience of bank work to oversee union drives in a sector with an increasingly feminized workforce. Labour leaders' inability or unwillingness to reflect on this approach and to support grassroots efforts and alternative strategies hindered bank union organizing. I thus highlight the intersection of gender and class and reveal how these factors have historically shaped the labour movement bureaucracy, union organizing, and the relationship between labour and the state.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explain my project, theory, and methodology. I start by reviewing the literature on bank workers, unions, and the state, positioning my project in relation to existing scholarship. I then discuss the theoretical approaches I use to analyze the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry. I conclude by outlining my research questions and methodology and by providing an overview of the remaining chapters.

Literature Review

Though banks are some of the largest and wealthiest employers in Canada,⁹ scholars have produced few historical analyses of the financial institutions and the people they employ.¹⁰ Most of the historiography consists of commissioned works on individual

⁹ In a 2012 ranking of Canada's largest employers, Toronto-Dominion Bank, Bank of Nova Scotia, RBC, Bank of Montreal, and National Bank of Canada ranked in the top forty (5, 6, 7, 14, and 31, respectively), for a combined total of more than 600,000 employees. "Canada's 50 biggest employers in 2012," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 28, 2012, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-magazine/top-1000/canadas-50-biggest-employers-in-2012/article4372880/> (accessed November 30, 2015). In terms of revenue, in 2013 RBC, Toronto-Dominion, Bank of Nova Scotia, Bank of Montreal, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce were among the twenty-five biggest companies in Canada (second, fifth, tenth, sixteenth, and twenty-second, respectively), with a combined revenue of almost \$140 billion. Financial Post, "FP500: 2014," *Financial Post*, <http://www.financialpost.com/news/fp500/2014/index.html> (accessed November 30, 2015).

¹⁰ A variety of financial services companies make up the banking industry in Canada, including banks, credit unions (caisse populaires in Québec), and trust companies. Banks provide a range of financial services and are regulated by the federal government and governed by the *Bank Act*. Trust companies are regulated by the federal or provincial government and mainly provide trustee services. Credit unions are financial cooperatives regulated by the provinces. As banks employ a significant number of people and unions have repeatedly tried and failed to unionize them, in this dissertation I examine union organizing in banks specifically. Unions and workers have also organized in other types of financial institutions, including credit unions and trusts. Though some efforts to unionize credit unions and trust companies encountered the same problems as bank union campaigns and ultimately failed, others succeeded. Credit unions in particular have proven easier to unionize, perhaps due to the smaller size of the institutions, their focus on community relations and mutual aid, and, in some cases, their connections to trade unions. For more information on the differences between banks, trust companies, and credit unions, see Canadian Bankers Association, "What is the difference between a bank, a trust company and a credit union?" *Canadian Bankers Association*, <http://www.cba.ca/en?view=article&catid=72%3Ageneral&id=170%3Awhat-is-the-difference-between-a-bank-a-trust-company-and-a-credit-union&Itemid=0> (accessed March 31, 2016).

banks.¹¹ Such studies are largely celebratory, providing a detailed account of the banks' origins, developments, and "contributions" to Canada. Works published prior to the 1970s focus almost exclusively on the banks' founders, presidents, and shareholders. Managers are occasionally discussed, particularly if they went on to prominent positions within the banks, but lower-level employees and labour relations do not merit mention. Reflecting changes in banks' attitudes toward their workers as well as shifts in the writing of history, studies produced after the 1960s discuss employees and employment practices but only briefly and still within a narrative that celebrates the banks' progress and achievements. Employee discontent and efforts to unionize are rarely mentioned. The same holds true for historical studies of the development of the Canadian banking system; these works mostly focus on the relationship between banks, the state, and the economy, and they pay scant attention to workers and labour relations if at all.¹²

A handful of historians have examined bank work and bank workers in Canada.

Their research provides important insight on bank work and employees' experiences of it

¹¹ Bank of Montreal, *The Centenary of the Bank of Montreal, 1817–1917* (Montréal: Head Office, 1917); Victor Ross, *A History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce with an Account of the Other Banks Which Now Form Part of Its Organization*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1920–1922); The Bank of Nova Scotia, *The Bank of Nova Scotia, 1832–1932* (Toronto: The Bank, 1932); Arthur St. L. Trigge, *A History of the Canadian Bank of Commerce*, vol. 3, 1919–1930 (Toronto: The Canadian Bank of Commerce, 1934); T. Taggart Smyth, *The First Hundred Years: History of the Montreal City and District Savings Bank, 1846–1946* (Montréal: The Bank, 1946); Joseph Schull, *100 Years of Banking in Canada: A History of the Toronto-Dominion Bank* (Vancouver: The Copp Clark Publishing Co. Limited, 1958); Banque Canadienne Nationale, *Banque Canadienne Nationale, 1874–1974: cent ans d'histoire* (Montréal, 1974); Joseph Schull and J. Douglas Gibson, *The Scotiabank Story: A History of the Bank of Nova Scotia, 1832–1982* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982); Duncan McDowall, *Quick to the Frontier: Canada's Royal Bank* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1993); Arnold Edinborough, *A History of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce*, vol. 4, 1931–1973 (Toronto: Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, 1995).

¹² Roeliff Morton Breckenridge, "The Canadian Banking System, 1817–1890" (PhD diss., Columbia College, 1894); The Canadian Bankers' Association, *Adam Shortt's History of Canadian Currency and Banking, 1600–1880* (Toronto: The Canadian Bankers' Association, 1986), first published 1896–1925 in the *Journal of the Canadian Bankers Association*; J.W. O'Brien, *Canadian Money and Banking* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); R.T. Naylor, *The History of Canadian Business, 1867–1914* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1975; Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Walter Stewart, *Towers of Gold, Feet of Clay: The Canadian Banks* (Don Mills, ON: Collins Publishers, 1982); Ronald Rudin, *Banking en français: The French Banks of Quebec, 1835–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

in the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as the feminization of the banking workforce over time.¹³ Though the studies mention employee discontent and organizing, they do not provide an in-depth analysis of the repeated attempts to establish a union of bank workers in Canada over the course of the twentieth century.

In contrast to the limited number of historical studies, there is a substantial interdisciplinary field of scholarship that examines bank work and bank workers in contemporary contexts, both in Canada and internationally. Scholars interested in gender, work, and organizational studies have produced much of this research; they have highlighted a number of issues, including the gendered and racialized nature of bank work, the effects of technological change on the labour process, and the structural

¹³ Barbara Hansen, "A Historical Study of Women in Canadian Banking, 1900–1975," *Canadian Women's Studies* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1978–1979): 17–22; Ronald Rudin, "Bankers' Hours: Life Behind the Wicket at the *Banque d'Hochelega*, 1901–21," *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (Fall 1986): 63–76; Michèle Dagenais, "Division sexuelle du travail en milieu bancaire: Montréal, 1900–1930 (MA thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1987); Kori Street, "Bankers and Bomb Makers: Gender Ideology and Women's Paid Work in Banking and Munitions during the First World War in Canada" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2000).

inequalities that exist within the banking industry.¹⁴ Several of these studies discuss unionization as a way to address the problems of bank work, but they provide limited historical analysis.¹⁵

In the Canadian context, scholarship on bank workers and unions primarily consists of research by sociologists, anthropologists, and industrial relations and legal scholars. Much of this work dates from the 1980s and 1990s and focuses on labour law

¹⁴ Jane E. Prather, "When the Girls Move in: A Sociological Analysis of the Feminization of the Bank Teller's Job," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 33, no. 4 (November 1971): 777–782; Lachlan Riches, "The Changing Employment Structure of the Australian Banking Industry," in *Money, Work and Social Responsibility: The Australian Financial System*, ed. G.J. Crough (Sydney: Transnational Corporations Research Project, University of Sydney, 1980), 53–68; Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, "Women, the Labour Process and Technological Change in the Banking Industry," in *Money, Work and Social Responsibility: The Australian Financial System*, ed. G.J. Crough (Sydney: Transnational Corporations Research Project, University of Sydney, 1980), 69–114; Andy Egan, "Women in Banking: A Study in Inequality," *Industrial Relations Journal* 13, no. 3 (1982): 20–31; Raoul Gobel and Andre Meers, "Impact of Two Successive Mechanization Projects on Motivation and Work Organization in a Bank," in *Work, Organizations, and Technological Change*, eds. Gerhard Mensch and Richard J. Niehaus (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1982), 167–178; Robert Szafran, "Female and Minority Employment Patterns in Banks: A Research Note," *Work and Occupations* 11, no. 1 (February 1984): 55–76; Patricia Louise Baker, "Banking Transformed: Women's Work and Technological Change in a Canadian Bank" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1987); Graham S. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Rosemary Crompton, "Women in Banking: Continuity and Change since the Second World War," *Work, Employment and Society* 3, no. 2 (1989): 141–156; Phebe-Jane Poole, *Reporting on Employment Equity in the First Year: An Examination of Aboriginal Persons, Persons with Disabilities and Visible Minorities in the Banking Industry* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1989); Phebe-Jane Poole, *Women in Banking: The First Year of Employment Equity* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1989); Uma Sekaran, "Paths to the Job Satisfaction of Bank Employees," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 10, no. 4 (October 1989): 347–359; Chloe E. Bird, "High Finance, Small Change: Women's Increased Representation in Bank Management," in *Job Queues, Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads into Male Occupations*, eds. Barbara F. Reskin and Patricia A. Roos (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 145–166; Joan Acker, "Thinking About Wages: The Gendered Wage Gap in Swedish Banks," *Gender and Society* 5, no. 3 (September 1991): 390–407; Amy Wharton, "The Affective Consequences of Service Work: Managing Emotions on the Job," *Work and Occupations* 20, no. 2 (May 1993): 205–232; Joan Acker, "The Gender Regime of Swedish Banks," *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 10, no. 2 (June 1994): 117–130; Lautard, "Bank Tellers"; Zabedia Nazim, "Interrogating Restructuring: A Critical Ethnography of Ethno-Racial Women Bank Workers in Canadian Retail Banking" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2007).

¹⁵ See also Lachlan Riches, "Trade Union Responses to Technological Change in the Banking Industry," in *Money, Work and Social Responsibility: The Australian Financial System*, ed. G.J. Crough (Sydney: Transnational Corporations Research Project, University of Sydney, 1980), 31–52; John Heritage, "Feminisation and Unionisation: A Case Study from Banking," in *Gender, Class and Work*, eds. Eva Gamarnikow, David H.J. Morgan, June Purvis, Daphne E. Taylorson (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983), 131–148; Patricia Baker, "Technology, Policy and Bank Unionism in Canada and Australia: International Lessons?" *Australian-Canadian Studies* 15, no. 1 (1997): 105–123.

and other factors that contributed to the flurry of organizing that occurred in the late 1970s following the 1977 Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) decision that an individual bank branch comprised an appropriate bargaining unit.¹⁶ In most cases, discussion of the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry is limited to a brief introductory overview of previous drives. Thus, although these studies provide important insights on the campaigns of the late 1970s and 1980s, they do not connect the struggles of that period to the longer history of union organizing in Canadian banks and, as legal scholar Rosemary Warskett points out, “the historical role of the state in moulding and channeling the labour movement’s opposition to capital.”¹⁷ Moreover, as anthropologist Patricia Baker explains, “Not all unions have faced the same obstacles or contradictions, nor have any given union’s experiences and interests necessarily remained the same over time.” Thus, according to Baker, “Analyses of the legal framework of bank

¹⁶ Graham S. Lowe, *The Canadian Union of Bank Employees: A Case Study* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Industrial Relations, 1978); Robyn Alexander, “Unionisation in Banking: A Comparison of Canada, Britain and Australia,” in *Money, Work and Social Responsibility: The Australian Financial System*, ed. G.J. Crough (Sydney: Transnational Corporations Research Project, University of Sydney, 1980), 115–130; Graham S. Lowe, *Bank Unionization in Canada: A Preliminary Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Industrial Relations, 1980); Elizabeth J. Shilton Lennon, “Organizing the Unorganized: Unionization in the Chartered Banks of Canada,” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 18, no. 2 (August 1980): 177–237; Paul Weiler, *Reconcilable Differences: New Directions in Canadian Labour Law* (Toronto: The Carswell Company Limited, 1980), 15–56; Graham S. Lowe, “Causes of Unionization in Canadian Banks,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 36, no. 4 (1981): 865–893; Allen Ponak and Larry F. Moore, “Canadian Bank Unionism: Perspectives and Issues,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 36, no. 1 (1981): 3–34; Rosemary Warskett, “Trade Unions and the Canadian State: A Case Study of Bank Worker Unionization, 1976–1980” (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1981); Elizabeth Beckett, *Unions and Bank Workers: Will the Twain Ever Meet?* (Ottawa: Labour Canada, 1984); Rosemary Warskett, “Bank Worker Unionization and the Law,” *Studies in Political Economy* 25 (Spring 1988): 41–73; Jane S. Bailey, *Organizing the Unorganized Revisited: An Analysis of the Efficacy of Labour Legislation in Facilitating Collective Representation in the Canadian Banking Sector* (Kingston, ON: Queen’s University Industrial Relations Centre, 1991); Patricia Baker, “Some Unions Are More Equal Than Others: A Response to Rosemary Warskett’s ‘Bank Worker Unionization and the Law,’” *Studies in Political Economy* 34 (Spring 1991): 219–233; Patricia Baker, “Reflections on Life Stories: Women’s Bank Union Activism,” in *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy*, eds. Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 62–86; Patricia Baker, “I Know Now that You Can Change Things’: Narratives of Canadian Bank Workers as Union Activists,” in *Ethnographic Feminisms: Essays in Anthropology*, eds. Sally Cole and Lynne Phillips (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 157–176.

¹⁷ Warskett, “Bank Worker Unionization and the Law,” 46.

organizing must take into account the specific histories of the unions involved, the various possibilities and constraints which operate on them at the level of the state, as well as struggles taking place within and between unions themselves.”¹⁸ In sum, we still need an in-depth historical study that analyzes union organizing in the Canadian banking industry in relation to the changing dynamics of the labour force, the labour movement, and the labour relations system.

In this dissertation, I build on the interdisciplinary scholarship on bank unionization and address gaps in the field by examining union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980. By studying the efforts undertaken by a variety of unions and labour organizations, in several provinces, and in four different decades, I answer Baker’s call for a historical analysis that considers how and why unions’ experiences in the banks differed from one another and over time. In doing so, I offer a longer view of bank union organizing and highlight a number of important issues, including historical and regional variations between organizing campaigns, politics and relations within the labour movement, the state’s role in helping and hindering unionization, and employer resistance to unions and the post-war labour relations system.

Theoretical Approach

Examining how and why labour movement politics, state intervention, and employer hostility shaped union organizing in the Canadian banking industry requires me to situate my work within theoretical debates about the relationship between labour, capital, and the state and the bureaucratization of the labour movement. In regards to the state, the crux of the debate is whether it is an agent of capitalism or acts at its behest to

¹⁸ Baker, “Some Unions Are More Equal Than Others,” 220.

constrain workers and unions or if the state is a neutral arbiter in labour relations that workers and unions can use to their advantage. On the one hand, the state occasionally assists workers in their fight for better wages and working conditions, for example, creating legislation to establish the eight-hour workday, minimum wages, and workplace health and safety standards; however, whether such gains are always victories for the working-class or smart accommodations by capital for its own benefit is also up for debate. On the other hand, the state often acts as a restrictive force, limiting workers' ability to join unions, walk off the job, and exercise control over their working conditions. Of course, as scholars have shown, in reality the relationship between labour, capital, and the state is much more complex than this simple dichotomy suggests. Marxist theorists in particular have debated the relative autonomy of the state, its ability to mitigate internal contradictions, and the agency of both the working class and individual actors within the state.¹⁹

In the field of Canadian labour history, until the 1970s industrial relations scholars produced most studies of the relationship between labour, capital, and the state. Motivated by a desire to prevent industrial conflict, these early labour historians researched the history of Canadian trade union activity and government and employer responses to devise strategies that would prevent workers from disrupting the Canadian economy. Given this limited aim, industrial relations scholars, such as Harold Logan and

¹⁹ Nicos Poulantzas, "The Problem of the Capitalist State," *New Left Review* 58 (November–December 1969): 67–78; Ralph Miliband, "The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas," *New Left Review* 59 (January–February 1970): 53–60.

Stuart Jamieson, employed a narrow analytical framework in their examination of Canadian labour history and the relationship between labour, capital, and the state.²⁰

By the 1980s, this limited focus had shifted somewhat to include a more nuanced understanding of the state and industrial relations policy as subject to multiple influences and interest groups. For example, Paul Craven showed how ideological and economic shifts combined with new American techniques of labour management to shape the formation and practice of Canada's industrial relations policy during the first decade of the twentieth century.²¹ Other scholars examined the crucial role of the state in shaping the labour market and labour conflicts. For instance, in his study of labour and capital in pre-Confederation Canada, H. Clare Pentland demonstrated that the state played an increasingly prominent role in labour disputes in the first half of the nineteenth century in an effort to maintain industrial peace and ensure the smooth and continued construction of a capitalist state and economy.²² Laurel Sefton MacDowell's analysis of the three-month strike by miners in Kirkland Lake, Ontario for union recognition and collective bargaining rights showed that the federal government's expansion of compulsory conciliation and failure to enact legislation compelling employers to recognize unions and bargain collectively hampered the strike and miners' efforts to win their demands and thereby supported the employer.²³

²⁰ See, for example, Harold A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada, Their Development and Functioning* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1948); Stuart Jamieson, *Industrial Relations in Canada* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900–66* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1968).

²¹ Paul Craven, *An Impartial Umpire: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900–1911* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

²² H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650–1860* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1981). Pentland originally completed this study as a doctoral dissertation in 1961; he published it as a manuscript in 1981.

²³ Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941–42*, revised ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2001). Sefton MacDowell originally published her study in 1983.

Historians focused on working-class experience pointed out that workers also respond to the state in varied ways depending on the economic and political context, lobbying, pleading, accommodating, and resisting the state. In his study of working-class culture in Hamilton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bryan D. Palmer showed how workers adapted to the changing nature of capitalist class relations, consistently struggling to maintain control over their working conditions in the face of increasing employer and state efforts to limit this control.²⁴ Similarly, Gregory S. Kealey's examination of Toronto workers' strategies for dealing with the changes wrought by industrial capitalism suggested that workers recognized that the state played a crucial role in securing labour victories and thus spent considerable energy lobbying the state to implement labour reforms.²⁵ Such studies emphasized the dialectical relationship that exists between workers and the state and complicated top-down understandings of industrial relations.

Meanwhile, in the field of women's and gender history, scholars have examined the gendered dimensions of the state, highlighting the contradictory nature of the relationship between women and the welfare state in particular.²⁶ On the one hand, the state is both rooted in and often supports gender inequality – limiting women's ability to earn a living wage, participate in politics, and exercise control over their bodies. On the

²⁴ Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979).

²⁵ Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (1980; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

²⁶ See, for example, Caroline Andrew, "Women and the Welfare State," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 17, no. 4 (December 1984): 667–684; Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy: 100 Years of State Intervention in the Family* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1992); Martha MacDonald, "Restructuring, Gender, and Social Security Reform in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 57–88; Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Ann Porter, *Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945–1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

other hand, the state occasionally responds to women's demands – for example, conceding women suffrage, abortion access, and wages equal to those earned by men for work of equal value. As with workers and the state, whether such legislative victories challenge women's oppression or subtly incorporate women into the dominant order or both, is open to debate.

In contrast to the numerous historical works produced on gender and state social provisioning, historians have paid less attention to gender and state labour policy. In one of the first historical works to explore this relationship, Joan Sangster highlighted the gendered nature of the state's response to labour conflict, specifically the ways in which ideas about the need to "protect" women contributed to the state's intervention in labour disputes involving female workers.²⁷ Studies of gender and minimum wage policies revealed that state policies that appear to benefit women often reflect and reinforce existing gender norms.²⁸ As well, legal scholars have shown how gender shapes the development of labour legislation and how law institutionalizes gender inequality.²⁹ At the same time, scholars have analyzed women's important role in shaping state policies pertaining to labour.³⁰ In sum, the limited historical scholarship on gender, labour, and the state highlights the complex and contradictory nature of the relationship between women workers and the state.

²⁷ Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers." *Labour/Le Travailleur* 3 (1978): 109–130.

²⁸ Margaret McCallum, "Keeping Women in Their Place: The Minimum Wage in Canada, 1910–1925," *Labour/Le Travail* 17 (Spring 1986): 29–56.

²⁹ Anne Forrest, "Securing the Male Breadwinner: A Feminist Interpretation of PC 1003," in *Labour Gains, Labour Pains: Fifty Years of PC 1003*, eds. Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst (Winnipeg/Halifax: Society for Socialist Studies/Fernwood Publishing, 1995), 139–162; Judy Fudge, "From Segregation to Privatization: Equality, the Law, and Women Public Servants, 1908–2001," in *Privatization, Law, and the Challenge to Feminism*, eds. Brenda Cossman and Judy Fudge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 86–127.

³⁰ Bob Russell, "A Fair or a Minimum Wage? Women Workers, the State, and the Origins of Wage Regulation in Western Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 28 (1991): 59–88.

Though historians have produced many important studies on labour and the state, when it comes to theorizing about the relationship between labour, capital, and the state in Canada, they have lagged behind scholars in other disciplines. Indeed, many historians who write about this relationship rely on theories produced by scholars working in such disciplines as political economy and sociology.³¹ Moreover, considerable debate exists over how to define the state and develop a useful theoretical framework about its role in society. As political economists Michael Howlett, Alex Netherton, and M. Ramesh explain, “The concept of the state is ambiguous and contentious enough to yield . . . as many as 145 separate definitions.”³²

In this dissertation, I use the theoretical insights of historical materialism and feminist political economy to understand the role of the state in capitalist society. Historical materialism is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the connection between the economy, society, and history and that places class relations at the heart of historical analysis. Specifically, it posits that the mode of production and the resultant class structure shape social relations. Under capitalism, a conflict exists between those who own the means of production – the capitalist class – and those who must labour in exchange for a wage – the working class. These two classes have opposing interests:

³¹ See, for example, Craven, *An Impartial Umpire*; Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 2001; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). In addition, I was unable to find any reviews of historiography on workers and the state in prominent scholarly journals of Canadian labour and working-class history or published books on the subject. This finding is based on my search of scholarly journals *Labour/Le Travail*, *Left History*, and *The Canadian Historical Review*; my readings of several books about workers and the state, including Craven, *An Impartial Umpire* and Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*; and bibliographic essays in such introductory labour history texts as Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800–1980* (Toronto: Butterworth and Co., 1983); Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1992); and Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, 5th ed. (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

³² Michael Howlett, Alex Netherton, and M. Ramesh, *The Political Economy of Canada: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 1999), 3.

capitalists accumulate more capital by extracting surplus value from workers' labour and by lowering the cost of materials and labour, while workers improve their wages and working conditions by wresting control from capitalists. Capitalists and workers are therefore engaged in a power struggle, and this class conflict influences other aspects of society, including the state.³³

A historical materialist theory of the state argues that the state arises out of class conflict and exists as “a power, apparently standing above society . . . to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’.”³⁴ Yet “‘the state’ is not a thing.”³⁵ Rather, it is a system of institutions “in which ‘state power’ lies” and through which “this power is wielded”; the state system includes the multiple levels of government, the civil service, the military, the police, and the courts.³⁶ State institutions, however, do not simply reflect class relations. As historian E.P. Thompson points out in his study of the Black Act in eighteenth-century England, “the law, like other institutions which from time to time can be seen as mediating (and masking) existent class relations . . . has its own characteristics, its own independent history and logic of evolution.”³⁷ Class relations shape state institutions, but state institutions do not simply act at the behest of the dominant class. Rather, the economic power possessed by the dominant class gives them a disproportionate amount of influence in society, politics, and the determination of state activity.

³³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Germany Ideology,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 146–200.

³⁴ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1972), 229.

³⁵ Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (Pontypool: The Merlin Press Ltd., 2009), 36.

³⁶ Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, 39–40.

³⁷ E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 262.

In the Canadian context, scholars have demonstrated that historically the state and capitalists have been close allies and that several functions of the state, including its system of labour relations, have ensured it played a key role in the development of a capitalist economy in Canada.³⁸ At the same time, feminist political economy theorizes that other factors, such as race and gender, intersect with class to shape the state system in Canada.³⁹ In sum, although the state constructs itself as an “impartial umpire,” it often serves the interests of dominant groups.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in modern democratic capitalist society, the relationship between labour, capital, and the state is complex, and subordinate groups can at times use the state to wrest concessions from dominant groups. Historical materialism and feminist political economy both understand the state as “contested terrain” – a space where the power struggle between dominant and subordinate groups unfolds. Feminist political economists have highlighted the complex and contradictory nature of the relationship between the state and women in particular; the state reflects and reinforces gender and other forms of inequality but occasionally supports efforts to improve the lives of women and other marginalized groups.⁴¹

³⁸ Leo Panitch, “The Role and Nature of the Canadian State,” in *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, ed. Leo Panitch (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 3–25; Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

³⁹ There exists a vast literature on gender and the state in Canada. Examples include Janine Brodie, ed., *Women and Canadian Public Policy* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996); Caroline Andrew and Sanda Rodgers, eds., *Women and the Canadian State* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997); Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle, eds., *Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Jane Pulkingham, eds., *Public Policy for Women: The State, Income Security, and Labour Market Issues* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Alexandra Dobrowolsky, ed., *Women and Public Policy in Canada: Neo-Liberalism and After?* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Craven, *An Impartial Umpire*.

⁴¹ Pat Armstrong and M. Patricia Connelly, eds., *Feminism, Political Economy, and the State: Contested Terrain* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 1999).

In examining bank union organizing in the relation to the labour relations regime developed during and after World War II – an era that witnessed an unprecedented level of state involvement in labour relations – I draw on theories that focus on the gendered and classed nature of state activity. I show that the state combined with several other factors to shape union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980. During the post-war period, women and immigrants entered the paid labour force in unprecedented numbers, many taking up jobs in the rapidly expanding and relatively unorganized service, office, and retail sectors. Although the Fordist accord reached between capital and labour in the 1940s included legislative changes that resulted in a significant increase in union membership and an improved standard of living for many workers, this legislation constrained workers’ power by channelling class conflict into an increasingly complex system of labour relations. As well, the new system of labour relations was also highly gendered and racialized; it thus failed to address the needs and issues of an increasingly substantial portion of the Canadian labour force, including the mostly female and non-unionized employees of the banking industry.⁴²

Compounding matters, non-unionized workers encountered an increasingly conservative and bureaucratized labour movement that was either unable or unwilling to organize them.⁴³ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the anti-communism of the Cold War and the focus on union corruption, particularly in the United States, had devastating consequences for the Canadian labour movement. Labour leaders engaged in fierce ideological battles and established rigid boundaries between acceptable social-democratic

⁴² Forrest, “Securing the Male Breadwinner.”

⁴³ Gillian Creese, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944–1994* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999); Meg Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 63–88.

trade unionists and unacceptable “communist” agitators. Political lines hardened and a number of activists and unions were expelled from the house of labour, as leaders tried to create a more politically respectable trade union leadership.⁴⁴ This process was also gendered; within this context, the respectable trade unionist was “the responsible breadwinner, the upright family man whose dedication and hard work earned him the affection of his family and the respect of his community.”⁴⁵ With radicals purged or intimidated into silence, leaders faced fewer challenges to their power and the labour movement had fewer debates over alternative union structures and organizing strategies. At the same time, new legislation restricted the issues over which unions could exercise control. Labour leaders increasingly spent more time policing members, meeting with lawyers, and attending labour board hearings than leading strikes and organizing new groups of workers.⁴⁶

By the 1970s, the situation started to change, as jobs in the traditional union strongholds of the resource and manufacturing industries began to disappear or move overseas. To maintain steady membership numbers and income from dues, some unions adopted new strategies and tactics in an effort to unionize new sectors of the workforce.⁴⁷ At the same time, a number of workers established their own unions.⁴⁸ Though some

⁴⁴ Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁴⁵ Julie Guard, “Womanly Innocence and Manly Self-Respect: Gendered Challenges to Labour’s Postwar Compromise,” in *Labour Gains, Labour Pains: Fifty Years of PC 1003*, eds. Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst (Winnipeg/Halifax: Society for Socialist Studies/Fernwood Publishing, 1995), 122.

⁴⁶ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers 2012), 88–90.

⁴⁷ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 2nd ed., 332–333; Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 145–146.

⁴⁸ The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1979); Jill Stainsby et al., *AUCE and TSSU: Memoirs of a Feminist Union, 1972–1993* (Burnaby, BC: Teaching Support Staff Union Publishing, 1994); Julia Smith, “An ‘Entirely Different’ Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers’ Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972– 1986,” *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 23–65.

organizing drives met with success, many resulted in lengthy strikes and legal battles or defeat. As well, the post-war period saw a massive wave of unionization in the public sector; however, unions consistently struggled to penetrate the private sector. In many cases, including several bank union drives, labour movement politics undermined organizing efforts. Therefore, in this dissertation I also engage with debates about the bureaucratization of the labour movement.

As labour studies scholar David Camfield points out, “‘bureaucracy’ is an important yet vexed term in the study of trade unions and radical politics.”⁴⁹ Rarely used in a positive sense, the term conjures up images of a small group of conservative union leaders, disconnected from the members they represent and only interested in protecting their own well-paid positions. Much of the debate over the labour bureaucracy reflects this perspective. Sociologists and industrial relations scholars have been the leading contributors to this debate. Focused on the structure of trade unions and the relationship between labour, capital, and the state, early works viewed the labour bureaucracy as a distinct upper layer of the labour movement comprised of people who hold elected office or paid staff positions in a trade union or labour organization and who represent members in negotiations with the state and capital. As the labour relations system requires labour bureaucrats to ensure that their organizations and members follow proper procedure as laid out in bylaws and government legislation, at times they must restrict the actions of

⁴⁹ David Camfield, “What is Trade Union Bureaucracy? A Theoretical Account,” *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research* 24 (2013): 133. Industrial relations scholar John Kelly makes a similar point in *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics* (London: Verso, 1988), 155.

the members they represent.⁵⁰ Therefore, union officials and union members have different interests and ideologies.

Other scholars challenge this “dichotomous conception of power”; they argue that it “misrepresents the problem and thus obstructs analysis and ultimately confuses strategy.”⁵¹ As industrial relations scholar Richard Hyman explains, in reality the relationship between union leaders and union members is “manifold, complex and often contradictory.” Instead of a theory of the labour bureaucracy that focuses on “a distinct *stratum of personnel*,” Hyman posits that bureaucracy refers to “a *relationship* which permeates the whole practice of trade unionism.”⁵² A strong union with many members requires some form of leadership to function, and so theories of the labour bureaucracy should focus on understanding the complex and contradictory nature of the relationship between workers and leaders rather than pitting the two sides against each other.

In this dissertation, I combine the theoretical insights of scholars who view labour bureaucracy as a group of people distinct from the workers they represent and as a system of social relations. More recently, scholars have questioned rigid structural understandings of the labour bureaucracy while still focusing on the notion of “a bureaucratic elite.” Rather than ascribe a particular ideology to the “bureaucratic elite,” historian Mark Leier insists that the relationship between leaders and members is fundamentally about power and who should exercise it.⁵³ He contends, “Bureaucracy is not a question of this or that tactical manoeuvre, this or that position. It is a fundamental

⁵⁰ C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1948).

⁵¹ Richard Hyman, “The Politics of Workplace Trade Unionism: Recent Tendencies and Some Problems for Theory,” *Capital and Class* 7 (Spring 1979): 61.

⁵² Hyman, “The Politics of Workplace Trade Unionism,” 61, original emphasis.

⁵³ Mark Leier, “Which Side Are They On? Some Suggestions for the Labour Bureaucracy Debate,” *International Review of Social History* 36 (1991): 425.

belief in the inability of the masses to rule themselves.” Thus, Leier concludes, “the reformism of the union bureaucracy lies precisely in its efforts to convince the working class, by example, ideology, and repression, that some such form of leadership is inevitable and in the best interest of the working class.”⁵⁴

Yet, as Camfield explains, theories of the labour bureaucracy that focus only on “official leadership can lead us to ignore or neglect how union activity happens, how the relations among members and between officials and members are organized.”⁵⁵ Thus, for Camfield, “bureaucracy is best understood as *a mode of existence of social relations in which people’s activity (labour) is organized through formal rules that limit their ability to determine its character and goals, and which they themselves are not able to alter with ease.*”⁵⁶ Though bureaucracy is not unique to unions, the labour relations system constructed during and after World War II, in which labour officials negotiate with bosses and the state on behalf of members, has fostered the development of an increasingly bureaucratized labour movement. Camfield contends that such a perspective “broadens our understanding of what union bureaucracy is. Bureaucracy is not a group of leaders. Nor is it an external cage in which unions are trapped. Rather, as a mode of existence of social relations, it is, to varying degrees, a significant quality of unionism itself – to be precise, of particular forms of union praxis in specific times and places. Where union bureaucracy exists, it is usually deeply internal to unions as working-class movement organizations.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Leier, “Which Side Are They On,” 426.

⁵⁵ Camfield, “What is Trade Union Bureaucracy,” 133.

⁵⁶ Camfield, “What is Trade Union Bureaucracy,” 138, original emphasis.

⁵⁷ Camfield, “What is Trade Union Bureaucracy,” 151.

Additionally, feminist scholars point out that the bureaucratization of the labour movement has been a gendered process. In recent decades, the burgeoning field of gendered organizational studies has revealed that gender is “deeply embedded” and an “integral part” of organizations; they thus reflect and reproduce gender divisions and inequality.⁵⁸ Sociologists and scholars of industrial relations and human resources have produced much of the research in this field, and an important focus has been work organizations and the labour process.⁵⁹ Historical studies of gender and the development of trade union bureaucracies in Canada and United States in the twentieth century show that “[u]nequal levels of education, skills, and resources among men and women restricted women’s access to leadership, and contradictory demands of work and family limited their participation.”⁶⁰ As well, gendered ideas about leadership and union activism shaped who was considered leadership material. With a predominantly male leadership, women union members often found their contributions and needs overlooked.⁶¹ In the context of bank union organizing in Canada between 1940 and 1980, the gender dynamics of the labour bureaucracy posed a problem: most labour leaders were male and the banking workforce was increasingly female.⁶²

Banking had previously been a male occupation; however, in the first half of the twentieth century, things started to change. Women took up new clerical positions that

⁵⁸ Joan Acker, “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations,” *Gender and Society* 4, no. 2 (June 1990): 144–145.

⁵⁹ See, for example, the journal *Gender, Work and Organization*.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Faue, “Paths of Unionization: Community, Bureaucracy, and Gender in the Minneapolis Labor Movement of the 1930s,” in *We Are All Leaders: The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s*, ed. Staughton Lynd (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 175.

⁶¹ Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto 1900–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Mercedes Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Creese, *Contracting Masculinity*.

⁶² Women held 9 per cent of union executive positions in 1970 and 18 per cent in 1980. Julie White, “A Rising Voice: Canadian Women Get Organised,” in *Strife: Sex and Politics in Labour Unions*, ed. Barbara Pocock (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1997), 96.

resulted from larger structural and technological changes in the industry; vacancies caused by male enlistment in the armed forces during wartime also facilitated women's entry into bank work.⁶³ By 1941, women comprised 33 per cent of bank employees.⁶⁴

Like many sectors, banking had a gendered division of labour that relegated women to the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder.⁶⁵ Though the structure varied depending on the size of the workplace, bank offices and branches generally had multiple occupational groups, including accountants, inspectors, ledgerkeepers, loan officers, machine operators, managers, secretaries, stenographers, tellers, and typists. In the early decades of the twentieth century, most women worked as clerks and stenographers. Over time, however, the gender composition of some groups shifted, as changes in the structure, practices, and technology of banking resulted in deskilling and increased feminization of certain jobs, most notably tellers.⁶⁶ Whereas in earlier periods few women had held this position, by 1957 teller was "[t]he largest single occupational group among women in the branches."⁶⁷

The number of female bank employees continued to increase throughout the post-war period, and by 1951, they outnumbered male bank workers.⁶⁸ Two decades later, in

⁶³ Baker, "Banking Transformed," 73–128; Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 64–71.

⁶⁴ Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, "TABLE 17. Gainfully occupied, 14 years of age and over, by industry and sex, for Canada and the provinces, 1941," in *Eighth Census of Canada: 1941* (Ottawa: Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty and Controller of Stationery, 1946), vol. 7.

⁶⁵ Baker, "Banking Transformed," 73–128; Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 64–71.

⁶⁶ Prather, "When the Girls Move in."

⁶⁷ Helen Stephens, "Women in Canadian Banking," *The Canadian Banker* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 115.

⁶⁸ In 1951, 25,194 women worked in banking compared to 21,910 men. Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, "TABLE 16. Labour force, 14 years of age and over, by industry and sex, for Canada and the provinces, 1951," in *Ninth Census of Canada: 1951* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1953), vol. 4.

1971, women comprised 66 per cent of the industry's labour force.⁶⁹ By the mid-1970s, the last period that I examine in this dissertation, 72 per cent of the country's 122,572 bank employees were women.⁷⁰

Despite the increase in their numbers, however, women continued to earn less than their male colleagues and to predominate in low-level positions. In 1971, economist Marianne Bossen revealed that 72 per cent of male employees earned an annual salary over \$5,000 while almost 90 per cent of female employees received less than \$5,000 per year. In terms of jobs, 52 per cent of women worked in "some support capacity" while 44 per cent of men worked in "management and staff specialist occupations."⁷¹ In her follow-up study published in 1976, Bossen noted some improvements – more women worked in management – but "the heavy concentration of men at management levels and the heavy concentration of women in lower-level occupations" persisted.⁷² Her detailed data on employment at three banks indicated that 78 per cent of their female employees worked as clerks, tellers, secretaries, and typists.⁷³ More recently, scholars have identified additional barriers and discriminatory practices faced by racialized women.⁷⁴ At times, bank workers in Canada have pursued individual and collective forms of resistance, and

⁶⁹ Statistics Canada, "TABLE 1. Labour force, 15 years of age and over by detailed industry and sex, showing (a) age groups (b) marital status (c) level of schooling and (d) class of worker (including wage-earners by age group, for Canada and provinces (place of residence), 1971," in *1971 Census of Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1971), vol. 3, pt. 5.

⁷⁰ Marianne Bossen, *Employment in Chartered Banks 1969–1975* (sponsored by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Canadian Bankers' Association, 1976), 6.

⁷¹ Marianne Bossen, *Manpower Utilization in Canadian Chartered Banks* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1971), 14–15.

⁷² Bossen, *Employment in Chartered Banks 1969–1975*, 14.

⁷³ The three banks employed 48,303 women: 15,589 clerks, 15,334 tellers, and 6,702 secretaries and typists. Bossen, *Employment in Chartered Banks 1969–1975*, 26.

⁷⁴ Nazim, "Interrogating Restructuring."

the Canadian labour movement has conducted union drives, but these efforts have done little to transform labour relations in the banks.⁷⁵

The structure of the Canadian banking industry has also made unionization difficult. Scholars have pointed out that since the establishment of the first banks in Canada in the early nineteenth century the industry has always been highly regulated and concentrated and played a significant role in the economy.⁷⁶ A lack of legal restrictions on branch banking allowed banks to expand across the country while keeping control and capital centralized. Mergers compounded matters.⁷⁷ Although the industry underwent a number of significant structural changes between 1940 and 1980 due to mergers, increased participation in the global market, and changes in legislation and technology, during this period bank profits continued to increase and power became more concentrated.⁷⁸ By 1988, three banks controlled “roughly two-thirds of the country’s banking assets.”⁷⁹ For workers and union organizers, the structure of the banking industry thus presents a major obstacle: branch banking means that many employees work in small workplaces spread across a vast geographic area, while employer control, resources, and power remain centralized and concentrated.

In this dissertation, I analyze union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980 using theories of the state and the labour bureaucracy that emphasize the importance of historical analysis and class and gender relations. In doing

⁷⁵ Baker, “Banking Transformed”; Nazim, “Interrogating Restructuring.”

⁷⁶ W.T. Easterbrook and Hugh G.J. Aitken, *Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1956; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 449–474. Citations are to the University of Toronto edition.

⁷⁷ Murray Cooke, *Banking on Mergers: Financial Power versus the Public Interest* (Toronto: Centre for Social Justice, 2006).

⁷⁸ P. Nagy, *The International Business of Canadian Banks* (Montréal: Centre for International Business Studies, 1993); James L. Darroch, *Canadian Banks and Global Competitiveness* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

⁷⁹ Easterbrook and Aitken, *Canadian Economic History*, 474.

so, I engage with and build on the existing literature on the post-war settlement and union activity in Canada. Scholars have looked at how legislation enacted in the 1940s constrained, or, in some cases, aided union activity more than in the past.⁸⁰ These studies focus primarily on the years up to and including 1948, however, and so do not offer in-depth historical analyses of union organizing in the post-war period. Though scholars of industrial relations and labour law have examined how legislation helps or hinders unionization, there is a need for studies that balance a broad political economy approach with archival and documentary research on specific workplaces and organizing drives. As well, few scholars have examined union organizing and private sector white-collar workers.⁸¹ Furthermore, much of the work that has questioned the “golden age” of the Fordist accord looks at workers marginalized by the post-war settlement and struggles that involved small employers.⁸² To build on the existing literature, I provide an historical analysis of bank union organizing over four decades as an example of union activity in a massive unorganized white-collar sector in the post-war period. By showing that large employers, such as the banks, continued to demonstrate an anti-union animus during this period, I contribute to the re-thinking of the Fordist accord.

Overview of Dissertation

In examining union organizing in the Canadian banking industry between 1940 and 1980, this dissertation answers a number of important questions. How did the

⁸⁰ Panitch and Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion*; Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*; Peter S. McNinnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst, eds., *Labour Gains, Labour Pains: Fifty Years of PC 1003* (Winnipeg/Halifax: Society for Socialist Studies/Fernwood Publishing, 1995).

⁸¹ Creese, *Contracting Masculinity*.

⁸² Sangster, ““We No Longer Respect the Law””; Patrias, “Employers’ Anti-Unionism in Niagara.”

relationship between labour and the state change during the post-war period? How did these changes shape union organizing in unorganized industries? What factors contributed to the success and failure of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry? What does the history of bank union organizing reveal about the post-war labour relations system, Canadian labour and working-class history, and white-collar unionization?

To answer these questions, I use a variety of primary and secondary sources. Archival research forms a crucial part of my project; I look at primary source materials produced by the federal labour relations board and several unions, labour organizations, and activists who participated in bank union organizing in Canada between 1940 and 1980. These sources are shaped by the people who produced and donated the collections as well as the archivists who catalogued and preserved them. Nevertheless, these sources provide valuable information on the origins, approach, and outcome of bank union drives in Canada during this period.

I emphasize the archival record because most of these early organizing efforts are still undocumented. Though the archival documents largely reflect the views of union organizers and labour leaders, some materials reveal the views and reactions of bank workers. The records do not offer the same kind of picture that a local grassroots study of bank workers involved with union organizing would, but they provide an initial, critical means of uncovering important organizing efforts that have gone unstudied for too long.

Given my focus on union organizing, I primarily rely on labour and state records, which give a fuller picture of the views and actions of these groups than those of capital. Still, I extrapolate some sense of capital's views from descriptions in documents in the

government and labour archives as well as media coverage of the union drives and court cases. I also look at *The Canadian Banker*, the official journal of the Canadian Bankers Association, for the years covered in this dissertation; however, it contains limited information about unions or employee grievances. I located only one article that mentioned unionization as part of a broader examination of “Canadian banks and labour legislation” in the early 1980s. The author, a manager from human resources consulting group Price Waterhouse Associates, explained that the 1977 CLRB decision to allow single-branch bargaining units “destroyed what had long been the banks’ strongest defence against union organizers” and “made the banking industry much more vulnerable.”⁸³ The banks’ response to union organizing throughout the twentieth century makes it clear that they oppose it. As such, I chose to focus on union and state sources to understand how unions might organize in spite of employer opposition.

Further, as industrial relations scholar Richard Hyman points out in his discussion of the bureaucratization of the British labour movement, “the ‘offensive’ of employers and the state, though clearly significant, has not alone been the decisive influence. No less important have been the emergent tendencies within workplace unionism itself, which have interacted with the strategies of employers, governments, and full-time officials.”⁸⁴ While employers and the state hindered bank unionization, so, too, did parts of the Canadian labour movement. Understanding how and why labour movement politics undermined union organizing in the past is crucial if unions and labour organizations are to avoid repeating these mistakes in the future.

⁸³ David E. Tyson, “Canadian banks and labour legislation,” *The Canadian Banker* 88, no. 5 (October 1981): 31.

⁸⁴ Hyman, “The Politics of Trade Unionism,” 56–57.

To help me theorize my project and contextualize the primary source materials, I incorporate secondary source materials on bank workers, union organizing, and work and labour in post-war Canada and the United States, including the published works of historians, political economists, sociologists, and scholars of gender and women's studies and industrial relations. I supplement my primary and secondary source research with interviews with two former bank union organizers.⁸⁵

In the remainder of this dissertation, I provide an in-depth analysis of specific cases of bank union organizing. In Chapter 2, I examine the first major union drive in the Canadian banking industry. In the early 1940s, the Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee (OPWOC) established six locals of bank workers in Ontario and Québec. Local 5 represented employees of the Banque Canadienne Nationale (BCN) and were the only group of bank workers to go on strike during this period. I look at the factors that contributed to the strike's failure, and I show how and why the banks, the state, and labour movement officials shaped the outcome of the BCN strike. Although employer hostility and labour union bureaucracy hindered OPWOC members' organizing efforts, the action and inaction of the federal and provincial labour boards undermined the strike and thereby BCN workers' efforts to unionize.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the bank union drives undertaken by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) between 1956 and 1960. The CLC launched its first bank campaign in 1956 in Toronto, and the drive soon spread to other parts of Canada, including British

⁸⁵ In this dissertation, I provide a broad overview of the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry. To supplement my analysis of organizing by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) in the late 1970s, I spoke with two former CLC organizers, Robyn Alexander and Rosemary Warskett. I was in touch with people who were involved with some of the other drives that I examine; however, I decided not to do additional interviews. Analyzing the experiences of individual workers and union activists is an important project, but it falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

Columbia (BC). In 1959, the CLC-chartered Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union submitted a certification application to the Canada Labour Relations Board; the board rejected the application, deeming the proposed unit "inappropriate." This ruling shaped the CLC's next failed effort to organize bank workers, this time in Vancouver in 1960. Tracing the origins, development, and outcomes of these campaigns sheds light on why they failed and how and why officials' attitudes and strategies toward bank worker unionization changed over time. Employer hostility, state intervention, and the CLC's own strategy contributed to the failure of these drives, and the experience shaped CLC officials' attitudes toward bank worker unionization in the years that followed.

In Chapter 4, I look at the formation of the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (SEB) in the late 1960s and its members' struggle for a first contract. I situate the SEB story within the changing dynamics of the labour force and the labour movement in Canada and Québec in the 1960s, and I examine the specific circumstances that led SEB members to unionize, the fight to secure union recognition and a first contract, and the reaction of their employer and the labour movement to these developments. Although SEB members experienced some of the same issues that hampered other bank union drives, they benefitted from the grassroots nature of their campaign and the support they received from key members of the regional labour movement.

In Chapter 5, I examine bank union organizing in the 1970s, focusing on the efforts undertaken by the CLC, the Canadian Union of Bank Employees (CUBE), and the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC). The CLC's efforts to

organize private sector white-collar workers into a new charter union, the Association of Commercial and Technical Employees, in the early 1970s resulted in few new certifications, especially in the banking industry. In 1976, two new unions, CUBE and SORWUC, submitted applications for certification to represent workers at several bank branches in BC and Ontario. The CLRB's decision to grant the certifications overturned the 1959 ruling and cleared the way for branch-by-branch organizing. Yet by the end of the decade, SORWUC had withdrawn from negotiations and cancelled its certifications, the other unions were struggling to recruit new members and sign contracts, and the vast majority of bank workers remained outside of unions. The banks' anti-union behaviour and the labour movement's inability to overcome divisions regarding ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy contributed to the failure of the 1970s drives.

In the conclusion, I summarize the central argument of my project and review the individual chapters. I also reiterate the theoretical significance of my project. I conclude by suggesting some directions for future research.

Conclusion

The history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry is an important and under-researched area of inquiry. In completing this dissertation, I provide a much-needed historical analysis of union organizing and private sector white-collar workers, and I contribute to the scholarship that seeks to re-evaluate the post-war labour relations system and its effect on union activity. By showing that bank workers consistently expressed interest in unionization throughout the twentieth century, I challenge claims that private sector white-collar workers do not want to unionize. As such, a central question of this dissertation is why bank union drives failed. Most efforts floundered, I

argue, due to the banks' anti-union activity, federal and provincial labour boards' action and inaction, and labour movement disputes over ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy.

CHAPTER 2: THE FIRST CANADIAN BANK STRIKE, 1941–1942

Introduction

On 6 May 1942, at a meeting of the Québec Regional War Labour Board (RWLB), representatives of the Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee (OPWOC) asked the board, yet again, to make a decision on the matter of salary adjustments and cost-of-living bonuses for employees of the Banque Canadienne Nationale (BCN). The union had submitted the original application for adjustments to the board in December of the previous year, but the case had been held up for five months due to bureaucratic back-and-forth with the National War Labour Board (NWLB) over such issues as whether the national or regional board had jurisdiction over banks and whether OPWOC actually represented BCN employees.

In the intervening time, in addition to the frustratingly slow response of the boards, OPWOC members had to contend with management's refusal to recognize the union. As such, at the May 6 meeting OPWOC members also asked that BCN comply with Privy Council Order (PC) 2685, an order-in-council passed by the federal government in 1940 that stipulated that employees could join a union and that employers should recognize unions. In response to OPWOC's request, an employer representative

on the board reportedly stated, “The bank has made it clear that they will never recognize the union. You people are asking for the moon.”¹

By unionizing and engaging in the first Canadian bank strike, OPWOC members certainly attempted a seemingly impossible task. Unsurprisingly, their efforts to organize in an industry run by some of the most powerful and wealthy institutions in the country ultimately met with defeat. Yet despite OPWOC’s failure to secure a collective agreement in the banking industry or even maintain its membership, the union’s experiences provide important information about Canadian and Québec labour relations and union organizing during World War II. The bank’s anti-union behaviour, the regional war labour board’s drawn out and disappointing decision on BCN employees’ application for monetary increases, and labour leaders’ willingness to accept the board’s decision undermined the strike and hindered OPWOC and thereby bank workers’ efforts to unionize in the early 1940s. The strike thus challenges claims that private sector white-collar workers have not been interested in unions, and it complicates our understanding of the relationship between workers, labour leaders, and the state in the early 1940s.

I begin with a discussion of bank work in 1940s Canada, including bank employees’ wages and working conditions. Next, I look at the formation of OPWOC and its early organizing activities, including the eventual establishment of six locals of bank workers in Montréal, Ottawa, and Toronto. I then focus on Local 5, which represented BCN employees – the only group of bank workers to go on strike during this period. I discuss the specific grievances that led BCN employees to walk off the job, and I provide a detailed analysis of the strike and its significance, as well as the role of the employer,

¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike: The Facts: The Banque Canadienne Nationale Strike*, n.d., ca. 1942.

the war labour boards, and the labour leadership in hindering workers' efforts to secure union recognition and a collective agreement. I conclude with some remarks about the legacy of the first Canadian bank strike for future organizing struggles in the industry.

White-Collar Work and Union Organizing in 1940s Canada

To understand the significance of the BCN strike, it is necessary to examine the changing dynamics of white-collar work in the first half of the twentieth century and union organizing in Canada and the United States (US) in the late 1930s and early 1940s. During the first few decades of the twentieth century, white-collar work underwent a significant transformation: technological change and the concomitant feminization of the white-collar workforce drastically altered the wages and working conditions of many office and professional workers.² Although their earnings had previously outpaced those of blue-collar workers, between 1911 and 1941 white-collar workers fell behind.³ Women, who comprised the majority of clerical workers by 1941, fared particularly poorly; they earned lower wages and were usually confined to menial, entry-level positions.⁴ Bank employees in particular faced a number of issues unique to their sector, including policies barring them from marriage until they earned a certain salary and

² Graham S. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

³ Between 1911 and 1941, the annual average salary for "production workers in manufacturing" rose 193 per cent, from \$417 to \$1,220. In contrast, the average annual salary for clerical workers increased 51 per cent, from \$612 to \$922. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 145.

⁴ LAC, Eileen Sufrin (Sufrin) fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, OPWOC pamphlet, "'White Collar' Workers Be Salary-Wise ORGANIZE!" n.d., ca. 1941. In 1941, the average annual salary for female clerical workers was \$731, while the average annual salary for male clerical workers was \$1,113. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 145.

requiring them to change branches every few years. These types of regulations contributed to the banking workforce's instability and high rates of turnover.⁵

In light of the deteriorating wages and working conditions, white-collar worker organizing increased. As early as 1913, some bank workers were publicly calling for the creation of a professional association. That year, bank employee turned author and organizer J.P. Buschlen published *A Canadian Bankclerk*, a novel about the life of a fictional bank clerk. Buschlen was motivated by a desire “to enlighten the public concerning life behind the wicket and thus pave the way for the legitimate organization of bank clerks into a fraternal association, for their financial and social (including moral) betterment.”⁶ The following year, Buschlen published a collection of short stories about bank work; one story was entitled “Bankclerks Organized” and discussed the need for a bank employee union. In contrast to many commentators on the prospects of bank worker unionization, both then and now, Buschlen believed that bank work and unions were well-suited to one another: “The Canadian banking business is uniform throughout, and Canadian bankclerks are closely inter-associated: here are two good reasons why our association must be successful.”⁷

Union organizing in the Canadian banking industry in the first decades of the twentieth century was limited, however, and did not lead to any substantial gains. In early February 1914, more than three hundred people met to discuss the establishment of a

⁵ Ronald Rudin, “Bankers’ Hours: Life Behind the Wicket at the *Banque d’Hochelega*, 1901–21,” *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (Fall 1986): 64–69.

⁶ J.P. Buschlen, *A Canadian Bankclerk* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913), 9.

⁷ J.P. Buschlen, *Behind the Wicket: Short Stories Relating to Life in the Canadian Banks* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1914), 261.

Bank Clerks' Association.⁸ Under the leadership of temporary chair J.P. Buschlen, the association hoped to address employees' poor salaries and feelings of vulnerability. Attendees pointed out the importance of the latter in particular, claiming that many clerks did not attend the meeting out of fear of dismissal.⁹ Though the association had lofty goals, it was short-lived. Management, meanwhile, dismissed it as a group of "silly" and "overpaid" employees who "fail to appreciate" their "advantageous" conditions.¹⁰

Five years later, in 1919, bank workers attempted to organize again. On December 16, approximately six hundred Ontario bank workers attended a meeting in Toronto and formed the Canadian Bank Employees' Association (CBEA), affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). One of the lead organizers reportedly told attendees that the union "was an expression of discontent. If the bank clerks were satisfied with their wages and conditions there was no necessity for an organization."¹¹ The following year, the CBEA tried to initiate industry-wide bargaining, but the banks refused to negotiate and the CBEA soon dissolved.¹² Still, the formation of the Bank Clerks' Association in 1914 and the CBEA in 1919 demonstrates that the first Canadian bank strike that occurred in the early 1940s was part of a longer history of struggle to improve wages and working conditions in Canada's banking industry.

⁸ According to the article, "It was made plain that the association will not be in the form of a union, so far as promoting strikes is concerned." "Bank clerks discussed forming an association," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 4, 1914.

⁹ "Bank clerks discussed forming an association," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 4, 1914.

¹⁰ "Advice to bank clerks," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 25, 1914.

¹¹ "Bank clerks will organize association," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 17, 1919.

¹² Rudin, "Bankers' Hours," 68. In March 1920, the Canadian Bank Employees' Association wrote to the head offices of the Canadian chartered banks to request a number of improvements in wages, benefits, and working conditions. Though a CBEA official claimed that some of the banks implemented salary increases in response to the creation of the association, I could neither confirm these claims nor find any further information about the CBEA and its negotiations with the banks. "Bank employees ask 25 per cent. increase," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 22, 1920; "Now ask Board of Conciliation," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), April 5, 1920.

Bank employee organizing in the first half of the twentieth century was also shaped by the dynamics and activities of the broader labour movement. After a high watermark of union organizing in the late 1910s, the labour movement experienced a number of losses in the 1920s and 1930s. State repression of leftists and unionists, powerful anti-union employers, and economic downturn combined to place unions and workers on the defensive. Wages and working conditions declined, and union membership plummeted. In 1919, there were approximately 380,000 union members in Canada, but by the mid-1920s, this number had dropped to 240,000.¹³

At the same time, the labour movement suffered internal divisions. In the US, the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) challenged the dominance and strategy of the AFL. Originally called the Committee of Industrial Organizations, the CIO emerged from divisions within the AFL over how to organize workers. While many AFL leaders wanted to continue to pursue a craft union strategy, organizing workers by skill, proponents of industrial unionism believed that workers should be organized by industry. In November 1935, at an AFL meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, John L. Lewis formed the CIO.¹⁴ In the following years, the dispute between the AFL and the CIO played out amongst labour federations and unions north of the border as well.¹⁵ In 1939, the AFL-affiliated Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC) expelled all CIO unions. The following year, the barred unions merged with the All-Canadian Congress of Labour to form the Canadian Congress of Labor (CCL). Meanwhile, communists and social

¹³ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1992), 219.

¹⁴ For more information about the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), see Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

¹⁵ On the CIO in Canada, see Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Don Taylor and Bradley Dow, *The Rise of Industrial Unionism in Canada – A History of the CIO* (Kingston, ON: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen’s University, 1988).

democrats battled for workers' political allegiance, and many unions and labour federations allied themselves with one or the other. In sum, though workers continued to organize and the labour movement won some notable victories during the interwar period, the movement suffered many losses and made little headway in terms of organizing the unorganized.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, things changed dramatically. In the US, union organizing increased as a result of renewed worker militancy and new labour legislation passed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Workers made some important gains in the years preceding World War II, but many victories occurred between 1939 and 1945, as wartime production breathed new life into the flailing economy and the floundering labour movement. Many Canadian men of working age enlisted, and though women filled some of the void, labour remained in short supply. Workers thus found themselves in a strong position from which to demand higher wages and improved working conditions. Yet most employers showed little interest in bargaining with workers or their associations. With no way of forcing employers to recognize unions and negotiate wages and working conditions, workers wielded their most powerful tool – the strike. Between 1941 and 1943, workers engaged in hundreds of work stoppages.¹⁶

In an effort to temper the rise in worker militancy and thereby avoid the bitter and violent class conflicts experienced during and after World War I, the Canadian state decided to increase its control over labour relations and the economy. In 1939, the federal government enacted the *War Measures Act*, allowing lawmakers to bypass the usual legislative process and quickly enact sweeping temporary legislation. In June 1940,

¹⁶ Detailed statistical analysis reveals that between 1941 and 1943 almost 425,000 workers participated in 1,106 strikes in Canada. Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891–1950," *Labour/Le Travail* 20 (Fall 1987): 117.

Parliament passed the *National Resources Mobilization Act*, increasing state control of property and labour. With its new and unprecedented powers, the federal government passed a number of orders-in-council that addressed labour and the economy. Enacted on 19 June 1940, PC 2685 stipulated that workers could join a union of their choosing and have their representatives negotiate an agreement with their employers. A seemingly significant legal step in terms of union recognition, workers and unions soon discovered that in reality the order changed little, as it did not require employers to comply.¹⁷

Still, many workers and unionists took advantage of the altered context, leading to a significant surge in worker organizing and labour movement activity in the late 1930s and early 1940s and an increase in union membership. Between 1938 and 1946, TLC membership more than doubled, rising from 160,378 to nearly 360,000; CCL membership tripled, increasing from 100,000 in 1940 to 315,000 in 1946.¹⁸ Though both labour organizations made important advances in organizing, as historian Bryan Palmer explains, “It was among workers in the CIO-dominated sectors of resource extraction and mass production that militant action was concentrated.”¹⁹

At the time, the CIO group making headlines for organizing was the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC). Established in 1936 to organize steel workers, SWOC won several notable battles in the US with previously intransigent employers, including U.S. Steel and Little Steel. North of the border, SWOC membership initially grew rapidly, after the CIO sent an organizer to recruit steel workers in Sydney, Nova

¹⁷ For more information about Privy Council Order 2685, see Jeremy Webber, “The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada during World War II,” *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (Spring 1985): 57–88; Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers’ Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 2001; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 235. Citations are to the Toronto edition.

¹⁸ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour*, 285.

¹⁹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour*, 285.

Scotia. State repression and employer hostility, however, caused membership to decline almost as quickly as it had grown.²⁰ Nevertheless, SWOC remained active in Canada; in 1939, the committee had three locals in Toronto and 1,000 members in Ontario.²¹ With the outbreak of war and the demand for industrial labour and steel workers in particular, SWOC's membership increased again, and the committee once more became a leader in organizing. It is thus not surprising that SWOC and the CIO-influenced Canadian Congress of Labor supported bank workers' attempts to unionize in the early 1940s.

The Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee

The CCL established OPWOC as the organizing committee for white-collar workers in February 1941, after bank workers in Toronto and Montréal expressed an interest in organizing.²² The CIO viewed organizing committees as temporary organizations that workers in particular industries could use in the early stages of organizing and eventually transform into permanent industrial unions. As industrial relations scholars Don Taylor and Bradley Dow explain, the strategy and structure of the CIO aimed to make “the previously ‘invisible’ industrial workers proprietors of their own cause – rather than foot-soldiers in someone else’s campaign.”²³ Industry-wide organizing committees also helped the CIO avoid dual unionism – “two unions fighting

²⁰ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour*, 256.

²¹ Wendy Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939–45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 21. In 1942, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) disbanded and reformed as the United Steel Workers of America.

²² Eileen Sufrin, *Where Angels Fear to Tread: Eileen Tallman and the Labor Movement*, ed. Wayne Roberts (Hamilton, ON: Labour Studies, McMaster University, 1981), 17; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Jane Connolly to Mr. N. S. Dowd, February 8, 1941.

²³ Taylor and Dow, *The Rise of Industrial Unionism in Canada*, 20.

for membership in a single jurisdiction” – a significant and divisive issue for the labour movement then and now.²⁴

Though SWOC expected bank workers to do much of the organizing themselves, SWOC director Charlie Millard hired Eileen Tallman to work on the campaign. Tallman was born in Montréal in 1913 but grew up in Toronto. Her father was a travelling salesman for a men’s clothing company, and her mother had been a dressmaker before marrying. After graduating from high school and completing a diploma in stenography and bookkeeping, Tallman worked as a teacher and then as an office worker. In the 1930s, she became involved in the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement (CCYM), the youth wing of the new social-democratic political party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Tallman was active in the Ontario CCYM provincial executive throughout the 1930s, and when the CCF established a Trade Union Committee in 1937, she was named secretary. Tallman knew Millard from his involvement with the Ontario CCF, but they became better acquainted through her work on the Trade Union Committee. When Millard asked her to take on the bank campaign, Tallman quit her office job and became a full-time OPWOC organizer.

Having secured support and resources from the CCL and set up shop in the SWOC office in Toronto, OPWOC representatives went to work signing up members.²⁵ The CCL had never organized bank employees and so organizers had their work cut out for them. To develop a critical mass of unionized bank workers, OPWOC members and supporters distributed letters and pamphlets across Canada. In May 1941, OPWOC

²⁴ Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, 5th ed. (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 58. For more information on jurisdictional battles during World War II specifically, see Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*, 35–38.

²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Norman S. Dowd to Mr. C.H. Millard, March 7, 1941; Sufrin, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 17.

circulated a letter to bank employees in Toronto, encouraging them to unionize. The letter highlighted the low wages paid by the banks, stressed that collective bargaining was “the only way” to obtain better wages and working conditions, and emphasized that now was the time to organize due to the “government’s desire to see discontent in industry removed” and the need “to protect positions now being filled by inexperienced employees.”²⁶ Over the summer, OPWOC also distributed the letter to bank workers in other Canadian cities, including Montréal.²⁷

OPWOC also tried to develop a community of bank workers. In July, the committee circulated its first monthly newsletter, *Bank Notes*.²⁸ The newsletter contained basic information about OPWOC and how to become a member, as well as information pertaining to bank work, upcoming events, and efforts by banks to discourage employees from unionizing. OPWOC also organized banquets and other social events to provide employees at different branches and banks opportunities to meet and interact.²⁹

Though bank employees eventually formed locals in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montréal, workers across Canada expressed interest in joining OPWOC.³⁰ Further, as the organizing gained momentum, OPWOC made use of the CCL’s cross-country network of affiliates to reach as many bank workers as possible. In February 1942, all affiliates received a letter from CCL secretary-treasurer Pat Conroy, asking them to leaflet banks in

²⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Jane Connolly to “Friend,” May 28, 1941. Eileen Tallman was involved with OPWOC from its formation and worked as the lead organizer in the bank drive; however, to avoid “discrimination,” she used an alias, Jane Connolly, until she was officially hired as a full-time OPWOC employee. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from C.H. Millard to Norman S. Dowd, February 27, 1941.

²⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Jane Connolly to “Friend”, July 24, 1941; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Joe Wall to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, June 18, 1941.

²⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, *Bank Notes*, July 1941.

²⁹ Sufirin, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 17.

³⁰ LAC, Sufirin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, September 1941.

their area.³¹ Affiliates who ordered leaflets included locals of the United Automobile, Aircraft, Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAWA); the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees and Other Transport Workers (CBRE); the National Union of Machinists; the National Union of Theatrical Employees; the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers; Building Workers of Quebec Inc.; and SWOC.³² At the end of March, Tallman reported that the leafleting by affiliates “is bearing fruit.”³³ Despite the enthusiastic response of bank workers in other parts of the country, however, OPWOC decided to focus on chartering locals in Toronto and Montréal first. Tallman reported that although organizers were “anxious to build up membership as widely as possible,” they felt it would be best to establish locals in Canada’s two largest cities first.³⁴

Given the low wages and poor working conditions of bank employees at the time, OPWOC membership increased rapidly. Tallman later recalled, “The conditions in the banks were so Neanderthal that it just took a start and people were interested. In those days the bank tellers were mostly men. It was the men who showed the most interest in organizing. . . . The tellers only had to compare their own conditions with other places that were unionized. They read the papers, and were well aware of how far behind they were falling. So they were interested in catching up.”³⁵ Though men may have “showed the most interest in organizing,” women also got involved. The December 1941 issue of

³¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Pat Conroy to “Sir and Brother,” February 12, 1942. Though Conroy signed the letter, Tallman wrote it. See LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 30, 1942.

³² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, March 30, 1942.

³³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, March 30, 1942.

³⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Jane Connolly to Mr. A.R. Mosher, August 2, 1941.

³⁵ Sufrin, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 17.

Bank Notes reported on the success of an afternoon tea that had recently been held for “young ladies in the union.”³⁶

Women’s involvement in OPWOC reflected the shifts that occurred in the gender composition of the banking labour force in the first half of the twentieth century. Before 1900, few women worked in banks; however, by 1930, the number of female bank employees had increased dramatically due to structural and technological changes in the industry and labour shortages caused by male enlistment in the armed forces. For example, in 1911, women comprised 8.6 per cent of the clerical staff of the head office and Ontario branches of the Bank of Nova Scotia; by 1931, they made up 30.4 per cent.³⁷ In 1941, 33 per cent of all employees in the Canadian banking industry were women.³⁸ As in other occupations, however, the salaries of female bank workers lagged behind those of their male colleagues.³⁹

Given that a substantial number of bank employees were women, OPWOC made a concerted effort to reach out to them. The monthly newsletter ran articles addressed “TO THE LADIES” that explored issues facing women bank employees, most of whom were confined to temporary part-time positions and earned less than men. Such articles explained how the banks exploited women and how unionization could help women achieve permanent positions and equal pay.⁴⁰

³⁶ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, December 1941.

³⁷ Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 55.

³⁸ Statistics Canada, “TABLE 17. Gainfully occupied, 14 years of age and over, by industry and sex, for Canada and the provinces, 1941,” in *Eighth Census of Canada: 1941* (Ottawa: Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty and Controller of Stationery, 1946), vol. 7.

³⁹ In 1931, the average annual salaries for male and female clerks at the head office and Ontario branches of the Bank of Nova Scotia were \$1,085.60 and \$993.83, respectively. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 154–155.

⁴⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, *Bank Notes*, July 1941; LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, August 1941.

OPWOC chartered its first local in August 1941. Local Union No. 1 represented workers employed by the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) in Montréal. Although the organizing drive was overseen by Alan Wright of SWOC – then acting as the OPWOC representative in Montréal – OPWOC officials reported that “the main impetus . . . for the splendid progress in Montreal has come from the membership themselves. They are working with enthusiasm and vigor to build their union, with very gratifying results.”⁴¹ The August issue of *Bank Notes* explained that membership in Toronto was increasing apace and that workers were also organizing in Hamilton, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Windsor, and Ottawa.⁴² In late August, workers established two more locals: RBC employees in Ottawa formed Local No. 2, and employees of Imperial Bank in Toronto set up Local No. 4.⁴³ Later that fall, OPWOC announced the establishment of Locals No. 5 and No. 6, consisting of Montréal employees of the Banque Canadienne Nationale and Banque Provinciale, respectively. By December 1941, OPWOC reported that they had signed up almost one thousand bank workers.⁴⁴

Although employed by different banks and in different cities, OPWOC members shared many grievances. Major issues included wages, overtime, cash shortages, job security, seniority, pensions, marriage regulations, and union recognition. An OPWOC “Bill of Rights” listed eight key demands: recognition of the union and a collective agreement, annual increases and a minimum salary scale, overtime pay, promotion based

⁴¹ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, August 1941.

⁴² LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, August 1941.

⁴³ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, September 1941. Local Union No. 3 was comprised of a group of Toronto bank workers. I was unable to confirm which bank employed them; however, I believe it was the Canadian Bank of Commerce. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. N.S. Dowd, October 29, 1941; “Would spread bank strike: Labor leader issues threat at Montreal,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), May 2, 1942.

⁴⁴ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, December 1941.

on seniority, a grievance procedure, regular employee status for women and messengers, adjustments to the pension and insurance plans, and the creation of a teller risk fund.⁴⁵

OPWOC focused on wages as a key organizing issue. Organizing pamphlets highlighted the fact that wages differed between banks, branches, and cities with no attention paid to the cost of living or years of employment. Wages also differed for men and women, regardless of position, and women's status as "temporary" employees prevented them from participating in the pension fund. Workers also complained that banks lacked a clear policy for increases and that management could withhold increases and bonuses if they wished. Moreover, employees pointed out that wages were not keeping pace with wartime inflation. OPWOC members found the banks' refusal to pay higher wages particularly egregious given their immense profits, especially during wartime. The union argued, "THE BANKS CAN AFFORD TO PAY BETTER SALARIES! WHY DON'T THE BANK EMPLOYEES GET THEM?"⁴⁶

OPWOC members connected the issue of wages to other grievances, such as unpaid overtime. They also complained about bank policies that required employees who earned an annual salary of less than \$1,500 to seek management's permission before marrying. Since married women did not enter the banking workforce in significant numbers until the 1950s, the marriage rule was directed primarily at men, who were imagined as male breadwinners.⁴⁷ According to OPWOC, the BCN Rules Book stated, "The Bank cannot keep in its service an employee whose marriage is not justified by the

⁴⁵ LAC, Suftrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, September 1941.

⁴⁶ LAC, Suftrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, "You Can BANK on ORGANIZATION," n.d., original emphasis.

⁴⁷ In 1941, it was assumed that a woman might resign on marriage; by the late 1950s, this was less likely. In 1958, an article in *The Canadian Banker* reported that 40 per cent of female bank employees in Canada were married. Naomi Bristol Malloy, "A Banking Career and Marriage," *The Canadian Banker* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1958): 93.

salary which he receives, his personal revenues and future prospects which he may have. The Head Office must be advised of the marriage of each of the employees.”⁴⁸

Organizers claimed that the marriage policy stemmed from banks’ concern that the increased responsibilities that came with marriage may lead employees to steal if they did not earn enough money.⁴⁹ The banks preferred to use resources to police employees’ personal lives rather than to pay them a living wage.

In sum, poor wages and working conditions and an increase in union organizing across Canada motivated bank workers to unionize during World War II. Aware that they were falling behind blue-collar workers, whose unionization rates were increasing rapidly, bank workers turned to the labour movement for help. The enthusiastic response to OPWOC’s organizing drive from bank workers across Canada indicates that white-collar workers were interested in unions. Nevertheless, by the end of the war, white-collar unionization rates still lagged behind those of their blue-collar counterparts. As one of the most significant white-collar union organizing efforts during this period, it is crucial to examine the factors that contributed to the failure of OPWOC’s bank campaign, including the actions of the banks, the state, and the labour leadership.

The banks responded swiftly to the organizing drive. The first issue of *Bank Notes* reported threatening and intimidating behaviour by the Dominion bank management in particular. According to OPWOC, management distributed “a large advertisement” amongst employees, deterring them from joining the union and reminding them that

⁴⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁴⁹ Sufrin, *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, 17. Bank employees had criticized the marriage policy for many years and, in some cases, mounted successful legal challenges. In 1914, J.P. Buschlen quoted an editorial in a recent issue of *The Toronto Saturday Night* that discussed the Australian government’s recent passage of a bill that made it a criminal offense for employers to prevent employees over the age of 21 from marrying. Buschlen, *Behind the Wicket*, 263.

“[a]ny individual or group of individuals who obstruct are disloyal if not criminal.”⁵⁰

OPWOC also claimed that management was circulating false information about the union, including that it had communist ties.⁵¹

While the banks repeatedly invoked the threat of communism to discredit the union, OPWOC officials also engaged in anti-communist behaviour to legitimize the campaign and to overcome preconceived ideas about unions. Tallman explained that “labour union” brought to mind “pictures of thugs, racketeers and so on” and elicited “a different reaction . . . than if it is simply called an industrial union or just a union.”⁵²

OPWOC officials’ desire to disassociate the union from communism reflected broader tensions and dynamics on the left at the time. From the mid-1930s through to the mid-1950s, Canadian labour leaders engaged in a fierce ideological battle, resulting in the purging of many activists and affiliates deemed to be “communist” and the creation of deep and long-lasting divisions within the labour movement.⁵³ In light of this context, and given OPWOC’s close connections to SWOC and its leader Charlie Millard – a staunch supporter of the CCF and the anti-communist faction of the CCL – OPWOC officials responded quickly and firmly to the banks’ claims that the union had communist connections.⁵⁴ In its first newsletter, OPWOC poked fun at the banks’ claims that Tallman was a “Communist from Chicago,” assuring readers that “she was born and raised in Canada, has never been to Chicago, and is wise to the history and tactics of the

⁵⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, *Bank Notes*, July 1941.

⁵¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, *Bank Notes*, July 1941.

⁵² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, February 17, 1942.

⁵³ Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*.

⁵⁴ For more information on C.H. Millard, see Laurel Sefton MacDowell, “The Career of a Canadian Trade Union Leader: C.H. Millard 1937–1946,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 43, no. 3 (1988): 609–632.

Communists and employers alike in the labour movement.”⁵⁵ Similarly, an OPWOC booklet on the BCN strike reiterated that Tallman was “a consistent opponent” of communist politics and ideology.⁵⁶

The banks also pressured union members to resign. In March 1942, Charlie Millard reported that RBC told two OPWOC members – one the local vice-president and the other a former executive officer – that “there did not seem to be any future in the bank for them.”⁵⁷ Though both men had worked for the bank for more than a decade and management said their work was fine, they were told to resign; in one case the reason given was personal appearance, and in the other, management claimed the employee “did not seem to be particularly interested in his job.”⁵⁸

In response to management’s anti-union tactics, OPWOC representatives encouraged workers to continue organizing. Quoting one enthusiastic bank worker, one newsletter article stated, “We can’t be any worse off than we are now. The banks have been using us as a doormat for years – this is our chance to do something about it, and we are going to take it.”⁵⁹ Further, OPWOC representatives assured bank workers that the labour movement and the new legislation would protect union members from management reprisals. They declared, “The moment any case of discrimination against a member of the O.P.W.O.C. is brought to our attention, we’ll be on the job with all the machinery of protection and action at the disposal of the Canadian Congress of Labour – and with over 100,000 people behind you, including your own associates in the Union,

⁵⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, *Bank Notes*, July 1941.

⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁵⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from C.H. Millard to Mr. Pat Conroy, March 25, 1942.

⁵⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from C.H. Millard to Mr. Pat Conroy, March 25, 1942.

⁵⁹ LAC, Sufirin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, September 1941.

why be afraid to stand up for your rights?”⁶⁰ Such declarations may have been sincere; however, as members of OPWOC Local 5 would discover when they appealed to the national and regional war labour boards and went on strike, solidarity and legislation were meaningless without the support of labour leaders and war labour boards.

Local 5

Though Local 5 was one of the last OPWOC locals to be set up, its members were the first and only ones to submit their case to a war labour board and to withdraw their labour power. The local thus merits closer analysis. Banque Canadienne Nationale employees formed OPWOC Local 5 in fall 1941 for reasons that overlapped with and diverged from those of their colleagues employed by other banks. In contrast to such institutions as Dominion, Imperial, and Royal, which operated in various provinces across Canada and hired anglophones and francophones, BCN primarily operated in Québec, served mainly French-speaking customers, and employed mostly French-

⁶⁰ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, *Bank Notes*, September 1941. Added to the Criminal Code in 1939, Section 502A “made it a crime to refuse to employ a person for the ‘sole’ reason that the person was a ‘member of a lawful trade union . . . formed for the purpose of advancing in a lawful manner their interests.’” Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*, 226. As scholars Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker demonstrate, in reality the amendment “did little to protect workers from anti-union employers. It served to raise unionists’ expectations, but when attempts were made to have employers prosecuted for discharging union members, hopes were quickly dashed.” Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*, 239.

speaking workers.⁶¹ At the time, Québec workers earned the lowest wages in the country, and francophones often earned lower wages than anglophones, even in the same job, due to a low demand for French-speaking workers.⁶² OPWOC claimed that the high cost-of-living in Montréal compounded matters for the employees of BCN's 65 branches in the city. As well, BCN employees complained of wage inequalities within classifications and a lack of standards for annual raises.⁶³

Along with paltry wages, BCN workers also had to contend with many of the same issues as their colleagues employed by other banks, including unpaid overtime, a marriage regulation, penalties for cash shortages, and concerns over job security, seniority, and pensions. BCN employees wanted to end the bank's practice of mandatory unpaid overtime, a problem they claimed the extra workload brought on by the war exacerbated. Although branches only opened from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., many employees worked from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and then again from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays when the bank had evening hours. The main branch provided "supper money"

⁶¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*. Banque Canadienne Nationale (BCN) was established in 1924, when a recession led to the merger of the Quebec City-based Banque Nationale (est. 1859) and Montréal-based Banque d'Hochelega (est. 1874). Both banks had been established in the nineteenth century by francophone businessmen who wanted to establish banks "under their own control . . . that will promote their own interest[s]," and the banks had previously competed against one another and Montréal-based Provincial Bank of Canada (est. 1861 as the Banque Jacques Cartier) for domination of the Québec market. In 1979, in "one of the largest bank mergers in history," BCN and the Provincial Bank of Canada merged to form the National Bank of Canada. "History," National Bank of Canada, https://www.nbc.ca/bnc/cda/content/0,2662,divId-2_langId-1_navCode-10683,00.html/ (accessed April 23, 2014). National Bank of Canada continues to exist today. According to a National Bank brief, as of January 2014 the bank was "the sixth largest bank in Canada and the leading bank in Quebec," with 451 branches across Canada; 2.4 million clients; 19,784 employees; and \$195 billion in assets. National Bank of Canada, "NATIONAL BANK IN BRIEF: Data as at January 31, 2014," National Bank of Canada, <https://www.nbc.ca/en/about-us/our-organization/the-bank/portrait-of-the-bank/national-bank-in-brief.html> (accessed April 27, 2016).

⁶² At the time, OPWOC members claimed that newspaper advertisements encouraging investment in Québec described the province as "a 'low wage area.'" LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*. According to historian Ronald Rudin, the wage inequality reflected a lower demand for francophone workers, a result of several factors, including a growing population, low levels of education, and a limited need for French-speaking office workers. Rudin, "Bankers' Hours," 71.

⁶³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

for employees, but none of the branches paid overtime.⁶⁴ Workers also wanted the bank to stop meddling in their personal affairs, such as their plans for marriage and business.

BCN employees had suggestions for improvements as well. They wanted BCN to establish a risk fund for tellers, as the Bank of Montreal had done, so that workers would no longer have to pay for shortages out of their own pockets. In addition, BCN workers wanted the bank to establish a joint committee of management and employees to review dismissals and deal with hiring grievances. They believed such a committee would protect workers from being “arbitrarily dismissed” and ensure that the bank based promotions “on seniority and ability” rather than “favoritism.”⁶⁵ Workers also wanted a pension plan and some say in how it functioned, including the amount of contributions, type of benefits, and age at which employees could access it.

Frustrated by their low wages and poor working conditions and believing that unionization would help them change their situation, in 1941, BCN employees began organizing. On November 12, they were officially chartered as OPWOC Local 5. By the end of the month, they claimed that 80 per cent of eligible employees had signed up.⁶⁶

Management responded to workers’ organizing efforts by attacking the union and intimidating employees; however, they also offered a few crumbs.⁶⁷ They established a “Manager’s Committee” to hear grievances and to look at salary increases, and they reminded workers that the bank was “one big happy family.”⁶⁸ The Manager’s Committee also circulated a petition asking employees to reject the union, which they

⁶⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁶⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁶⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁶⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. N.S. Dowd, December 23, 1941.

⁶⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

described as greedy, “anti-Christian” “sedition-mongers.”⁶⁹ According to OPWOC representatives, the tactic proved unsuccessful; only 1 per cent of union members signed the petition.⁷⁰

When appeals to employees’ loyalty failed to break the union, management turned to coercion. Branch managers had private meetings with every employee; during these meetings management suggested “in a ‘fatherly’ way” that employees quit the union or face a variety of consequences, including transfer to another branch or denial of a pay increase.⁷¹ Managers told employees that individual annual reports used to determine promotions and pay increases would not be submitted to Head Office until the employee signed a letter resigning from the union.⁷² In one week, the union office received more than two hundred form resignation letters, all sent by registered mail.⁷³ OPWOC representatives claimed that members telephoned the office to explain that they wished to remain union members but had signed the letters in order to receive the salary increases.⁷⁴ The union considered filing a complaint with the war labour board over the bank’s anti-union activity but felt that doing so would put too much pressure on employees.⁷⁵

Management also went after union officers working at BCN, transferring them to other branches or forcing them to quit. In early December, one member of the Local 5 executive resigned after he received a transfer to a branch located 600 kilometres from

⁶⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁷⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

⁷¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

⁷² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁷³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

⁷⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

Montréal. Later that month, management transferred Local 5 vice-president George Boisvert to Contre-Coeur, Québec, 65 kilometres away. As OPWOC gleefully reported, however, the distance “did not prove quite far enough. . . . He still attended union meetings and later left the bank to become a union representative for Quebec.”⁷⁶

While management attempted to break the union, OPWOC members assembled a bargaining proposal. It addressed such things as union recognition; salaries; hours of work and overtime; sick benefits; vacations and leaves of absence; seniority, transfers, and dismissals; the risk fund for tellers; the marriage regulation; the pension fund; and a grievance procedure.⁷⁷ The bank, however, was not prepared to bargain. On December 12, OPWOC sent a copy of the proposed agreement to the BCN general manager along with a letter asking to begin contract negotiations.⁷⁸ The bank did not respond. Proof that BCN management had no interest in bargaining came at the end of the month when workers received their annual increases. The union had asked that all employees receive \$100, but the bank gave the usual amounts of \$50 and \$75.⁷⁹

Though OPWOC members hoped to deal with many of their grievances at the bargaining table when management agreed to negotiate, PC 8253 – the Wartime Wages and Cost-of-Living Bonus Order – provided strict guidelines for determining wages and cost-of-living bonuses. An anti-inflation measure passed by the federal government on 24 October 1941, PC 8253 froze wage rates at 1920s levels, allowing increases only if a wage could be proven to be lower than the average rate of a similar job in the same or a

⁷⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁷⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, “Brief Presented by O.P.W.O.C. to Quebec Regional War Labor Board,” January 13, 1942.

⁷⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, “Brief Presented by O.P.W.O.C. to Quebec Regional War Labor Board,” January 13, 1942.

⁷⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

comparable location.⁸⁰ PC 8253 also set up one national labour board and five regional labour boards (for the Maritimes, Québec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia) to deal with applications for increases and other matters pertaining to labour relations as directed by the Minister of Labour. Under the new legislation, BCN employees had to present their case for salary increases and cost-of-living bonuses to a war labour board. OPWOC had forwarded copies of the letter and proposed agreement to the National War Labour Board and the Québec Regional War Labour Board on December 15. On December 30, the national board informed OPWOC that the regional board would oversee their case.⁸¹

The War Labour Boards

The war labour boards were the latest development in a long history of state intervention in labour relations in Canada. Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the state had played an increasingly prominent role in labour disputes in an effort to maintain industrial peace and foster the development of capitalism.⁸² In response to the surge in worker organizing and strike activity that occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the federal government took steps to limit workers' ability to strike and to channel class conflict into bureaucratic structures during and after World

⁸⁰ "Stabilization Of Prices And Wages in Canada: Issuance Of Orders Designed to Control Cost of Living—mandatory," *Labour Gazette* (November 1941): 1362–1373, <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/oldlabourstudies/onlinelearning/article.php?id=495> (accessed January 13, 2016).

⁸¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, "Brief Presented by O.P.W.O.C. to Quebec Regional War Labor Board," January 13, 1942.

⁸² H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650–1860* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1981); Joan Sangster, "The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 3 (1978): 109–130; Paul Craven, *An Impartial Umpire: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900–1911* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*.

War II.⁸³ Part of that process, PC 8253 stipulated that all wage increases had to be approved by the tripartite war labour boards. Though these particular boards were new, the use of tripartite boards to quell labour unrest was not. The 1903 Railway Labour Disputes Act had authorized “ad hoc tripartite boards” to conciliate industrial disputes, and as scholars Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker explain, “[t]he use of ad hoc tripartite boards . . . remained the federal government’s preferred agency of intervention until well into World War II.”⁸⁴ Though some labour leaders believed that working with the government helped workers by securing legal reforms and a say in the resolution of labour disputes, others argued that collaboration and compromise legitimized the capitalist state.⁸⁵

The war labour boards established in the early 1940s had mixed effects for workers and unions. On the one hand, in many cases the boards granted increases in wages, benefits, and cost-of-living bonuses. For example, between November 1941 and February 1943, the Ontario Regional War Labour Board approved 81 per cent of the 6,891 applications it received.⁸⁶ Historian Wendy Cuthbertson explains that although unionists were concerned PC 8253 would hinder unionization because it prohibited employers and workers from negotiating monetary issues, over time “labour leaders began to believe that wage controls made unions *more* appealing to workers because of the money and expertise it took to take a case to a war labour board.”⁸⁷ Unions could

⁸³ Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners’ Strike of 1941–42*, revised ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2001); Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Sean Tucker and Brian Thorn, “Railing Against the Company Union: The State, Union Substitution, and the Montréal Tramways Strike of 1943,” *Labour/Le Travail* 58 (Fall 2006): 41–70.

⁸⁴ Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*, 43.

⁸⁵ Craven, *An Impartial Umpire*, 196.

⁸⁶ Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*, 47–48.

⁸⁷ Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*, 47–48, original emphasis.

recruit members by pointing to the monetary increases obtained for unionized workers through the war labour boards.

On the other hand, the boards could thwart efforts by workers and unions to improve wages. In determining whether to grant an increase, war labour boards had to consider the wage rates of similar occupations in similar locations. Workers and unionists in low-wage areas, such as Québec, argued that this policy reinforced the wage inequality that existed between Québec workers and their counterparts in other parts of the country.⁸⁸ As well, if the board did not approve an increase, workers and unions had limited recourse; they could appeal to the national board if they felt the regional board had erred in procedure, but national board decisions were final.

OPWOC's experience with the war labour boards demonstrates that while the national and regional war labour boards assisted some workers during World War II, they harmed others. Employer recalcitrance and labour leaders' ambivalence exacerbated matters. In OPWOC's case, the Québec Regional War Labour Board's failure to decide the union's case in a timely manner combined with BCN's refusal to submit necessary information significantly shaped members' decision to strike in the spring of 1942. As well, when the board finally decided the case, the decision and CCL's tepid response further undermined the strike, the union, and ultimately the drive to unionize Canadian bank workers. In sum, the state, the bank, and the leadership of the labour movement all played crucial roles in hindering bank workers' struggles to unionize and improve their wages and working conditions in the early 1940s.

OPWOC members employed at BCN initially submitted their case to the RWLB in December 1941. In their application, they asked the board "to conciliate" in their

⁸⁸ Tucker and Thorn, "Railing Against the Company Union," 44.

dispute with BCN and to force the bank to match the Royal Bank of Canada's cost-of-living-bonus, which followed PC 8253.⁸⁹ At the time, three employer representatives, three union representatives, and a chair made up the board. Gérard Tremblay, the provincial Deputy Minister of Labour, chaired the RWLB. The employer representatives were T.R. McLagan, general manager of Canadian Vickers Limited, an aircraft and ship-building company; Jean-Marie Dessureault, president of lumber company J.M. Dessureault Inc. and future member of the BCN board of directors (he was elected in 1944, two years after the OPWOC strike); and François Faure, a director of the Consolidated Paper Corporation, Limited. The union representatives were Phillip Lessard, president of the Catholic Federation of Pulp and Paper Workers; Boot and Shoe Workers Union representative Lionel Thibault; and Paul-Emile Marquette, a CCL regional director.⁹⁰ The board rotated its meetings between Montréal and Québec City.

Several factors contributed to OPWOC's frustrating and drawn-out experience with the RWLB. On a practical level, the board's meeting schedule presented challenges; the RWLB only met one day each week. If the board did not reach a decision on a case the same day they considered it, applicants had to wait until the board's next meeting the following week.

BCN's obstinate refusal to provide the board with pertinent information or even respond to requests for information also caused delays. On December 29, the board asked BCN to submit payroll figures, but by the board's next meeting, the bank had not responded. Even though one of the board's labour representatives produced detailed salary information for half of the bank's branches, the board did not make a decision on

⁸⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, "Brief Presented by O.P.W.O.C. to Quebec Regional War Labor Board," January 13, 1942.

⁹⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

the BCN case at that meeting.⁹¹ Frustrated, OPWOC sent a telegram to the provincial Minister of Labour, Edgar Rochette. On January 7, Rochette told the union that the RWLB would review documents demonstrating that BCN's basic wage rates were lower than those of similar institutions.⁹² Hoping to obtain a speedy resolution to the dispute, on January 13 OPWOC representatives appeared before the board; they presented a brief detailing current and proposed salaries at BCN, and they asked for a full cost-of-living bonus for BCN employees.⁹³ In the brief, OPWOC highlighted the low wages currently paid to bank workers in general as well as the stressful nature of the job, particularly during wartime. OPWOC also argued that BCN's "standard of salaries and hours is worse than that of any other bank in the district covered by this application."⁹⁴ As evidence, they included a chart showing that the Bank of Montreal employees earned roughly double what BCN employees earned.⁹⁵ Despite the detailed information provided by OPWOC, the board again refrained from making a decision.

The RWLB thus hindered matters considerably, taking time to gather and process information and to ponder the finer points of wartime labour legislation. An initial delay occurred between the time OPWOC submitted the application and the first hearing due to confusion as to whether the national board or the regional board should oversee the case.⁹⁶ Following the decision that the RWLB would handle it, the regional board spent

⁹¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

⁹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, "History of the Handling of the Case Local No. 5, Office & Professional Workers Organizing Committee vs. Banque Canadienne Nationale by the Quebec Regional War Labour Board," n.d.

⁹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, "Brief Presented by O.P.W.O.C. to Quebec Regional War Labor Board," January 13, 1942.

⁹⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁹⁶ Wendy Cuthbertson describes a similar situation in her discussion of the war labour boards' involvement in the strike by Ford workers in Windsor, ON in November 1942. Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War*, 128.

two months considering the wage information submitted by OPWOC and conducting its own research into wages paid by other banks in Montréal.⁹⁷ In February, Tallman wrote, “Regional Board proceedings in the Banque Canadienne Nationale case are still dragging along with no decision in sight for the immediate future.”⁹⁸ Then, in early March, the board informed OPWOC that it needed to determine whether PC 8253 applied to the banks.⁹⁹ Although the national board confirmed on March 7 that it did, two weeks later the board told OPWOC that the matter had still not been resolved.¹⁰⁰

The board also dithered over making a decision on the cost-of-living bonuses. On March 12, the RWLB informed OPWOC that the board had “considered the matter,” but the case had been referred to the national board to decide “the legality of such adjustment.”¹⁰¹ The ridiculous nature of the board’s reasons for delaying their decision reached new heights when, on March 24, OPWOC learned that the board had delayed its decision on the cost-of-living bonus in particular due to a “poorly written and inaccurate” draft letter to the banks produced by the RWLB.¹⁰²

Finally, on April 8 the RWLB informed OPWOC that the national board had instructed the regional board to authorize a 7 per cent cost-of-living bonus for BCN employees. Annoyed that the board had not informed the union of the decision earlier and frustrated that the board had only awarded 7 per cent – the amount the bank already paid – OPWOC representatives threatened to appeal to the national board. The RLWB chief

⁹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

⁹⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, February 21, 1942.

⁹⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁰⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁰¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Gérard Tremblay to R.J. Lamoureux, March 12, 1942.

¹⁰² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from A.R. Mosher to Miss Eileen Tallman, March 24, 1942.

executive officer responded by telling OPWOC that they should consider the decision a success because BCN employees “really should not be receiving any bonus under 8253.”¹⁰³ Moreover, he claimed that regional board decisions were final and could not be appealed to the national board.

The RWLB threw up yet another roadblock on April 9 when board secretary H.C. LeBrun wrote to OPWOC to inform them of an explanatory memorandum recently issued by the national board.¹⁰⁴ Sent to all regional boards, Explanatory Memorandum No. E.M. 10 stated that war labour boards should consider an employee application only if “it comes from an employee[,] a group of employees, or the appointed representative of the employees’ organization holding the agreement.”¹⁰⁵ In light of the memorandum, the RWLB told OPWOC that the board would not consider the application for BCN employees until the board received proof that the employees had selected OPWOC to be their official representative.¹⁰⁶

Though the federal government established the war labour boards to serve as arbiters of applications for monetary increases only, the OPWOC case demonstrates that the boards played a much more significant role during this period. Specifically, the action of the boards aided the bank and hindered OPWOC members’ efforts to attain union recognition, negotiate a collective agreement, and obtain increases in their wages and cost-of-living bonuses. For while the board debated and dithered, bank management stepped up its anti-union activities. In early March, management told the Local 5

¹⁰³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, April 10, 1942.

¹⁰⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from H.C. LeBrun to Mr. R.J. Lamoureux, April 9, 1942.

¹⁰⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, “Explanatory Memorandum No. E.M. 10,” n.d.

¹⁰⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, telegram from JB Germain to RJ Lamoureux, April 10, 1942.

president that he must transfer to the Matane branch – located 628 kilometres northeast of Montréal – or resign; he refused both options, and on March 4 the bank fired him.¹⁰⁷ OPWOC wrote to the provincial Minister of Labour about the incident and the bank’s previous actions, asking him “to inform the management of the Banque Canadienne Nationale that such interference with their employees’ legal right to organize in a union of their own choice is contrary to government policy as set forth in Order-in-Council P.C. 2685 and cannot but have a harmful effect on the relationships of employers and employees within this institution.”¹⁰⁸ In his response, the Minister reminded the union that they could pursue legal action if they could prove that the bank had interfered with an employee’s right to unionize but that the bank had the right to transfer its employees and it may be difficult to prove that a transfer occurred to hinder union activity.¹⁰⁹ In April, the bank transferred the financial secretary of Local 5 to the Roxton Falls branch – located 100 kilometres east of Montréal. According to OPWOC representatives, the transfer of the financial secretary “makes the fourth officer of their Executive who has been confronted with a transfer ‘or else’ since their case has been under consideration.”¹¹⁰ OPWOC therefore informed the RWLB that that the union would not be able to provide “proof of representation”; the union would not name union officers if the board would not protect members’ from employer reprisals.¹¹¹

Throughout the delays, Local 5 members received support from OPWOC officials and locals as well as the CCL. In March 1942, the CCL contacted the House of Commons

¹⁰⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁰⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Edgar Rochette, March 16, 1942.

¹⁰⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹¹⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, April 10, 1942.

¹¹¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from R.J. Lamoureux to Mr. J.B. Germain, April 11, 1942.

Committee on Banking and Finance to ask whether OPWOC could make a presentation to the committee; however, the committee was “in no sense” willing to “entertain any representations concerning Labour relationships.”¹¹² In regards to messages of support, in January OPWOC Local No. 1 passed a resolution of support,¹¹³ and CCL president A.R. Mosher congratulated members on their work to date and reaffirmed the CCL’s interest in their struggle.¹¹⁴

Despite the support from OPWOC and the CCL, management’s anti-union tactics and the war labour board’s unwillingness to act underscored for OPWOC members the need to obtain union recognition from their employer, and this, in turn, contributed to their decision to strike later that month. In their own history of the strike, OPWOC explained that “unless the Bank agreed to deal with their spokesmen (in effect, the union) any gains from the Regional Board could not be enforced or protected in the future.”¹¹⁵ At a membership meeting on April 10, Local 5 members expressed their frustration with the regional board, and they asked OPWOC officials to ask BCN yet again to begin negotiations.¹¹⁶ The membership also agreed “to call a strike ‘when necessary’ – and immediately in the event of any further discrimination by the management.”¹¹⁷ The following day, OPWOC sent another letter to BCN general manager Charles St. Pierre,

¹¹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from P. Conroy to Mr. C.H. Millard, April 10, 1942.

¹¹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, January 8, 1942.

¹¹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, telegram from AR Mosher to Miss Eileen Tallman, January 8, 1942.

¹¹⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike. The First Canadian Bank Strike* was a leaflet produced and distributed by OPWOC shortly after the strike. Although the leaflet does not list an individual author, Tallman likely wrote it. See LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, May 23, 1942.

¹¹⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from R.J. Lamoureux to Mr. J.B. Germain, April 11, 1942.

¹¹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from E. Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, April 12, 1942.

asking that he follow PC 2685 and meet with Local 5 members.¹¹⁸ Again, the bank did not respond.

BCN's refusal to respond to the union, combined with the RWLB's failure to make a decision on wage increases and cost-of-living bonuses or even confirm that OPWOC represented BCN employees, increased union members' frustration. In a final effort to avoid strike action, CCL secretary-treasurer Pat Conroy travelled to Montréal and met with St. Pierre on April 29. St. Pierre told Conroy he would speak with the BCN board of directors and contact him with an update. Meanwhile, earlier that week the bank had dismissed two more union members. When Conroy briefed Local 5 about the meeting with St. Pierre, they decided they had had enough. That same night, they voted unanimously to strike the next day.¹¹⁹

En grève!

The BCN strike lasted just over three weeks, though it would be several months before all of the strikers returned to work or found other jobs and the RWLB finally made a decision on wages and bonuses. Yet despite its short time frame and the relatively small number of workers involved, the BCN strike is significant for several reasons. Most notably, when Local 5 members erected picket lines outside BCN branches on Thursday, 30 April 1942, they officially began the first bank strike in Canadian history.

Although there had never been a strike in the Canadian banking industry, bank workers around the world had begun to organize in the first half of the twentieth century. In Ireland, bank employees in Limerick met on 27 September 1917, and six months later,

¹¹⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Representative – O.P.W.O.C. to Mr. Charles St. Pierre, April 11, 1942.

¹¹⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

on 17 March 1918, they established the Irish Bank Officials' Association.¹²⁰ The same year, a group of Scottish bank clerks in Sheffield created the Bank Officers Guild, and in 1919, another group of workers formed the Scottish Bankers Association, acquiring 25,000 members by 1924.¹²¹ The early 1940s brought another wave of organizing. In the US, hundreds of bank workers joined the United Office and Professional Workers of America during World War II, while the Office Employees International Union launched several organizing campaigns in the banks.¹²² Farther south, in 1943, bank workers in Uruguay established the Asociación de Bancarios del Uruguay.¹²³ Also in 1943, bank employees in Sri Lanka (then British Ceylon) created the Ceylon Bank Clerks' Union, subsequently calling strikes in 1944, 1945, and 1946.¹²⁴ Comparatively, Canadian bank workers were relatively unorganized. Nevertheless, BCN employees' decision to strike reflected and was part of the significant increase in worker organizing and strike activity that occurred in Canada and many other countries around the world during World War II.

The response to the strike reflected its historical significance; the strikers immediately garnered a great deal of attention from the press and the public. OPWOC members recalled that on the first day of picketing people reacted with astonishment and

¹²⁰ Irish Bank Officials' Association (IBOA) the Finance Union, "Over 90 Years of Progress," *IBOA the Finance Union*, <http://www.iboa.ie/about/history.html> (accessed January 19, 2015). The IBOA was one of the first bank worker unions in the world.

¹²¹ The two Scottish unions merged in 1946 to form the National Union of Bank Employees. Unite, "Finance and Legal – history," *Unite*, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/how-we-help/list-of-sectors/finance-and-legal/financeandlegalresourcesandinformation/financeandlegalhistory/> (accessed January 19, 2015).

¹²² Mark McColloch, *White Collar Workers in Transition: The Boom Years, 1940–1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 42–45.

¹²³ Robert J. Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Uruguay and Paraguay* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 53.

¹²⁴ Robert N. Kearney, *Trade Unions and Politics in Ceylon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 50.

curiosity.¹²⁵ Never ones to miss a sensational story, newspapers provided coverage of the first day of the strike. Montréal's *La Presse* put the story on its front page.¹²⁶

The exact number of workers who participated in the strike and the effect on BCN operations are difficult to determine. OPWOC claimed that roughly 200 workers walked off the job on the first day of the strike and that another fifty joined them on the second day.¹²⁷ Management countered with its own much lower estimates.¹²⁸ Based on the competing claims and OPWOC's assertion in November 1941 that BCN had 600 employees, the number of strikers fell somewhere between 14 and 43 per cent of BCN workers. As well, according to OPWOC the strike disrupted services at many branches. Though many branches remained open during the strike, the bank relied on workers from other branches in the province, and employees who crossed the picket line struggled to keep up with the increased workload.¹²⁹

The strikers' spirits remained high for the first few days, no doubt heartened by the support they received from a variety of sources, including other OPWOC locals and Montréal unions, the CCL, and the public.¹³⁰ OPWOC members recalled that as people passed the picket line, "[c]uriosity changed to enthusiastic shouts of 'Go to it, boys,' 'Keep at it till you win,' 'Good for you!'"¹³¹ Other OPWOC locals and the CCL and its

¹²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹²⁶ "Une grève d'employés de banque," *La Presse* (Montréal), April 30, 1942.

¹²⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹²⁸ "Bank strikers to meet board," *Montreal Daily Star*, May 6, 1942.

¹²⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹³⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to "Sir and Brother," May 1, 1942.

¹³¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

affiliates also supported Local 5.¹³² Donations came in from locals of SWOC, the UAWA, the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Dockyard Workers, the CBRE, and the International Shoe and Leather Workers' Federation. Many groups and individuals also sent messages of support and encouragement. OPWOC members recalled, "Telegrams of encouragement and support poured in from every part of Canada."¹³³ At a meeting of Montréal bank workers held on the twelfth day of the strike, noted Québec political activist and president of the League for Women's Rights Marie Thérèse Casgrain expressed her support.¹³⁴ Support from these groups helped Local 5 members maintain morale.¹³⁵

Though OPWOC received some crucial support from the CCL and its affiliates, the union also faced skepticism and criticism from these groups over the amount of support and whether it was "justified." Upon receiving a letter from Tallman requesting financial assistance, CBRE national secretary-treasurer M.M. Maclean wrote to CBRE vice-president J.E. McGuire in Montréal to ask him "whether . . . the assistance requested is justified."¹³⁶ The CCL executive also questioned OPWOC's request for donations, though not until after the strike had ended. In July, CCL secretary-treasurer Pat Conroy wrote to Tallman to inform her that he had received a number of complaints in response

¹³² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Pat Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, May 4, 1942; "SUPPORT IS GIVEN TO BANK STRIKERS: Members of Other Locals in Union Aid – Employers Say Only 90 Out," *Gazette* (Montréal), May 7, 1942, original emphasis; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Norman S. Dowd to Miss Eileen Tallman, May 22, 1942.

¹³³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹³⁴ "STRIKERS BACKED BY MRS. CASGRAIN: Women's Leader Addresses Rally Held by Bank Employees," *Gazette* (Montréal), May 12, 1942, original emphasis.

¹³⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. M.M. Maclean, May 12, 1942.

¹³⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from M.M. Maclean to Mr. J.E. McGuire, May 5, 1942.

to her appeal for funds.¹³⁷ Tallman did not take kindly to Conroy's reprimand and expressed particular annoyance at the notion that other unions would object to requests for donations. She insisted, "[T]he object of their federation is to strengthen one another by moral and financial aid when needed, and if their treasury won't stand it, all they have to say is no."¹³⁸ For Tallman, affiliates' hostile reaction to the request for donations ran counter to the very idea of the CCL and threatened future organizing efforts. Moreover, the labour movement's recent outpouring of support for striking miners at Kirkland Lake likely contributed to Tallman's annoyance. Historian Laurel Sefton MacDowell argues that the CCL executive viewed the miners' strike as "a crucial one for the future of organized labour" because it centred on fundamental issues of union recognition and collective bargaining.¹³⁹ Though the BCN strike was the first strike in the banking industry and one of the first strikes by white-collar workers, labour leaders were either unable or unwilling to provide striking bank workers with the same level of support.

In addition to tensions with the CCL, OPWOC Local 5 faced substantial obstacles during the strike, many of which resulted from the bank's underhanded tactics, the difficulties involved in picketing numerous branches simultaneously, and the local's limited financial resources. Management's efforts to break the strike began immediately and consisted of a variety of tactics, including launching "a 'back-to-work' campaign" and disseminating false and misleading information. They told workers that the strike was over and that the strikers had returned to work, and they again trotted out the union's supposed communist leanings. Branch managers travelled by taxi to personally collect

¹³⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from P. Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, July 22, 1942.

¹³⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 28, 1942.

¹³⁹ MacDowell, *Remember Kirkland Lake*, 130.

employees willing to work during the strike, and they arranged for the police to escort these workers through the picket line. OPWOC's complaints that the police were strike-breaking and interfering with picket lines fell on deaf ears. OPWOC also accused management of providing "employees with intoxicating liquors while persuading them to remain at work" and threatening to cancel a loan taken out by the parent of one striker if she did not return to work.¹⁴⁰ According to the union, management also harassed strikers' families; bank representatives met with workers' parents to encourage them to convince their children to return to work. OPWOC also believed management to be behind several anonymous anti-union actions, including a phone call to a strikers' mother telling her he was in jail. As well, management told the press that the picketers were young rabble-rousers and that the majority of BCN employees did not support the strike.¹⁴¹

OPWOC's limited resources also proved to be an issue. In contrast to strikes by workers employed at a single workplace, OPWOC had to spread strikers over several picket lines at over forty branches and located across a sizeable geographic area. As the strike wore on, this became increasingly difficult, as strikers returned to work or took other jobs. Moreover, the number of strikers fluctuated drastically throughout the strike, as some workers waited a few days before joining the strike while others walked out only to return to work the following day.¹⁴² OPWOC also faced financial limitations. Though the union had built up a substantial treasury before the strike, it struggled to provide

¹⁴⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁴¹ "Cette grève à la Banque Canadienne Nationale," *Le Devoir* (Montréal), May 6, 1942; "Le nombre des grévistes: 90," *La Presse* (Montréal), May 6, 1942; "Bank Strikers To Meet Board: Employe[e]s, Management Still Disagree Over Number on Strike," *Montreal Daily Star*, May 6, 1942; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁴² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

strike pay.¹⁴³ Indeed, the strike would eventually drain OPWOC's entire meagre strike fund, and it would take several months for the union to recover financially.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, things at the war labour board continued to move slowly. On April 29, the day before the start of the strike, the RWLB chief executive officer had finally written to OPWOC to clarify that the regional board had received confirmation from the national board that E.M. No. 10 did not prohibit the RWLB from ruling on the BCN case.¹⁴⁵ On May 6, two union representatives and three strikers appeared before the RWLB; they urged the board to make a decision on the BCN case and they insisted that the board's stalling "was a contributory cause of the strike."¹⁴⁶ The union delegation reminded the board of the issues outlined in the workers' original application – wage parity with employees in the English banks and full cost of living bonuses. They also reiterated that BCN "was the last bank to start paying a bonus (January, 1942) and then granted the lowest bonus of any bank—7% based on the previous year's salary."¹⁴⁷ Yet again, the board refrained from making a decision.

While the board deliberated, OPWOC pursued several strategies to counter pressures to end the strike. One of their key tactics was to lobby the government to intervene. Government officials, however, repeatedly refused to get involved. On April 30, CCF Member of Parliament for Vancouver East Angus MacInnis presented the matter

¹⁴³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, May 23, 1942.

¹⁴⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 3, 1942; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, August 21, 1942.

¹⁴⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from J.B. Germain to Mr. R.J. Lamoureux, April 29, 1942.

¹⁴⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁴⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

to federal Minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell in the House of Commons.¹⁴⁸ In his response, Mitchell explained that his department could conciliate but the matter would have to be referred to the RWLB because the issue was not under federal jurisdiction. When OPWOC representatives learned of Mitchell's comments, they immediately sent him a telegram, reporting intimidation by management and asking that his department conciliate in the dispute.¹⁴⁹ The Assistant Deputy Minister of Labour responded two days later, providing a litany of excuses as to why the federal department was unwilling to take up the BCN case.¹⁵⁰ Believing persistence would eventually pay off, the union contacted provincial officials, only to receive more excuses.¹⁵¹ OPWOC representatives even contacted Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.¹⁵² The response, which came from the Department of Labour, simply informed the union that the RWLB and a provincial conciliation officer were dealing with the case.¹⁵³

High-ranking CCL officials also attempted to convince the government to intervene. On May 8, CCL secretary-treasurer Pat Conroy asked the provincial Minister of Labour, Edgar Rochette, to help resolve the dispute.¹⁵⁴ Rochette explained that a conciliation officer had attempted to set up a meeting between the bank and the union to

¹⁴⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁴⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, telegram from Eileen Tallman to Mr Humphrey Mitchell, May 1, 1942.

¹⁵⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁵¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁵² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, copy of telegram from Eileen Tallman to Wm [sic] Lyon Mckenzie [sic] King, May 11, 1942.

¹⁵³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁵⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, telegram from Pat Conroy to Mr. Edgar Rochette, May 8, 1942.

no avail, and he insisted that he could not do much because the current legislation did not require employers to engage in collective bargaining with unions.¹⁵⁵

Conroy's response to Rochette's comment about the lack of legislation provides a useful window into the priorities and strategy of labour leaders during this period. Specifically, Conroy believed Rochette's response demonstrated that the labour movement needed to press the government to pass legislation requiring employers to engage in collective bargaining.¹⁵⁶ In a letter to the federal Minister of Labour, Conroy explained that members of OPWOC Local 5 "have sought every agency of appeal and now find themselves in the position where, on account of lack of proper legislation in the matter of collective bargaining there is no source of opinion or authority to whom they apparently can appeal for justice." For Conroy, the state could fill the void. He argued, "[U]ntil such time as Labour receives proper protection in the matter of collective bargaining, and also until proper mediation and arbitration machinery as a supporting facet of collective bargaining is introduced, then we are going to have a continuance of Labour trouble in this country."¹⁵⁷ Conroy did not seem at all concerned by the fact that state representatives had failed to use the existing legislation to settle the OPWOC case quickly. Moreover, this faith in the state would shape CCL leaders' support or lack thereof for OPWOC members in the final weeks of the strike and after the RWLB issued its decision.

¹⁵⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, telegram from Pat Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, May 11, 1942.

¹⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from P. Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, May 11, 1942.

¹⁵⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from P. Conroy to The Honourable Humphrey Mitchell, May 12, 1942.

The “Trente-Neuf”

Though many workers returned to work after the first week of the strike, 39 refused to go back until management recognized the union. Dubbed the “Trente-Neuf,” the thirty-six men and three women worked in various branches and positions and had been employed by BCN for varying lengths of time. Ledgers comprised almost two-thirds of the Trente-Neuf (twenty-four); four tellers, two juniors, two stenographers, a messenger, a general clerk, an agent, a cashier, an accountant, a discount clerk, and one worker from the Clearing Department made up the other third. The most senior of the group, the general clerk, had worked at the bank for twenty-four years; the accountant had been a BCN employee for sixteen years, and the messenger had worked there for twelve years. The agent and one of the tellers had each been at BCN for eleven years. Though ten of the Trente-Neuf had worked at BCN for less than one year, their average length of employment was just over four years.¹⁵⁸ The bank punished the strikers for their persistence, swiftly firing all 39 and then hindering their applications for financial and employment assistance.

OPWOC officials took several actions to assist the thirty-nine fired workers, attempting to get them reinstated, helping them obtain government assistance and alternate employment, and paying what little strike pay the union could afford. Upon learning of the firings, union representatives immediately contacted the provincial conciliator. Though he agreed to visit the bank and thereby offered some assistance to the union, the state could not prevent employers from firing workers during a strike. As it seemed unlikely the bank would rehire all 39 strikers, OPWOC helped them sign up for

¹⁵⁸ According to a list compiled by OPWOC, the 39 had a combined 1,965 months of employment at BCN, which works out to an average of 4.2 years. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. A.R. Mosher, May 20, 1942.

unemployment insurance and find alternate employment. Unfortunately, management's refusal to inform the strikers officially that the bank had terminated their employment proved a significant problem. The government required applicants for government assistance or wartime work placement to submit official employment information. Management, however, had not given the Trente-Neuf termination notices; they had simply circulated a notice to branches stating that the employees were "no longer in the service of the bank."¹⁵⁹

Although government officials had repeatedly demonstrated they did not intend to intervene in the BCN strike, OPWOC officials turned to the state for help once more. Yet again, government officials dithered and made excuses as to why they could not intervene. On May 15, Tallman sent a telegram to the federal Assistant Deputy Minister of Labour, informing him that the BCN workers were prepared to return to work if the board would protect them from discrimination and promise to make a quick decision on their application for wage and bonus increases.¹⁶⁰ The minister did not respond.¹⁶¹ When OPWOC representatives contacted the provincial Department of Labour and the Unemployment Insurance Commission, each department claimed it was the other's responsibility to confirm applicants' employment status.¹⁶² Unable to get anywhere on their own, the union also had CCL president A.R. Mosher ask the federal Department of Labour to get the bank to clarify the employees' status and dismissal date.¹⁶³ In sum,

¹⁵⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. A.R. Mosher, May 20, 1942.

¹⁶⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, telegram from Eileen Tallman to Mr Gerald Brown, May 15, 1942.

¹⁶¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike*.

¹⁶² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. A.R. Mosher, May 20, 1942.

¹⁶³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. A.R. Mosher, May 20, 1942.

despite the state's repeated failure to intervene in the BCN strike or make a decision on the workers' application for cost-of-living bonuses and salary increases, OPWOC representatives remained hopeful someone from the government would do something; they firmly believed that workers stood a greater chance of achieving some modicum of success with the state than with the employer.

Meanwhile, the bank's treatment of the Trente-Neuf taxed OPWOC, stretching its finances and dampening its organizing efforts in other banks. As the strike neared the one-month mark, OPWOC representatives reported on the union's dire financial situation. As well, they knew that the fate of the Trente-Neuf and the RWLB case would significantly shape the future of OPWOC Locals 5 and 6.¹⁶⁴ Already, by mid-May, Local 6 organizing had "cooled off" due to the uncertainty surrounding Local 5's application to the RWLB.¹⁶⁵

The Trente-Neuf carried on with the BCN strike until late May. On Saturday, May 23, the bank finally confirmed that it had fired the 39 strikers. At a union meeting held later the same day, OPWOC members officially ended the first Canadian bank strike.¹⁶⁶

OPWOC continued to assist the fired workers after the strike. Tallman knew that organizing in other banks would cease if workers were worried about losing their jobs.¹⁶⁷ OPWOC's support of the workers paid off: by the end of May, the number of fired BCN

¹⁶⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. A.R. Mosher, May 20, 1942.

¹⁶⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, May 17, 1942.

¹⁶⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, May 23, 1942.

¹⁶⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, May 23, 1942.

employees in need of work had dropped to twenty-three, and by July 3, only four remained unemployed.¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, by mid-July, the RWLB had still not made a decision on BCN employees' application for increases to their wages and cost-of-living bonuses. On July 14, Tallman wrote, "[B]y now I'm beginning to think it will take dynamite to move those fellows."¹⁶⁹ The following week, Conroy informed Tallman that he would contact the board yet again to protest the delay in reaching a decision on the BCN case.¹⁷⁰

In late July, seven months after Local 5 members originally submitted their application to the board, the RWLB finally made a decision on salary increases and cost-of-living bonuses for BCN employees. The long-awaited decision disappointed OPWOC members: the board had ignored much of the information submitted by the union and ultimately failed to meet any of the workers' demands. On the matter of cost-of-living bonuses, the union had asked for an increase from 7 per cent to 14.6 per cent and for the increase to be retroactive to the date of application. The board only increased the bonuses to 10 per cent and made no comment as to whether the decision was retroactive.¹⁷¹ As for salaries, OPWOC had submitted a brief showing BCN paid significantly less than the Bank of Montreal; yet the board made no mention of this or the union's request for a change in the salary range. Instead, the board stated that it had determined it could not grant the request because "il y a eu des ajustements dans les salaires selon une coutume

¹⁶⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Norman S. Dowd, May 28, 1942; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 3, 1942.

¹⁶⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 14, 1942.

¹⁷⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 13, letter from P. Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, July 22, 1942.

¹⁷¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 30, 1942.

établie par la Banque.”¹⁷² The adjustments the board referred to, however, were the usual annual increases that the bank gave to some employees based on the number of years they had worked at the bank; they were not a special general increase given to all employees.¹⁷³ In sum, after all of their hard work and patience, BCN workers received only a measly 3 per cent increase in their cost-of-living bonus.

Tallman was outraged by the board’s decision. OPWOC needed to obtain a more favourable decision from the board, not just for the BCN workers who had fought so hard but also to assist with future organizing.¹⁷⁴ Rumours that the board had not followed proper procedure in deciding the BCN case further annoyed her. According to Tallman, a labour representative stated that the board’s decision was made after one of the employer representatives visited the bank and without input from all of the board members. As such, Tallman asked the CCL for help.¹⁷⁵

CCL officials’ response to the board’s decision and Tallman’s request for assistance in re-opening the case demonstrated that although the CCL provided crucial assistance to BCN workers in their struggle to improve their wages and working conditions, the organization also hindered these efforts. In the months following the RWLB’s decision, OPWOC representatives and CCL officials engaged in a considerable amount of back-and-forth regarding this issue but took limited action. On August 5, the CCL president informed OPWOC that he had asked the congress representative on the RWLB, Paul-Emile Marquette, for a report on the matter, but he warned that the union

¹⁷² Excerpt from Québec Regional War Labour Board decision, quoted in LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 30, 1942.

¹⁷³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 30, 1942.

¹⁷⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, August 10, 1942.

¹⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 30, 1942.

could only appeal the decision to the national board if the regional board had not followed proper procedure.¹⁷⁶ Mosher wrote to Marquette the same day to ask him to explain how the board reached its decision on the BCN case.¹⁷⁷

In his response to Mosher, Marquette claimed that he had never missed a RWLB meeting and that he had done his best to advocate for the BCN workers. In defending his actions, Marquette raised questions as to whether the board had followed proper procedure. Specifically, he stated that although the minutes of the July 14 board meeting indicated that an update was given on the BCN case, he did “not recollect at that meeting that the Chairman . . . called on the attention of all members of the Board to take a decision on the question.”¹⁷⁸

Rather than take immediate action in light of Marquette’s veiled accusations that the RWLB did not follow the rules, the CCL executive hemmed and hawed for several weeks before seemingly dropping the matter entirely. In mid-August, Conroy told Tallman that the CCL executive committee had postponed its meeting “to some indefinite date” but that it was his “opinion that the Executive Committee and the Executive Council will have to adopt a policy suitable to the circumstances in which these Boards are operating throughout the country.”¹⁷⁹ A few days later, Mosher told Tallman that he had “placed a number of complaints before the National War Labour Board” in the hope

¹⁷⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from A.R. Mosher to Miss Eileen Tallman, August 5, 1942.

¹⁷⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from A.R. Mosher to Mr. Paul Emile Marquette, August 5, 1942.

¹⁷⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Paul E Marquette to Mr. A.R. Mosher, August 7, 1942.

¹⁷⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Pat Conroy to Miss Eileen Tallman, August 13, 1942.

that “some improvement in the conduct of the [regional] Board may be forthcoming.”¹⁸⁰ Complaints from labour leaders and the increasing number of strikes ultimately led the government to hold an inquiry on the National War Labour Board in 1943 and to redesign its labour relations system in the latter half of the 1940s.¹⁸¹

OPWOC representatives were right to be concerned that the RWLB decision would hinder future organizing. Though some bank workers in Toronto wanted to maintain their union membership, the prospects for bank union organizing in Montréal were not good; by October, one of the locals in the city had folded and the others were struggling to retain members.¹⁸² The first significant effort to unionize Canadian bank workers was over.

Conclusion

The employer, the state, and the labour leadership shaped the outcome of the BCN strike and hindered union organizing efforts in the Canadian banking industry in the early 1940s. Specifically, the bank’s anti-union behaviour, the war labour boards’ delay in deciding the BCN case, and labour leaders’ half-hearted support for the bank workers undermined the strike in particular and white-collar organizing in general during this period.

Although the BCN strike failed to achieve Local 5 members’ goals, it remains significant to the history of union organizing and labour relations. First, as the first strike

¹⁸⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from A.R. Mosher to Miss Eileen Tallman, August 18, 1942. I was unable to determine what happened with the BCN case, the CCL, and the board after this date.

¹⁸¹ For more information on the inquiry, see Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*, 266–270. On the introduction of new labour relations legislation in the late 1940s, see McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*.

¹⁸² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, October 19, 1942.

by Canadian bank workers and one of the first strikes by white-collar workers in Canada the strike is a key event in the history of bank worker activism and union organizing in Canada. By forming a union and going on strike, OPWOC members demonstrated that bank workers were interested in unions and that they were willing to take to the streets to fight for better wages and working conditions. Aided by the media's extensive coverage, the strike shone a spotlight on the plight of bank workers and thereby challenged the notion that bank work was a middle-class profession in which unions were not necessary.

Second, the lessons and experiences gained by workers and union leaders in the BCN strike would shape subsequent efforts to organize white-collar workers. OPWOC's leaflet about the strike circulated throughout North America and undoubtedly provided valuable information to workers and union officials hoping to organize white-collar workers.¹⁸³ Additionally, some of the BCN workers went to work for other unions. Tallman, meanwhile, continued to work for the CLC, organizing office workers at Algoma Steel Corporation in Sault Ste. Marie and General Motors in Oshawa and, most notably, leading the four-year drive to organize workers at T. Eaton and Company Limited in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the most significant effort to organize retail workers in Canadian history.¹⁸⁴

Third, the BCN strike reveals important information about the role of the state in labour relations in the early 1940s. In particular, OPWOC members' frustrating experience with a variety of government officials and labour boards shows how the state

¹⁸³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, October 19, 1942.

¹⁸⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, July 14, 1942; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 105, file 14, letter from Eileen Tallman to Mr. Pat Conroy, August 21, 1942; Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada's Largest Department Store 1948 to 1952* (Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1982).

influenced the outcome of labour disputes and organizing efforts in the years leading up to the establishment of the post-war settlement. During World War II, the state drastically increased its role in labour relations and aided organizing in some sectors, such as the auto and steel industries. In contrast, the BCN case demonstrates that the actions of various government bodies and actors hindered workers' efforts to improve their wages and working conditions in other industries.

Finally, CCL officials' half-hearted support for the BCN strike and their acceptance of and support for increased state intervention in labour relations raises serious questions about the strategies and tactics of labour leaders during this period. OPWOC members initially reached out to labour leaders to ask for help in their struggle to improve their wages and working conditions. Though labour leaders provided some crucial support, they remained committed to pursuing state-based solutions, a strategy that assisted some workers but failed others. The OPWOC case thus poses a serious challenge to the notion that workers should rely on labour bureaucrats and government officials to negotiate justice for them, a fundamental tenet of the system of labour relations established at the end of World War II and that continues to exist today. This issue and the others that arose during the BCN strike would shape subsequent efforts to establish a union for Canadian bank workers, including the Canadian Labour Congress drives in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

CHAPTER 3: THE CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS AND BANK UNION ORGANIZING, 1956–1960

Introduction

On April 6, 1964, former bank worker Robert E. Paradis wrote to the Ontario Federation of Labour to request information on how to create a union for bank workers. Paradis knew that there had been previous efforts to unionize the Canadian banking industry, and he felt that the time was right for another attempt. Underscoring his commitment to the task, Paradis declared, “I myself am going to go to the limit in forming this Union and with the information you forward, along with people I have worked with the past 10 years in the bank, along with any additional help you may give, I feel confident in meeting this objective.”¹

Unfortunately for Paradis and other bank employees interested in unionization, Joseph MacKenzie, the director of organization for Canada’s largest labour association, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), felt much less confident. In his reply to Paradis, MacKenzie explained, “Certainly, we are very much interested in developing organization among bank employees,” but “[t]here have been numerous attempts which, I regret to say, were unsuccessful.” For MacKenzie, the CLC’s past organizing experiences in the banking industry had revealed a significant “problem”: in order for the Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) to certify a union as a bargaining unit representative, the

¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from Robert E. Paradis to Ontario Federation of Labour, April 6, 1964.

union had to sign up the majority of the employees of one bank. Though MacKenzie remained “hopeful” that the CLC “may be able to develop a broad campaign that would make the breakthrough somewhere along the line,” the tone of his letter implied that the CLC would not be undertaking a bank union drive anytime soon.²

The tepid response from MacKenzie – a high-ranking CLC officer in charge of union organizing – to Paradis – a worker eager to unionize his industry – highlights the difference in aims and strategies that often exists between workers and the leaders of large bureaucratic labour organizations. It also reflects CLC officials’ increasingly ambivalent attitude toward bank worker unionization, an attitude shaped by their failed attempts to establish a union for bank employees. Whereas in the 1950s CLC representatives viewed banking as a key sector in the broader struggle to organize white-collar workers and so devoted considerable energy and resources to organizing bank employees, several years, two failed campaigns, and one rejected certification application later, their enthusiasm had waned, a trend that would persist into the 1970s.

In this chapter, I examine the CLC’s involvement in bank union organizing between 1956 and 1960 to understand why their campaigns failed and how and why officials’ attitudes and strategies toward bank worker unionization changed over time. Employer hostility, state intervention, and the CLC’s strategy hindered the efforts to unionize bank employees in this period. Moreover, the failures shaped CLC officials’ attitudes toward bank worker unionization in the years that followed. A closer analysis of the CLC’s attempts to establish a union of bank employees in 1956–1957, 1959, and 1960 thus reveals important information about the aims and strategies of the congress

² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Robert E. Paradis, April 30, 1964.

during its first five years of existence. It also provides valuable insight on the effectiveness of different approaches to organizing private sector white-collar workers.

I begin by situating the CLC's activities in the context of post-World War II labour relations, particularly the post-war settlement reached between labour, capital, and the state in the late 1940s, a settlement that significantly shaped union organizing in the second half of the twentieth century. I then look at the CLC's first bank campaign, which began in Toronto in 1956 and eventually spread to other parts of the country, most notably British Columbia (BC). Next, I examine the certification application submitted to the CLRB in 1959 by the CLC-chartered Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union. As the first application for certification to represent bank employees in Canada, the case is a significant development in the history of bank worker unionization. Furthermore, the subsequent ruling and CLC officials' interpretation of it shaped attitudes and strategies towards bank unions for the next two decades. I then discuss the CLC's second bank campaign that occurred in 1960 and aimed to organize employees working at BC branches of the Bank of Montreal into the Bank Employees Association, a section of the Office Employees International Union (OEIU). I conclude with some remarks about the significance of the CLC campaigns.

Labour Relations and Union Organizing in Post-War Canada

To understand why the Canadian Labour Congress decided to organize bank employees in the late 1950s, it is necessary to examine the broader context of labour relations and union organizing in Canada in the decade after World War II. During the war, workers had capitalized on the state's expanded control of the economy and the increased demand for labour to win improvements in wages and working conditions and

to secure some legislative protections for unions. Hoping to avoid the losses in wages and membership experienced after World War I, in the mid- to late 1940s, workers pushed to protect wartime gains. In 1946 and 1947, roughly 175,000 workers engaged in more than 400 strikes.³

In response to the labour unrest, the state implemented what has come to be known as the “post-war compromise” or the “Fordist accord.” A reference to auto manufacturer Henry Ford, “Fordism” is the term used to describe the socio-economic system that existed in many parts of the western world between 1945 and 1970. As historian Bryan Palmer explains, Fordism was “a larger regime of accumulation premised on the stabilizing impact of social security, high wages, placid and predictable class relations, and general corporate/trade union agreement on the parameters of industrial discipline.”⁴

In Canada, to stabilize class relations and thereby foster economic growth, during and immediately after the war the state forced concessions from both labour and capital through a variety of legal mechanisms. Precedent-setting legal rulings buttressed new legislation. Most notably, in his 1946 arbitration of a strike by workers at the Ford plant in Windsor, Ontario, Justice Ivan Rand ruled that all employees in the bargaining unit would be subject to compulsory dues check-off regardless of union membership as all employees benefit from the wages and working conditions negotiated by the union. In exchange, unions had to refrain from engaging in illegal or wildcat strikes and union

³ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1992), 281.

⁴ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 283

leaders had to “repudiate” such actions should they occur.⁵ A few years later, in 1948, the federal government passed the Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act (IRDIA), incorporating and enshrining many of the policies and practices it had established through its temporary wartime legislation, such as workers’ right to engage in collective bargaining, file grievances, and go on strike. In sum, the new regime of “industrial legality” established in the immediate post-war period compelled employers to recognize and negotiate with unions certified by federal or provincial labour relations boards but, at the same time, set strict limits on the activities of workers and union leaders. Nevertheless, many unionists hailed the post-war compromise as a victory, as it awarded unions some legitimacy and provided them with some legal protections.⁶

Due to the surge in worker organizing and the changes in the industrial relations framework, union membership and activity increased substantially in the 1940s and 1950s. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of union members in Canada quadrupled, rising from 362,000 to 1,459,000.⁷ Across Canada, workers in a variety of industries, including electrical, lumber, mining, rubber, steel, and textiles, participated in massive organizing drives and strikes. In some instances, they met with devastating defeats, but in many cases, they won significant victories.⁸

The momentum generated in the 1940s continued into the 1950s as workers and union leaders attempted to build on the gains made in the previous decade. Strikes

⁵ Ford Motor Co. of Canada v. International Union United Automobile, Aircraft and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (U.A.W.-C.I.O.) (Union Security Grievance) [1946] O.L.A.A. No. 1.

⁶ For more information on the creation of the post-war settlement in the 1940s, see Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers’ Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 2001; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Peter S. McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

⁷ Errol Black and Jim Silver, *Building a Better World: An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 58.

⁸ For an overview of union activities during this period, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 285–290.

erupted, and some involved violent picket-line confrontations. Yet there was no denying that by the mid-1950s the recognition of collective bargaining rights, the ways in which they were ordered by state legislation and a variety of government boards, and the rise of ensconced trade union officialdoms were having an effect on how labour, capital, and the state interacted. The new post-World War II regime of industrial relations inevitably drew labour leaders and their legal teams into complex negotiations with employers, one component of which involved filing grievances, another policing and disciplining members who showed inclinations of breaking out of the bounds of established contracts. Thus as many scholars have pointed out, the system of industrial relations set up in the post-war period encouraged and facilitated the bureaucratization of unions and discouraged and suppressed grassroots worker activism.⁹ Unions increasingly operated as service organizations run by an elite group of paid executive officers.

In the 1950s, labour leaders also attempted to overcome some of the movement's internal divisions. The anti-communism that had wracked the labour movement in Canada and the United States (US) in previous years reached a fever pitch in the late 1940s and early 1950s, resulting in bitter battles within and amongst unions and the purging of many unions and labour activists.¹⁰ By the middle of the decade, however, attitudes had shifted somewhat. South of the border, in 1955, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) put aside their ideological and theoretical differences and joined forces to form the AFL-CIO. Their

⁹ See, for example, Fudge and Tucker, *Labour Before the Law*, 302–315; Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers 2012), 79–80, 88–90; McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation*, 191; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 284.

¹⁰ For more information on the ideological battles within the Canadian labour movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

Canadian counterparts quickly followed suit: in April 1956, the Trades and Labor Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labor merged and established the Canadian Labour Congress. Under new president Claude Jodoin, the CLC hoped to move beyond the old divide of craft unionism versus industrial unionism and to focus on organizing the many workers that remained outside unions.

Though a significant number of workers had benefited from the organizing and legislative advances made by unions during and after the war, many others had not. Unionization rates in such sectors as industrial production and resource extraction increased significantly, but outside of those areas unions failed to gain much ground. Thus, while union membership increased in the 1930s and 1940s, in the 1950s, over 65 per cent of Canadian workers were still not unionized.¹¹ In analyzing the legacy and limitations of the post-war settlement, scholars have identified several reasons why post-war legislative changes and increased union organizing did not benefit all workers equally, including the gendered and racialized nature of the legislation and the labour movement and the persistence of barriers to and biases against organizing specific groups of workers.¹²

The changing dynamics of the labour force compounded matters. Women and immigrants had always worked for wages; however, in the post-war period, their numbers increased dramatically, as new waves of immigrants arrived in Canada and more women

¹¹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 299.

¹² See, for example, the critical analyses of the post-war settlement in Cy Gonick, Paul Phillips, and Jesse Vorst, eds., *Labour Gains, Labour Pains: Fifty Years of PC 1003* (Winnipeg/Halifax: Society for Socialist Studies/Fernwood Publishing, 1995). See also Black and Silver, *Building a Better World*, 112–114; Ronnie Leah, “Black Women Speak Out: Racism and Unions,” in *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy*, eds. Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 157–171; Julie White, “Patterns of Unionization,” in *Women Challenging Unions: Feminism, Democracy, and Militancy*, eds. Linda Briskin and Patricia McDermott (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 191–206.

entered or returned to the labour force.¹³ Many of these workers found employment in the rapidly expanding service and white-collar sectors, areas with historically low rates of unionization.¹⁴ Women, in particular, filled the majority of clerical jobs.¹⁵ As in other sectors, they often occupied the lowest positions and earned less than men.¹⁶

While white-collar workers' numbers increased during the 1940s and 1950s, their issues remained the same. Many clerical employees still earned meagre wages, had limited control over their working conditions, and lacked job security and union representation. As in past decades, bank workers laboured under particularly poor conditions. In 1956, one union organizer described relations between workers and the banks as a "Middle Ages concept of master-servant relationship" with "absolute subservience" required of bank employees – as if banking was a military organization."¹⁷ Banks continued to exert control over all aspects of their employees' lives; workers risked dismissal for failing to inform their managers of such personal matters as the purchase of a home or the birth of a baby.¹⁸ Wages, too, continued to be low, and bank

¹³ Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 92.

¹⁴ Between 1941 and 1961, the number of clerical workers increased from 303,655 to 563,083. Clerical workers comprised 7.2 per cent of the labour force in 1941; by 1961, they made up 12.9 per cent. Graham S. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 49. In 1961, the service sector employed 62.4 per cent of all paid workers. Jean-Guy Bergeron, "Unionization in the Private Service Sector" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 12. Though the number of service and clerical workers increased during this period, unionization rates in both sectors remained low. In 1961, 18.9 per cent of service workers were unionized. Bergeron, "Unionization in the Private Service Sector," 12. In 1962, less than 1 per cent of workers in finance, insurance, and real estate were unionized. George Sayers Bain, *Union Growth and Public Policy in Canada* (Ottawa: Labour Canada, 1978), 10.

¹⁵ In 1941, women comprised 50.1 per cent of clerical workers; in 1961, they occupied 61.5 per cent of clerical positions. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 49. For more information on the feminization of clerical work, see Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*.

¹⁶ In 1961, female clerical workers, on average, earned an annual salary of \$2,339; male clerical workers earned, on average, \$3,381. Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution*, 145.

¹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks," *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

¹⁸ "Turnout small but bank union launched here," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956.

employees usually earned far less than blue-collar workers.¹⁹ Adding insult to injury, many bank workers spent their days handling large sums of money.²⁰ Yet the labour movement had not mounted a significant campaign to unionize bank workers since the failed strike at the Banque Canadienne Nationale in Montréal in 1942. Though unions launched several drives to organize other white-collar workers in the 1940s and 1950s, unionization rates in the entire sector remained low.²¹

Given that many white-collar workers remained unorganized and that their numbers were increasing rapidly, in October 1956, only a few months after the creation of the CLC, its leaders announced a white-collar union drive. Russell Harvey, the CLC officer overseeing the new initiative, described it as “a crusade, not an organizing campaign,” and he argued that it “will bring meaning to the merger of our movement as nothing has before.” According to Harvey, Canada’s two largest labour organizations “didn’t merge to be comfortable but to bring drive and impetus to the movement.”²² The drive to unionize white-collar workers in the fall of 1956 would be the congress’s first national campaign, and organizers’ first target would be bank workers.

¹⁹ Though salaries varied, in 1956, labour officials claimed that, on average, Toronto bank employees earned a starting salary of \$1,400 per year, a number far below the national average of roughly \$3,400. “Turnout small but bank union launched here,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956; Statistics Canada, no date, “Average Weekly Wages and Salaries, Industrial Composite, by Province, 1939 to 1975 (table),” *Statistics Canada*, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectione/4147438-eng.htm#1> (accessed January 14, 2016). In addition, organizers argued that bank salaries did not adequately increase over time, citing the case of one worker whose annual salary was only \$3,600 after 27 years of employment. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks,” *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

²⁰ “Turnout small but bank union launched here,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks,” *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

²¹ The most significant campaign to unionize white-collar workers in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the unsuccessful drive to bring thousands of employees of retail giant T. Eaton and Co. in Toronto into the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (1948–1952). For more information on the Eaton’s drive, see Eileen Sufrin, *The Eaton Drive: The Campaign to Organize Canada’s Largest Department Store 1948 to 1952* (Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1982).

²² James Senter, “Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956.

The CLC's First Bank Campaign

The Canadian Labour Congress's first attempt to unionize bank workers began in October 1956, when organizers launched a campaign to bring approximately 4,000 Toronto bank employees into Local 131 of the Office Employees International Union. As was the case with the effort to unionize Canadian bank workers in the early 1940s, labour officials became interested in bank workers after employees from several banks in Toronto approached the organization about unionizing.²³ Upon speaking with workers about their wages and working conditions, organizers quickly realized that bank employees had much to gain from unionization. Indeed, though bank worker organizing had stalled in Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s, elsewhere bank employees had continued to unionize and build on their previous gains. For example, in the US, workers at two small banks in New Jersey managed to retain their certification and engage in collective bargaining.²⁴

CLC officials appointed G. Russell Harvey, the congress's regional director of organization for Ontario, director of the campaign. Described as "a glib, forceful and well-informed gentleman"²⁵ who dressed "like a well-tailored business executive,"²⁶ Harvey was a significant figure in the North American labour movement in the 1950s. In his youth, he had worked as a photoengraver and had been involved in the workers' education movement. After serving as president of his union, in 1936, he became chair of the Allied Printing Trades Council in Toronto. Next, he worked as the director of

²³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "To All Toronto Bank Employees," October 13, 1956.

²⁴ Mark McColloch, *White Collar Workers in Transition: The Boom Years, 1940–1970* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 77–78.

²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks," *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

²⁶ Joseph E. Finley, *White Collar Union: The Story of the OPEIU and Its People* (New York: Octagon Book, 1975), 231.

organization for the AFL in Canada for a number of years, and, in 1956, he became the CLC director of organization for Ontario. Since 1944, he had also been a member of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, a position he held until he died in 1966.²⁷ A committed unionist, he was, however, staunchly opposed to communism and actively worked to purge “reds” from the ranks of the labour movement.²⁸

By the time of the bank campaign, Harvey was known as a leader in white-collar union organizing. He had worked on a number of campaigns in the 1940s and 1950s involving retail workers at Robert Simpson Company, actors and writers at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and office workers at the Canadian International Paper Company, the Abitibi Power and Paper Company, and Christie Brown and Company, Ltd.²⁹ According to a former colleague, when Harvey died in 1966, many unionists viewed him “as the person who almost singlehandedly built white collar unionism in Canada in its first decade.”³⁰ In appointing Harvey to oversee the bank campaign, CLC leaders thus selected a director who had organized white-collar workers and helped to expel communists, but who had never worked in a bank.

CLC officials selected the OEIU as the union bank workers would join. Established in 1945, when the AFL granted a charter to several locals of office employees who had decided to form one union, OEIU had previously attempted to

²⁷ Finley, *White Collar Union*, 231.

²⁸ For more information on Harvey’s anti-communism, see Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, “‘A Link Between Labour and Learning’: The Workers Education Association in Ontario, 1917–1951,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 8/9 (Autumn/Spring 1981/82): 74–76.

²⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks,” *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

³⁰ Finley, *White Collar Union*, 234.

organize bank workers in the US.³¹ At the time of its creation, OEIU had 22,000 members. A decade later, its numbers had swelled considerably; in October 1956, the Toronto newspaper *The Globe and Mail* reported that OEIU had approximately 60,000 members.³² In Canada, at the time of the bank campaign, the union had 38 locals and 4,500 members. Local 131 in Toronto, the local that bank workers would be joining, had roughly 600 members and represented workers at a variety of companies, including Pilkington Glass, milk company Borden Co. Ltd., rubber company Dunlop Canada Ltd., and bread company Christie Brown and Co. Ltd.³³

Several factors shaped the approach taken by CLC officials in the bank campaign, including their particular politics and perspectives and their previous experiences organizing white-collar workers. In contrast to many industrial union drives of the 1930s and 1940s led by communists who viewed labour and capital as fundamentally opposed to one another,³⁴ leaders who came out of the craft union movement and held a more conciliatory view of the relationship between bosses and workers oversaw the CLC's first bank campaign. As well, based on their previous experiences with white-collar workers, organizers anticipated having to deal with employees' ignorance about and negative

³¹ In the mid- to late 1940s, OEIU launched campaigns to unionize workers at several American banks, including the Cleveland Trust Company, Bank of America, and the Dallas office of the Federal Reserve; most of the campaigns met with defeat. For more information on OEIU's involvement with bank worker organizing in the 1940s, see McColloch, *White Collar Workers in Transition*, 43–44, 49–50, 68.

³² Office and Professional Employees International Union, "Our History," *Office and Professional Employees International Union*, <http://www.opeiu.org/AboutOPEIU/OurHistory.aspx> (accessed March 2, 2015); James Senter, "Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956. In 1965, OEIU changed its name to the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU).

³³ James Senter, "Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956. For more information on the OEIU and Local 131 in particular, see Finley, *White Collar Union*.

³⁴ See, for example, Mercedes Steedman, "The Promise: Communist Organizing in the Needle Trades, the Dressmakers Campaign, 1928 to 1937," *Labour/Le Travail* 34 (Fall 1994): 37–73; Michael J. Earle, "The Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932–1936," *Labour/Le Travail* 22 (Fall 1988): 99–137.

attitude toward unions and their reluctance to participate in union drives.³⁵ They tailored their strategy accordingly. Rather than pursue “a flamboyant, hard-driving campaign,”³⁶ organizers instead tried to appeal to bank workers’ sense of professionalism and pride in their jobs and to convince them that unionization did not mean a declaration of class war. According to one OEIU representative, “the union was not interested in teaching ‘employer hatred’ but in stressing there should be a ‘partnership between the investment of labor;’ with white-collar workers getting more out of the partnership than they are at present.”³⁷

The focus on labour-management “partnerships” reflected Harvey’s own conciliatory attitude toward employers, an attitude likely shaped by his past involvement with the more conservative AFL as well as his status as a member of the tripartite Ontario Labour Relations Board. Once, while attending a labour convention as an AFL representative, Harvey praised the “fine speech” of the Assistant Labour Relations Officer in attendance and told delegates that the AFL’s policy on economic issues aligned with that of “the President of the great corporation of Lever Brothers.”³⁸ In a similar vein, during the 1956 bank campaign, Harvey assured bank workers that the CLC was “not prepared to enter into any ‘boss-hating campaign.’”³⁹

Organizers also tried to appeal to bank employees’ pride in their jobs and feelings of superiority over other workers. At an organizing meeting, Harvey argued that bank

³⁵ James Senter, “Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956.

³⁶ James Senter, “4,000 in banks union’s target; meetings held,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 3, 1956.

³⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Labor: Use ‘tea and cakes’ to woo bank clerks into union ranks,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 5, 1956.

³⁸ “A.F. of L. Official States Policy,” *Western Star* (Corner Brook, NL), August 9, 1949, <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/westernstar/id/21160> (accessed January 15, 2016).

³⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks,” *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956.

workers had come to see their work as “a ‘position’ rather than a job” because they had historically been “a hand-picked lot who had to scheme and pull strings to get a job.”⁴⁰ He encouraged attendees not to let “snobbishness” blind them to their poor wages and working conditions, pointing out that although bank employees may have felt superior to blue-collar workers, in reality their wages were falling behind.⁴¹

In addition to highlighting the potential benefits of unionization, organizers also used negative tactics, including shaming bank workers and conjuring the spectre of communism. One leaflet distributed to bank employees queried, “Could we hold up the salaries paid and treatment given Canadian Bank Employees to communist enslaved satel[I]ite people to demonstrate our Canadian way of life is superior to Communism? . . . Certainly not.” The same leaflet attempted to appeal to masculine pride, asking:

Have bank employees been dominated to the degree that the end result is equivalent to a brain washing? Are they now too timid to exercise their lawful right to join the union? . . . Is the antiquated master-servant policy of banks so ingrained in the employees that they have lost their individuality . . . initiative . . . pride . . . and sense of personal freedom to do lawful things in their own interests?⁴²

⁴⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Bank salaries called scandal unions urged,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 3, 1956.

⁴¹ James Senter, “4,000 in banks union’s target; meetings held,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 3, 1956.

⁴² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “To All Toronto Bank Employees,” October 13, 1956, original ellipses.

Similarly, at an organizing meeting Harvey reportedly told attendees that they had an “inferiority complex” and that the “biggest problem” facing organizers was “not the first agreement, but the lack of faith of the bank employee in himself.”⁴³

Meetings comprised a key component of the CLC’s organizing strategy.

Throughout the fall, organizers held a series of informational meetings at the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto. These meetings provided an important opportunity for bank workers to meet with one another and with CLC and OEIU officials. They also allowed organizers to answer questions and communicate crucial information about the campaign. By holding these meetings, CLC officials aimed to confirm that sufficient interest in unionization existed amongst the city’s bank workers before proceeding with the Toronto campaign.⁴⁴ In a circular announcing one meeting, organizers warned, “[U]nless this evidence of interest and support continues to increase the campaign will be stopped.”⁴⁵

Though attendance at the meetings never swelled to the levels hoped for by organizers, it increased over time. Approximately thirty people attended the first meeting, on September 18, and over one hundred attended the second meeting, on October 2.⁴⁶

⁴³ James Senter, “4,000 in banks union’s target; meetings held,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 3, 1956.

⁴⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Bank Salaries and Conditions Can Be Improved,” n.d.; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “To All Toronto Bank Employees,” October 18, 1956.

⁴⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “To All Toronto Bank Employees,” October 13, 1956.

⁴⁶ Although estimates of the number of attendees at each meeting differ, the differences are relatively minor, and all accounts indicate that the number of attendees increased significantly at each meeting, i.e. approximately 30 people attended the first meeting, roughly 100 attended the second meeting, and around 130 attended the third meeting. James Senter, “4,000 in banks union’s target; meetings held,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 3, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “CLC drives to organize city banks,” *Telegram* (Toronto), October 3, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Bank salaries called scandal unions urged,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 3, 1956; “Turnout small but bank union launched here,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “100 here join Canada’s first bank union,” *Telegram* (Toronto), October 24, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Bank employees vote to form union in Toronto,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 24, 1956.

The latter received considerable coverage in local and national newspapers, with reporters noting the historical significance of the bank drive.⁴⁷ Spurred on by the positive response from bank workers, organizers scheduled a third meeting for Tuesday, October 23. According to *The Globe and Mail*, only 70 people showed up at the beginning, but more people arrived during the meeting, and many others, who could not attend because they were at work, phoned in to express their support. As such, organizers decided to hold a vote. Attendees voted overwhelmingly to join OEIU Local 131.⁴⁸

Attendees' decision to sign union cards indicates that some bank workers were interested in unionizing. It also suggests that organizers' strategy of appealing to bank workers' professionalism, forgoing a "boss-hating campaign," and working to garner interest in unionization before officially launching a drive was somewhat successful. In the months that followed, however, the CLC's approach increasingly hindered the campaign. Anti-union behaviour by the banks compounded matters.

As organizers anticipated, the banks reacted swiftly to the first signs of organizing and used a variety of tactics to discourage unionization, including promising bonuses and wage increases, threatening reprisals, and disseminating false information about the union. In late October, newspapers reported that the Imperial Bank planned to triple the amount of its annual wage increase and that the Bank of Nova Scotia intended to give its employees an extra increase.⁴⁹ Organizers also claimed that the banks used "terror

⁴⁷ James Senter, "4,000 in banks union's target; meetings held," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 3, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "CLC drives to organize city banks," *Telegram* (Toronto), October 3, 1956.

⁴⁸ "Turnout small but bank union launched here," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956.

⁴⁹ James Senter, "Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956.

tactics” to scare people off the union.⁵⁰ At the head office of one bank, management reportedly met with individual employees to ask them about their union membership, an action that, according to Harvey, discouraged employees from attending future union meetings. Sources also suggest management attempted to spread rumours about the political affiliations of the OEIU and the perils of unionization.⁵¹ In regards to the latter, in mid-November OEIU reported that Toronto-Dominion employees had heard a “shady rumour” that if they unionized the banks would open on Saturdays.⁵²

Organizers tried to counter the banks’ anti-union activity in several ways. They told workers that employer reprisals for union activity were illegal; they insisted that the banks would “surely not stoop to such low levels of conduct to resist the Union.”⁵³ Nevertheless, organizers threatened to file a complaint with the CLRB if necessary.⁵⁴ In response to claims that the union had communist affiliations, organizers reminded workers of the anti-communist credentials of both the OEIU and the CLC, again adopting a conciliatory tone toward the banks. In a circular addressing the issue, organizers explained, “It is fortunate for the Banking Institution in Free Canada that this Union, and others comprising the Canadian Labour Congress, has for over thirty years waged an

⁵⁰ James Senter, “Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956.

⁵¹ James Senter, “May drop union plan for bank employees,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), November 21, 1956.

⁵² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Interest and Support for the Union Is Increasing,” November 15, 1956.

⁵³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Interest and Support for the Union Is Increasing,” November 15, 1956.

⁵⁴ James Senter, “Report on labor: Office workers could rule CLC,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 29, 1956.

unending and successful fight against Communist infiltration and domination in Canada.”⁵⁵

Organizers also attempted to use the banks’ promises of salary increases and bonuses to increase support for the union, arguing that monetary gains were “directly the result of your union campaign.”⁵⁶ Similarly, when Royal Bank announced that it would start paying overtime as of 1 December and newspapers reported that a similar policy may soon be implemented by the other banks, organizers claimed this advance as an organizing victory, too.⁵⁷ Organizers and CLC officials thus urged workers to consider what other gains could be made with a collective agreement.⁵⁸

In spite of the banks’ promises, threats, and misinformation, bank workers continued to express support for the campaign. In mid-October, organizers claimed that they had a list of more than five hundred names and addresses of bank employees interested in unionization.⁵⁹ By November 5, approximately 270 Toronto bank workers had signed union cards.⁶⁰ Judging by organizers’ enthusiastic reports and confident comments in the press, the campaign appeared to be proceeding smoothly.

By mid-November, however, things had changed. Less than one month after officially launching the drive, officials began to consider abandoning the Toronto campaign in favour a national one. Although 400 workers had signed union cards and organizers had a mailing list with 800 names, officials felt the Toronto campaign was

⁵⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Interest and Support for the Union Is Increasing,” November 15, 1956, original emphasis.

⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Remarkable Progress,” October 31, 1956.

⁵⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Canadian Labour Congress News,” November 29, 1956.

⁵⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Remarkable Progress,” October 31, 1956.

⁵⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “To All Toronto Bank Employees,” October 13, 1956.

⁶⁰ “National drive for bank union is under study,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), November 6, 1956.

progressing too slowly. Only 40 people attended a meeting on November 20, a significant drop from the previous meeting on November 5. Harvey reportedly warned those in attendance that the campaign “can’t go dragging on through the years” and that at the next meeting a decision would need to be made as to whether the campaign would continue. In making his point, Harvey referred to the significant amount of time and resources expended on the failed drives to organize workers at Robert Simpson Company and T. Eaton and Co. His comments demonstrate how past organizing failures shaped labour leaders’ attitudes and actions in subsequent years.⁶¹

Though CLC officials’ frustration with the limited progress in the Toronto campaign contributed to the decision to change course, they had always intended to expand the bank drive to other parts of the country.⁶² From the outset, CLC president Claude Jodoin indicated that should the Toronto campaign prove successful, the congress would take steps to launch a national drive.⁶³ In late October, Harvey reported that organizers were already active in Montréal and would soon begin work in Hamilton, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Vancouver.⁶⁴ The desire to launch a national campaign likely increased when, after officially launching the Toronto campaign on October 23, organizers received many inquiries from bank workers in other cities.⁶⁵

⁶¹ James Senter, “May drop union plan for bank employees,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), November 21, 1956.

⁶² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “CLC drives to organize city banks,” *Telegram* (Toronto), October 3, 1956.

⁶³ “Turnout small but bank union launched here,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956.

⁶⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Bank employees vote to form union in Toronto,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 24, 1956; “Turnout small but bank union launched here,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 24, 1956; “Latest project of CLC: Meeting may organize Hamilton bank clerks,” *Hamilton (ON) Spectator*, October 25, 1956. Aside from brief mentions in a few newspaper articles, I was unable to find much information about organizing activities in these cities during this period.

⁶⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, “Remarkable Progress,” October 31, 1956.

Practical concerns also shaped officials' decision to shift to a national drive. In considering the best strategy for securing certification, they had come to the consensus that the CLRB would only grant certification if the union received support from a majority of the entire national workforce of one bank. In late November, officials thus made a conscious decision to "slow down" the Toronto campaign while they gathered information about bank workers in other cities.⁶⁶ While Local 131 representatives continued to meet with Toronto bank workers, the CLC effectively halted the campaign. In February 1957, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the Toronto campaign had "not been abandoned or forgotten," but it might "die of inertia."⁶⁷

CLC officials hoped that the national drive would produce better results. Believing that the Toronto effort failed because bank workers supported unionization but refused to "come out and show themselves,"⁶⁸ organizers used a similar organizing strategy in the national campaign. A closer look at the national campaign, however, reveals that the strategy may have been the problem; the issues that plagued the Toronto campaign soon surfaced in the national drive.

Like the Toronto campaign, the strategy in the national campaign reflected the attitude and approach of particular CLC officials. The CLC's director of organization, Joseph MacKenzie, oversaw the expanded drive. Born in 1910 in Glasgow, Scotland, MacKenzie immigrated to Canada as a child with his parents and attended school in Toronto. Initially employed as a printer, in 1933 he took up a position in the shipping

⁶⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Henry G. Rhodes," November 28, 1956.

⁶⁷ James Senter, "Report on labour: Would organize banks on nation-wide scale," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 4, 1957.

⁶⁸ James Senter, "May drop union plan for bank employees," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), November 21, 1956.

room at the Seiberling Rubber Company but was fired when he tried to organize the plant. Nevertheless, in 1937, he helped to establish Local 118 of the United Rubber Workers Union Local 118, and he eventually served as the Canadian director of the international union. When the CLC was founded in 1956, “Rubber Joe” became the congress’s national director of organization, a position he held until his retirement in 1975. At the time of the bank campaign, MacKenzie thus had a considerable amount of organizing experience but mostly in industrial settings, and he had been in leadership positions for almost two decades.⁶⁹

Though CLC officials had declared white-collar organizing to be of utmost importance and many bank workers had already expressed an interest in unionization, MacKenzie took a restrained approach to the matter, asking organizers to conduct more research and to refrain from signing up workers. On November 2, he distributed a circular to congress representatives across Canada, requesting information on the number of banks and bank workers in their area.⁷⁰ In the following weeks, responses poured in from across the country from representatives in cities of all sizes.⁷¹ In several cases, representatives reported that local bank employees were “anxious to obtain information concerning [the] possibility of organization as soon as possible.”⁷²

⁶⁹ For more information on Joseph MacKenzie, see F.T. Collier, “Lippe Appointed to Head Maritime Union Trustees,” *Gazette* (Montréal), February 13, 1965, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1946&dat=19650213&id=Vp0tAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=AJ8FAAAAI BAJ&pg=4827,2945462&hl=en> (accessed January 20, 2016); John Clark, “Joe MacKenzie stops organizing,” *Canadian Labour* 20, no. 3 (September 1975): 22–24, 40.

⁷⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from W.K. Craig to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, November 7, 1956.

⁷¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, various letters, November 1956.

⁷² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Henry Harm to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, November 5, 1956. See also LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from P.H. Paquet to Mr. J. MacKenzie, November 11, 1956; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from W.K. Craig to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, November 28, 1956.

Yet despite a flurry of research and correspondence between CLC and OEIU officials, by December hopes for a national campaign were beginning to fade; MacKenzie felt representatives had still not ascertained whether sufficient support existed to proceed with a national campaign. As he told one CLC representative, “We do not want to get these people excited in any one area, and then have to tell them that we are unable to do a job.”⁷³ Organizers continued to meet with Toronto bank workers and gather information in other parts of the country, but by January 1957 things had slowed considerably. On January 17, MacKenzie wrote to the president of the OEIU, Howard Coughlin, to explain that bank worker interest “did not evidence itself right across the country.”⁷⁴ The CLC would continue to gather information and if and when bank workers seemed sufficiently interested, congress officials would ask the OEIU to coordinate a campaign.

In early February, MacKenzie stepped up efforts to determine the level of interest amongst employees of the Imperial Bank of Canada and the Canadian Bank of Commerce in particular; the employees of these two banks had shown the greatest interest to date.⁷⁵ He asked all field representatives to contact workers at branches of these banks,⁷⁶ and he instructed CLC regional directors to “press for action on this

⁷³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. W.K. Craig, December 10, 1956.

⁷⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Howard Coughlin, January 17, 1957.

⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Henry G. Rhodes, November 28, 1956.

⁷⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to All Field Representatives, February 6, 1957.

matter” so that the congress could decide whether to proceed with a national campaign.⁷⁷ MacKenzie emphasized, “This is one of the fields of potential organization that must be developed. Without a doubt it will be difficult, but all potential new organization is difficult. The organization of ‘white collar’ workers is close to the top of our must list.”⁷⁸

In the following weeks, MacKenzie received reports from several representatives indicating that bank workers’ feelings towards unionization ranged from interest and enthusiasm to indifference and hostility. The CLC representative in Peterborough, Ontario reported that ten Bank of Commerce employees “have been following the development of the Congress campaign with considerable interest and they are definitely interested people.”⁷⁹ Similarly, a Nova Scotia representative told MacKenzie, “The majority of the employees in both Sydney and Glace Bay are in favour.”⁸⁰ The representative in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan found that “a number of employees . . . would welcome union organization.”⁸¹ Requests for organization also came in from Kitimat and Ladysmith in BC.⁸²

Other representatives reported negative responses. In London, Ontario, the representative stated that the reaction of bank workers was “the opposite to that which we

⁷⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. T.C. Gooderham, February 6, 1957; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Henry Harm, February 6, 1957; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Victor Trudeau, February 6, 1957; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Russell Harvey, February 6, 1957; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Henry G. Rhodes, February 6, 1957.

⁷⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. T.C. Gooderham, February 6, 1957.

⁷⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Henry Nokes to Mr. J. Mackenzie [*sic*], February 18, 1957.

⁸⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Jim MacDonald to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, February 12, 1957.

⁸¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J.R. Evans to Mr. J. MacKenzie, n.d., ca. February 1957.

⁸² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

would hope it would be.”⁸³ In Niagara Falls, some employees “were indifferent,” while another “wanted nothing to do with Union.”⁸⁴ In Halifax, the signs were “not very encouraging,”⁸⁵ and the representative in Fredericton described employees as “very cool on the subject of organizing.”⁸⁶ Bank workers in Saint John, New Brunswick had previously expressed an interest in unionization; however, the representative reported that employees’ working conditions had since improved.⁸⁷ In the Trois-Rivières region of Québec, the representative indicated there was “no possibility”; most of the employees were “girls” and they earned good wages for the area.⁸⁸

The representative’s reference to “girls” speaks to the condescending and dismissive attitude some unionists expressed toward women workers during this period. Though male unionists have historically held complicated and divergent ideas about women, work, and unions, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries many male members of the Canadian labour movement argued that women should not and could not be organized because their work was unskilled, temporary, and part-time.⁸⁹ For example, a BC representative reported that most of the employees with whom he spoke appeared

⁸³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from R.M. McLeod to Mr. J. MacKenzie, February 9, 1957.

⁸⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from George Downing to Mr. J. MacKenzie, February 14, 1957.

⁸⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from G.A. Smith to Mr. J. MacKenzie, February 12, 1957.

⁸⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. Harold Stafford to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, February 14, 1957.

⁸⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. Harold Stafford to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, February 14, 1957.

⁸⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J.M. Landriault to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 23, 1957.

⁸⁹ For further discussion of the historical bias of men against organizing women, see Joan Sangster, “The 1907 Bell Telephone Strike: Organizing Women Workers,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 3 (1978): 109–130; Ruth Frager, “No Proper Deal: Women Workers and the Canadian Labour Movement, 1870–1940,” in *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, eds. Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1983), 44–64; Gillian Creese, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Race in a White-Collar Union, 1944–1994* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999); Meg Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 63–88.

“very favourable to organization,” but most of them were “young girls” who he believed were “irresponsible and did not know anything about the Trade Union Movement.”⁹⁰ The representative’s sexist and dismissive attitude was particularly problematic given that women now comprised the majority of the banking workforce.⁹¹ Indeed, in his own report, the CLC representative noted that the use of young female employees was “pretty well general in the smaller branches.”⁹² Yet neither he nor the high-ranking CLC officials overseeing the campaign appeared to consider that organizing an increasingly feminized industry might require a different approach or at least a female organizer.

Yet CLC officials proved unwilling or unable to re-evaluate their strategy. Instead, as they had done with the Toronto campaign, they let the national campaign peter out. Rather than have representatives sign up interested bank workers, MacKenzie actively discouraged them from doing so. For example, when the CLC representative in Sydney, Nova Scotia asked whether he should sign up employees who were keen to unionize,⁹³ MacKenzie told him, “the answer is no.”⁹⁴ In sum, despite bank workers’ desire to sign union cards and CLC officials’ professed commitment to white-collar organizing, MacKenzie decided not to unionize any bank employees at this time.

Though MacKenzie may have been reluctant to continue the bank campaign in the early months of 1957, BC representatives felt sufficient interest existed amongst bank

⁹⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

⁹¹ I was unable to determine when exactly women became the majority of bank employees; however, by 1951, they made up 53 per cent of the banking workforce. Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, “TABLE 16. Labour force, 14 years of age and over, by industry and sex, for Canada and the provinces, 1951,” in *Ninth Census of Canada: 1951* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1953), vol. 4.

⁹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

⁹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Jim MacDonald to Mr. Joseph MacKenzie, February 12, 1957.

⁹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. J. MacDonald, February 15, 1957.

workers in the Pacific province to warrant further investigation. In February, they told MacKenzie that they planned to circulate a questionnaire amongst bank workers at the Imperial Bank and the Canadian Bank of Commerce so that they would have a list of contacts should they decide to launch a campaign.⁹⁵ MacKenzie expressed support for the group's activities, but in keeping with his approach thus far, he cautioned them against signing up members lest workers suffer reprisals from their employers.⁹⁶

The use of a survey, a more formalized social science technique, signalled a marked departure from the methods used in previous organizing drives; even the Toronto campaign, launched only a few months earlier, had gauged worker interest by the number of attendees at meetings. BC organizers, however, felt that they could collect more information through a survey than by speaking with individual employees on their breaks; the survey would provide them with "some idea" of bank workers' interest in unions, and it would produce a list of contacts.⁹⁷ For an item that must have required a considerable amount of effort to distribute, the questionnaire was rather underwhelming. It included a short explanation of the reasons for the survey – bank workers had requested information about unionization – and then asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed with the following statement: "As a bank employee, I appreciate the necessity of a Union in order to substantially improve our wages and working conditions through collective bargaining."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

⁹⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Dan Radford, March 7, 1957.

⁹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

⁹⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. Joe MacKenzie, February 19, 1957.

The survey results disappointed organizers. They had distributed roughly 450 questionnaires but received only 67 back; less than half indicated support for unionization. CLC representatives in Victoria also reported disappointing results. Still, Vancouver organizers considered the exercise to be of value; it revealed that the banks had made improvements since the start of the CLC campaign. Thus, they remained optimistic about the potential for future organizing amongst bank workers.⁹⁹

In the months following the correspondence between the BC representatives and MacKenzie, the CLC appears to have done little in regards to further developing the bank campaign on a national, provincial, or local scale. The campaign's last gasp came in early June 1957 when a BC representative sent a telegram to MacKenzie asking for permission to proceed with a certification application for a branch of Vancouver bank workers.¹⁰⁰ MacKenzie's response to Gooderham indicates that in less than a year, CLC officials' attitude toward bank worker unionization had changed dramatically, shifting from enthusiasm to defeatism. Rather than encourage BC organizers to proceed with a test case in order to gain some sense of how the CLRB might rule on certification in the banking sector, MacKenzie instead tried to dissuade them from submitting an application. In his "personal opinion," a single-branch certification "would be impossible to secure."¹⁰¹ As well, an application could have negative consequences for the workers involved. Further, MacKenzie explained, a failed application might "retard our efforts if, in the future, we

⁹⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from Dan Radford to Mr. J. MacKenzie, March 8, 1957; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from W.G. Gauld to Mr. J. MacKenzie, March 11, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, telegram from Tom Gooderham to Joe MacKenzie, June 5, 1957.

¹⁰¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. T.C. Gooderham, June 10, 1957.

can develop interest in either an area or in a complete banking chain.”¹⁰² It is understandable that CLC leaders wanted to avoid failures that might harm future organizing; however, one wonders whether they considered that their cautious approach might also be hindering their efforts.

Though BC organizers could have continued their campaign without the support and approval of the national office, the lack of evidence of further bank organizing during this period suggests it is unlikely they did so. Still, their efforts were not completely in vain. Just two years later, in 1959, BC was the setting for one of the most significant developments in the history of Canadian bank workers’ struggles to unionize, when the CLC-chartered Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers’ Union, Local No. 1583 submitted an application for certification to represent a small group of bank workers in Kitimat, BC. The case and the CLC’s assessment of it provide valuable insight on the ways in which the federal board shaped union organizing in the 1950s.

The Kitimat Case

At first glance Kitimat, a small and relatively isolated industrial town located 650 kilometres northwest of Vancouver, seems an unlikely setting for a landmark legal decision on bank worker unionization.¹⁰³ Then, as now, aluminium smelting provided the

¹⁰² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 8, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. T.C. Gooderham, June 10, 1957.

¹⁰³ The provincial government of British Columbia (BC) created the municipality of Kitimat on 31 March 1953 when it passed the Kitimat Incorporation Act. The town had previously been a small fishing village, and both the village and the surrounding area are the traditional lands of the Haisla peoples. In 1950, the provincial government granted the Aluminium Company of Canada (now Rio Tinto Alcan) permission to undertake the Kitimat Project. To complete the project, between 1951 and 1953 Alcan forced settlers and the Cheslatta T’en peoples off the land, flooded the Kitimaat valley, and constructed a hydroelectric dam, an aluminium smelter, and a town. Janice Beck, *Three Towns: A History of Kitimat*, ed. James Tirrul-Jones (Kitimat, BC: Kitimat Centennial Museum Association, 1983), 46; April Tam, “CAW 2301 History Project: 55 Years of History from The Workers’ Voices,” CAW 2301, www.caw2301.ca/files/Projectforweb.pdf (accessed March 6, 2015).

economic foundation for the town and the surrounding area.¹⁰⁴ The growth of Kitimat and the aluminium smelting industry had occurred alongside and contributed to the development of a strong labour movement in the region.¹⁰⁵ The strength and visibility of the local labour movement undoubtedly shaped the organizing efforts of three female employees in Kitimat's small Bank of Nova Scotia branch in 1959.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, in making the case for certification before the CLRB, the union pointed to the high rates of unionization in the area, arguing that "bank employees should not be denied the benefits of such organization."¹⁰⁷

Though the local labour movement and CLC officials played a part in the Kitimat case, the organization of the workers and the submission of the certification application

¹⁰⁴ Beck, *Three Towns*, 65; Kitimat, "Kitimat Community Profile 2014," *Kitimat*, <http://www.kitimat.ca/assets/Municipal~Hall/PDFs/Community%20Profile%202014%20-%20Web%20Quality.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2015). Given the central role of Alcan in the creation and development of Kitimat, the fortunes of the town have always been tied to those of the aluminium smelting industry. Following the completion of the Kitimat Project, in the mid-1950s Kitimat became a boomtown: the population increased to approximately 9,000, and the town "was rated as one of the wealthiest communities in Canada for its size." Beck, *Three Towns*, 64–65. In April 1958, 12,250 called Kitimat home. Pixie Meldrum, *Kitimat: The First Five Years* (Kitimat, BC: The Corporation of the District of Kitimat, 1958), 9. By the end of the decade, however, aluminium prices had dropped, and the people of Kitimat felt the negative effects. Alcan cancelled its plans to expand the smelter, and many workers lost their jobs in "the largest concentrated layoff in Kitimat's short history." Beck, *Three Towns*, 66.

¹⁰⁵ Although Alcan oversaw the Kitimat Project, thousands of labourers toiled to complete what one author describes as "the largest construction project ever undertaken in Canada at the time." Tam, "CAW 2301 History Project." Workers from over thirty countries travelled to the Kitimaat valley and lived in makeshift work camps. Tam, "CAW 2301 History Project." Given BC's strong history of union organizing, particularly in the resource and industrial sectors, many workers in the region joined unions. For more information on BC labour history, see Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in B.C.* (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour Boag Foundation, 1967); Benjamin Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left, 1948–1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁶ "Union bid rejected," *Northern Sentinel* (Kitimat, BC), September 17, 1959. Since the early 1950s, workers and unions have played an important role in Kitimat's development; union members even served on the first town council. Meldrum, *Kitimat*, 6; John Kendrick, *People of the Snow: The Story of Kitimat* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1987), 139.

¹⁰⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB), *Between: Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union, Local No. 1583, Canadian Labour Congress, Applicant, - and - The Bank of Nova Scotia, Kitimat Branch, Respondent*, September 11, 1959.

appear to have been a grassroots effort.¹⁰⁸ Chartered by the CLC, the Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union, Local No. 1583 nonetheless operated fairly independently. According to their lawyer, Local 1583 members were "running their own affairs at the local level. They requested a charter and a charter was granted."¹⁰⁹

The Kitimat branch of the Bank of Nova Scotia had been open for just under three years when, on 31 March 1959, three of the branch's five employees signed an application for certification.¹¹⁰ There had been considerable turnover in the branch's workforce since the bank opened in May 1956; when union members signed the application, the branch had five employees: a manager, a chief clerk, a teller, a ledgerkeeper, and a clerk-typist. In the application, the union argued that only the latter three employees should be included in the bargaining unit; they asked that the manager be excluded for obvious reasons and the chief clerk because he often exercised management duties, functioning as a sort of "sub-manager." Management disagreed; they contended that the unit should include four employees because "the manager is the only one who can possibly be excluded under the definition of 'employee.'"¹¹¹

Though not stated explicitly by CLC or union officials, given the small size of the proposed bargaining unit and previous comments by organizers indicating that they did not know what type of unit the CLRB would consider appropriate, Local 1583 members and CLC officials likely viewed the application for certification as a test case. Indeed, in

¹⁰⁸ In minutes from a CLC meeting about bank worker organizing held on 27 January 1960, CLC officials mention "the spontaneous situation that arose in Kitimat." LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, White Collar Workers Committee meeting minutes, January 27, 1960.

¹⁰⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings in: Application for Certification; Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union, Local No. 1583 (C.L.C.); and The Bank of Nova Scotia, Kitimat Branch, Kitimat, B.C.*, August 11, 1959.

¹¹⁰ The branch opened in May 1956. The Royal Bank of Canada opened Kitimat's first bank branch two years earlier, in 1954. Meldrum, *Kitimat*, 24. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹¹¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

his opening comments to the board at the CLRB hearing, counsel for Local 1583, Maurice W. Wright, stated, “This issue is very important. Although the application only affects three employees in an isolated branch at Kitimat the issues are extremely important. What would an appropriate bargaining unit be?”¹¹² Even the chair of the CLRB acknowledged the significance of the Kitimat case; at the hearing he stated, “[T]his is the first banking application the Board has had so far as I know and therefore it is a matter of considerable importance to the Board and also to the banks and the employees of the banks.”¹¹³ Whatever the reasons for the application, having obtained signatures from 100% of the proposed three-member bargaining unit, on April 17, Local 1583 submitted the application to the CLRB. The board scheduled a hearing for August 11 in Ottawa.

Seven board members presided over the 95-minute hearing.¹¹⁴ Charles Rhodes Smith served as chair.¹¹⁵ The employer representatives were E.R. Complin, the employee relations manager for the Du Pont Company of Canada, a chemical company; A.J. Hills, chief of personnel for the Canadian National Railway; and Gérard Picard, the president of

¹¹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*. Similarly, on 29 October 1965, CLC acting assistant director, Department of Organization Rheel Bastien wrote to another CLC official regarding the possibility of organizing bank workers again, forwarding a copy of the CLRB’s decision on the 1959 application and explaining that the new effort “may end up to be another one of these test cases.” LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Rheel Bastien to Mr. Harry Simon, October 29, 1965.

¹¹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹¹⁴ LAC, Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) fonds, RG 145, volume 261, file “Old (pre-1973) Labour Relations Board Minutes, “MINUTES OF THE 218TH MEETING OF THE CANADA LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD,” August 11, 1959, original emphasis.

¹¹⁵ Born in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Smith worked as a lawyer and provincial politician before he became chair of the CLRB in 1953. The Manitoba Historical Society, “Memorable Manitobans: Charles Rhodes Smith (1896–1993),” *The Manitoba Historical Society*, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/smith_cr.shtml (accessed March 9, 2015).

the National Metal Trades Federation.¹¹⁶ Labour was represented by A.H. Balch, a Canadian representative of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen; J.A. d'Aoust, a vice-president of the United Paper Makers and Paper Workers; and honorary president of the CLC Aaron Mosher.¹¹⁷

Though some unionists hailed the post-war establishment of permanent tripartite boards as a victory, the labour representatives appointed to serve on the boards tended to be conservative and accommodationist. Mosher, in particular, had already demonstrated his reluctance to challenge the boards in the early 1940s, even after a labour representative implied that a war labour board did not follow proper procedure in deciding an application for increases in salary and cost-of-living bonuses for employees at Banque Canadienne Nationale. The appointment of conservative labour leaders to the new federal and provincial labour boards in the post-war period thus helped to ensure that the boards would not issue any radical rulings

At the hearing on the Kitimat application, counsel for both sides focused primarily on the appropriateness of the proposed bargaining unit. Wright, representing Local 1583, opened the proceedings. Anticipating management's counter-arguments, he

¹¹⁶ "16th Annual Conference of the Personnel Association of Toronto," *The Labour Gazette* (1958): 614, <http://www.mocavo.com/The-Labour-Gazette-1958-Volume-58/651673/688> (accessed March 9, 2015); Library and Archives Canada, "A.J. Hills papers," *Library and Archives Canada*, http://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayItem&lang=eng&rec_nbr=180782&rec_nbr_list=180782,3205644,1949774,1574355,1549506 (accessed March 9, 2015); Economics and Research Branch, Department of Labour, Canada; *Labour Organizations in Canada*; 48th ed. (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1959); 28; <http://www.mocavo.com/Annual-Report-of-the-Labour-Organizations-in-Canada-for-the-Years-1959-1963/906326/53#52> (accessed March 9, 2015).

¹¹⁷ The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University Libraries, "Hamilton and District Labour Council Finding Aid – Second Accrual," *The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections*, McMaster University Libraries, <https://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/findaids/findaids/h/hamlabou.01.htm> (accessed March 9, 2015); Economics and Research Branch, Department of Labour, Canada; *Labour Organizations in Canada*; 48th ed. (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1959); 35; <http://www.mocavo.com/Annual-Report-of-the-Labour-Organizations-in-Canada-for-the-Years-1959-1963/906326/59> (accessed March 9, 2015); David Kwavnick, *Organized Labour and Pressure Politics: The Canadian Labour Congress, 1956–1968* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), 121.

argued that although the bank was a national company with integrated operations centralized in Toronto, the unit was appropriate. Wright pointed out that other labour boards had granted certifications to unions to represent workers at individual locations of national companies, and he insisted that Bank of Nova Scotia branches operate as independent units and so workers at each branch have their own interests. As well, Wright argued that a nation-wide bargaining unit would disadvantage bank workers due to the impossibility of organizing such a massive unit. Moreover, he contended that a nation-wide unit would especially disadvantage workers in small branches and isolated areas, as workers in more populous areas would overrule their interests. In sum, he stated, “my submission to the Board is that the appropriate bargaining unit is a group of employees who work together day in and day out in any particular branch.”¹¹⁸ To cap off his argument, Wright also accused management of increasing the number of branch employees to counter organizing efforts, and of being hypocritical, shifting from arguments for national units and local units as it suited their purpose.¹¹⁹

R.V. Hicks, Q.C. represented the employer.¹²⁰ Hicks contended that the board need only concern itself with the appropriateness of the proposed three-person unit; if board members determined the proposed unit to be inappropriate, “then the Board need

¹¹⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹¹⁹ Wright pointed out that after the union submitted the application for certification, the bank increased the number of staff from five to eight. Wright was careful to explain that he did not know why the bank had increased staff, but he emphasized that the increase did not make sense given that Kitimat was currently experiencing an economic downturn and the population had decreased by almost 50 per cent. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹²⁰ The Bank of Nova Scotia’s decision to hire Hicks, a prominent management labour lawyer, speaks to the significance of the Kitimat case from the bank’s perspective. According to his obituary, Hicks was “Canada’s first full time management labour lawyer.” In addition, he was a founding partner of Hicks Morley, currently the largest management labour firm in the country. “Hicks, Robert Vyvyan, Q.C. B.A., LL.B.”; *Globe and Mail* (Toronto); November 9, 2013; <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/Deaths.20131109.93331393/BDAStory/BDA/deaths> (accessed March 9, 2015). Hicks Morley, “Founding Partners,” *Hicks Morley*, <http://www.hicksmorley.com/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=264&catid=1> (accessed March 9, 2015).

not concern itself with the question of the appropriateness of a broader unit.”¹²¹ To this end, Hicks argued that the proposed unit was inappropriate because the bank employed thousands of employees across the country, Head Office in Toronto dealt with all personnel decisions, and the branch staff changed on a regular basis.

Employee turnover formed the crux of Hicks’s argument. Specifically, he argued that the board should reject the application because two of the three employees who signed the application had since resigned; therefore, the union no longer represented a majority of the employees.¹²² Though there had been significant employee turnover at the Kitimat branch in the few months between when employees signed the application – March 31 – and the date of the hearing – August 11, the chair dismissed Hicks’s argument, explaining that the board considered the date of application to be the cut-off date for consideration of employees. Hicks then argued that the board should only certify a nation-wide unit because banks had employees across the country and frequently transferred them. He explained that since the Kitimat branch opened, the majority of its employees had come to the branch through transfers.¹²³

Several board members responded to Hicks’s argument by asking for clarification about bank policies on hiring, transfers, salaries, and benefits. The resulting exchange reveals how age and gender shaped bank employees’ experiences of work, especially in regards to transfers. Hicks explained, “[W]ith the younger staff we do not like to transfer

¹²¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹²² According to Hicks, since the union submitted the application, the teller had resigned because she was leaving Kitimat, and the clerk-typist had quit to take up another position. Management also transferred several employees to the branch. In addition to transfers and new hires, Hicks reported that the branch had acquired two “trainees”; described as “[l]ocal boys just out of school.” Hicks explained that they would receive training in Kitimat before “probably” be transferred to another branch. He clarified that the bank had not brought in the trainees to enlarge the proposed unit; rather, hiring and transferring trainees was part of the bank’s standard operating procedure. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹²³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

them too far away from home at the outset but as they gather experience they move from one part of the country to another.” As for women, in contrast to the transfer of male employees, which was common and usually occurred at the bank’s behest, Hicks confirmed that female transfers were rare and were mostly done at the employee’s request, often as the result of a father or husband being transferred. Hicks acknowledged, however, that a “third type existed, “the career type who like the work.”¹²⁴

Aside from the question about transfers, there were few explicit references to gender during the hearing, despite the fact that the three employees in the proposed unit were women. Still, an exchange between two of the board members captures the condescending and dismissive attitude some men exhibited toward women during this period. When a board member attempted to correct the chair’s description of the three employees as girls, pointing out that “[o]ne is a married woman, not a girl,” the chair snapped back, “I still call her a girl.”¹²⁵ Clearly, working-class men were not the only ones to hold such views.

Hicks concluded his argument by addressing Wright’s claim that a ruling in favour of a national unit would make it impossible for bank workers to unionize due to the cost and amount of work involved. In Hicks’s opinion, given that more than 4,400 branches existed across the country, organizing bank workers on a branch-by-branch basis would also be an “absurdity”: “I leave it with the Board to imagine the multiplicity of bargaining that would take place in the event of banks ever becoming certified in a general way. It would be just as economically impossible to visualize as I urge upon you

¹²⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*. For more information on women in the Canadian banking industry in the late 1950s, see Helen Stephens, “Women in Canadian Banking,” *The Canadian Banker* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 113–123; Naomi Bristol Mallovy, “A Banking Career and Marriage,” *The Canadian Banker* 65, no. 2 (Summer 1958): 93–97.

¹²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

it is totally unrealistic to visualize the potentiality of thousands of units being subject to single certification and single negotiations.”¹²⁶

The minutes of the board meeting shed light on how the federal labour relations board operated during this period. Given the significance of certification applications, it is surprising how little time board members spent on them. After the hearing on the Kitimat case concluded, the board spent 25 minutes conducting a hearing on another certification application and then adjourned for almost two hours, presumably for lunch. Upon reconvening for the afternoon session, the board “gave consideration” to six different applications for certification, including the Kitimat case, in less than two hours. In short, on average the board spent less than twenty minutes considering a case.¹²⁷

As well, the vote on the Kitimat case demonstrates the power of the chair and raises questions about the structure of the “tripartite” board. In theory, the chair serves as a neutral representative of the state; however, in reality, like other board members the chair occupies a particular class position. In the case of the Kitimat application, the chair – an Oxford-educated lawyer and former member of the Liberal-Progressive government in Manitoba – likely had interests that aligned more closely with those of the employer board members than with those of the labour leaders. The meeting minutes suggest the vote on the Kitimat application was contentious and close. The board initially voted on a motion to grant the certification order for the three-person bargaining unit, but the motion was defeated. The board approved the second motion, to reject the application because the proposed unit was “not appropriate for collective bargaining,” by a vote of four to

¹²⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Transcript of Proceedings*.

¹²⁷ LAC, CLRB fonds, RG 145, volume 261, file “Old (pre-1973) Labour Relations Board Minutes, “MINUTES OF THE 218TH MEETING OF THE CANADA LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD,” August 11, 1959.

three. The dissenting votes of the three labour representatives were noted in the minutes, indicating that the chair cast the deciding vote.¹²⁸

The board issued the Reasons for Judgment on September 11, exactly one month after the hearing. According to the judgment, the board based its decision “entirely on the appropriateness or otherwise of a bargaining unit limited to employees at this small, rather isolated, branch of the Bank.” In the end, the board decided that the union failed to prove that the three employees who comprised the proposed unit would not be subject to the bank’s transfer policy and that the Kitimat branch operates independently from other branches. As the board deemed these two issues to be of primary importance in determining the appropriateness of the proposed unit, it did not bother to deal with the union’s other claims. The board made no comment on the arguments that “[i]t is quite normal for employees of a branch office to comprise a separate bargaining unit” and that the Kitimat bank workers had a right to benefit from the region’s “extensive union organization” and “to be represented by the union of their choice.” In short, the board doubted that the proposed bargaining unit could be “a viable unit.” Thus, the board rejected the application, “deeming the proposed bargaining unit to be inappropriate.”¹²⁹

Though the board rejected Local 1583’s application for certification to represent the three Kitimat bank workers, it qualified its rejection and provided some hope for future efforts to form a union of bank workers. Given the significance of the ruling and this section in particular, it is worth quoting at length:

¹²⁸ LAC, CLRB fonds, RG 145, volume 261, file “Old (pre-1973) Labour Relations Board Minutes, “MINUTES OF THE 218TH MEETING OF THE CANADA LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD,” August 11, 1959.

¹²⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Between: Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers’ Union*.

While this application is rejected the Board deems it advisable to state that this decision must not be taken as indicating that the Board agrees with the Respondent's contention that the appropriate bargaining unit must be a nation-wide unit of employees of the Bank. The present decision rests on and is applicable only to its own particular facts. The Board points to the facts that this is the first application with which it has had to deal, concerning bank employees, and that employees of Canadian banks have hitherto not been organized by trade unions for collective bargaining. The Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act applies to banks and their employees, and the Board will consider all applications concerning bank employees, with the purpose of giving effect to the intent of the Act. It may well be that units of some of the employees of a Bank, grouped together territorially or on some other basis, will prove to be appropriate, rather than a nation-wide unit.¹³⁰

In short, though the CLRB rejected the Kitimat application, it left the door open for further applications and provided some indication as to what it might deem to be an appropriate unit.

The Kitimat case may seem insignificant given the small number of workers involved and the CLRB's rejection of the application.¹³¹ Nonetheless, the case was a major development in bank union organizing. As the first group of Canadian bank

¹³⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Between: Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers' Union*.

¹³¹ Newspapers provided hardly any coverage of Local 1583's application for certification and the CLRB decision. My search of the two major daily newspapers in BC, *The Province* and *The Sun*, as well as Canada's national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, yielded no results. Even the local Kitimat newspaper, *The Northern Sentinel*, only ran one short article on the case after the CLRB released its decision. "Union bid rejected," *Northern Sentinel* (Kitimat, BC), September 17, 1959.

workers to file an application for certification, Local 1583 members took a huge step, one that the director of organization for the country's largest labour organization had failed to take just a few years earlier. The CLRB rejected the application, but in the hearing and Reasons for Judgment the board confirmed that bank workers can unionize and that it would consider applications to represent bank employees. Thus, it is not surprising that in 1960, only a few months after the CLRB released its decision on the Kitimat case, the CLC launched another campaign to unionize bank workers. Perhaps hoping that a province-wide drive focused on one bank would facilitate a groundswell of support, this time they aimed to organize Bank of Montreal employees in BC.

The CLC's Second Bank Campaign

As with the first campaign in 1956–1957, the CLC's second campaign was part of a plan to organize white-collar workers.¹³² CLC officials tasked the congress's White Collar Workers Committee with running the new bank campaign, and they selected the OEIU as the union bank workers would join.¹³³ This time, however, in light of the 1959 CLRB ruling on the Kitimat application, organizers would focus on one bank in one province – the Bank of Montreal in BC. The decision to focus on the Pacific province likely stemmed from the amount of interest expressed by the BC bank workers in the 1956–1957 campaign as well as the province's high rate of unionization.¹³⁴

¹³² For more information on the low rates of unionization in the white-collar sector and the CLC's plan to organize white-collar workers during this period, see Jack Clarke, "White collar unions gaining," *Province* (Vancouver), March 26, 1960; Denis Blunden, "Unions attracting office personnel," *Sun* (Vancouver), March 30, 1960.

¹³³ According to *The Province* newspaper, in March 1960, OEIU represented approximately 2,500 Vancouver office workers. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Throughout B.C.: Union bids for bank employees," *Province* (Vancouver), March 28, 1960.

¹³⁴ In 1958, 54 per cent of BC workers were unionized. Isitt, *Militant Minority*, 12.

Members of the White Collar Workers Committee met in Parksville, BC on January 27 to plan the campaign. In attendance were representatives from several labour unions and organizations, including the OEIU, the CLC, the British Columbia Federation of Labour, and the Vancouver and District Labour Council.¹³⁵ Divisions quickly emerged between the national and local labour officials. On the one hand, in light of the Kitimat case and previous research on bank worker organizing, MacKenzie argued for a quiet campaign focused on one bank in one area; he felt that organizers should not publicize the campaign until the labour board had processed a certification application. On the other hand, OEIU Canadian vice-president Bill Lowe, speaking on behalf of the local organizations, argued for an open campaign. After considerable discussion, committee members ultimately decided to maintain “secrecy in our initial approach” but “to prepare for an open campaign to be undertaken at any time.”¹³⁶

Meeting attendees also discussed logistics, including resources and leadership. Several individuals offered support. The representative for the BC Federation of Labour and the Vancouver and District Labour Council “offered the fullest co-operation and support” from the organizing committees of both organizations, while MacKenzie promised to forward any relevant CLC research, to solicit help from the CLC’s public relations director, and “to be present” when the campaign began. Committee members appointed CLC regional director of organization and education for BC Tom Gooderham chair of the central committee that would oversee the campaign.¹³⁷ Prior to taking on his CLC position, Gooderham had worked as a staff representative for the Trades and Labor

¹³⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from T.C. Gooderham to “Sir & Brother,” March 31, 1960.

¹³⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, meeting minutes, January 27, 1960.

¹³⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, meeting minutes, January 27, 1960.

Congress in Victoria and so likely came out of the craft union tradition.¹³⁸ As with the Toronto campaign, it appears that the idea of hiring a bank worker or a woman did not cross the minds of the committee members, despite the fact that women now comprised 60 per cent of the banking workforce.¹³⁹

The minutes from the January meeting demonstrate that, in their initial discussions, officials did consider some of the lessons learned from the CLC's first bank campaign and made some changes to their strategy. Closer analysis of the second campaign, however, reveals that they did not adequately address the problems that plagued the first drive. Therefore, many of the same issues emerged in the second one. In particular, officials again spent considerable time debating the details of how and when to proceed. The slow pace of the campaign, combined with several other adverse factors, including employer opposition and employee reticence, ultimately undermined the CLC's second campaign to unionize bank workers.

Organizers made limited progress in the weeks following the January meeting. By February 22, they had accomplished little. Indeed, the meeting minutes report that following a "lengthy and thorough discussion," the committee voted to "concentrate the drive on one bank, this being the Bank of Montreal" and to proceed "by means of an open campaign."¹⁴⁰ Both of these issues had already been discussed and more or less decided at the January meeting.¹⁴¹ Still, officials did make an important decision at the February

¹³⁸ "New Appointment To Canadian Labour Congress," *Daily News* (St. John's, NL), May 14, 1956.

¹³⁹ In 1958, *The Canadian Banker* reported that 60 per cent of bank employees in Canada were women. Malloy, "A Banking Career and Marriage," 93.

¹⁴⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, meeting minutes, February 22, 1960.

¹⁴¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, meeting minutes, January 27, 1960.

meeting: attendees decided that BC bank workers would join a newly chartered OEIU local: the Bank Employees Association (BEA) Local 387.¹⁴²

With a concrete plan in place, organizers spent the next few weeks conducting research and reaching out to bank workers in preparation for the launch of the drive. Yet again delays occurred, this time in regards to setting dates for specific actions. Though the committee had originally decided to distribute their first leaflet to Bank of Montreal employees on April 18, in mid-March they realized that April 18 was Easter Monday – a bank holiday; all banks would be closed.¹⁴³ Organizers rescheduled the action for April 21.¹⁴⁴

In addition to delays caused by poor planning and bureaucratic back and forth, CLC national officers' doubts about the potential for success also hindered the campaign. In mid-March, one congress official expressed concern that the campaign's "[p]ublicity value may be lost in noise" from the upcoming CLC convention (to be held in Montréal at the end of April).¹⁴⁵ He also worried that organizers had not yet established sufficient support amongst bank workers and so may rush into a drive that would likely fail: "Certainly doesn't look too promising. . . . few contacts – very frightened. . . . More and more convinced more quiet work should be done – even though management does learn

¹⁴² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, meeting minutes, February 22, 1960.

¹⁴³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from T.C. Gooderham to Mr. Jack Williams, March 11, 1960.

¹⁴⁴ Though organizers set a new date for distributing their first leaflet, sources indicate that they continued to debate the exact date. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, hand-written note, March 16, 1960. I was unable to determine who wrote the note, but it was likely MacKenzie or CLC public relations director Jack Williams.

¹⁴⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, hand-written note, March 16, 1960. I was unable to determine who wrote the note, but it was likely MacKenzie or Williams.

something about it. Seems to me with so few contacts for a nucleus we are just indulging in a hit and almost certain miss. Impatience never resulted in any major progress.”¹⁴⁶

While some officials worried, others worked to prepare public relations materials. On March 17, CLC public relations director Jack Williams forwarded several draft documents to assist with the campaign, including “a kick-off leaflet,” a press release outline, a chart comparing wages, a report on the Bank of Montreal pension plan, and additional information on jobs classifications for clerks and on female employees and the pension plan.¹⁴⁷ These materials provide useful information about the issues organizers believed to be of primary importance to bank workers at the time, as well as the strategy pursued by organizers. As in the 1956–1957 campaign, organizers again sought to appeal to bank workers’ rationality and professionalism. The “kick-off leaflet” leaflet stated, “You are the one to decide whether the circumstances under which you work are satisfactory. If you feel they should be improved and if you think this can best be done in co-operation with your fellow employees, then there is a way open. . . . This is your opportunity to better yourself.”¹⁴⁸

Knowing women comprised a significant portion of the banking workforce, organizers drafted a special leaflet for female employees.¹⁴⁹ The leaflet reminded readers that “women are now in the majority among bank employees,” and it highlighted some of the key issues women bank workers faced, including wage inequality, automation,

¹⁴⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, hand-written note, March 16, 1960. I was unable to determine who wrote the note, but it was likely MacKenzie or Williams.

¹⁴⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from Jack Williams to Mr. William A. Lowe, March 17, 1960.

¹⁴⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, draft of “An Open Letter to Employees of the Bank of Montreal,” enclosed with letter from Jack Williams to Mr. William A. Lowe, March 17, 1960.

¹⁴⁹ At the time of the drive, *The Province* newspaper reported that at the Bank of Montreal, “[a]bout 65 per cent of the bank’s employees are women.” Aileen Campbell, “Poses a pretty problem: There’s a limit to knees – but where?” *Province* (Vancouver), April 27, 1960.

increased workloads, and lack of pay increases. The leaflet declared, “THE BANK EMPLOYEES’ ASSOCIATION STANDS FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR WOMEN EMPLOYEES.”¹⁵⁰

As in the first campaign, organizers focused on pensions, pointing out that the Bank of Montreal plan did not match those offered by other employers. For one thing, employees had no say in the structure of the plan; organizers argued that the plan was “not a gracious gift of the bank” but “part of the conditions of employment and should be administered democratically.”¹⁵¹ In addition, organizers contended that the employer used the pension plan to discourage employees from quitting; employees who left the bank only received their contributions to the plan and not any of the interest earned.

Though organizers had drafted campaign materials, by late March they had still not set a start date. Having initially changed the date from April 18 to 21, they then moved it several more times. On March 21, Gooderham sent a telegram to MacKenzie informing him that organizers would not be ready by April 7 but they felt confident that April 20 would work. In addition to a new start date, Gooderham also asked MacKenzie to consider additional changes.¹⁵² That plans had changed became clear when, on March 27, organizers publicly announced the start of a drive to organize all bank workers in BC.¹⁵³ The following day, newspapers reported that over one hundred OEIU members

¹⁵⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, draft of “Women,” enclosed with letter from Jack Williams to Mr. William A. Lowe, March 17, 1960, original emphasis.

¹⁵¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, draft of “How Much Does Your Pension Cost,” enclosed with letter from Jack Williams to Mr. William A. Lowe, March 17, 1960.

¹⁵² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, telegram from Tom Gooderham to Joe M[a]cKenzie, March 21, 1960.

¹⁵³ At the time, one newspaper reported that organizers estimated “there are 7,000 bank employees in B.C.” “Union starts drive to unite bank workers,” *Sun* (Vancouver), March 28, 1960.

were assisting CLC organizers with the campaign and that the BC Federation of Labour and local labour councils had indicated their support, too.¹⁵⁴

Based on the experience of the first campaign, organizers anticipated the banks would put up a fight. The 1960 campaign, however, demonstrated yet again the difficulty of organizing in the Canadian banking industry, a sector dominated by a handful of powerful corporations with immense resources and a firm commitment to preventing unionization in their industry.¹⁵⁵ In a letter to supporters, Gooderham summed up the degree of the bank's commitment to squashing the drive: "It appears the banks are going to fight organization of their employees in every manner possible and with every means at their disposal."¹⁵⁶

Indeed, anti-union activity by the banks prior to the official launch of the organizing drive had shaped organizers' decision to start the campaign sooner than planned. According to Gooderham, the Canadian Bankers Association had hired a Toronto lawyer to oversee a campaign to establish an employee association. As the union drive progressed, organizers accused the banks of using a number of tactics to prevent unionization, including promising wage increases, spreading false information about the union, and interrogating employees and threatening them with pay cuts, longer hours, and

¹⁵⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Throughout B.C.: Union bids for bank employees," *Province* (Vancouver), March 28, 1960.

¹⁵⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Throughout B.C.: Union bids for bank employees," *Province* (Vancouver), March 28, 1960.

¹⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, letter from T.C. Gooderham to "Our Area Contacts," April 5, 1960.

even job loss.¹⁵⁷ They also claimed that the banks had asked employees to sign a petition indicating that they did not want to join the union.¹⁵⁸

In terms of wages, shortly after organizers announced the drive several banks announced increases. On April 2, *The Sun* newspaper reported that, as of April 1, the Royal Bank of Canada had increased female employees' wages by two to four dollars per week and that the bank would review the wages of male employees in the coming weeks.¹⁵⁹ Rumours circulated that the Bank of Montreal and the Bank of Nova Scotia had also increased wages.¹⁶⁰ Later that month, organizers reported that, as of April 1, all of the chartered banks had implemented wage increases and that it appeared the increases had only occurred in BC.¹⁶¹ For organizers, the improvements to wages and benefits were a clear attempt by the banks "to thwart attempts to organize bank employees."¹⁶²

Organizers worked to counter the bank's anti-union activities. One strategy was to garner media attention about the banks' behaviour. On April 1 and 2, the two largest

¹⁵⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, "Firing threat laid to banks," *Province* (Vancouver), April 1, 1960; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, letter from T.C. Gooderham to "Our Area Contacts," April 5, 1960.

¹⁵⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Bank Employees Association Local 387 Bulletin #2," April 19, 1960.

¹⁵⁹ According to *The Sun*, female RBC employees who earned less than \$2,000 per year received a \$200 increase, and women who earned over \$2,000 per year received a \$100 increase. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, "Union stalled: Banks hike pay for women," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 2, 1960.

¹⁶⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, "Union stalled: Banks hike pay for women," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 2, 1960.

¹⁶¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Bank Employees Association Local 387 Bulletin #2," April 19, 1960.

¹⁶² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, "Union stalled: Banks hike pay for women," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 2, 1960.

Vancouver newspapers, *The Province* and *The Sun*, ran stories about the banks' tactics.¹⁶³ Officials also threatened to file a complaint with the Canada Labour Relations Board; however, they ultimately decided against it for fear of management reprisals against individual employees.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, organizers reminded workers that the recent increases proved employees could make gains by unionizing.¹⁶⁵ Organizers also pointed out the banks' hypocritical stance in regards to collective organizing, reminding workers that "[t]he chartered banks are members of, participate in, and are represented through the Canadian Bankers Association."¹⁶⁶ As well, they emphasized that under the IRDIA employees had the right to organize without employer interference.¹⁶⁷ Organizers even sent a letter to the federal Minister of Labour, asking him to stop the Canadian Bankers Association's "illegal and unethical actions."¹⁶⁸

Though CLC national officers may have expressed doubt over whether the drive would succeed, local organizers worked hard to ensure the campaign's success. Early in the campaign, they enlisted the help of unions and labour organizations across BC. On March 31, Gooderham circulated a letter to various labour organizations and trade

¹⁶³ Interestingly, the newspapers that ran articles on the bank drive also contained bank advertisements that highlighted the "courteous, efficient service" provided by bank employees and that lauded the merits of a career in banking; some of the ads even profiled individual bank workers. The Toronto-Dominion Bank, "People make the difference," *Province* (Vancouver), March 21, 1960. For more examples of bank advertisements that appeared in Vancouver newspapers during the organizing drive, see The Bank of Nova Scotia, "What does the future hold for you?" *Sun* (Vancouver), April 5, 1960, original emphasis; The Bank of Nova Scotia, "What does the future hold for you?" *Province* (Vancouver), April 5, 1960, original emphasis; The Chartered Banks Serving Your Community, "'Good for you, Julie!'" *Province* (Vancouver), April 25, 1960; The Toronto-Dominion Bank, "People make the difference," *Province* (Vancouver), April 25, 1960.

¹⁶⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, "Firing threat laid to banks," *Province* (Vancouver), April 1, 1960; Denis Blunden, "Anti-union bank drive under fire," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 28, 1960.

¹⁶⁵ "Pay hikes granted by banks," *Province* (Vancouver), April 4, 1960; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Bank Employees Association Local 387 Bulletin #2," April 19, 1960.

¹⁶⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Bank Employees Association Local 387 Bulletin #2," April 19, 1960.

¹⁶⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, "Bank Employees Association Local 387 Bulletin #2," April 19, 1960.

¹⁶⁸ Denis Blunden, "Anti-union bank drive under fire," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 28, 1960.

unions, asking if they would be willing to serve as local contacts, supply information on bank workers in their region, and recruit other people to help distribute information to bank workers.¹⁶⁹ In addition to contacting people in other parts of the province, in the weeks immediately after the launch of the campaign, organizers attempted to build momentum. They issued press releases and did interviews with the local news media, and they conducted a survey amongst employees in all BC banks. Organizers also leafleted the provincial head offices of the major banks, as well as many branches of the Imperial Bank of Canada and the Bank of Montreal in the Vancouver area, on Vancouver Island, and in the interior of the province.¹⁷⁰

In light of the progress made in the first two weeks of the drive, in early April organizers seemed optimistic about the campaign's potential. At a press conference on April 6, an OEIU official stated that they intended to submit a certification application soon.¹⁷¹ Even the banks' anti-union activities could not dampen their spirits; in a letter to MacKenzie, Gooderham cheerfully declared, "We are on our way."¹⁷²

Organizers' enthusiasm and optimism, however, soon changed to frustration. Over the course of two weeks, they had handed out approximately 2,500 bulletins to employees of the Bank of Montreal and the Imperial Bank of Canada in various parts of the province, and they had begun leafleting branches of the other major banks as well. Organizers had also planned to start visiting the homes of bank workers who had supplied

¹⁶⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from T.C. Gooderham to "Sir & Brother," March 31, 1960.

¹⁷⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, letter from T.C. Gooderham to Mr. J. MacKenzie, April 6, 1960. For press coverage of the leafleting campaign, see Denis Blunden, "'Blitz' starts to organize bank aides," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 7, 1960; Jack Clarke, "Bank staffs canvassed by union," *Province* (Vancouver), April 7, 1960.

¹⁷¹ Jack Clarke, "Bank staffs canvassed by union," *Province* (Vancouver), April 7, 1960.

¹⁷² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 10, letter from T.C. Gooderham to Mr. J. MacKenzie, April 6, 1960.

their addresses; however, they had not yet amassed a sufficient number of contacts. Thus, Gooderham expressed doubts about the outcome of the campaign. He also questioned the efficacy of organizers' current strategy, pointing out that "[h]anding out to all the banks takes too much time and wasted manpower" and insisting, "We have to find a better method to reach the employees."¹⁷³ The bank's ongoing anti-union activities likely added to organizers' frustration.¹⁷⁴

By mid-May, the campaign had cooled considerably, but local officials had not yet given up all hope. Gooderham reported that organizers had been in contact with several bank employees, most of whom joined the union, and that they had obtained additional names and contact information. As such, Gooderham felt that the campaign could still "get a good number signed up, but it is going to be a long haul."¹⁷⁵ In the coming days, organizers planned to circulate another bulletin to workers and to continue compiling a mailing list of bank employees. In his response to Gooderham, MacKenzie stated that he found the report "very encouraging" and that he felt "there is distinct possibilities [*sic*] in this campaign. Even if we don't make an application at this time some real contacts are being established that can be maintained for future action."¹⁷⁶

By the beginning of June, however, the campaign had lost momentum, and CLC officials were growing impatient. On June 1, MacKenzie sent a telegram to Gooderham asking for an update.¹⁷⁷ In his response, Gooderham indicated that progress was "slow"

¹⁷³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from T.C. Gooderham to Mr. J. MacKenzie, April 20, 1960.

¹⁷⁴ Denis Blunden, "Anti-union bank drive under fire," *Sun* (Vancouver), April 28, 1960.

¹⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from T.C. Gooderham to Mr. J. MacKenzie, May 16, 1960.

¹⁷⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Tom Gooderham, May 20, 1960.

¹⁷⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, telegram from J. MacKenzie to Tom C. Gooderham, June 1, 1960.

but representatives were still following up with contacts.¹⁷⁸ The memos attached to Gooderham's telegram by the CLC's highest officers appear to be the final documents in the organization's archives pertaining to the 1960 campaign, and the comments in them more or less sum up the CLC's approach to bank worker organizing during this period. In response to one official's note that "[n]ot much progress being made in the organization of Bank employees," CLC president Claude Jodoin responded, "So I see. Time will come I Hope."¹⁷⁹

In the end, like the CLC's first bank campaign, the second campaign began with great enthusiasm but failed to secure any certifications in the banking sector. Even the OEIU, the union that oversaw the two campaigns, conceded that they had made little progress. An article published in the union's official newsletter in 1961 stated that, in Canada, "[a]mong financial and insurance enterprises, where office workers predominate, the number of employees covered [by a collective agreement] is negligible. For banks, non-life insurance, and investment and loan companies, the coverage is zero." Thus, the article concluded, "It is apparent from these Department of Labour statistics that the task of organizing the unorganized is a long way from completion, particularly in the area of white-collar workers."¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, CLC officers' assessment of the two failed campaigns and the unsuccessful application for certification shaped the organization's decision to step back from bank union organizing. In a letter written to a CLC representative in the mid-1960s,

¹⁷⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, telegram from Tom Gooderham to Joe MacKenzie, June 1, 1960.

¹⁷⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 9, referral slip from WD [William Dodge] to D MacDonald and C Jodoin, n.d.

¹⁸⁰ "Union workers are a minority," *White Collar*, no. 193 (October 1961): 3, <http://www.opeiu.org/portals/0/whitecollar/1960-1969/1961-Oct-193.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2015).

MacKenzie explained, “When it comes to organizing banks, we do not want to let any opportunity slip by but, at the same time, we have to recognize the major task involved.”¹⁸¹ That the director of organization for Canada’s largest labour organization acknowledged the enormity of the task but failed to critically assess the congress’s previous strategies and redouble its efforts reveals a fundamental problem in the approach to bank worker unionization in the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than experiment with new strategies and techniques and support and encourage bank workers who wanted to unionize, the CLC, for the most part, responded to bank workers’ inquiries about unionization with a mix of poor strategic thinking, limited confidence in working-class agency, and, ultimately, scepticism that bred pessimism.

Conclusion

Between 1956 and 1960, the Canadian Labour Congress attempted to unionize bank workers as part of a larger project of organizing thousands of unorganized white-collar workers in Canada. Yet even though CLC officials expressed an interest in bank union organizing, in the end their efforts were unsuccessful. Several factors contributed to the congress’s failure, including the banks’ anti-union activity, the CLRB’s ruling on the Kitimat application, and the CLC’s own strategy.

Nevertheless, although the CLC failed to unionize Canadian bank workers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the organization’s experiences provide valuable insight on bank union organizing, the functioning of the CLC and the CLRB, and issues shaping white-collar union organizing in the private sector in the post-war period. First, the CLC

¹⁸¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from J. MacKenzie to Mr. Robert McLeod, May 19, 1964.

drives demonstrate, yet again, that bank workers are interested in unions. As was the case with the Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee in the early 1940s, in 1956, 1959, and 1960, the Canadian Labour Congress acted in response to inquiries from bank workers. CLC organizers may not have submitted a certification application in 1956 or 1960, but the fact that bank employees approached the congress about unionizing, signed union cards, and, in the case of the Kitimat workers, even organized their own local, challenges claims that bank workers remain unorganized because they are unreceptive to unions. Moreover, the hostile reaction of the banks to the CLC campaigns demonstrates that unions and workers must anticipate and develop successful strategies to counter banks' consistent and sophisticated efforts to prevent unionization in their industry.

Second, the CLC's experiences provide valuable insight on particular organizing strategies and their efficacy. In 1956 and 1960, when CLC officers assigned high-ranking union bureaucrats and large international unions to the campaigns, both drives failed to produce any significant results. In 1959, however, officials supported the grassroots efforts of a small group of bank workers in Kitimat, BC, a situation that produced the first application for certification in the banking industry and a landmark ruling from the Canada Labour Relations Board. The drastic difference in strategy and results between the Kitimat case and the CLC campaigns suggests that bank worker unionization may require the use of alternative approaches to union organizing in which employees take the lead and the labour movement provides support. Indeed, as I will show in the next two chapters, the next major developments in the history of bank union organizing would

come about as a result of the determined efforts of small, independent unions and, of course, the tenacity and commitment of bank workers themselves.

For in spite of the failed CLC campaigns of 1956 and 1960, bank workers continued to express a desire to unionize. Although the CLC's interest in the banking sector waned in the 1960s, some workers remained committed to the idea of a bank worker union. In response to CLC director of organization Joseph MacKenzie's explanation of the difficulties of organizing in the banks, in May 1964 former bank worker Robert E. Paradis wrote, "I have made up my mind in accomplishing this matter and I feel certain . . . it can be done."¹⁸² Just three years later, in 1967, bank workers employed by the Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal in Québec would prove Paradis right when they formed the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal. The local continues to exist today (as the Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434) and currently represents approximately 2,000 workers at bank branches in Montréal and Ottawa.

¹⁸² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from R.E. Paradis to Mr. J. MacKenzie, May 4, 1964.

CHAPTER 4: BANK WORKERS UNIONIZE IN QUÉBEC, 1965–1968

Introduction

In February 1968, the 1,100 members of the recently formed Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (SEB) made history when they successfully negotiated a first collective agreement with their employer, the Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (C & D). By securing a contract, SEB members became the first group of North American bank workers to have their work covered by a collective agreement.¹ In an article discussing the significance of the contract, the largest labour federation in Québec – the Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) – summarized the significance of the achievement: “la forteresse est ébranlée Aujourd’hui, la forteresse a perdu la guerre de l’usure.”²

SEB’s story is noteworthy for several reasons. Most importantly, it proves that bank employees in Canada can unionize and secure a contract. Furthermore, the local,

¹ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau (SEPB) 434, documents d’ARCHIVES [*sic*] 434 (documents), “Premier contrat de travail dans le secteur bancaire: salaires haussé de 40 p.c.,” *Le Devoir* (Montréal), February 22, 1968. In 1968, Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (SEB) members voted to affiliate to the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU). Upon becoming affiliates of the international union, SEB became the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, Local 434 (SEBE 434)/OPEIU Local 434. In 2004, the local became SEPB 434/Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE) Local 434, after Canadian OPEIU members voted to form an independent union. The archival materials that I consulted in the SEPB 434 office consist of one box of documents and one box of photographs. Neither box is numbered so I refer to the boxes using the descriptions written on the outside of each box, i.e. “documents” and “photos.”

² SEPB 434, documents, “Les banques: la forteresse est ébranlée,” *Le Monde ouvrier*, no. 4 (April 1968): 12.

now called the Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau (SEPB) 434, continues to represent approximately 2,000 workers at bank branches in Ottawa and the region of Montréal. Its continued existence demonstrates that unions can survive in sectors with powerful and hostile anti-union employers such as the banks.

To understand how and why SEB – a small, independent union – succeeded where large unions and labour organizations repeatedly failed, I examine the formation of SEB and its members' struggle for a first contract. The SEB case differed markedly from other union drives undertaken in the Canadian banking industry: it was a grassroots campaign by employees with a strong sense of community and who received crucial support from the regional labour movement. These differences contributed to SEB's success. Although SEB members encountered some of the same issues that hindered other bank union organizing campaigns, support from C & D employees and the labour movement helped the union overcome obstacles, secure certification, and ultimately, negotiate a first agreement. The SEB case thus raises important questions about the type of organizing tactics workers and unions might use in the banks.

I begin by contextualizing the SEB campaign within the changing dynamics of the labour force and the labour movement in Canada and Québec in the 1960s. Next, I look at the particular circumstances that shaped C & D employees' decision to unionize in 1967, including the history of the bank and the wages, working conditions, and grievances of its employees. I then examine the formation of the union, members' negotiations with the bank, and their attainment of a first collective agreement, as well as the labour movement's reaction to these developments. I conclude by discussing the significance of the SEB victory to the history of bank worker unionization in North America.

Union Organizing in 1960s Canada and Québec

Following a period of relative calm in the 1950s, Canada witnessed an explosion of union activity in the 1960s. Several factors contributed to the change. The composition of the Canadian labour force shifted dramatically in the 1960s. New groups of immigrants arrived in Canada, many of them taking up work in the expanding construction and service sectors.³ Indeed, as had been the case in the 1950s, the service, office, and professional sectors continued to grow, while the industrial and manufacturing sectors declined.⁴ The labour force got younger, too, as the post-war “baby boom” generation came of age and took up paid employment. Between 1961 and 1975, the number of young workers increased substantially, and young people comprised an increasingly significant portion of the paid labour force.⁵ Additionally, more women were working for wages. Whereas in 1961, women comprised 27.3 per cent of the Canadian labour force, by 1971 they made up 34.6 per cent.⁶ Erin Phillips and Paul Phillips point out that the number of women working for wages had been increasing since the 1940s, but in the 1960s and 1970s, the “trickle” became “a flood. The increase in participation rates in both the Sixties and Seventies equals the total increase in the previous six decades, from 1901 to 1961.”⁷ Despite the change in their numbers, however, the

³ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1992), 305–307.

⁴ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers 2012), 86.

⁵ Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 216.

⁶ Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*, 3rd ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

⁷ Paul Phillips and Erin Phillips, *Women and Work: Inequality in the Labour Market* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, Publishers, 1983), 34.

majority of women continued to be employed in service and clerical jobs, and women still comprised the majority of workers in the clerical sector.⁸

Along with changes in the labour force, the 1960s also brought worsening wages and working conditions for many people. Although union members used strikes and collective bargaining to wrest higher wages from employers in the 1940s and 1950s, by the early 1960s, inflation had begun to undercut any gains, and workers struggled to deal with the rising cost of living. The labour force also experienced dramatic changes in the labour process, as employers used new forms of technology to increase productivity and replace workers with machines and computers.

In response to such pressures, labour militancy increased, and in the mid to late 1960s, many workers turned to union organizing and strikes. Across Canada, thousands of public-sector workers unionized and challenged legislation that barred them from striking and denied them collective bargaining rights. At the same time, workers in a variety of sectors, both public and private, went on strike. As historian Bryan Palmer explains, “[S]trikes increased throughout the early 1960s and reached an unprecedented peak in 1966, when over 617 strikes involving more than 410,000 workers cost corporations over 5 million worker days and 0.33 per cent of working time.”⁹ A sign of their frustration with employers *and* union leaders, workers engaged in numerous “wildcat” strikes, walking off the job in defiance of bosses, union officers, and the law.¹⁰

The increase in worker militancy was particularly notable in Québec, where class tensions merged with a burgeoning nationalist movement. In an effort to modernize

⁸ Phillips and Phillips, *Women and Work*, 48–49.

⁹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 272–273.

¹⁰ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 272–273. For more discussion of the wave of wildcat strikes that occurred in the 1960s, see Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 211–241.

Québec and wrest control of the province's resources from an anglophone minority, in the 1960s, the provincial government enacted a series of social and economic reforms. Government policies dovetailed with a broader cultural resurgence amongst francophones in Québec, many of whom "increasingly identified themselves as Québécoises and Québécois, as a people occupying a distinct national territory."¹¹ By the end of the 1960s, Québec's "Quiet Revolution" had fundamentally altered the social and political landscape of the province and fostered the creation of new political movements while reinvigorating old ones, including the labour movement.¹²

At the same time, in addition to coping with the rising inflation and decreasing wages affecting workers across Canada, as in decades past francophone workers in Québec continued to earn lower wages than anglophones in the province. In 1965, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism reported that in Québec, on average francophones earned 35 per cent less than anglophones.¹³ In response to the commission's report, labour organizations, such as the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), called for the elimination of "differences in economic opportunity and in living standards which have created a chasm between English and French-speaking Canada."¹⁴

To voice their discontent with the status quo and to improve their wages and working conditions, over the course of the 1960s Québec workers in the public and private sectors joined unions and went on strike. Across the province, strikes occurred in such sectors as education, health care, utilities, public transit, construction, newspapers,

¹¹ The Education Committees of Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec (CEQ), *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, trans. Arnold Bennett (Montréal and New York: Black Rose Books Inc., 1987), 191.

¹² For more information on the connection between the Quiet Revolution and the labour movement in Québec, see Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 187–219.

¹³ Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 195.

¹⁴ SEPB 434, documents, "Gap must be closed," *Le Travailleur Canadien/Canadian Labour* (March 1968): 12.

manufacturing, and the postal and railway services.¹⁵ As historian Desmond Morton writes, by the end of the decade Québec workers “had moved from the back row to the front rank in labour militancy.”¹⁶

The labour relations system crafted in the years immediately after World War II seemed incapable of containing the new wave of class conflict. In response to the surge in strike activity, governments and employers turned to the courts to obtain injunctions against striking workers, and in some cases union leaders were jailed. Such tactics alleviated some of the immediate pressure; however, in the mid-1960s, federal and provincial governments reluctantly took steps to revise existing labour laws.

In Québec, in the early 1960s the provincial government enacted a series of amendments to the Labour Relations Act, and in 1964 the government brought in the province’s first labour code. Though the new code did not fundamentally change post-war labour relations in Québec, it provided some assistance to workers and unions in their battles with employers and the state. The code reduced bureaucratic delays for certification, bargaining, and strikes; facilitated the collection of union dues; allowed unions to choose the official language of collective agreements; and, most notably, legalized public sector strikes.¹⁷

At the federal level, in 1966, the Canadian government appointed a task force on labour relations that released its report two years later, and in 1972, a new Canada Labour Code came into effect. Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments had also passed

¹⁵ For more information about the wave of strike activity in Québec in the 1960s, see Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 198–212.

¹⁶ Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, 5th ed. (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 260.

¹⁷ For more information about the 1964 Québec Labour Code, see Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 201.

laws to allow public sector workers to strike and engage in collective bargaining. As a result, by the mid-1970s, in both Canada and Québec, thousands of public-sector workers had joined the organized labour movement, and unionization rates had increased substantially.¹⁸

Workers and unions achieved significant victories in the public sector in the 1960s, but they struggled to make advances in the private sector. Over the course of the 1960s, the private sector unionization rate in Canada decreased, from 30 per cent in 1961 to 29.3 per cent in 1970.¹⁹ In banking and finance, most employees remained unorganized, though the labour movement made some attempts to unionize these groups.²⁰ In August 1966, the Syndicat National des Employés de la Banque Canadienne Nationale, a union affiliated with the Québec-based Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN), formed and launched a campaign to organize workers at the Banque Canadienne Nationale (BCN). A few months later, the union submitted a certification application to the Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB), asking to represent 116 employees who worked in clearing departments in Montréal and Québec City. The organizing drive faced several adverse factors, including employer opposition and jurisdictional battles. A rival employee association formed shortly after the CSN campaign began and attempted to intervene in the certification process, but the federal

¹⁸ In Canada, union members comprised less than 30 per cent of the non-agricultural labour force in 1961. By the mid-1970s, they made up almost 37 per cent. Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 98. In Québec, by the end of the 1960s the unionization rate had risen from less than 30 per cent to almost 40. Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 198.

¹⁹ Jean-Guy Bergeron, "Unionization in the Private Service Sector" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 12. In Québec, in 1970 it was estimated that "the level of unionization in the private sector was barely 25%, a rate which would have been even lower without the 100,000 construction workers, who were required by law to join unions in the late Sixties." Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 198.

²⁰ In 1961, less than 1 per cent of finance, insurance, and real estate employees were unionized. In 1975, the unionization rate in these sectors had risen to a meagre 1.4 per cent. George Sayers Bain, *Union Growth and Public Policy in Canada* (Ottawa: Labour Canada, 1978), 10.

labour board denied the request as it received it after the deadline. The following spring, the CLRB rejected the certification application, arguing that the clearing department employees did not form a “community of interest” distinct “from other employees engaged in other phases of banking activities in the same office.”²¹ That same year, CLC organizers met with floor traders and office employees at the Toronto Stock Exchange, but the effort fizzled soon after the first meeting.²²

The CLC, in particular, continued to take a measured approach to bank worker unionization in the 1960s. As in earlier years, congress officials claimed to be “interested in the possibility of organizing” bank workers but took limited action.²³ The CLRB’s rejection of the Kitimat application in 1959 and the failed drives of 1956–1957 and 1960 had not helped matters. Over the course of the 1960s, CLC officers repeatedly argued that they could not organize bank workers until the congress ascertained what the CLRB would consider an appropriate bargaining unit. As acting assistant director of the department of organization Rheel Bastien wrote to a CLC representative who asked about bank worker unionization, “It is not quite clear how we can go about organizing these people.”²⁴

The CLC’s approach to resolving the bargaining unit issue speaks to the congress’s conservative and conciliatory approach to union organizing and labour

²¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, “Canada Labour Relations Board; Between: Syndicat National des Employes de la Banque Canadienne Nationale (CSN), Applicant; and La Banque Canadienne Nationale, Respondent,” April 12, 1967. For more information on the Banque Canadienne Nationale (BCN) case, see LAC, Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) fonds, RG 145, BAN 1998-00708-1, box 9, file 766-01883, folders 1 to 3 and pocket 1.

²² For more information on the short-lived effort to unionize workers at the Toronto Stock Exchange in 1967, see the documents in LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 16.

²³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Rheel Bastien to Bernard Wilson, October 22, 1965.

²⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Rheel Bastien to Harry Simon, October 29, 1965.

relations during this period. In its decision on the Kitimat case, the CLRB stated that it would “consider all applications concerning bank employees” and that “units of some of the employees of a Bank, grouped together territorially or on some other basis” may “prove to be appropriate.”²⁵ Yet rather than sign up interested bank workers and submit more certification applications to force the board to decide what constituted an appropriate bargaining unit, congress officials instead conducted more research, thinking that with more information “it may be possible . . . to get a suggested plan from certain members of the Board.”²⁶ In short, CLC officials looked to the labour board to determine the congress’s organizing strategy. Sociologist Stanley Aronowitz argues that relying on bureaucrats and lawyers to resolve issues for workers “reproduces . . . the awe of the law,” which “disempowers the rank and file and strengthens the authority of the labor bureaucracy.”²⁷

The labour board, however, proved unhelpful. A CLC official asked CLRB chief executive officer Bernard Wilson whether the federal board held jurisdiction over bank workers and “[w]hat criteria . . . the board [would] use to define a bargaining unit.”²⁸ In response, Wilson simply attached a copy of the board’s decision on the Kitimat case and confirmed that, as per the decision, bank workers fell within the jurisdiction of the CLRB.²⁹ The board’s rejection of the CSN certification application in 1967 likely

²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 511, file 11, CLRB, *Between: Kitimat, Terrace and District General Workers’ Union, Local No. 1583, Canadian Labour Congress, Applicant, - and - The Bank of Nova Scotia, Kitimat Branch, Respondent*, September 11, 1959.

²⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Rheal Bastien to Harry Simon, October 29, 1965.

²⁷ Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers’ Movement* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 23.

²⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Rheal Bastien to Bernard Wilson, October 22, 1965.

²⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Bernard Wilson to Rheal Bastien, October 26, 1965.

compounded matters, underscoring for CLC officials the impossibility of organizing bank workers. In a letter to another labour official, CLC executive vice-president William Dodge posited, “[I]t is going to be difficult to get certification except on a national basis.”³⁰

Unable to determine what the CLRB would consider an appropriate bargaining unit, congress officials held off on organizing and instead conducted more research. The CLC records from this period contain several documents pertaining to bank organizing, including a list of bank branches in Saskatchewan.³¹ Members of the labour movement also sent relevant materials to CLC officers. One union official forwarded a Toronto-Dominion Bank (TD) pamphlet for new employees for the CLC’s file “on the possible organization of the banking industry.”³² Another union officer passed on a TD pamphlet that reviewed changes in the bank’s organizational structure; he thought the information might help CLC officials devise a new organizing strategy. He explained, “This, to me, bolsters arguments for the union in organizing an Area Management Unit in this bank and, I think, would give us greater argument for having it considered an ‘appropriate bargaining unit’ when it was put before the labour relations board.”³³ His comments demonstrate yet again how the power of the labour boards permeated all aspects of union organizing, from strategy to certification.

³⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from William Dodge to Larry Sefton, May 9, 1967.

³¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 21, “Saskatchewan Organizing Potential; 1966.”

³² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from John C. Ward to J. MacKenzie, August 17, 1967.

³³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 20, letter from Larry Sefton to Terry Morley, November 2, 1967.

CLC officials continued to research banks and to assemble lists of bank employees throughout the 1960s.³⁴ Their findings, however, likely contributed to their belief that it was impossible to unionize bank workers. In 1968, a CLC researcher reported that TD alone had 392 branches in Ontario and 692 branches across Canada.³⁵ In 1970, the journal of the Canadian Bankers Association reported that in May of that year, Canadian banks had 6,098 branches in Canada and 92,376 bank employees, up from 5,959 branches and 88,562 employees a year prior.³⁶ Officials undoubtedly found the sheer numbers of employees and workplaces daunting, to say nothing of the immense power and resources banks could draw on to prevent unionization.

Therefore, as in the past, the next significant development in bank worker unionization resulted from a grassroots effort by bank workers rather than a top-down campaign run by labour leaders. In October 1967, while the CLC continued to dither and delay, the CLRB certified the recently formed Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal as the bargaining agent for approximately 1,100 employees of Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal. The following year, SEB members signed a collective agreement with the bank – the first union contract covering bank workers in North America. They have maintained their certification for almost fifty years. In light of the local's significant achievements, it is

³⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390 W. C. Org. 5 Bank Of Montreal, P. Q., letter from John F. Simonds to "All Quebec Staff," March 7, 1967; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390 W. C. Org. 5 Bank Of Montreal, P. Q., letter from A.A. Pelletier to M. John F. Simonds, March 13, 1967; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390 W. C. Org. 5 Bank Of Montreal, P. Q., memorandum from A.A. Pelletier to John F. Simonds, April 7, 1967.

³⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, memorandum from Terry Morley to Larry Sefton, April 30, 1968.

³⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, "Banking Data," *The Canadian Banker* (July/August 1970): 44.

important to understand how and why members established the local, received certification, and secured a first agreement.

Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal

Founded in 1846 as a savings bank, the Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (C & D) differed from the big commercial banks in key ways. Most notably, its founders, the second bishop of Montréal, Monsignor Ignace Bourget, and a group of “prominent Montrealers from many linguistic and denominational communities,”³⁷ intended for the bank to serve as an institution that would securely invest “the savings, large and small, of the professional, clerical and industrial classes.”³⁸ Over the years, the bank worked to construct an image of itself as “a mutual and philanthropic Institution.”³⁹ For example, a C & D advertisement from the early 1930s shows a businessman and a worker holding hands and proclaims that “LE PROGRES ET LA PROSPÉRITÉ sont le fruit de la coopération dans le travail et de la constance dans la pratique de l'Économie.”⁴⁰ As well, unlike many other banks, at the time of the union drive C & D was not a member of the Canadian Bankers Association.⁴¹

Nevertheless, C & D had many things in common with other Canadian banks.

Like most banks, C & D dealt with significant amounts of money and earned substantial

³⁷ Laurentian Bank, “Our History,” Laurentian Bank, https://www.laurentianbank.ca/en/about_lbc/my_bank/our_history.html (accessed April 30, 2015).

³⁸ T. Taggart Smyth, *The First Hundred Years: History of the Montreal City and District Savings Bank* (Montréal: The Bank, 1946), 8. For more information on the creation of the bank and its early history, see John Irwin Cooper, “The Origins and Early History of the Montreal City and District Savings Bank, 1846–1871,” *CCHA Report 13* (1945–46): 15–25; Patrick Durrant, “Montreal’s City and District: Bank with a difference,” *Gazette* (Montréal), August 2, 1972.

³⁹ Smyth, *The First Hundred Years*, 9.

⁴⁰ Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal advertisement, *La Sphère féminine* (1933–1934), original emphasis.

⁴¹ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

profits. In 1967, the bank reported profits of \$1.9 million, and its assets totalled more than \$400 million.⁴² As well, like the Banque Canadienne Nationale in particular, C & D mostly operated in the province of Québec; at the time of the union drive, C & D had 75 branches in and around Montréal.⁴³

C & D also had similar employment policies as other banks. In the mid-1960s, the average C & D employee was young, spoke French and English, and had eleven years of education. Salaries ranged from \$50.00 to \$62.50 per week.⁴⁴ The standard workday began at 8:45 a.m. and ended at 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m.; employees received a 55-minute meal break. The bank also expected employees to work an additional hour in the evening, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Those who worked the evening shift received an extra \$0.75, but those who did not had \$1.50 deducted from their pay. The bank required employees to submit a doctor's note when they missed work due to illness, and employees complained that "le papier peut être contesté selon l'humeur du gérant."⁴⁵ C & D also

⁴² SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, "First in Canada: Montreal bank union certified," October 19, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968.

⁴³ For many years, the bank only had branches in and around Montréal; however, in the 1970s it expanded, opening its first branch outside of the city in 1975 and its first branch outside of the province in 1981. In 1987, C & D changed its name to Laurentian Bank of Canada. Laurentian Bank, "Our History," Laurentian Bank, https://www.laurentianbank.ca/en/about_lbc/my_bank/our_history.html (accessed April 30, 2015).

⁴⁴ In 1967, the provincial minimum wage for adult workers in Québec was \$1.25 per hour, so the weekly pay for an employee earning minimum wage and working a 40-hour week would be \$50. Government of Canada, "Hourly Minimum Wages in CANADA for Adult Workers," *Government of Canada*, <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/rpt2.aspx?lang=eng> (accessed June 10, 2015).

⁴⁵ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, "Historique du SEPB – 434 (1967 – 2015)," *Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434*, <http://www.sepb.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=3907&menu=71&sousmenu=95> (accessed April 30, 2015).

frequently moved employees from branch to branch, often without notice or consultation, and employees claimed that managers used transfers as a punitive measure.⁴⁶

As had been the case in the BCN and CLC drives, gender was a central issue for C & D employees. Across Canada, the number of female bank employees had been increasing since World War II, a trend that continued in the 1960s. In 1966, 62.2 per cent of the 80,000 people working for Canada's eight chartered banks were women.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as in many other industries, most female bank employees earned less than male employees and worked in low-level positions.⁴⁸ In a special report on gender inequality and employment in the Canadian chartered banks prepared for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada in the late 1960s, economist Marianne Bossen found that "opportunities are expanding for male and female employees but for the latter these occur in select occupations."⁴⁹ The majority of women (52 per cent) worked in "some support capacity" and 45 per cent had "non-managerial line operations jobs," such as tellers and ledgerkeepers.⁵⁰ At C & D, most female employees were tellers, and women could not work in a number of upper-level positions, including assistant accountant and monitor.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, "Historique du SEPB – 434 (1967 – 2015)," *Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434*, <http://www.sepb.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=3907&menu=71&sousmenu=95> (accessed April 30, 2015).

⁴⁷ SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal contract won, union now eyes chartered banks", *Financial Times of Canada* (Montréal), February 26, 1968.

⁴⁸ In 1967, full-year full-time female workers in Canada earned 58.4 per cent of their male counterparts. Diane Galarneau and Louise Earl, "Women's earnings/men's earnings," *Perspectives on Labour and Income* 11, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 21.

⁴⁹ Marianne Bossen, *Manpower Utilization in Canadian Chartered Banks* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1971), 35.

⁵⁰ Bossen, *Manpower Utilization in Canadian Chartered Banks*, 15.

⁵¹ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, "Historique du SEPB – 434 (1967 – 2015)," *Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434*, <http://www.sepb.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=3907&menu=71&sousmenu=95> (accessed April 30, 2015).

Structural and technological changes at C & D in the 1950s and 1960s

compounded the poor wages and working conditions. In 1958, the bank brought in new punch card equipment to replace its manual accounting system. A decade later, in 1968, the bank introduced a computer system. As in other industries, such developments posed a serious threat to bank workers, drastically altering their working conditions and threatening their job security.⁵² In the midst of these technological changes, in 1965, the bank listed its shares on the Montréal Stock Exchange, a move that undoubtedly resulted in additional workplace pressures.

Such factors fostered a sense of frustration amongst C & D employees. In response, some people simply quit, a fact reflected in the high level of turnover amongst the bank's workforce; according to employees, in 1965 approximately 40% of the bank's workforce resigned over an 11-month period.⁵³ Others, however, pursued a different path, believing a union might enable them to improve their wages and working conditions. Though unionization presented its own challenges, given the sorry state of affairs for C & D employees, they felt the potential gains outweighed the risks. In their own history of their local, SEPB 434 members wrote, "Quand on demande aux employées de l'époque d'expliquer leur démarche presque téméraire dans les circonstances, elles répondent '**on n'avait plus rien à perdre**; on a cessé d'avoir peur et on a décidé de foncer.'"⁵⁴

⁵² In the 1960s and 1970s, *White Collar*, the official newsletter of the OPEIU, published many articles about the threat technological change posed to bank workers. See Office and Professional Employees International Union, "White Collar," *Office and Professional Employees International Union*, <http://www.opeiu.org/WhiteCollar.aspx> (accessed July 25, 2015). For information on the effect of technological change on Canadian workers in general in the 1960s, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 273–275.

⁵³ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Léopold Tassé to Antonio Rainville, December 3, 1965.

⁵⁴ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, "Historique du SEPB – 434 (1967 – 2015)," *Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434*, <http://www.sepb.qc.ca/librairies/sfv/telecharger.php?fichier=3907&menu=71&sousmenu=95> (accessed April 30, 2015), original emphasis.

The Union Drive

When C & D workers decided to form a union, they were able to build on the strong sense of community that existed amongst the bank's employees due to their working conditions and their employee association, the Association des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, Incorporée (AEBE). Management-supported unions and employee associations were a form of paternalism that developed in Québec in the early twentieth century in response to the Catholic Church's encouragement of cooperation between workers and management in order to achieve social peace.⁵⁵ As historian Joan Sangster demonstrates in her study of labour relations at a department store, as the Québec labour movement grew more militant, some workers sought to transform their paternalistic associations into independent trade unions.⁵⁶

At C & D, the employee association was established in 1920 to facilitate communication between management and employees. Such an association likely fit well with C & D's self-image as a philanthropic institution that promoted cooperation between labour and business. Workers, however, complained that in reality management "a plein pouvoir et n'a que des obligations morales (et non légales) vis-à-vis ses employés."⁵⁷ In

⁵⁵ Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 88; Joan Sangster, *Transforming Labour: Women and Work in Post-war Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 130.

⁵⁶ Sangster, *Transforming Labour*, 130–131.

⁵⁷ SEPB 434, documents, "Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977," 1977.

an effort to improve their salaries, in 1963 employees formed their own association under the same name. By fall 1965, more than 800 employees had joined the new association.⁵⁸

According to SEB members, the fact that most employees knew each other aided the association's growth. As was common in the banking industry, C & D frequently transferred employees from one branch to another; yet in contrast to the branches of large national banks that were spread across the country, C & D branches were concentrated in the region of Montréal, meaning workers remained in the same geographic area when they changed branches. C & D employees also had an internal postal system that allowed them to circulate information across the bank's 75 branches in a matter of minutes; this system proved extremely useful during the union drive and subsequent negotiations.⁵⁹ As well, common dinner breaks provided employees with many opportunities to socialize and get to know one another.⁶⁰

Workers also had a strong tradition of employee-organized social events and activities, a practice that continued during and after the union drive. For example, included on the agenda of an SEB meeting scheduled for 17 December 1967, in the thick of contract negotiations, was a report on an upcoming "grande soirée dansante."⁶¹ An article published in *Le Travailleur Canadien/Canadian Labour* in March 1968 mentions various activities organized by the local, including "drama, an orchestra, donations to the poor, industrial visits, travel excursions and Christmas gift purchases for members at 40-

⁵⁸ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Charles Bilodeau, n.d., ca. November 1965. The archival materials that I consulted in the SEPB 434 office included several documents pertaining to the Association des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, Incorporée (AEBE); however, there was little information about the original employee association established in 1920.

⁵⁹ SEPB 434, documents, "Les banques: la forteresse est ébranlée," *Le monde ouvrier* 53, no. 4 (April 1968): 12.

⁶⁰ SEPB 434, documents, "Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977," 1977.

⁶¹ SEPB 434, documents, meeting agenda, "TRES IMPORTANT," December 17, 1967, original emphasis.

per-cent savings.”⁶² In October 1969, the official newsletter of the OPEIU reported, “The ‘swinging’ 1,100 members in the youthful bank employee unit of Local 434, in Montreal, kicked-off the group travel trend last year by chartering two flights, one to the West Indies and the other to Florida.”⁶³ SEBE 434’s official newsletter – *Le Lien* – often published reports on social events organized by union members.⁶⁴ Such events and activities undoubtedly contributed to the culture of friendship and community that existed among C & D employees and that united them across gender lines and job descriptions.

By November 1965, AEBE had garnered support from a significant number of C & D employees. Organizers scheduled a general assembly meeting for 9 November to decide how to tackle the wage issue. At the meeting, AEBE members created a special committee tasked with preparing a study on salaries. The committee’s research revealed significant differences between the wages paid by C & D and other banks. Moreover, according to AEBE president Léopold Tassé, the extra hours that C & D required its employees to work compounded matters: the bank did not compensate employees for the extra hour of work but deducted \$2.50 from the paycheques of employees who did not show up.⁶⁵

In light of the research, on 3 December 1966 Tassé sent a letter to C & D general manager Antonio Rainville, outlining members’ proposal. AEBE members’ demands focused on two key issues: wages and hours of work. They wanted “un sentiment de sécurité assuré par des salaires justes et adéquats et par des heures de travail toujours

⁶² SEPB 434, documents, clipping from *Le Travailleur Canadien/Canadian Labour* (March 1968): 28.

⁶³ “Locals study charter flights,” *White Collar*, no. 282 (October 1969): 2.

⁶⁴ Copies of *Le Lien* can be found in SEPB 434, documents.

⁶⁵ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Léopold Tassé to Antonio Rainville, December 3, 1965.

moins nombreuses.”⁶⁶ In regards to wages, they demanded an immediate 10 per cent salary increase for all employees, including maintenance workers, and they asked that the increase be retroactive to November 1965. As for evening work, Tassé explained that although the late hours caused employees “social, familial, and financial” hardship, they realized that it gave the bank an edge over its competitors; employees did not object to working late, but they wanted compensation for the extra hours. In his response to Tassé, Rainville stated that he would form a special committee to study the AEBE report on salaries and to meet with the association.⁶⁷

The two sides met in January, and by early February, they had hammered out a deal. On 7 February 1966, the AEBE executive held a meeting to discuss how to proceed. The committee authorized five members of the committee that had produced the report on salaries to sign an agreement with the bank that would be in effect from 1 April 1966 to 1 April 1969.⁶⁸ Two days later, on 9 February, roughly 800 members attended a special general meeting.⁶⁹ At the meeting, Tassé read out the most recent letter from Rainville and the proposed agreement between the association and the bank. The members voted unanimously to approve the proposed agreement, and they authorized the five members of the study committee to sign it.⁷⁰ Representatives for the bank and the association signed the agreement on 17 February 1966, and it came into effect on 1 April 1966.⁷¹

⁶⁶ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Léopold Tassé to Antonio Rainville, December 3, 1965.

⁶⁷ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Antonio Rainville to Léopold Tassé, December 24, 1965.

⁶⁸ SEPB 434, documents, AEBE Executive, meeting minutes, February 7, 1966.

⁶⁹ Sources differ on the exact number of attendees. The meeting minutes state 720; however, in a letter to Rainville written two days later, Tassé stated that 850 members attended the meeting. SEPB 434, documents, AEBE special general meeting minutes, February 9, 1966; SEPB 434, documents, letter from Léopold Tassé to Antonio Rainville, February 11, 1966.

⁷⁰ SEPB 434, documents, AEBE special general meeting minutes, February 9, 1966.

⁷¹ SEPB 434, documents, “Entente entre La Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal et L’Association des Employés de La Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Inc.,” February 17, 1966.

The agreement contained several improvements for C & D employees, including wage increases, improvements to the pension plan, and payment for evening work. Yet it soon became apparent that it did not do enough. The major issues continued to be wages and hours of work. Despite the creation of a monthly stipend for evening work, the amount was so low that employees claimed that most workers “doit payer de sa poche pour venir travailler.”⁷²

By 1967, union talk was in the air. Many private sector white-collar workers had historically expressed disinterest and hostility toward unions; however, attitudes had changed in recent years, as unorganized office and professional employees watched unionized workers in other sectors make significant gains. Frustrated by their conditions but lacking the legal power to change them, members of the AEBE executive contacted a labour lawyer who encouraged them to consider unionizing.⁷³ To learn more about unionization, over the course of several months they met with representatives from several labour organizations, including the OPEIU and the CSN.⁷⁴ They soon concluded that “il faut créer un véritable syndicat si on veut espérer obtenir une véritable convention collective de travail.”⁷⁵ The AEBE executive scheduled an association meeting for 31 March 1967 to decide how to proceed. Part way through the meeting, supervisors were asked to leave and a vote was held:⁷⁶ over 700 of the 1,100 C & D employees voted to join a new independent union, the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Épargne de la

⁷² SEPB 434, documents, “Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d’Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales,” *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967.

⁷³ SEPB 434, documents, “Les banques: la forteresse est ébranlée,” *Le monde ouvrier* 53, no. 4 (April 1968): 12.

⁷⁴ SEPB 434, documents, “Les banques: la forteresse est ébranlée,” *Le monde ouvrier* 53, no. 4 (April 1968): 12.

⁷⁵ SEPB 434, documents, “Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977,” 1977.

⁷⁶ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

Cité et du District de Montréal.⁷⁷ Attendees also elected an executive consisting of a president, a secretary, a treasurer, two vice-presidents, and two directors.⁷⁸ Charles Bilodeau, an accountant at the Verdun branch and a long-time C & D employee, was elected president.

According to *The Globe and Mail*, Bilodeau had worked at C & D for seventeen years and had been organizing the union for six months.⁷⁹ In August 1953, the bank hired him to work as a clerk at the Sainte-Catherine Ouest branch. Following several transfers and promotions, in October 1961 Bilodeau was made an accountant, and in May 1966, he transferred to the Verdun branch where “il connut ses plus grands succès” and where he worked during the union drive. Bilodeau was not necessarily hostile to management, and after the contract negotiations he continued his ascension up the ranks of the bank, becoming an inspector and, in November 1969, a branch manager. Throughout his career at C & D, Bilodeau maintained the respect of his colleagues, a fact evidenced by the publication in the union newsletter of a flattering article discussing Bilodeau and his contributions to the bank and the union and congratulating him on his promotion to branch manager.⁸⁰

As in other instances of bank worker organizing, SEB’s significance was not lost on the news media. Reminding people of the earlier failed attempt to organize BCN employees in Montréal in the 1940s, newspapers claimed that if the SEB application succeeded, “Il s’agirait du premier syndicat en Amérique groupant des employés de

⁷⁷ SEPB 434, documents, “Favour Union,” *Gazette* (Montréal), April 3, 1967.

⁷⁸ SEPB 434, documents, “Les employés se syndiquent à la Banque d’Épargne,” *Dimanche-Matin* (Montréal), April 2, 1967.

⁷⁹ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

⁸⁰ SEPB 434, documents, “Le grand ‘CHARLES’ a été promu directeur,” *Le lien* 1, no. 6 (November 1969): 2.

banque.”⁸¹ Newspapers also noted that the majority of C & D employees had already joined the union, a fact that distinguished SEB from previous bank unions. Indeed, in the days after the founding meeting, membership cards poured into the union office from employees who did not attend the meeting.⁸² By Sunday, newspapers were reporting that 70 per cent of eligible employees had joined the union.⁸³

SEB members submitted their certification application to the CLRB on April 7. In the application for certification, they asked the CLRB to certify the union as the bargaining agent for all C & D employees, with the exception of managers and others excluded by law.⁸⁴ SEB claimed that 90 per cent (1,008) of the proposed 1,125-person bargaining unit had joined the union, or, in other words, 82 per cent of the bank’s workforce of 1,232. According to the CLRB investigating officer, however, SEB applied to represent 1,122 employees of the bank’s total workforce of 1,445 employees, and the union asked to exclude 323 employees from the unit. Though the CLRB officer reported that fewer employees had joined the union than SEB claimed, he nonetheless confirmed that the vast majority (70 per cent) of the bank’s workers supported the union at the time of the application.⁸⁵

While SEB members waited for the CLRB to make a decision on their application, they explored affiliation with one of the large trade union federations. At the time, most unions in Québec were affiliated to either the CSN or the FTQ (the provincial arm of the CLC), and throughout the 1960s the two organizations engaged in a fierce

⁸¹ SEPB 434, documents, “Les employés se syndiquent à la Banque d’Épargne,” *Dimanche-Matin* (Montréal), April 2, 1967.

⁸² SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

⁸³ SEPB 434, documents, “Les employés se syndiquent à la Banque d’Épargne,” *Dimanche-Matin* (Montréal), April 2, 1967.

⁸⁴ SEPB 434, documents, CLRB application for certification as bargaining agent, April 7, 1967.

⁸⁵ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

battle for members.⁸⁶ In June, Bilodeau told reporters that although he had consulted with a labour federation about how to proceed with negotiations, SEB would remain independent. Borrowing a phrase from former Québec premier Jean Lesage, who had implemented a number of economic reforms in the first half of the decade to increase the province's control of its economy, Bilodeau stated, "Nous voulons demeurer maîtres chez nous Nous croyons que nous sommes les seuls à connaître véritablement nos problèmes. Par conséquent nous croyons être les seuls à pouvoir y remédier." Essentially, Bilodeau did not see the benefit of affiliation; he argued that "les grandes centrales syndicales ne sont pas rompues aux négociations entre les employés de banques et leurs patrons."⁸⁷ As evidence, he pointed to the CSN's recent failed certification application to represent BCN employees.⁸⁸

Bilodeau's claim to independence, however, was somewhat misleading. Although members founded SEB as an independent union and did not affiliate with any other organizations until they secured their first agreement, they received crucial support from prominent members of the labour movement at various points in their struggle. In particular, OPEIU organizer Roméo Corbeil provided substantial assistance to SEB members during the certification hearings and contract negotiations.

⁸⁶ For more information on the battle between the CSN and the FTQ in the 1960s, see Education Committees, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec*, 198–200; Morton, *Working People*, 274–275; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 311–312.

⁸⁷ SEPB 434, documents, "Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d'Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales," *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967. The article identifies "Jacques Bilodeau" as the SEB president; however, it is likely a typo, as Charles Bilodeau was the SEB president at the time. For more on Jean Lesage and economic nationalism in Québec in the 1960s, see Dale C. Thomson, *Jean Lesage and the Quiet Revolution* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1984).

⁸⁸ The CLRB released its decision on the BCN application on 12 April 1967, just five days after SEB members submitted their application for certification. When discussing the SEB case, the news media often mentioned the failed CSN application. See, for example, SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967.

Corbeil was a prominent figure in the OPEIU throughout his 30-year career with the union. After serving in the army during World War II, Corbeil worked at building supplies company Sherwin Williams in Montréal, where he became involved in the International Chemical Workers' Union. In 1956, OPEIU president Howard Coughlin recruited Corbeil away from the Chemical Workers to work as an organizer in Québec. Under Corbeil's watch, the membership of OPEIU Local 57 in Montréal increased from 100 in the mid-1950s to 1,700 in 1966.⁸⁹ In 1969, Corbeil was named regional director for eastern Canada. Two years later, he became international vice-president, and in 1974, he was appointed Canadian director as well. Former lawyer for OPEIU Joseph E. Finley described Corbeil as "the Union's most successful organizer in eastern Canada."⁹⁰

It is unclear when Corbeil started working with SEB. In some instances, union members implied that their relationship with Corbeil began in July 1967, when they asked him for help to prepare for the CLRB hearing on their certification application. Around that time, SEB also signed a service contract with OPEIU; under the contract, SEB paid a fee to the international union in exchange for organizing staff.⁹¹ Other evidence, however, indicates that Corbeil may have been involved with the local earlier. Reflecting on his involvement with the local, Corbeil stated, "In 1967, as the OPEIU and City and District Savings Bank Employees' Union representative, I worked as a technical adviser, organizer, strategist, etc... I participated in the affiliation of the

⁸⁹ Joseph E. Finley, *White Collar Union: The Story of the OPEIU and Its People* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 238.

⁹⁰ Finley, *White Collar Union*, 240. For more information on Corbeil, see Finley, *White Collar Union*, 238, 239, and 240–243; SEP 434, documents, OPEIU, "Tribute to Roméo Corbeil," 1986.

⁹¹ SEP 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, "Staff at four Montreal banks seek union's aid in organizing," October 25, 1967; SEP 434, documents, Gilles Racine, "Le premier syndicat d'employés de banque est fondé à Montréal," *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967; SEP 434, documents, "Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977," 1977.

Savings Bank employees to the OPEIU, attended certification meetings before the Ottawa Labour Relations Board and to the certification of the first bank in Canada in October 1967 [*sic*].”⁹² Regardless of when Corbeil became involved with SEB, it seems he played a prominent role in the lead-up to the certification hearing and during contract negotiations.

SEB members would need all the help they could get, especially as the bank had already taken steps to hinder the union. Soon after SEB submitted its certification application, the general manager of the bank, F.X. Guérard, prepared a brief for branch managers, outlining the bank’s position on union organizing and why employees should not unionize. Guérard discouraged managers from telling employees outright not to join the union (as this would be illegal), but he encouraged them to ask employees to consider how well they knew the union leaders, whether the union was after their dues, if they were willing to lose their salary in the event of a strike, and what role the individual had within the union. Guérard included the usual employer misinformation about unions: they do not provide members with sufficient information, the executive can increase dues whenever they wish, and unions can charge members extra money to support strikes or political candidates. Guérard also warned that unions can force their members to go on strike and that strikes are often violent and result in injuries and property damage. Ultimately, Guérard concluded, “du point de vue salaire, bénéfices, sécurité d’emploi, heures de travail, conditions d’emploi et opportunité, l’employé n’a rien à gagner d’appartenir à un syndicat.”⁹³

⁹² SEP 434, documents, OPEIU, “Tribute to Roméo Corbeil,” 1986, original ellipses.

⁹³ SEP 434, documents, summary of a brief by M. Guérard, n.d., ca. April 1967.

The bank attempted to hinder the union through legal means, too, by challenging the certification application.⁹⁴ C & D demanded that the board exclude 320 positions from the bargaining unit, as they claimed these employees carried out supervisory duties or dealt with confidential materials.⁹⁵ The bank did not contest the majority (802) of employees, including 400 clerks, 245 tellers, 91 accounting assistants, and 17 night cleaners. For its part, the union asked to exclude 323 employees, including 216 part-time employees and 81 managers.⁹⁶ According to the CLRB investigating officer, Roger L. Fournier, the 70 part-time cleaners worked approximately fifteen hours per week, and the 57 part-time cashiers and 89 part-time clerk-operators worked roughly four hours per week.⁹⁷ The union likely decided to exclude part-time employees after learning of management's opposition to their inclusion;⁹⁸ in their original certification application submitted to the CLRB in April, they did not ask to exclude part-time workers.⁹⁹

The CLRB scheduled a hearing for July in Ottawa and assigned Fournier to study the case.¹⁰⁰ Fournier met with SEB's lawyer, Michel Robert, to discuss job classifications, and he had the bank and the union complete questionnaires on the matter. In his report, Fournier stated that SEB had signed up 1,011 of C & D's 1,122 employees

⁹⁴ SEPB 434, documents, "Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d'Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales," *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967.

⁹⁵ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to Michel Robert, July 24, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

⁹⁶ SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

⁹⁷ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

⁹⁸ LAC, CLRB fonds, RG 145, BAN 1998-00718-9, box 5, file 766-011936, folder 2, company response to the application of the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal, May 12, 1967.

⁹⁹ SEPB 434, documents, CLRB application for certification as bargaining agent, April 7, 1967.

¹⁰⁰ SEPB 434, documents, "Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d'Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales," *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967.

eligible for inclusion in the union's proposed bargaining unit.¹⁰¹ In short, according to Fournier, 90 per cent of the bank's employees wanted to unionize.

The bank continued its anti-union activities throughout the CLRB investigation. In June, Bilodeau accused the bank of "avoir tenté officieusement de tuer le syndicat dans l'oeuf"; he claimed that management was circulating rumours about potential negative effects of unionization, including high union dues and the abolition of the pension plan. In speaking with the press, Bilodeau attempted to counter the rumors.¹⁰²

The bank's actions, however, made little difference. In late July, Fournier reported that SEB had only received one resignation letter since submitting the certification application.¹⁰³ Indeed, in spite of the bank's efforts to hinder the union, membership continued to grow. By late June, 94 per cent of eligible C & D employees had joined the union,¹⁰⁴ leading SEB representatives to declare, "Management is fighting the union, but we are confident that we will soon be certified as the only bank employees' union in North America."¹⁰⁵

While both sides waited for the CLRB to reach a decision on the certification application, the media continued to provide substantial coverage of the new bank union and its landmark case. SEB members understood well the significance of their application, and they used the press's interest to promote their case in particular and bank worker organizing in general. *The Globe and Mail* reported that "Bilodeau said . . . that while there have been previous attempts to organize Canadian bank employees this is the

¹⁰¹ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

¹⁰² SEPB 434, documents, "Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d'Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales," *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967.

¹⁰³ SEPB 434, documents, letter from Roger L. Fournier to J. Lorne MacDougall, July 28, 1967.

¹⁰⁴ SEPB 434, documents, "Le syndicat des employés de la Banque d'Épargne veut demeurer indépendant des centrales," *La Presse* (Montréal), June 20, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967.

¹⁰⁵ SEPB 434, documents, "Montreal bank union guinea pig," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967.

first time that an application has received such massive support from a group of bank clerical workers. He said that if the union wins labor board recognition he and his colleagues will try to organize the staffs of every chartered bank in Canada.”¹⁰⁶ Bilodeau declared that “la syndicalisation des banques n’est plus qu’une affaire de temps.”¹⁰⁷

The CLRB finally scheduled a hearing for 29 August in Ottawa, and on 6 October 1967, the board handed down its decision, certifying the union as the official bargaining agent for 1,100 bank workers. Newspapers reported on the significant event: “Pour la première fois en Amérique du Nord, l’existence du syndicat des employés d’une banque à charte a été reconnue officiellement.”¹⁰⁸ According to the press, negotiations were set to begin on 20 October.

Given the significance of the CLRB decision, various commentators weighed in on the implications for the banking industry if the union secured a contract. Journalist Loren Chudy surmised that “Canada’s first union in a bank is likely to remain an only child, for a while at least” because “[t]he job of organizing becomes colossal when you consider a bank like the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce has some 1,400 branches nation-wide.” In Chudy’s opinion, the major difficulty would be reaching a sufficient number of bank workers, many of whom frequently transferred between branches across the country. Moreover, Chudy argued that the C & D drive had benefitted from two key factors: the bank’s concentration in the region of Montréal and the involvement of

¹⁰⁶ SEPB 434, documents, “Montreal bank union guinea pig,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 23, 1967.

¹⁰⁷ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹⁰⁸ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, “Le syndicalisme bancaire,” n.d., ca. 1967.

Corbeil. As for the prospects at other banks, Chudy contended, “Elsewhere, the road to bank unions is more rocky. Bank officials maintain their usual antipathy.”¹⁰⁹

Even labour officials expressed skepticism about the possibility of organizing other bank workers. Don Barclay, the OPEIU’s international representative for Ontario, stated, “We could probably do the job . . . but the entire labor movement would have to take part . . . and I mean everyone.”¹¹⁰ Likewise, Marjorie Whitten, president of Toronto OPEIU Local 131 – a group that had tried to unionize bank workers in the 1950s – echoed these sentiments: “We haven’t touched it now for, I’d say, four or five years We couldn’t get them organized on any great scale. It’s really going to take a combined effort.”¹¹¹

SEB president Charles Bilodeau begged to differ, however. He claimed that even though the SEB organizing drive had been carried out rather quietly, the union had attracted interest from employees at several other banks.¹¹² The union’s first priority was obtaining a contract for its own members, but Bilodeau invited bank workers to affiliate with SEB; when they had signed up at least 60 per cent of their co-workers, they could form their own union.¹¹³

Journalists also speculated about the implications of a strike by SEB members. In media interviews, union representatives acknowledged the possibility, but they also tried

¹⁰⁹ SEPB 434, documents, Loren Chudy, “Banks are made of marble and anti-union feeling,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 20, 1967.

¹¹⁰ SEPB 434, documents, Loren Chudy, “Banks are made of marble and anti-union feeling,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 20, 1967.

¹¹¹ SEPB 434, documents, Loren Chudy, “Banks are made of marble and anti-union feeling,” *Toronto Daily Star*, October 20, 1967.

¹¹² SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

¹¹³ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

to assure the public that workers were aware of the serious repercussions that could result from a bank strike and that they thus viewed a strike as a last resort. Indeed, SEB members' aversion to strikes shaped their relationship with other labour organizations. In 1968, newly elected SEB president Robert Desharnais stated that C & D employees engaged in exploratory meetings with the CSN while researching unionization; however, "les contacts avec la CSN ont été très peu concluants. Les représentants . . . ont brandi dès le début la menace de la grève pour faire plier l'employeur. Cette façon de procéder n'a pas plu aux employés de la Banque d'épargne. Pour eux, dans le secteur bancaire, la grève demeure un moyen ultime. La CSN, pour les employés de banque, demeure associée au mot grève."¹¹⁴ SEB representatives insisted that the union "emploierait des mécanismes différentes de ceux qu'emploient actuellement les syndicats quand ils mènent des grèves totales."¹¹⁵ Though SEB officials did not affiliate with the CSN because of the federation's stance on strikes, negotiations with their employer would lead them to reconsider their attitude toward strikes and demonstrations.

The Struggle to Secure a Collective Agreement

Upon receiving certification, SEB members began to prepare for negotiations. They hoped to address several issues in their first collective agreement, including wages and hours of work. The main issue, however, was the composition of the bargaining unit. Though the CLRB ruling on SEB's application was significant, the board did not certify the unit as requested by the union. The CLRB included most non-managerial positions, including junior accountants, clerks, tellers, painters, and carpenters, but it excluded

¹¹⁴ SEPB 434, documents, "Les banques: la forteresse est ébranlée," *Le monde ouvrier* 53, no. 4 (April 1968): 12.

¹¹⁵ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, "Le premier syndicat d'employés de banque est fondé à Montréal," *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

accountants and assistant inspectors.¹¹⁶ Union members wanted these employees included in the unit for several reasons: accountants and assistant inspectors had been part of the unit proposed in the original application for certification; the bargaining unit included grade 11 employees, who were two levels higher than accountants (who were grade 9); several accountants were on the executive (including current union president Charles Bilodeau); members feared raiding; and rumours had circulated that the bank might decrease the number of monitors, which would significantly lower the union's membership.¹¹⁷ At a general assembly meeting on 17 October attended by almost 900 members, attendees unanimously resolved that the two groups of workers be included in the unit.¹¹⁸

SEB members sought to deal with several other issues as well. In regards to wages, the bargaining team hoped to win an increase of \$20 per week, about \$1,000 per year.¹¹⁹ They also wanted to improve the supplementary amount paid for evening work. Though the bank paid employees between \$12 and \$45 per month for the mandatory evening shifts they had to work five days per week, most of the employees who worked the shifts were at the lowest rank and thus earned only \$12 per month (\$0.60 per night). Moreover, the bank deducted \$2.40 from the pay cheques of employees who did not show up in the evening. As well, the bank refused to acknowledge the shift as overtime, even though it meant that employees' work was spread over twelve hours.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ LAC, CLRB fonds, RG 145, volume 262, "MINUTES OF THE 479TH MEETING OF THE CANADA LABOUR RELATIONS BOARD," September 27, 1967, original emphasis.

¹¹⁷ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, "Le premier syndicat d'employés de banque est fondé à Montréal," *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹¹⁸ SEPB 434, documents, summary of general assembly meeting, October 17, 1967.

¹¹⁹ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, "Le premier syndicat d'employés de banque est fondé à Montréal," *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹²⁰ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, "Local bank staff union certified," n.d., ca. October 1967.

Union members also called for an end to the long-standing policy that required employees to ask their branch manager for permission to marry.¹²¹ A vestige of the male breadwinner ideology, the marriage rule was an old one that had existed in many banks for years. According to one newspaper, it “applied mostly to young employees and was considered a safety device for both the bank and perhaps also the tyro who was about to jump into matrimony when the annual pay of a junior clerk was about \$300.”¹²² Though management often claimed that they no longer enforced the rule because bank salaries had increased, the policy nonetheless annoyed many employees.¹²³

Union members put forward proposals to address a number of other issues, too. They asked for seniority rights for promotions and transfers, and they called for an end to discriminatory promotion policies that limited women’s opportunities for advancement. As well, SEB members wanted three weeks of paid vacation after three years of employment, a guaranteed number of sick days, and all employees to be permanent to prevent reductions in their numbers.¹²⁴

SEB members also proposed new policies to assist employees who experienced armed robberies. At the time, Québec had been the “champion des vols à main armée” for several years, a title it would continue to hold well into the 1970s.¹²⁵ In 1980, the provincial government finally took steps to deal with the problem, establishing a working group to study why Québec consistently reported a significantly higher number of

¹²¹ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹²² SEPB 434, documents, “Union Will Ask Bank To Ring Out A Rule,” *Gazette* (Montréal), October 20, 1967.

¹²³ SEPB 434, documents, “CLERKS WANT TIME OFF AFTER BANK HOLDUPS,” newspaper clipping, n.d., ca. December 1967, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹²⁵ SEPB 434, documents, George Lamon, “Le Québec champion des vols à main armée,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 17, 1980.

robberies than other provinces.¹²⁶ For bank workers in particular, the frequent occurrence of armed robberies was a pressing health and safety issue. As such, SEB members asked that employees receive a paid leave after experiencing a robbery, especially an armed one.¹²⁷ In speaking with the press, SEB representatives cited a recent example in which management threatened to dock the pay of a teller who had experienced an armed robbery if the employee did not return to work that evening.¹²⁸

C & D management, however, had no interest in negotiating. On October 11, just five days after receiving certification from the CLRB, the union wrote to management to begin negotiations; yet in late October, SEB lawyer Philip Cutler reported that negotiations had yet to begin due to “stalling by bank officials.”¹²⁹ According to Cutler, over a period of six days the bank sent the union three letters outlining a variety of excuses as to why negotiations had to wait: “The first letter postponed discussion until a directors’ meeting had been held. The second said the matter was under consideration by solicitors for the bank and the third said the lawyers had not reached a decision.”¹³⁰

Not content to sit and wait, the union tried to pressure management to negotiate. On 24 October, bailiffs served the bank directors with a copy of SEB’s proposed agreement.¹³¹ SEB representatives also told the press that if an agreement was not

¹²⁶ For more information on armed robberies in Québec, see the various newspaper clippings on the subject in SEPB 434, documents.

¹²⁷ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, “CLERKS WANT TIME OFF AFTER BANK HOLDUPS,” n.d., ca. December 1967, original emphasis.

¹²⁸ SEPB 434, documents, Gilles Racine, “Le premier syndicat d’employés de banque est fondé à Montréal,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 19, 1967.

¹²⁹ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, letter from “Secretary” to “Sir,” December 4, 1967.

¹³⁰ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

¹³¹ SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

negotiated within twenty days, the union would pursue conciliation, which could potentially put them in a legal strike position. According to SEB lawyer Phil Cutler, “If the minister [of Labour] says there is no need [to establish a conciliation board], the employees are free to strike after seven days if a settlement has not been reached. If a conciliation board is established, the union is free to strike on the eighth day after the board’s report is submitted if an agreement has not been reached.”¹³²

A week later, the union stepped up the pressure. On 30 October, two OPEIU members set up an information picket outside of C & D’s head office on Montréal’s St. James Street. Union representatives were quick to point out, however, that “il n’ya pas de grève ni de ralentissement de travail.”¹³³ Rather, the picketers intended to pressure bank management to recognize the union. As one representative told the press, “We do not want by any means to hurt the bank or the business of its customers We merely want to let the people know that City Bank’s employe[e]s are the worst paid in the business.”¹³⁴ He warned that OPEIU members planned to extend their picketing to all 75 C & D branches within 24 hours. Indeed, over the course of the next month, many employees set up information pickets in front of their respective branches during their lunch hours.¹³⁵

With the bank still refusing to negotiate, on 2 November the union asked the Minister of Labour to establish a conciliation board. On 10 November, the director of the Conciliation and Arbitration Branch appointed C.E. Poirier as conciliator. According to

¹³² SEPB 434, documents, newspaper clipping, John Rolfe, “Staff at four Montreal banks seek union’s aid in organizing,” October 25, 1967.

¹³³ SEPB 434, documents, “Piquets d’information,” *La Presse* (Montréal), October 30, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, “Pickets appear at bank,” *Montreal Star*, October 31, 1967.

¹³⁴ SEPB 434, documents, “Pickets appear at bank,” *Montreal Star*, October 31, 1967.

¹³⁵ SEPB 434, documents, “Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Epargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977,” 1977.

union representatives, “We made ourselves available to Mr. Poirier for any meeting whatsoever, but . . . the Management of the Bank refused to participate in such a conciliation meeting.”¹³⁶

Instead, the bank continued its attempts to hinder the union, this time turning to the courts. In his research on the Ontario labour relations system in the decades after World War II, political scientist Charles Smith challenges “the notion that government and business had matured to accept collective bargaining in the post-war period.”¹³⁷ Rather, Smith contends, “[E]mployers continued to lobby for greater judicial interference in labour relations, seeking to extend the reach of courts and judges into the workplace.”¹³⁸

In the case of C & D, the bank asked the Québec Superior Court for a writ of prohibition against the CLRB shortly after the board released its decision. A writ of prohibition is a written order from an appellate court that “prohibits a lower court from acting because it does not have jurisdiction to do so.”¹³⁹ In short, the bank asked the court to overturn the certification order. C & D based its request on three points. First, it argued that the original certification application was invalid because two accountants had signed it and the CLRB had since excluded accountants from the bargaining unit. Second, the bank contended that the board erred by ruling on the status of the union. Therefore, the bank’s third point was that the board exceeded its jurisdiction. The court disagreed. On

¹³⁶ SEPB 434, documents, letter from “Secretary” to “Sir,” December 4, 1967.

¹³⁷ Charles W. Smith, “The Politics of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*: Business, Labour, and Government in the Consolidation of Post-War Industrial Relations, 1949–1961,” *Labour/Le Travail* 62 (Fall 2008): 110.

¹³⁸ Charles W. Smith, “‘Fairness and Balance?’: The Politics of Ontario’s Labour Relations Regime, 1949–1963” (PhD diss., York University, 2008), 34.

¹³⁹ Nolo’s Plain-English Law Dictionary, “writ of prohibition,” Legal Information Institute, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/writ_of_prohibition (accessed July 1, 2015).

30 October, Justice Albert Mayrand ruled against the bank due to a lack of supporting evidence, rejecting their petition with costs.¹⁴⁰

Though the court's ruling against the bank was a win for the union, as journalist John Schreiner pointed out, SEB members could still look forward to "what will probably be a long series of legal skirmishes."¹⁴¹ Indeed, Schreiner claimed that bank lawyers were already investigating the legality of the information picket set up by OPEIU representatives. True to form, in mid-November the bank renewed its legal challenge, announcing that it would appeal Mayrand's ruling.¹⁴² The bank also wrote to the Minister of Labour to ask that the conciliation process be suspended pending the outcome of the appeal, but the director of the Conciliation and Arbitration Branch denied their request. The conciliator scheduled a meeting between the bank and the union for December 12.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, after the bank failed to overturn the certification, management returned to manipulation and falsehoods. On 2 November, just three days after Justice Mayrand released his decision, C & D general manager F.X. Guérard circulated a letter to employees to inform them of "la vérité" of the situation between the union and the bank. Regarding certification, Guérard explained that the CLRB had agreed with the bank that

¹⁴⁰ SEPB 434, documents, "Bid By Bank To Halt Union Court Rejects," *Gazette* (Montréal), October 31, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, Justice Albert Mayrand, *LA BANQUE D'ÉPARGNE DE LA CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL, requérante contre LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES RELATIONS OUVRIERES et al intimés et LE SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYES DE LA BANQUE D'ÉPARGNE DE LA CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL et al mis en cause*, November 3, 1967, original emphasis.

¹⁴¹ SEPB 434, documents, John Schreiner, "FP reports on labor: Union membership reaches new high," *Financial Post* (Toronto), November 11, 1967.

¹⁴² SEPB 434, documents, "La FTQ ne permettra pas l'assassinat juridique du premier syndicat de banque," *Le Devoir* (Montréal), November 23, 1967. In March 1968, following the successful negotiation of a first collective agreement with SEB, the bank withdrew its appeal of the court's dismissal of its request for a writ of prohibition. SEPB 434, documents, Canada, Province de Québec, District de Montreal, Cour d'Appel, *LA BANQUE D'ÉPARGNE DE LA CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL, Appelante - vs - LE CONSEIL CANADIEN DES RELATIONS OUVRIERES & AL, Intimés - et - LE SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYES DE LA BANQUE D'ÉPARGNE DE LA CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL & AL - et - L'HONORABLE JOHN R. NICHOLSON, Mis-en cause*, March 12, 1968, original emphasis.

¹⁴³ SEPB 434, documents, revised page of letter from "Secretary" to "Sir," December 4, 1967, enclosed with letter from Michel Robert to Monsieur Faucher, December 4, 1967.

certain employees should be excluded from the bargaining unit, but unfortunately, “certains comptables et assistants-inspecteurs” refused to accept the board’s decision. He contested media reports that the courts had refused to consider the bank’s petition, stating that, in reality, the judge “a pris la requête de la Banque en délibéré et il rendra sa décision plus tard.” Guérard also challenged SEB’s claims that the bank was refusing to negotiate and was engaging in anti-union behaviour. He insisted that the bank “est prête à reconnaître les désirs légitimes de ses employés” but that it would only negotiate with the union once the courts confirmed its certification. In regards to the picketing that had recently been carried out at several branches, Guérard contended that “il s’agit là d’un geste irréfléchi de la part du comité du Syndicat et de ses conseillers, et que le piquetage ne peut nuire éventuellement aux employés de la Banque qu’à la Banque elle-même.”¹⁴⁴

Throughout November, the union continued to explore new ways to pressure management to negotiate. On 22 November, SEB officials circulated a letter to members updating them on the situation to date and asking their support for escalated action. The executive made several proposals, including intensifying their publicity campaign, taking a strike vote at the next general meeting, seeking support from the FTQ, and holding a demonstration in front of the bank’s head office. They also pointed out the hypocrisy of the bank. As evidence, they provided an excerpt from a management document in which the bank stated, “Notre politique, qui se conforme à la Loi, est la suivante: 5. – La Banque ne reconnaîtra pas de syndicat, à moins que celui-ci n’ait été accrédité par le Conseil des Relations ouvrières comme le représentant des employés.”¹⁴⁵ Given that the

¹⁴⁴ SEPB 434, documents, letter from F. X. Guérard to “Cher employé(e),” November 2, 1967.

¹⁴⁵ SEPB 434, documents, letter from “Votre Comité” to “tous les membres,” November 22, 1967.

CLRB had certified the union on 6 October, SEB officials posed the question, “A SAVOIRE QUI VEUT LA BAGARRE”?¹⁴⁶

In attempting to intensify their publicity campaign in order to increase the pressure on the bank, SEB members again received crucial support from the labour movement, this time from the FTQ. On 22 November, FTQ general secretary M. Gérard Rancourt told reporters, “La FTQ et ses affiliés ne permettront jamais l’assassinat juridique, par la Banque d’épargne de la cite et du district de Montréal, du premier syndicat veritable à s’implanter dans le secteur bancaire au Canada. Nous ne laisserons pas indéfiniment cet employeur choisir seul le terrain de l’affrontement qu’il semble rechercher avec le syndicat qui représente ses employés.”¹⁴⁷

The FTQ’s support continued throughout November. On 30 November, the organization issued a press release, announcing that SEB members would be demonstrating in front of the C & D head office on 1 December to protest their employer’s refusal to recognize the union. SEB president Charles Bilodeau explained that the demonstration was a final attempt to draw public attention to the problem, without engaging in an illegal strike that would harm customers and union members.¹⁴⁸ According to Rancourt, the demonstration had the full support of the FTQ, and he stressed that it was only the first step in a plan of escalation. Additionally, he warned that the bank’s efforts to use legal measures to delay bargaining were extremely dangerous,

¹⁴⁶ SEPB 434, documents, letter from “Votre Comité” to “tous les membres,” November 22, 1967, original emphasis.

¹⁴⁷ SEPB 434, documents, “La FTQ ne permettra pas l’assassinat juridique du premier syndicat de banque,” *Le Devoir* (Montréal), November 23, 1967.

¹⁴⁸ SEPB 434, documents, Fédération des travailleurs du Québec (FTQ), “Information,” November 30, 1967.

and he reminded the banks that they could face negative consequences from a labour dispute, including loss of clientele. In closing, Rancourt declared:

LA SYNDICALISATION DES EMPLOYÉS DU SECTEUR
BANCAIRE EST DEVENUE UN PROCESSUS IRRÉVERSIBLE EN
RAISON DES GAINS RÉALISÉS DEPUIS QUELQUE TEMPS PAR
LES TRAVAILLEURS SYNDIQUÉS DE L'INDUSTRIE ET DU
SECTEUR PUBLIC. IL SOUTIENT QU'EN DÉPIT DE LEUR
"STANDING" SOCIAL ET DU FAIT QU'ILS ONT LES MAINS
PROPRES, CES COLS-BLANCS SONT DEVENUS "LES
PROLÉTAIRES DE NOTRE TEMPS."¹⁴⁹

The protest began as scheduled at 4:15 p.m. on 1 December. According to media reports, over 700 demonstrators from across the city, many of them women, arrived by taxi. Carrying placards, they marched in front of the C & D head office on St. James Street and demanded that the bank recognize their union and begin negotiations. They also spoke with reporters and people passing by, explaining that they hoped to "inciter la clientele à faire pression auprès de la Banque."¹⁵⁰ Union representatives stated that they did not want to go on strike, "[b]ut if the bank refuses to recognize us we may have to set up a permanent picket line next week."¹⁵¹

In the news coverage of the protest, reporters placed great emphasis on the calm and orderly nature of the demonstration. An article in *The Globe and Mail* stated,

¹⁴⁹ SEPB 434, documents, "Information," November 30, 1967, original emphasis.

¹⁵⁰ SEPB 434, documents, "Première manifestation syndicale devant une banque," *Dimanche-Matin* (Montréal), December 3, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "Bank union's protest is an orderly affair," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 2, 1967; SEPB 434, documents, "Employe[e]s of bank in protest," *Montreal Star*, December 2, 1967.

¹⁵¹ SEPB 434, documents, "Bank union's protest is an orderly affair," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 2, 1967.

“[D]iscontented bank clerks set a new standard of good union behavior yesterday as they paraded for an hour around the head office of their employer.” The article contrasted the behaviour of the bank clerks with stereotypical picket line activity: “In keeping with the dignity of their occupation, the marching clerks did not shout any slogans impugning the intentions of the bank’s management. Nor did they prevent customers or head office employees from entering or leaving the building. Their leaders, in fact, apologetically expressed the hope that no further demonstrations will be necessary.”¹⁵² In sum, newspapers reported, “There were no incidents.”¹⁵³ Rather, when the demonstration ended, “the clerks again piled into taxis and good-humoredly headed back to serve clients during the evening.”¹⁵⁴

Following the demonstration, SEB representatives began preparations for the 12 December conciliation meeting. On 4 December, union representatives sent a letter to C & D board members, outlining the situation to date and asking them to rethink their attitude toward negotiations in light of their own policies. SEB representatives pointed to the bank policy mentioned in a document previously circulated to branch managers: “La Banque ne reconnaîtra pas de syndicat, à moins que celui-ci n’ait été accrédité par le Conseil des Relations Ouvrières comme le représentant des employés.” Given that the CLRB had certified the union on 6 October, SEB representatives asked that the bank adhere to its policy and begin negotiations. If not, they warned, “the Bank will leave us no other alternative but to go on strike when the Law will permit.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² SEPB 434, documents, “Bank union’s protest is an orderly affair,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 2, 1967.

¹⁵³ SEPB 434, documents, “Employe[e]s of bank in protest,” *Montreal Star*, December 2, 1967.

¹⁵⁴ SEPB 434, documents, “Bank union’s protest is an orderly affair,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 2, 1967.

¹⁵⁵ SEPB 434, documents, letter from “Secretary” to “Sir,” December 4, 1967.

Over the course of December, it became clear that a major obstacle to negotiations was the composition of the bargaining unit. According to C & D general manager F.X. Guérard, at the conciliation meeting on 12 December the bank told the union that it was ready to negotiate an agreement with the employees covered by the CLRB's certification order; however, the union presented an agreement that would cover accountants and inspectors as well.¹⁵⁶ As such, the meeting ended without a resolution. Following the conciliation meeting, on 14 December a group of employees, some of whom were accountants, met with the C & D president, E. Donald Gray-Donald. At the meeting, the employees threatened to stop work unless the bank agreed to include accountants in the negotiations. The following day, 15 December, another group of employees (several of whom had attended the meeting with Gray-Donald) met with Guérard and informed him that they had asked the conciliator to suspend negotiations between the bank and the union until 22 December and that the conciliator had agreed. At the meeting with Guérard, the employees repeated their demand that accountants be included in the bargaining unit.¹⁵⁷

Following the meetings, on 17 December SEB leaders circulated notice of a 21 December general assembly meeting. The agenda for that meeting included discussion of the executive committee's efforts to include accountants in the bargaining unit, empowering the executive committee to enter into negotiations with the bank, and setting the bargaining agenda. Union leaders declared, "Cette assemblée est certainement la plus importante depuis la formation de votre syndicat. Soyez tous présent."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ SEPB 434, documents, letter from F.X. Guérard to "Cher employé(e)," December 19, 1967.

¹⁵⁷ SEPB 434, documents, letter from F.X. Guérard to "Cher employé(e)," December 19, 1967.

¹⁵⁸ SEPB 434, documents, "TRES IMPORTANT," December 17, 1967, original emphasis.

In advance of the meeting, C & D general manager F.X. Guérard sent another letter to employees to update them on labour-management relations and to counter rumours that the bank was unwilling to negotiate. According to Guérard, the bank opposed including accountants and inspectors because it believed these employees exercised supervisory duties over other workers. Indeed, in its submission to the CLRB regarding the certification application, C & D had put forward the same argument, leading the board to exclude these employees from the bargaining unit. Though Guérard insisted that inspectors and accountants could not be included because of their duties, he did not provide any specifics; he simply claimed that the bank planned for accountants to take on more management duties in the future. Nevertheless, Guérard insisted that the bank was ready and willing to negotiate with the employees covered by the CLRB certification order *and* with accountants and inspectors, though only as separate units.¹⁵⁹

It is unclear what occurred at the 21 December union meeting; however, the bank and union met the following day, 22 December. Negotiations continued for nearly two months, and union members subsequently described them as “ardues et longues.”¹⁶⁰ By the middle of February, however, the two sides had reached a deal. On Wednesday, 21 February, SEB representatives announced that the bargaining team had negotiated a three-year agreement with the bank.¹⁶¹ A membership meeting would be held the following Monday to vote on ratification of the agreement and affiliation to the OPEIU.

¹⁵⁹ SEPB 434, documents, letter from F.X. Guérard to “Cher employé(e),” December 19, 1967.

¹⁶⁰ SEPB 434, documents, “Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977,” 1977.

¹⁶¹ SEPB 434, documents, “Les ‘premiers’ syndiqués des banques obtiennent une hausse de \$25 semaine en 30 mois,” *La Presse* (Montréal), February 22, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, “New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968.

SEB affiliated to the OPEIU on 1 March 1968, only a few weeks after concluding negotiations for their first agreement. With affiliation, SEB became SEBE 434.¹⁶²

In many ways, the SEB agreement represented a significant victory. Employees maintained their existing benefits, such as sick leave and access to retirement and insurance plans, as well as various banking-related benefits. Additionally, the agreement improved wages, overtime pay, grievances, promotions, evening work, and vacations and other benefits. In terms of wages, the average salary of C & D bank clerks rose \$25 per week, from \$63 per week to \$88, a 40 per cent increase. As well, overtime work would be remunerated at time and a half during the week and double-time on weekends. The agreement also established a clear grievance system and stipulated that promotions be based on seniority and that female employees have “equal chances of advancement.”¹⁶³ In addition, employees would receive three weeks of vacation after five years of employment with the bank. Perhaps the most significant part of the new agreement was the inclusion of a clause stating that the bank would alter its business hours: one month after the agreement was signed, employees would no longer be required to work evenings.¹⁶⁴

Though SEB members made many gains with the first agreement, they were unable to include accountants in the bargaining unit. Instead, accountants and assistant accountants formed a separate unit. According to media reports, by the time news of SEB

¹⁶² SEPB 434, documents, letter from J. H. Hicks to Robert Desharnais, April 11, 1968.

¹⁶³ SEPB 434, documents, “City & District First To Sign Union Pact,” *Gazette* (Montréal), February 22, 1968.

¹⁶⁴ SEPB 434, documents, “New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, “Premier contrat de travail dans le secteur bancaire: salaires haussés de 40 p.c.,” *Le Devoir* (Montréal), February 22, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, “City & District First To Sign Union Pact,” *Gazette* (Montréal), February 22, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, “Les ‘premiers’ syndiqués des banques obtiennent une hausse de \$25 semaine en 30 mois,” *La Presse* (Montréal), February 22, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, “Hausse moyenne de 40% de salaires: La première convention collective couvrant des employés de banque signée avec la Banque d’Épargne,” *Montréal-Matin*, February 23, 1968.

members' contract broke, 95 per cent of the bank's 110 accountants and assistant accountants had voted to form a separate union and affiliate with the OPEIU. Union representatives stated that the bank accepted the new union "en principe" and that negotiations would begin before the end of the month.¹⁶⁵ The accountants' union signed a collective agreement with the bank on 1 April 1968; however, it is unclear whether the union ever submitted a certification application to the CLRB.¹⁶⁶

Still, SEB members had much to celebrate about their contract. As accountant and former SEB president Charles Bilodeau told the press, "For a first contract, this one is very good." Moreover, Bilodeau felt confident that "[e]mployees of other banks and of the caisses populaires will be very tempted to join our union when they hear about this contract." He added, proudly, "We will now be the best-paid bank employees in Canada."¹⁶⁷ New SEB president Robert Desharnais echoed Bilodeau's comments about the contract's potential to inspire other workers to unionize.¹⁶⁸ To help the work along, Bilodeau told the press that SEB planned "to hire full-time organizers who will try to recruit members among the Montreal-area staff of other chartered banks."¹⁶⁹ In fact, he

¹⁶⁵ SEPB 434, documents, "Hausse moyenne de 40% de salaires: La première convention collective couvrant des demployés de banque signee avec la Banque d'Épargne," *Montreal-Matin*, February 23, 1968; SEPB 434, documents, "New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968.

¹⁶⁶ SEPB 434, documents, *ENTENTE intervenue à Montréal ce 1ième jour de avril 1968. ENTRE: LA BANQUE D'EPARGNE DE LA CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL ci-après appelée la "Banque" d'une part - et - SYNDICAT DES COMPTABLES DE LA BANQUE D'EPARGNE DE LAT CITE ET DU DISTRICT DE MONTREAL ci après appelé le "Groupe" d'autre part*, April 1, 1968, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁷ SEPB 434, documents, "New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968. This article refers to Bilodeau as the "union president," implying that he was still SEB president; however, other articles published around the same time refer to Robert Desharnais as SEB president. Though Bilodeau had been SEB president, he was an accountant and accountants had since formed their own local. Therefore, it is likely that Desharnais had replaced Bilodeau as SEB president and that Bilodeau was instead serving as president of the new union for accountants and assistant accountants.

¹⁶⁸ SEPB 434, documents, "Les 'premiers' syndiqués des banques obtiennent une hausse de \$25 semaine en 30 mois," *La Presse* (Montréal), February 22, 1968.

¹⁶⁹ SEPB 434, documents, "New bank-clerk union wins \$1,150 to \$2,575," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 17, 1968.

claimed that employees from BCN, Bank of Montreal, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and Banque Provinciale du Canada had already approached the union.

The excitement over the SEB contract and the potential for future organizing continued into March, as the labour movement, once again, began to discuss plans to unionize bank workers. In mid-March, newspapers reported that CLC and OPEIU officials would be meeting in Montréal the following month to discuss plans for further organizing in the banks. OPEIU organizer Roméo Corbeil told the press, “[I]t is only a matter of time before all Canadian bank employees are organized.” Despite his enthusiasm, Corbeil did not indicate when or where the next campaign would begin but stated that the OPEIU would “try to consolidate its base in Quebec before branching out,” as “Quebec workers are more responsive to trade unions and it is easier to organize in a concentrated area.”¹⁷⁰ Newspapers thus surmised that the union would try to organize the Banque Provinciale du Canada next, given the bank’s size (roughly 4,500 employees) and geographic concentration in Québec.

In the following months, commentators continued to weigh in on the significance and potential of the SEB victory, including those who had participated in previous organizing efforts. On 21 September 1968, Eileen (Tallman) Sufrin wrote to CLC director of organization Joe MacKenzie about bank worker organization, enclosing copies of the booklet on the first Canadian bank strike and an organizing pamphlet from the 1940s campaign. Sufrin thought the materials “might provide something for the record and I am sure that a lot of the members of the Montreal bank local are not aware

¹⁷⁰ SEPB 434, documents, “Unions plan new drive to organize bank workers,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 18, 1968.

how bad things were 25 years ago, because in view of the low pay and marriage prohibitions, they probably were not fathered by bank clerks!”¹⁷¹

News of SEB’s success also spread south of the border. On 11 May 1968, *AFL-CIO News* ran a lengthy article about the SEB drive and subsequent organizing among young bank workers in the United States. According to the article, in the month and a half since SEB members had signed their contract, employees of the Trust Company of New Jersey in Jersey City had voted to join the OPEIU, and bank employees from across the United States had contacted the union to inquire about organizing. OPEIU officials posited that such developments point to “an entirely new attitude that has prevailed in banking since post-World War II days” and “indicate the start of a new era in the labor movement.” Interestingly, OPEIU president Howard Coughlin claimed “that a complete switch in” the union’s “own outlook may be a key factor”: though union officials had previously “concluded that young people ‘find unionism unattractive, unexciting . . . uninteresting and are more concerned with having a good time,’” Coughlin admitted that over the past two years his perspective had shifted significantly. So much so, that the union president now believed, “not only that bank employe[e]s in North America are soon going to be organized, but that this job will be done by enthusiastic young men and women in their late teens and early twenties.”¹⁷² In sum, judging by the energy and enthusiasm expressed by bank workers and union officials in the months after the SEB

¹⁷¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390-W. C. Org. 7 La banque Provinciale du Canada, P. Q., letter from Eileen [Sufrin] to Joe [MacKenzie], September 21, 1968.

¹⁷² SEPB 434, documents, “Young Workers Seen Launching New Era of Unionism in Banks,” *Washington (DC) AFL-CIO News*, May 11, 1968. For more evidence of bank worker organizing in the United States in the late 1960s, see the official newsletter of the OPEIU, *White Collar*. Office and Professional Employees International Union, “White Collar,” *Office and Professional Employees International Union*, <http://www.opeiu.org/WhiteCollar.aspx> (accessed July 25, 2015).

victory, bank worker unionization in Canada and the United States seemed well on its way.

Conclusion

The establishment, certification, and first contract of the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal were significant developments in the history of bank worker unionization in Canada. In accomplishing these tasks, SEB became the first union of North American bank workers to have their work covered by a collective agreement. Several factors contributed to SEB's ability to succeed where other labour organizations had failed. Most notably, SEB's experience differed in that the vast majority of C & D employees supported the union and the regional labour movement provided crucial support. As well, employees in the upper levels of the workplace hierarchy, in particular accountants and inspectors, led the union drive, which may have encouraged lower-level employees to sign up. Although SEB encountered some of the same obstacles that hindered earlier organizing efforts, broad-based support helped the union to counter management's efforts to thwart unionization and to force the employer to negotiate.

Given the historical significance of the SEB victory, the organizing drive and negotiations provide important lessons about bank worker unions and white-collar worker organizing. The SEB success indicated rank-and-file enthusiasm for unionization that inspired others. News of SEB's achievement quickly spread across Canada and the United States, and its efforts undoubtedly motivated other bank workers to explore unionization. After SEB members secured their contract, other groups of C & D employees organized. In 1968, accountants formed their own union, and in June 1969,

non-unionized management personnel at C & D formed an “association du personnel de cadres de la Banque d’Epargne.”¹⁷³ Though the majority of Canadian bank workers remain unorganized today, SEB continues to exist as the Syndicat des employées et employés professionnels-les et de bureau 434. The local thus proves that unions can survive in the banking sector and that bank workers can use their collective power to improve their wages and working conditions.

The SEB story also speaks to the potential of grassroots, worker-led organizing in the white-collar sector. Similar to the Kitimat case, workers led the SEB drive and the labour movement supported it. As Roméo Corbeil wrote in a booklet celebrating SEBE 434’s tenth anniversary, “Tout ceci a été accompli avec le support du Congrès du Travail du Canada, la Fédération des Travailleurs du Québec et l’Union Internationale des Employés Professionnels et de Bureau; le mouvement syndical était engagé à supporter votre syndicat et à ne point permettre l’empêchement par la Banque de la formation de votre Syndicat.”¹⁷⁴ The SEB story thus serves as an important reminder that workers have the skills and knowledge to organize their workplaces and that when they do, the assistance of union and labour movement officials can play a crucial role in shaping the outcome. This is not to say that large labour unions and federations have nothing to offer workers. Rather, it shows that when these groups work together, they can make great gains.

The issues of leadership and collaboration and top-down versus grassroots organizing would prove to be crucial factors in the next substantial effort to unionize

¹⁷³ SEPB 434, documents, “Association du personnel de cadres de la Banque d’Epargne,” *Le lien* 1, no. 3 (July 1969): 2.

¹⁷⁴ SEPB 434, documents, “Le Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d’Epargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal Local 434 – U.I.E.P.B. – C.T.C. – F.T.Q., 1967–1977,” 1977.

Canadian bank workers. Undertaken in the mid-1970s, this effort involved multiple unions, spanned several provinces, and produced a landmark legal ruling; yet it failed to establish a significant union presence in the banks. Nevertheless, in terms of scope, it remains the most significant union organizing effort in the Canadian banking industry.

CHAPTER 5: THE BATTLE FOR CANADIAN BANK WORKERS IN THE 1970S

Introduction

On 20 May 1966, the director of District 6 of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), Larry Sefton, wrote to the executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to inquire about the requirements for securing certification for a union of bank workers. He asked, “Is it necessary that all branch banks in Canada be organized before certification is obtained or all branches in a province, or what?”¹ Sefton’s question reveals that in the seven years since the failed 1959 Kitimat application, organizers had made little progress in ascertaining what the Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB) would consider an appropriate bargaining unit in the banking industry. Furthermore, according to Sefton, the certification process was not the only issue in need of clarification. In his opinion, the issue of jurisdiction – a union’s assertion of the right to be the sole organization responsible for organizing and representing a particular group of workers – needed to be resolved. As such, Sefton emphasized the need for labour officials to figure out which union would organize bank workers: “Sooner or later we are going to have to have some discussions about who will tackle the financial institutions in this country.”²

¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Larry Sefton to William Dodge, May 20, 1966.

² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, letter from Larry Sefton to William Dodge, May 20, 1966.

In the following years, the Canadian labour movement had many discussions about the need to “tackle the financial institutions,” often in response to inquiries from bank employees. Unfortunately, though most labour officials agreed on why bank workers should unionize, they disagreed on the matters of who, what, when, where, and how. Bank workers, however, refused to wait. In the latter half of the 1970s, while much of the labour movement continued to dither over the details, hundreds of bank employees joined the few unions willing and able to organize them. Indeed, the greatest surge in bank worker unionization in Canadian history occurred during this period. In some cases, workers joined such large, established unions and labour federations as the Retail Clerks’ International Association (RCIA) and the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN). Most, however, signed up with new smaller, independent unions, such as the Canadian Union of Bank Employees (CUBE) and the Service, Office, and Retail Workers’ Union of Canada (SORWUC).

Initially, the unions and labour organizations involved in bank worker organizing during this period worked separately but alongside one another, sharing resources while organizing in different provinces. Things changed drastically in 1977 though, when SORWUC and CUBE successfully challenged the 1959 CLRB ruling on single-branch bargaining units. With branch certification now possible, the CLC and other large unions and labour organizations that had historically failed or not bothered to organize bank workers turned their attention to the banking sector. In the ensuing months, bitter inter-union battles erupted, most notably between SORWUC and the CLC. As unions expended time, energy, and resources debating who had jurisdiction over bank employees, the banks waged a steady war against unionization in the branches, in the

media, and in the courts and, in the end, emerged victorious. By the end of the decade, SORWUC had abandoned its bargaining units, CLC representatives were struggling to negotiate contracts and recruit new members, and bank workers, for the most part, remained unorganized.

To gain a better understanding of the union drives undertaken in the banking industry in the 1970s and why they failed, in this chapter I examine the origins and development of the major organizing efforts and the tensions between them. Though several groups organized bank workers during this period, I focus on three key ones: CUBE, SORWUC, and the CLC. CUBE and SORWUC challenged the 1959 CLRB ruling on single-branch certification, and SORWUC subsequently organized the most bank workers during this period; the CLC is the country's largest labour organization and launched a national campaign to organize bank workers in the wake of CUBE and SORWUC's success. Moreover, the CLC and SORWUC engaged in the most hostile and public battle for bank workers and the fall-out from the dispute had significant implications for bank employees and the labour movement. The conflict between SORWUC and the CLC thus merits closer analysis.

The labour movement's inability and unwillingness to overcome ideological differences and jurisdictional issues played a key role in the failure of the 1970s drives. SORWUC's status as an independent feminist union focused on organizing women workers in a variety of sectors positioned it as radically different from most other unions and helped the union organize bank workers. Its independence, ideology, and success, however, also led CLC officials to view the feminist union as a threat. Rather than support SORWUC and build on its initial progress, CLC leaders chose to establish a new

bank workers' organizing committee, to isolate the independent union, and to defend representatives and affiliates who attempted to undermine it. Without support from the CLC, SORWUC leaders felt unable to counter the banks' efforts to thwart unionization; the union withdrew from negotiations and cancelled its certifications. The CLC continued with its campaign, but the congress's strategy proved less successful than SORWUC's; the banks' anti-union behaviour compounded matters. The battle over bank workers that occurred in the 1970s thus highlights the potential of grassroots, feminist unionism; the problems with jurisdiction and top-down organizing; and the importance of labour movement solidarity and support for new ways of organizing.

I first discuss the CLC's effort to organize bank workers in the early 1970s as part of the congress's campaign to unionize white-collar workers. The campaign failed to make much progress in the banking industry, but it set the stage for and cast a shadow over the flurry of organizing that followed. I then look at the grassroots organizing drives undertaken by two new unions, SORWUC and CUBE; these drives resulted in the 1977 CLRB ruling that a single bank branch was an appropriate bargaining unit. Next, I examine the CLC's renewed efforts to unionize bank workers in light of the CLRB decision. The congress's decision to mount a centralized top-down campaign rather than support the efforts of groups already organizing bank workers led to a number of conflicts between the CLC and affiliated and non-affiliated unions. In the remainder of the chapter, I analyze the tensions that developed between the CLC and SORWUC in particular, SORWUC's decision to withdrawal from negotiations and cancel its certifications, and the CLC's efforts to continue organizing after SORWUC stopped. I

conclude by commenting on the implications of the battle for bank employees for workers, unions, and the history of labour organizing in Canada.

The CLC and White-Collar Organizing in the Early 1970s

Aside from the successful unionization of approximately 1,100 employees at the Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal in Québec in the late 1960s, there had been few developments in bank worker unionization in the 1960s. Moreover, following the victory in Québec, labour bureaucrats quickly reverted to their wait-and-see approach, preferring to wait for a time when “conditions are right.”³ In the spring of 1968, officials from the CLC and the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) discussed organizing employees of Canada’s chartered banks⁴ and conducted research on bank workers.⁵ Nevertheless, similar to past efforts, the 1968 initiative quickly petered out. A short hand-written note stapled to the minutes of a meeting between the two groups read, “Attempted to arrange meeting in August to review the current position . . . but unsuccessfull [*sic*] No contact on matter since then.”⁶

The issue of bank worker unionization continued to arise every few years, however, often in response to inquiries from bank employees. In December 1970, a

³ Syndicat des Employées et Employés Professionnels-les et de Bureau 434, documentS d'ARCHiVES [*sic*] 434, “Unions plan new drive to organize bank workers,” *Toronto Daily Star*, March 18, 1968.

⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390-W. C. Org. 7 La banque Provinciale du Canada, P. Q., *Joint Meeting of the Officers of the CLC's NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON WHITE COLLAR ORGANIZATION and representatives of the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) concerning the organization of Canadian Chartered Banks*, April 18, 1968, original emphasis.

⁵ See, for example, LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390 W. C. Org. 5 Bank of Montreal, P. Q., memorandum from Rhéal Bastien to “Jos. MacKenzie,” March 29, 1968; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390 W. C. Org. 5 Bank of Montreal, P. Q., memorandum from Rhéal Bastien to John Simonds, April 26, 1968; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 453, file 17, memorandum from Terry Morley to Larry Sefton, April 30, 1968.

⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 202, file 390-W. C. Org. 7 La banque Provinciale du Canada, P. Q., handwritten note, October 23, 1968.

representative for the British Columbia Federation of Labour wrote to CLC white collar co-ordinator Art Kube to ask whether the congress intended to organize bank workers; the federation had been contacted by several bank workers who wanted to form a union.⁷ In November 1972, a regional director of organization wrote to the CLC director of the Department of Organization to determine if representatives should follow up with bank workers interested in organizing in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.⁸ Bank employees also contacted the CLC directly.⁹

As in years past, CLC officials responded to inquiries with explanations about the challenges of bank worker unionization and assurances that the congress was conducting research and hoped to launch an organizing campaign at some point in the future. Kube claimed that the issue of certification continued to be a significant obstacle. He explained that “the only way you can be certified for a particular bank is by signing up a majority of bank employees of a bank division” and that “an organizing drive of this magnitude is a very large undertaking.” Therefore, it would “be quite some time yet before such a project is undertaken.”¹⁰

Other high-ranking CLC officials expressed similar sentiments. In November 1972, director of organization Joe MacKenzie argued that the congress “should take it fairly easy” on bank worker organizing as they were “not at all sure as to what would constitute an acceptable bargaining unit before the Canada Labour Relations Board.”

⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from Colin Gabelmann to Art Kube, December 7, 1970.

⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from Ed Johnston to Joe MacKenzie, November 15, 1972.

⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from John Joice to “The Secretary, Canadian Labour Congress,” January 4, 1971; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from N. Ian Cameron to A. Kube, February 2, 1971; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from Susan Henry to A. Kube, n.d., ca. June 1972.

¹⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from Arthur Kube to Colin Gabelmann, December 10, 1970.

Rather than sign up interested bank employees, MacKenzie urged representatives to gather information quietly about the structure of the banks and possible contacts.

Demonstrating the long shadow cast by previous CLC efforts to organize bank workers, MacKenzie explained, “Our experience in the effort made in British Columbia some years ago causes us to approach the area of banks with extreme care.”¹¹ CLC officials’ comments to regional representatives and bank workers who contacted the congress indicate that perhaps the CLC was taking too much care: they appeared unable or unwilling to see the disjuncture between their professed goal of organizing bank workers and their lack of action on the matter.

Given the persistent interest from bank workers and the steady increase in the number of people working in the office and professional sectors, the CLC could not delay dealing with the issue of bank worker unionization much longer. Already, some bank employees had expressed frustration over the labour movement’s reluctance to organize the banks. In a letter to the CLC, one worker argued that the main obstacle was actually employer hostility and that delaying unionization only exacerbated matters. In calling on the CLC to organize the banks, the worker highlighted a key dilemma: “there must be a large extent of latent support that will not be uncovered until such time as a properly organised [*sic*] union has been created. We have, therefore, a most vicious circle established and one that will not be broke through until sufficient members of the banks’ employees realise [*sic*] they are losing out in the long run.”¹²

¹¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, microfilm reel H-593, letter from J. MacKenzie to Ed Johnston, November 22, 1972.

¹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 456, file 18, letter from John Joice to Arthur Kube, February 11, 1971.

The CLC's reluctance to establish a union for bank workers reflected the general lack of new organizing by the Canadian labour movement in the 1970s, a period in which workers and unions found themselves on the defensive. In the early 1970s, changes in the global economy and the policies and practices of the Canadian state led to an economic slow-down. By 1973, Canada, like much of the Western world, had entered a recession. Employers and governments looked to counter declining profits by increasing productivity and cutting wages and benefits. The result was an intensification of class conflict. Workers and employers clashed in a record number of strikes and lockouts, and in the public sector the state increased its use of back-to-work legislation.¹³ The rising unemployment rate compounded matters.¹⁴

In such a climate, the Canadian labour movement struggled to gain new members, especially in the private sector. Though the national unionization rate increased in the 1960s and 1970s, most of the growth occurred in the public and para-public sectors.¹⁵ In the private sector, union density decreased, as employers cut or relocated jobs in industries with historically high unionization rates, such as resource extraction and

¹³ 1,218 strikes and lockouts occurred in 1974, more than any other year in the twentieth century. Statistics Canada, no date, "Number of Strikes and Lockouts, Employers and Workers Involved and Time Loss, Canada, 1901 to 1975 (table)," *Statistics Canada*, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-516-x/sectione/4147438-eng.htm#6> (accessed November 7, 2015); Ernest B. Akyeampong, "Time Lost Due to Industrial Disputes," *Perspectives: On Labour and Income* 2, no. 8 (August 2001), <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/00801/5881-eng.html> (accessed November 8, 2015). Between 1970 and 1979, federal and provincial governments passed back-to-work legislation 41 times, up from just six times in the period 1950 to 1964. Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 26–27.

¹⁴ In 1966, the national unemployment rate was roughly 3.75 per cent; in 1976, it was nearly 8 per cent. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc. 1992), 271.

¹⁵ Between 1961 and 1980, the unionization rate in Canada increased from 30.6 per cent to 35.8 per cent. In the public sector in particular, union density increased from 29 per cent to 56 per cent. Jean-Guy Bergeron, "Unionization in the Private Service Sector" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 12.

manufacturing.¹⁶ Furthermore, continuing the trend of the past few decades, more and more workers were donning white collars instead of blue ones. By the early 1970s, clerical workers formed “the largest occupational grouping in the country, with over 1.3 million working members.”¹⁷ As in other periods, the unionization rate among private sector white-collar workers remained extremely low.¹⁸

In light of the changing nature of the Canadian work force, labour officials realized that they needed to organize new sectors. Thus in the fall of 1972, CLC officers began laying the groundwork for a major white-collar campaign. The campaign would begin in Toronto due to the high concentration of office workers in the downtown core, but it would eventually expand to other parts of the country. A new two-cent per capita tax created at the previous CLC convention would provide an estimated \$300,000 in annual funding for the campaign. The 26 member unions of the congress’s White-Collar Committee pledged their support and offered their own full-time organizers. Workers would join a new CLC union chartered for the campaign: the Association of Commercial and Technical Employees (ACTE).¹⁹

The campaign began in January 1973 and got off to a good start. By mid-February, organizers claimed that they had already received hundreds of inquiries.²⁰ The

¹⁶ The private sector unionization rate in Canada decreased from 30 per cent to 26 per cent between 1961 and 1980. Bergeron, “Unionization in the Private Service Sector,” 12.

¹⁷ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 323.

¹⁸ For example, in 1961, less than 1 per cent of finance, insurance, and real estate employees were unionized. By 1975, the unionization rate in these sectors was still just 1.4 per cent. George Sayers Bain, *Union Growth and Public Policy in Canada* (Ottawa: Labour Canada, 1978), 10.

¹⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 21, Wilfred List, “Labor Congress selects Toronto for white-collar union campaign,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 10, 1973.

²⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 20, Wilfred List, “Get into the ACTE: New union uses new approach to attract members,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), February 15, 1973.

number of inquiries had risen to 2,000 by the middle of April.²¹ That month, ACTE filed its first certification application, asking to represent 122 employees of the Canadian Underwriters Association in Toronto.²² In May, ACTE filed two more applications for certification.²³ As the months wore on, however, progress slowed. In November, ACTE organizers reported that in the previous three months the Toronto office had received only 82 inquiries. Organizers were “currently processing” ten and had referred fourteen to other CLC affiliates, but the majority of inquiries were listed as on “hold for future reference” or “dead.”²⁴

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1973, CLC officials had decided to expand the campaign to other parts of the country. Given the past failures in the banks, organizers had initially focused on insurance workers and other types of financial workers,²⁵ but things changed when the campaign turned westward. In January 1975, CLC representatives in Vancouver began working with employees of a Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC) data processing centre that employed approximately 600 workers.²⁶ On 24 February, the CLC granted the group a charter as ACTE Local 1718.²⁷ The CLC officially had a local of bank workers.

²¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 20, David Pike, “A white collar union’s ‘under-cover’ drive to organize Metro” *Toronto Star*, April 12, 1973.

²² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 20, David Pike, “A white collar union’s ‘under-cover’ drive to organize Metro” *Toronto Star*, April 12, 1973.

²³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 20, Donald Rumball, “White collar union vs financial world,” *Financial Post* (Toronto), May 5, 1973.

²⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 373, file D46A, memo from P. Walsh to J. MacKenzie and W. Dodge, November 1, 1973.

²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 24, “Initial White Collar Organizing Progress,” August 22, 1972.

²⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, letter from T. C. Gooderham to Joe MacKenzie, January 22, 1975.

²⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, letter from J. MacKenzie to Local Union Secretary-Treasurer, February 24, 1975.

In the following weeks, Local 1718 tried to sign up more members, but several obstacles hindered their efforts and ultimately contributed to the campaign's failure. Organizers struggled to obtain a list of employees' names and contact information. The bank assigned employees account numbers and in most instances referred to employees by account numbers rather than by names. As well, organizers had difficulty meeting workers, as the data centre operated twenty-four hours per day and many employees worked part-time.²⁸ Language barriers also posed a problem; many of the employees were new immigrants who did not speak English. To deal with this issue, organizers enlisted help from members who spoke the necessary languages.

Employer opposition compounded matters. Workers claimed that managers held lengthy meetings with individual employees to question them about the union, pressured staff to quit the union, and told employees that union members would be blacklisted.²⁹ Management also used more subtle tactics, such as allowing an anti-union poem to remain posted on workplace bulletin boards but immediately removing any union literature.³⁰ In January 1976, a year into the drive, management fired the local vice-president and cut the hours of the local president. Though the union filed a complaint of unfair labour practice with the CLRB and the two sides settled the complaint in July, the campaign struggled and appears to have petered out soon after.³¹

²⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, letter from R. O'Connor to Tom Gooderham, April 7, 1975.

²⁹ University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections (UBCL RBSC); Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC), Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, loose documents, Charlotte Johnson, "Organizing at C.I.B.C. Data Centre with A.C.T.E. '75 - '76," n.d.

³⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, memorandum from Rick O'Connor to Tom Gooderham, June 26, 1975.

³¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, letter from Gavin Hume to Association of Commercial and Technical Employees, July 19, 1976.

By the fall of 1976, the CLC white-collar campaign had achieved little in the two and a half years since its launch. Still, it remains significant to the history of bank worker unionization as a prelude to the flurry of organizing activity that occurred in the banks between 1976 and 1979. In debates amongst CLC affiliates over who should organize bank workers, many people repeatedly pointed to the failed white-collar campaign as evidence that the CLC was incapable of organizing this segment of the labour force. Moreover, some of the workers involved in the ACTE campaign, such as the CIBC data centre employees, would be key players in the next push to unionize bank workers. The next time, however, many would join a new small, independent union: SORWUC.

Bank Workers Organize

At the same time that the CLC's white-collar campaign was losing steam, two new unions were getting busy in the banks in western and central Canada. In British Columbia (BC), bank workers signed up with the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada. In Ontario (ON), they joined the Canadian Union of Bank Employees.

News of CUBE first broke in July 1976, when the Canadian Chemical Workers Union (CCWU) announced that approximately 60 bank employees had established the union in Simcoe, ON; most of the employees were women frustrated by low wages and gender inequality.³² The CCWU was an independent Canadian union founded by a former member of the International Chemical Workers Union, Robert Stewart, after he was removed from his executive position in the international union for pushing for

³² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, "Bank employees form union at Simcoe," *Brantford Expositor*, n.d., ca. July 1976.

Canadian autonomy.³³ In July 1976, one of the Simcoe bank employees, who was married to a CCWU steward, invited union officials to meet with several of her co-workers after the latter had expressed an interest in unionization.³⁴ At a meeting on July 26, the workers decided to unionize.³⁵ According to Stewart, the CCWU would help CUBE establish itself and then the new union would become an independent CCWU affiliate.³⁶

SORWUC differed drastically from CUBE and indeed most other unions. Formed in Vancouver in October 1972, it was an independent feminist union. SORWUC's founding members were influenced by and sought to combine the theories and practices of the labour and women's movements. They believed that unionization would help women workers address inequality, but frustrating experiences with male unionists had led them to conclude that women needed their own organizations. As a feminist union, SORWUC focused on organizing in sectors with predominantly female workers, such as clerical, retail, hospitality, and social services. Over the course of the union's fourteen-year existence, it organized hundreds of workers, often in workplaces that other unions claimed could not be unionized.³⁷

SORWUC became involved with bank worker organizing in the summer of 1976. The union had already signed up a few bank workers by leafleting the business district in

³³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, "Bank employees form union at Simcoe," *Brantford Expositor*, n.d., ca. July 29, 1976; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, Ron Blunn, "Chartered banks face strongest union challenge yet," *Calgary Herald*, August 17, 1976.

³⁴ Graham S. Lowe, *The Canadian Union of Bank Employees: A Case Study* (Toronto: Centre for Industrial Relations, University of Toronto, 1978), 12. Lowe provides a detailed analysis of the Canadian Union of Bank Employees organizing drive in Simcoe.

³⁵ Lowe, *The Canadian Union of Bank Employees*, 13.

³⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, "Bank employees form union," *Simcoe Reformer*, n.d., ca. July 1976.

³⁷ For further discussion of how and why SORWUC differed from much of the Canadian labour movement, see Julia Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986," *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 23–65.

downtown Vancouver, part of their efforts to reach female office workers.³⁸ In July, several employees from a Vancouver CIBC branch met with SORWUC representatives to discuss unionizing. By 9 August, half of the branch's employees had signed union cards.³⁹

SORWUC and CUBE both submitted applications for certification to the CLRB in August 1976. CUBE submitted two applications: it asked the board to certify it to represent approximately sixty employees at two branches of the Bank of Nova Scotia, located in Simcoe and Port Dover, ON, respectively.⁴⁰ SORWUC submitted their certification application on 16 August, asking to represent a group of twenty bank workers at the Victory Square Branch of the CIBC, located in the heart of Vancouver's business district.⁴¹

The news media provided detailed coverage of the two new unions, emphasizing the strategic timing and approach of the organizing drives. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the introduction of new technology, especially online systems and automated teller machines, had transformed the banking industry and bank work. As the work became automated it became deskilled and feminized. The number of female bank employees working in precarious, part-time jobs in which they had little control over the

³⁸ The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1979), 9.

³⁹ In 1979, SORWUC members published a detailed account of their organizing drive, first application for certification, and subsequent efforts and ultimate failure to organize bank workers. See The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*. As the book provides an in-depth discussion of SORWUC's activities and experiences, I examine SORWUC's organizing activities in relation to the broader context of bank worker organizing, in particular the union's conflict with the CLC.

⁴⁰ University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections (UBCL RBSC); Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada (SORWUC) fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 16, file 6, Canadian Union of Bank Employees, certification applications, August 6, 1976.

⁴¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, SORWUC, certification application, August 16, 1976.

labour process increased.⁴² By 1975, women comprised 72 per cent of the banking workforce.⁴³

Many of the newspaper articles pointed to a recent study on women in banking that painted a negative picture of female bank employees' wages, working conditions, and opportunities for advancement.⁴⁴ The report, *Employment in Chartered Banks 1969–1975*, was published in May 1976, just a few months before CUBE and SORWUC submitted their certification applications. Written by economist Marianne Bossen, the report was a follow-up to her 1969 report, produced as part of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. In both reports, Bossen revealed that women comprised the majority of the banking sector's labour force but faced low wages, poor working conditions, and limited prospects for advancement.⁴⁵ In the light of the rampant gender inequality in the bank, commentators believed that SORWUC's focus on women's issues would help the union to organize the predominantly female banking workforce. Yet they also acknowledged that the two unions had a monumental task in front of them.

According to one journalist, in 1976 Canada had more than seven thousand bank branches and more than 130,000 bank employees.⁴⁶

⁴² Patricia Louise Baker, "Banking Transformed: Women's Work and Technological Change in a Canadian Bank" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1987), 129–188. For more recent analyses of technological change, work, and female bank employees, see Elizabeth Anne Lautard, "Bank Tellers: Eight Women on the Financial Front Lines" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1999); Zabedia Nazim, "Interrogating Restructuring: A Critical Ethnography of Ethno-Racial Women Bank Workers in Canadian Retail Banking" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2007).

⁴³ Baker, "Banking Transformed," 152.

⁴⁴ See, for example, LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, Ashley Ford, "Bankers fear unions," *Province* (Vancouver), August 25, 1976.

⁴⁵ Marianne Bossen, *Manpower Utilization in Canadian Chartered Banks* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1971); Marianne Bossen, *Employment in Chartered Banks 1969–1975* (sponsored by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Canadian Bankers' Association, 1976). For more information about the production of the 1969 report, see LAC, Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada fonds, RG33-89, volume 24, files 1 and 8, and volume 25, file 6.

⁴⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, Ashley Ford, "Bankers fear unions," *Province* (Vancouver), August 25, 1976.

SORWUC members, however, were “not perturbed by the forecasts of those who see only doom ahead.”⁴⁷ Similarly, a CUBE representative insisted, “There’s no lack of support. People are just looking for something to start them off.”⁴⁸ Indeed, both unions reported a surge in organizing activity following the announcement that they had filed applications for certification. Moreover, as one journalist explained, “While the battle ahead will be long and arduous a couple of breakthroughs could open the floodgates. The rewards for labor could be as big as the rewards bank workers who favor such representation are hoping for.”⁴⁹

The banks were quick to respond to the applications. In the case of CUBE, on 23 August a representative for the Bank of Nova Scotia wrote to the CLRB to request a hearing to discuss and present evidence in regards to the application. In particular, the bank challenged the appropriateness of a single-branch bargaining unit, demanded that CUBE “establish its status as a trade union,” and insisted that the board exclude several employees from the bargaining unit.⁵⁰ The banks submitted similar challenges in response to SORWUC’s application. The board would need to settle these issues.

CUBE members decided to hold off on further organizing until the CLRB had ruled on the original applications, but SORWUC members did not.⁵¹ Shortly before filing

⁴⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, Ashley Ford, “Bankers fear unions,” *Province* (Vancouver), August 25, 1976.

⁴⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, Ron Blunn, “Chartered banks face strongest union challenge yet,” *Calgary Herald*, August 17, 1976.

⁴⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, Ashley Ford, “Bankers fear unions,” *Province* (Vancouver), August 25, 1976.

⁵⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, F. M. Goddard, “Reply and Intervention by Employer with Respect to Application for Certification as Bargaining Agent Made Pursuant to Section 124 of the Canada Labour Code, Board File 555-612 – Simcoe,” August 23, 1976; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, letter from A. Pedneault to Canadian Union of Bank Employees, August 26, 1976; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, letter from Kenneth V. Rogers to Ralph Ortlieb, August 30, 1976.

⁵¹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, loose documents, Melody Rudd, notes from meeting with Ken Rogers, October 15, 1976.

their application for certification, SORWUC bank members had voted to form their own local, and on 27 August, the SORWUC national executive granted a charter to the United Bank Workers, Local 2, SORWUC (UBW).⁵² Over the next two months, SORWUC members filed applications for twelve more branches in BC.⁵³ By December, they had submitted certification applications for fifteen branches.⁵⁴ As SORWUC members later explained, “Our strategy at this time was to get as many applications as possible before the CLRB. We wanted to prove that Victory Square was not an isolated incident; that bank workers all over B.C. wanted a ruling on their right to have a union.”⁵⁵ By the time of the CLRB hearings, CUBE had submitted four applications for certification and SORWUC had submitted 21.⁵⁶

The hearing began on 18 April 1977, and the board handed down its decision on SORWUC’s Victory Square application on 14 June.⁵⁷ In the landmark decision, the CLRB ruled that a “single branch location . . . encompasses employees with a community of interest and is an appropriate bargaining unit.”⁵⁸ In deciding the case, the board

⁵² UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 57, August 1977.

⁵³ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Jan O’Brien, “Women waving red flag of unionism under banks’ noses,” *Province* (Vancouver), 13 November 1976.

⁵⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 6, file 7, *The Monthly Statement: United Bank Workers Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (December 1976): 1.

⁵⁵ The Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 18.

⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” Ron Blunn, “[. . .] when they finally come, you can expect big changes,” *Financial Times* (Toronto), March 21, 1977.

⁵⁷ The dates on the CLRB decisions make it appear that the board issued CUBE’s certification orders four days earlier (10 June 1977); however, press coverage of the decisions indicates that the CLRB ruled on SORWUC’s application first. LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” CLRB order certifying CUBE as the bargaining agent for employees of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Jarvis, Port Dover, and Simcoe, Ontario, June 10, 1977.

⁵⁸ Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB), “Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada, applicant, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, employer,” *decisions/décisions information*, no. 20 (August 1977): 354.

weighed the employer's claims that "branch certification would create 'utter chaos'"⁵⁹ against the board's responsibility of "accepting or fashioning bargaining units that give employees a realistic possibility of exercising their rights under the [Canada Labour] Code."⁶⁰ Dismissing the employer's counter arguments as "hypothetical fears," the board reversed the 1959 decision.⁶¹ The board described the Kitimat case as:

[a] real life example of aborting the possibility of collective bargaining....

The experience after the Bank of Nova Scotia, Kitimat decision demonstrates that bank employees and trade unions realistically perceived that any form of union organizing was virtually impossible on any basis other than the branch basis.⁶²

Subsequent hearings would determine inclusions and exclusions and which branches had a union majority, but the ruling was nonetheless a huge victory. Bank workers could now unionize on a branch-by-branch basis. As one legal scholar commented in 1980, "[T]his is the most famous (or notorious, depending on your point of view) decision ever rendered by a labour board in Canada."⁶³ Employers, workers, and labour officials would

⁵⁹ CLRB, "Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada, *applicant*, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, *employer*," 347.

⁶⁰ CLRB, "Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada, *applicant*, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, *employer*," 349.

⁶¹ CLRB, "Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada, *applicant*, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, *employer*," 354.

⁶² CLRB, "Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada, *applicant*, and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, *employer*," 349, original emphasis.

⁶³ Paul Weiler, *Reconcilable Differences: New Directions in Canadian Labour Law* (Toronto: The Carswell Company Limited, 1980), 15. For detailed analyses of the 1977 CLRB decision on branch certification, see Elizabeth J. Shilton Lennon, "Organizing the Unorganized: Unionization in the Chartered Banks of Canada," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 18, no. 2 (August 1980): 177–237; Weiler, *Reconcilable Differences*, 15–56; Allen Ponak and Larry F. Moore, "Canadian Bank Unionism: Perspectives and Issues," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 36, no. 1 (1981): 3–34; Rosemary Warskett, "Trade Unions and the Canadian State: A Case Study of Bank Worker Unionization, 1976–1980" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1981); Rosemary Warskett, "Bank Worker Unionization and the Law," *Studies in Political Economy* 25 (Spring 1988): 41–73; Jane S. Bailey, *Organizing the Unorganized Revisited: An Analysis of the Efficacy of Labour Legislation in Facilitating Collective Representation in the Canadian Banking Sector* (Kingston, ON: Queen's University Industrial Relations Centre, 1991).

no longer have to wonder what would constitute an appropriate bargaining unit in the banks. In securing the CLRB decision that a single branch comprised an appropriate bargaining unit, SORWUC and CUBE thus removed a major barrier to bank worker organizing.

It would not be long, however, before the unions encountered new obstacles. Single-branch units struggled to negotiate collective agreements and could do little to challenge the banks' power, demonstrating that an appropriate bargaining unit was not necessarily an ideal bargaining unit. As well, other unions and labour organizations had started to express interest in signing up the tens of thousands of unorganized Canadian bank workers, leading commentators to wonder whether jurisdictional battles might ensue.⁶⁴ As one journalist wrote, "The Office and Technical Employees Union (OTEU) and the Association of Commercial and Technical Employees (ACTE), both with unsuccessful stabs at organizing bank employees, are not going to sit quietly by while an upstart union tries to corner an industry with more than 100,000 employees nationally and 15,000 provincially."⁶⁵

Indeed, by the time that the CLRB released its ruling in June 1977, several unions were organizing bank workers. In addition to SORWUC and CUBE, OTEU (a BC local of the OPEIU), RCIA, and USWA had also entered the fray.⁶⁶ SORWUC, however, was having the most success. By mid-August, the bank workers' section had applied for

⁶⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," Wilfred List, "Board allows bank branch unionization," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), June 15, 1977.

⁶⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Jan O'Brien, "Unions win first round with banks but fight far from over," *Province* (Vancouver), June 17, 1977.

⁶⁶ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 29, Angela Barnes, "Union seeks equitable pay, more benefits for bank staff," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 28, 1977.

certification to represent more than 400 members at 29 branches.⁶⁷ In September, UBW gained 135 new members, their busiest month to date. By October, UBW members numbered more than six hundred.⁶⁸ Yet the fight was not over. In addition to hindrances from employers and the state, bitter inter-union battles over jurisdiction, ideology, and strategy would plague the struggle to organize bank workers.

Jurisdictional Issues

Jurisdiction has long been an issue in the labour movement, both in Canada and beyond. Throughout the history of organized labour, unions and labour federations have clashed over the right to represent workers who do particular jobs or reside in a particular city, region, or country.⁶⁹ Jurisdictional disputes can result in a variety of negative outcomes for the workers and organizations involved, from unfriendly relations between particular unions to raiding, which happens when one union attempts to sign up workers already represented by another. As scholars have pointed out, raiding is a significant problem for the labour movement. In addition to wasting valuable resources, it also attracts negative attention from the media and the public.⁷⁰

In Canada, in the 1970s the major jurisdictional dispute was between the national unions and the “internationals” headquartered in the United States. Though the push for a “Canadian” labour movement was not new, it had picked up steam over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1969, Kent Rowley and Madeleine Parent established the Council of

⁶⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 17, file 15, *The Monthly Statement: United Bank Workers Newsletter* 1, no. 7 (July and August 1977): 3.

⁶⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 29, *The Monthly Statement: United Bank Workers Newsletter* 1, no. 8 (September/October 1977): 2.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁷⁰ Timothy J. Bartkiw and Felice Martinello, “Union Raiding and Organizing in Ontario,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 60, no. 2 (2005): 274.

Canadian Unions as an alternative to the CLC, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. In the early 1970s, a number of Canadian locals broke away from their international unions, and bitter battles occurred as new organizations fought to build their membership and old organizations fought to keep theirs.⁷¹

By the mid-1970s, the CLC was no stranger to jurisdictional disputes. On the one hand, CLC officials expressed concern about non-affiliated organizations encroaching on the congress's jurisdiction. For example, in May 1973, the executive council released a bulletin announcing that it had "launched a vigorous campaign to 'promote organizing activity among the unorganized by affiliates of the Congress.'" Though the stated goal of the campaign was "the organization of Canadian workers who are outside the labour movement," according to CLC president Donald MacDonald, it would "also help to 'counter raiding activities of various independent organizations and federations.'"⁷² Similarly, a report on "Independent Union Activities in Canada" concluded, "A combined effort on the part of all affiliates is necessary both to stop the slow leakage of members into rival groups and to strengthen the Congress to a point of invulnerability to the chauvinistic ambitions of those who have recently been concentrating their attacks on

⁷¹ For more information on the disputes between national and international unions in the 1960s and 1970s, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 318–320. British Columbia was a key battleground in this fight. Most notably, in October 1972 1,700 aluminium smelter workers left the United Steelworkers of America and joined the Canadian Aluminum Smelter and Allied Workers' Union, which had formed early that year. At the time, one scholar described the event as "the largest successful attempt at secession from a U.S.-based union." Paul Knox, "Breakaway Unionism in Kitimat," in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, eds. Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 43. See also Jack Scott, "British Columbia and the American Labour Movement," in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, eds. Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 33–41; Philip Resnick, "The Breakaway Movement in Trail," in *Essays in B.C. Political Economy*, eds. Paul Knox and Philip Resnick (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), 52–59; Benjamin Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left, 1948–1972* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 157–166 and 197–198.

⁷² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 24, "Information," May 17, 1973.

the legitimate Canadian labour movement and particularly the [C]anadian sections of international unions.”⁷³

On the other hand, some organizations accused the CLC of violating jurisdictional agreements. In the early 1970s, the congress clashed with OPEIU over white-collar organizing. Prior to the launch of the CLC’s white-collar campaign in 1973, officials from the two organizations reached an agreement about “organizing activity in the pure white collar field, which is defined as including banks, finance, insurance and real estate companies, home offices, stock exchanges and similar establishments.” Most notably, the agreement confirmed that “the OPEIU will be recognized as having prior jurisdictional rights in the pure white collar field.”⁷⁴ In the months following the launch of the ACTE drive, OPEIU officials repeatedly expressed anger about and disapproval of the campaign. They argued that it violated the CLC constitution in several ways, including by creating a new Canadian union to organize workers in the jurisdiction of an existing international union and CLC affiliate. In a letter to the CLC president, the OPEIU vice-president claimed that the campaign had “raised confusion in the minds of the unorganized as to its objectives. Certainly it gives the appearance that the Canadian Labour Congress is providing an alternative to those who are against joining International Unions.”⁷⁵ He asked that the CLC executive disband ACTE and instead support the organizing efforts of affiliates who already represent white-collar workers. Given that

⁷³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 24, “Resume of Independent Union Activities in Canada,” n.d., ca. 1973.

⁷⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 516, file 24, letter from Donald MacDonald to Howard Coughlin, October 16, 1972.

⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 373, file D46A, letter from R. F. Bone to Donald MacDonald, July 31, 1973.

ACTE continued to exist for at least another two years, it seems the CLC chose to ignore the OPEIU complaints.

The 1970s appear to be the first time that jurisdictional conflicts occurred over bank workers. During the initial months of organizing, the groups involved with bank unionization maintained friendly relations with one another. While awaiting the decision on their certification applications, CUBE and SORWUC sent each other updates and copies of various materials, including certification applications, leaflets, constitutions, and information on unfair labour practices.⁷⁶ SORWUC representatives also reached out to OPEIU Local 434, the union representing workers at Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal in Québec.⁷⁷ By November 1976, other unions, such as the OTEU in BC, had submitted certification applications to represent bank workers, but all parties appeared content to organize alongside one another rather than claim exclusive jurisdiction over bank workers. Nevertheless, SORWUC members in particular expressed concern “that other more established unions will step right in if the CLRB gives the go ahead to branch-by-branch organizing.”⁷⁸

The CLC had already been monitoring the unions involved in bank worker organizing. Shortly after SORWUC filed their first application for certification, the lawyer for ACTE Local 1718 wrote to the CLRB to ask for a copy of the application. In September, CLC officials in Ottawa and Vancouver exchanged letters about SORWUC. The Vancouver representative felt that the CLRB would reject SORWUC's application

⁷⁶ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 16, file 6, various letters from SORWUC members to CUBE representatives, August 1976 to October 1976.

⁷⁷ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, file 6, letter from Judi Cooper, October 1, 1976. The letter is not addressed to Local 434; however, it is written in French and mentions the recipient's “expérience de certification, et surtout la décision par le Conseil Canadien des Relations de Travail.” Therefore, the letter was likely sent to members of OPEIU Local 434.

⁷⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Jan O'Brien, “Women waving red flag of unionism under banks' noses,” *Province* (Vancouver), November 13, 1976.

“due to the ‘appropriate bargaining unit’ requirement.” Still, he promised to “check out what SORWUC is doing re banks and report” back.⁷⁹

The CLC also watched CUBE. Throughout the summer of 1976, congress representatives and officials exchanged letters, documents, and newspaper clippings about CUBE’s activities.⁸⁰ They also reached out to the union directly. CUBE responded by sharing materials related to the union and its certification applications.⁸¹ Officials for both organizations eventually began to discuss the possibility of CUBE members being “turned over” to the CLC should the CLRB grant the certifications.⁸²

As the date of the CLRB hearing approached, CLC officials started to discuss how they might intervene in the organizing by small, unaffiliated unions. Particularly noteworthy are memoranda sent by director of research and legislation Ron Lang and director of education Larry Wagg, respectively, to president Joe Morris, executive vice-president Shirley Carr, and director of organization Ed Johnston in April 1977. The correspondence between these high-ranking officials about the organization of bank employees provides valuable insight on how the congress viewed and responded to organizing by non-affiliates.

Dr. Ronald William Lang was the CLC’s director of research and legislation from 1975 to 1988. Born in St. Mary’s, ON in 1933, Lang came to union activism through working as a general labourer at Canada Cement in Woodstock, ON. From 1961 to 1964,

⁷⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, memorandum from Larry Widen to Ed Johnston, September 21, 1976. See also LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 463, file 15, letter from Ed Johnston to Tom Gooderham, September 14, 1976.

⁸⁰ See, for example, LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, referral slip from Doug West to Ralph Ortlieb, July 29, 1976; LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, referral slip from Ralph Ortlieb to Ed Johnston, September 8, 1976.

⁸¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, letter from Kenneth Rogers to Ralph Ortlieb, August 30, 1976.

⁸² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 684, file 21, letter from Ralph Ortlieb to Joe Morris, August 30, 1976.

he was president of Local 368 of the United Cement, Lime and Gypsum Workers International Union; in 1963, he also served as president of the Woodstock, Ingersoll and District Labour Council. After graduating from Labour College in Montréal in the early 1960s, Lang completed a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in political science at the University of Waterloo and eventually a PhD at the London School of Economics. In May 1972, the CLC hired him as the director of legislation. During his time with the congress, Lang served on a number of government committees and advisory councils pertaining to labour issues. In the 1970s in particular, Lang worked closely with then CLC president Joe Morris to develop a system of tripartism among business, government, and labour as an alternative to wage controls.⁸³

In his April 19 letter to congress officials, Lang emphasized the importance of organizing bank workers. He argued that banks comprised “the most serious and persistent gap in trade union organization” and that the industry had “successfully avoided unionization” due to the bargaining unit issue. Yet despite the pressing need to organize bank workers, Lang cautioned against arguing for “something less than national units if it is going to destroy and lead to carving out in existing national structures such as the railways.”⁸⁴ In essence, Lang was more concerned with protecting existing

⁸³ Letter from Dr. Ronald W. Lang to “Whom it May Concern,” July 7, 2010, available online at University of Waterloo, “W. Robert (Bob) Needham,” *University of Waterloo*, <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~rneedham/> (accessed February 5, 2016). For more information on Lang, see John Carter, “Champion of workers’ rights honoured with special degree,” *Ottawa Community News*, November 4, 2015, <http://www.ottawacommunitynews.com/news-story/6081470-champion-of-workers-rights-honoured-with-special-degree/> (accessed February 5, 2016). For more on Lang and Morris’s support of tripartism, see Anthony Giles, “The Canadian Labour Congress and Tripartism,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 37, no. 1 (1982): 93–125.

⁸⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from R. Lang to J. Morris and S. Carr, April 19, 1977.

certifications against hypothetical threats than with organizing an industry with thousands of unorganized workers.

Moreover, as in earlier decades, CLC officials again looked to the labour board to determine the congress's strategy. Lang had contacted CLRB chair Marc Lapointe, who directed him to a recent board decision regarding the issue of bargaining unit appropriateness, a decision that would likely shape the ruling on the bank cases. Lang included sections from the decision, *Trade of Locomotive Engineers and Canadian Pacific, Ltd., B.C.*, highlighting Lapointe's argument that "where collective bargaining is being denied workers because it is impossible to organize them on a national basis, then the Board has a duty to certify them (if other conditions are met) on a unit by unit basis. However, when enough units are certified the Board 'will take an active part' in amalgamating or enlarging these units." In light of the board's decision, Lang concluded, "the time has come when the Congress must undertake a concerted organizing drive on the banking industry."⁸⁵ In sum, rather than organize bank workers and push the board to determine what an appropriate bargaining unit would be in the banking industry, CLC officials chose to wait until the board clarified its position on the certification of smaller units in a national industry.

Wagg responded to Lang's memorandum three days later. Whereas Lang expressed strategic concerns, Wagg worried about the ideological threat. Born in Redwing, ON in 1926, Wagg had worked as a printer's apprentice at the *Guelph Daily Mercury* and then as a journeyman at *The Brantford Expositor*. While in Brantford, he served as president of Local 378 of the International Typographical Union and as

⁸⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from R. Lang to J. Morris and S. Carr, April 19, 1977.

president of the Brantford and District Labour Council. In 1962, the CLC hired him to work first as the assistant director of education for Ontario, then the Prairies, and then Ontario again. In 1974, he became the national director of education. While in this position, Wagg played a significant role in the development of labour education in Canada, at times working closely with government officials. He was also an ardent supporter of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and then the New Democratic Party.⁸⁶

In his response to Lang's comments, Wagg outlined several "concerns" he had about organizing currently being done in unorganized sectors. Most notably, he drew parallels between the "new" organizing by groups like SORWUC and the campaigns undertaken by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s. He pointed out that, as happened in the 1930s, labour leaders provided a litany of excuses as to why certain groups of workers could not be unionized; meanwhile, new unions developed new models to organize these workers. In Wagg's opinion, SORWUC's grassroots model and commitment to organizing accounted for their success: "They have none of the constitutional inhibitions that restrain us. They are not concerned about jurisdiction, it is their union. They . . . have no inhibitions about all the legal reasons that may or may not allow them to be certified. Most important, they are employees of the banks in the main, and are able to 'talk the bank employees['] language.' They believe that they have the right to organize and that is their prime motivation."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Neville Hamilton, "Moving service pays tribute to Larry Wagg," *Congress of Union Retirees of Canada*, <http://unionretiree.ca/moving-service-pays-tribute-to-larry-wagg/> (accessed February 5, 2016); "Larry Wagg: Obituary," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/ottawacitizen/obituary.aspx?n=larry-wagg&pid=141781549> (accessed February 5, 2016).

⁸⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from L. Wagg to R. Lang, April 22, 1977, original emphasis.

Wagg recognized the potential of SORWUC and CUBE. He explained that if the CLRB ruled in their favour, the new unaffiliated unions would be able “to take advantage of this ‘victory’ and get widespread support from bank employees across Canada. It could spread very fast. They will not have to rely on long drawn out door-to-door organizing campaigns. It will also open the door to the insurance and other white collar service employees joining with them.” Yet, rather than insist CLC officials support the new union in its efforts to organize the thousands of organized bank workers in Canada, Wagg suggested the congress find “some way . . . to utilize the talents of these people,” who he described as “young, idealistic, and dedicated to their cause.” At the very least, Wagg cautioned, the CLC needed to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past: “I think we should try not to make the same mistakes our predecessors did and find ourselves with a ‘new’ labour organization for workers, because we have not been able to react to or communicate with this large number of unorganized workers.”⁸⁸

The CLC archives do not indicate what Morris and Carr thought of Wagg’s comments, but Lang agreed. In June, after the CLRB decided to certify single-branch units, Lang wrote to Morris and Carr again, urging them to “take the lead in a well organized and concerted drive to move on banks.” For Lang, bank worker organizing was “an excellent area in which the Congress can assume the leadership in a positive manner.”⁸⁹

Lang and Wagg’s assessment of and plan to deal with organizing in the banking industry by unaffiliated unions highlights how and why labour officials attempt to control

⁸⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from L. Wagg to R. Lang, April 22, 1977.

⁸⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from R. Lang to J. Morris and S. Carr, June 20, 1977.

workers. Drawing on Marxist theories of the labour bureaucracy, labour studies scholar David Camfield argues that labour officials comprise “a bureaucratic social layer” whose conditions are distinct from the workers they purport to represent and whose interests align with those of the union or labour organization.⁹⁰ As Camfield explains, “For them to socially reproduce themselves as union officials, the union institution must be preserved.”⁹¹ Therefore, labour officials tend to act in ways that protect the organization, even when doing so means restraining or undermining their own members. In the case of bank union organizing in the late 1970s, Lang and Wagg recognized the potential of SORWUC and CUBE, yet rather than view the unions as successful groups that the CLC should support, they saw them as threats that they needed to bring into the congress fold. Although not stated explicitly, the lingering effects of Cold War ideology likely shaped their suspicion of rank-and-file grassroots organizing, which congress officials may have associated with communism due to the historical connection between communists and the CIO. Indeed, one former CLC bank organizer recalls that anti-communism “was very evident” among the CLC leadership in the late 1970s, and she argues that it led them to be suspicious of activists and to take a top-down approach to organizing.⁹²

Meanwhile, within the CLC, officials and affiliates fought with one another for control over bank union organizing; several affiliated unions had already claimed jurisdiction. In May 1977, while everyone was awaiting the CLRB decision, OPEIU president Howard Coughlin wrote to CLC secretary-treasurer Donald Montgomery to reprimand him for comments he had made to the press about unions and bank workers.

⁹⁰ David Camfield, “Neoliberalism and Working-Class Resistance in British Columbia: The Hospital Employees’ Union Struggle, 2002–2004,” *Labour/Le Travail* 57 (Spring 2006): 28.

⁹¹ Camfield, “Neoliberalism and Working-Class Resistance in British Columbia,” 28.

⁹² Rosemary Warskett (former CLC bank union organizer), interview by Julia Smith, December 18, 2015.

Coughlin reminded Montgomery that OPEIU was “the dominant Union in the banking field in Canada.”⁹³ Similarly, in September, RCIA Canadian director Clifford Evans wrote to CLC president Joe Morris to criticize the White Collar Organizing Committee’s statement that the “Congress alone is capable of organizing the jurisdiction of bank workers.” Evans accused the CLC of using money supplied by affiliates to create a new union, and he urged Morris to take steps to ensure that the congress and its affiliates did not end up “vying with each other.” Evans reminded Morris that the RCIA was willing to organize bank workers on its own or with other affiliates. Thus, he suggested the CLC “develop a Council of Unions” and “support such a Council (or single organization) with personnel, resources, finances, publicity and maximum co-operation in all other areas so that this massive organizing campaign will have the maximum opportunity of succeeding.”⁹⁴

In late September, the CLC executive council met in Toronto to discuss the matter, and on 28 September, the organization announced that it would be launching “a nationwide drive to sign up the employees of Canada’s 11 chartered banks.”⁹⁵ According to newspaper reports of the announcement, the executive council decided to establish a Bank Workers Organizing Committee, “patterned on the old industrial organizing drives of the 1940s when several unions pooled resources to undertake organizing jobs too large for one union.”⁹⁶ Funding for the campaign would come from the one million dollars that

⁹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” letter from Howard Coughlin to Donald Montgomery, May 24, 1977.

⁹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” letter from Clifford Evans to Joe Morris, September 13, 1977.

⁹⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Rosemary Speirs, “Labor unites forces to organize bank workers,” *Toronto Star*, September 28, 1977.

⁹⁶ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Rosemary Speirs, “Labor unites forces to organize bank workers,” *Toronto Star*, September 28, 1977.

had accrued in the account established for the failed white-collar organizing campaign of the early 1970s.

The CLC planned to launch its drive in spring 1978 and so spent the next few months making preparations. First, they wanted to bring CUBE into the CLC. Officials had been working on CUBE for a few months. In July, the CLC regional director of organization for Ontario, Ralph Ortlieb, met with CUBE officers Ken Rogers and Robert Stewart. According to Ortlieb, Rogers and Stewart had already met with officials from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) to discuss the possibility of “giving” the bank workers to that union, but CUPE president Grace Hartman had told them that “the Congress should head up any campaign.” Ultimately, Ortlieb concluded, both CUBE officers felt “that the CLC has the structure and personnel to carry out a serious national campaign.”⁹⁷

By late September, it was clear CUBE had aligned with the CLC. *The Toronto Star* reported that CUBE had applied to be a CLC affiliate and that Rogers had stated, “Somebody should assume the role of bank organizing who has the capability to do the job properly.”⁹⁸ What began as talk of affiliation, however, soon changed to an outright takeover. Only two days after *The Toronto Star* article appeared, *The Globe and Mail* reported that instead of affiliating, Rogers and Stewart had offered to “step down” so they could be replaced by “CLC personnel or selected bank employees approved by the CLC.”⁹⁹ By December, newspapers explained that CUBE officials had asked the CLC to

⁹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” letter from Ralph Ortlieb to Donald Montgomery, July 22, 1977.

⁹⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Rosemary Speirs, “Unions plan new attempt to organize big banks,” *Toronto Star*, September 26, 1977.

⁹⁹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Angela Barnes, “CUBE feels bank drive aids position,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 30, 1977.

“put the union directly under the congress’ administrative control.”¹⁰⁰ As the months passed, CLC control continued to increase. In May 1978, Montgomery ordered Ortlieb to “replace the current President and Secretary-Treasurer” of CUBE.¹⁰¹ Two months later, a CLC representative updated Montgomery on the replacement plan: “this will confirm the arrangements made with Ken Rogers. . . . I will be elected as National President and Doug West as National Secretary-Treasurer.”¹⁰²

In contrast to CUBE, SORWUC was hesitant to join the CLC bank worker campaign or to become a congress affiliate. When SORWUC was established, the union’s founding members had decided not to affiliate to any of the municipal, provincial, or national labour organizations “but to try to maintain friendly relations with them.”¹⁰³ According to UBW president Dodie Zerr, SORWUC members felt that the union should decide about affiliation later, after it had acquired more members.¹⁰⁴ SORWUC and the CLC therefore continued to work independently throughout the fall of 1977.

As the campaigns progressed, however, relations between the two organizations became increasingly hostile. Though SORWUC was not the only union to opt out of the CLC’s bank employee organizing committee, its conflict with the congress was public and intense and ultimately about more than just jurisdiction. The battle between

¹⁰⁰ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Angela Barnes, “CUBE, Scotiabank negotiations considered far too slow by union,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 20, 1977.

¹⁰¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from Donald Montgomery to Ralph Ortlieb, May 26, 1978.

¹⁰² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from L. Singler to D. Montgomery, July 4, 1978.

¹⁰³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 6, file 6, Helen Potrebenko, “Working for Women Working,” n.d., ca. 1975.

¹⁰⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 11, letter from Dodie Zerr to Debby Ward, April 19, 1977.

SORWUC and the CLC reflected fundamental ideological differences between the two organizations about union structure and organizing strategy. Their inability or unwillingness to reconcile these differences would have devastating consequences for bank union organizing during this period.

SORWUC versus the CLC

SORWUC and the CLC's different ideological perspectives shaped their respective attitudes and approaches to bank worker organizing and ultimately the conflict that occurred between the two organizations.¹⁰⁵ As a grassroots feminist union, SORWUC saw bank worker unionization as a gendered issue and believed that women workers needed to control their own unions. SORWUC's founding members had structured the union to avoid what they saw as fundamental flaws of bureaucratic unions, such as ossified leadership, top-down decision-making, and lack of member involvement. Members voted on most major decisions, and no executive officer or union employee could receive a salary greater than that earned by bargaining unit members.¹⁰⁶ The combination of the union's feminist politics and its bottom-up style of organizing contributed significantly to the success of their campaign. UBW president Charlotte Johnson explained, "[O]ne of the most important reasons for our success is that the United Bank Workers is run by us--- not outsiders or professionals."¹⁰⁷ Another union officer insisted that the union's feminist perspective helped it appeal to female bank

¹⁰⁵ In this section, I provide an historical analysis of the conflict between SORWUC and the CLC in relation to the broader history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry. For another analysis of the conflict that examines it in relation to theories of the state, labour relations, and "legitimate" and "illegitimate" unionism, see Warskett, "Trade Unions and the Canadian State."

¹⁰⁶ Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union."

¹⁰⁷ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 29, Charlotte Johnson, "THE C.L.C. and SORWUC," *The Monthly Statement: United Bank Workers Newsletter* 1, no. 8 (September/October 1977): 8, original emphasis.

workers: “If they don’t like unions at least they understand that they’re being screwed around as women. We can sign people up easier on the basis of feminism than trade union consciousness.”¹⁰⁸

Further evidence of SORWUC’s feminist politics and grassroots approach was the considerable support the union received from feminist groups. The day after the CLRB issued its decision on single-branch units, Vancouver Status of Women issued a press release, applauding “the historic victory” as “a triumph” for bank employees and “a significant decision for all the working women in Canada.”¹⁰⁹ In March 1978, members of the Ottawa Women’s Centre held a demonstration in front of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, criticizing the national news network for ignoring SORWUC’s efforts by only focusing on the CLC campaign.¹¹⁰ As tensions between SORWUC and the CLC increased, working women’s groups, such as Organized Working Women (OWW) in Ontario, expressed their solidarity with the feminist union.¹¹¹ Support from OWW members was particularly notable because its membership was comprised of women in trade unions, many of which were CLC affiliates.

SORWUC also received crucial assistance from other community groups and unions across BC. People volunteered to do reconnaissance and leaflet the banks in their towns, and many unions donated money and provided the union with interest-free

¹⁰⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 21, Jan O’Brien, “Women waving red flag of unionism under banks’ noses,” *Province* (Vancouver), November 13, 1976.

¹⁰⁹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 7, file 2, Gayla Reid, Vancouver Status of Women news release, June 15, 1977.

¹¹⁰ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 7, Drew Gregg, “Women picket CBC-TV,” *Ottawa Citizen*, n.d., ca. March 1978.

¹¹¹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, file “ONTARIO WORKING WOMEN CORRES.,” letter from Deirdre Gallagher to Heather MacNeil [*sic*], September 30, 1977. For more information on Organized Working Women, see Barbara Linds, “Organized Working Women – Outside the Mainstream?” *Resources for Feminist Research* 10, no. 2 (July 1981): 73–74; University of Ottawa Library, Archives and Special Collections, Canadian Women’s Movement Archives fonds, X10-1, box 86, multiple files.

loans.¹¹² By December 1976, SORWUC had received donations from a number of unions and labour organizations, including the Social Service Employees Union; the Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical, and Allied Workers; the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers Union; the Letter Carriers Union of Canada; the Canadian Association of Smelter and Allied Workers; the New Westminster Labour Council; and the Vancouver Municipal and Regional Employees' Union.¹¹³

Former bank workers also offered to help. On 10 April 1978, M. Warwick Bluck wrote to SORWUC. Now a lawyer and fellow of the Canadian Bankers Association, Bluck had been a leader in the attempt to organize bank workers in BC in the late 1950s. In 1962, he successfully sued his employer, the Bank of Montreal, for wrongful dismissal after the bank fired him for union activity. In 1978, Bluck joined the UBW and wrote to bank unions in other countries to gather information about their collective agreements.¹¹⁴

The strategies of SORWUC and the CLC also differed in key ways. The CLC initially focused its white-collar organizing efforts on big cities; SORWUC organized wherever workers expressed interest and had the most success in small towns. The SORWUC archives contain letters from bank workers and supporters located throughout the province, writing in to request more information about the bank union and to offer

¹¹² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 12, letter from Peter Burton to Pat Barter, September 28, 1976; UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, files 11 and 12, various letters re: donations and loans, 1976–1978.

¹¹³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 6, file 7, *The Monthly Statement: United Bank Workers Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (December 1976): 1.

¹¹⁴ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 8, file not labelled, letter from M. Warwick Bluck to Jean Rands, April 10, 1978; UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 15, file 30, letters from M. Warwick Bluck to the president of the National Union of Bank Employees, the president of the Irish Bank Officials Association, and the president of the Australian Bank Officials Association, May 31, June 1, and June 2, 1978. For more information on Bluck's legal case, see the coverage in the OPEIU newsletter, *White Collar*, nos. 197, 199, 200, 201, and 204 (February, April–June, and October), Office and Professional Employees International Union, "White Collar," *Office and Professional Employees International Union*, <http://www.opeiu.org/WhiteCollar.aspx> (accessed February 5, 2016).

assistance. Letters came from such places as Brackendale, Burns Lake, Campbell River, Castelgar, Chetwynd, Courtney, Dawson Creek, Duncan, Fort St. John, Gibsons, Haney, Houston, Hudson's Hope, Invermere, Kamloops, Kimberley, Mission City, Nanaimo, Nelson, New Denver, North Vancouver, Port Hardy, Powell River, Prince Rupert, Princeton, Queen Charlotte City, Terrace, Trail, and Victoria.¹¹⁵ In some cases, bank workers requested SORWUC send organizers to their town.¹¹⁶

SORWUC members did much of the organizing work themselves, a marked contrast to the CLC's top-down campaign. For example, a CLC organizational chart listed high-ranking officials but made no mention of bank workers.¹¹⁷ Similarly, early hires to the CLC bank worker organizing staff included experienced organizers with university degrees but no bank employees.¹¹⁸ SORWUC members preferred to leaflet bank branches in person, while a CLC representative recommended large ads in local TV guides and updating CLC and OTEU materials from previous white-collar campaigns.¹¹⁹ A report outlining the "recommended approach" for the congress's bank campaign listed "four distinct areas of approach – give-away (calendar), publication, advertising and follow-up (i.e. flyer)."¹²⁰ The author of the report at least acknowledged the need to target

¹¹⁵ See UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 14, file 35, various letters, 1976–1980; UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, file "CORRESPONDENCE – leaflets," various letters, 1977.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 14, file 35, letter from "Under Paid" to "Union Organizers," September 26, 1976.

¹¹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78," "Bank Workers Organizing Campaign Organization Chart," n.d., ca. 1977.

¹¹⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file "Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing)," memorandum from Laraine Singler to Joe Morris, January 31, 1978.

¹¹⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78," memorandum from John Clark to Donald Montgomery, October 5, 1977.

¹²⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78," Michael Fitzpatrick, report on recommended approach and budget breakdown for CLC campaign directed to banking employees, November 4, 1977.

the campaign to women, who comprised the vast majority of potential members; he recommended advertising in *Chatelaine*, a monthly women's magazine.

The strength of SORWUC's grassroots approach was not entirely lost on CLC officials. The CLC director of public relations explained to another congress official, "[M]ake it clear that it's the bank employees themselves that need to organize themselves -- not the CLC on their behalf."¹²¹ As well, a former CLC bank organizer recalls that some bank employees worked with organizers to design pamphlets, leaflet bank branches, and meet with workers at home and that in some cities, such as Pictou, Nova Scotia, employees "very much organized themselves."¹²²

Yet although some organizers, bank workers, and congress leaders may have wanted to build a union from the ground up, the structure of the CLC campaign did not foster such an approach. According to UBW member Heather MacNeill, a top-down approach to bank union organizing was bound to fail. Underscoring the importance of SORWUC's volunteers, feminist politics, and democratic structure to the union's success, she argued, "[T]he question of democracy and the fact that bank workers control this union is probably the single-most important issue. In plain terms, any drive that does not have democracy from our experience is going to fall flat on its back."¹²³

MacNeill and several other UBW members had first-hand experience of a failed bank worker campaign; they had been involved in ACTE. Their negative experiences with the CLC charter union led them to take a cautious approach to the congress's bank

¹²¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from Charles Bauer to Donald Montgomery, November 7, 1977.

¹²² Warskett, interview.

¹²³ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, file "ONTARIO WORKING WOMEN CORRES.," letter to Deirdre Gallagher [from Heather MacNeill], n.d., ca. October 1977, original emphasis.

campaign. MacNeill explained, “[W]hen I was working with ACTE, it was the CLC who made all the decisions and if any of the organizing committees got out of hand, the CLC would simply threaten to remove their charter.” Thus, she concluded, “[T]he thing about this Bank Organizing Committee being directly controlled by the CLC means that they simply won’t be able to do it, and I really believe this. The Banks will take full advantage of playing up all the undemocratic stuff about the union, bank workers will be extremely skeptical and the CLC simply doesn’t know how to organize women workers. Not a clue. And they are going to blow it again, just like ACTE.”¹²⁴

UBW president Charlotte Johnson had also had a negative experience with the CLC. She had been president of ACTE Local 1718 and one of the key organizers at the CIBC data centre in Vancouver. According to Johnson, the employees had been excited about forming a union, but the ACTE organizers felt differently: “Their attitude was ‘we’ll give it a good try but we doubt if we’ll be successful’. It was downhill from there.” Johnson claimed that she and another employee did the bulk of the organizing, and she complained that ACTE organizers chose to distribute generic ACTE leaflets rather than the one she had designed. In contrast to ACTE, Johnson considered SORWUC “a breath of fresh air.” According to Johnson, SORWUC “helped us set up our own autonomous section, the United Bank Workers and really threw all its resources behind the organizing drive in the banks. Even though SORWUC was not as rich as the CLC, ‘money was

¹²⁴ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 14, file “ONTARIO WORKING WOMEN CORRES.,” letter to Deirdre Gallagher [from Heather MacNeill], n.d., ca. October 1977, original emphasis.

never an object' and their enthusiasm and hard work helped us in the UBW to launch such a successful organizing drive."¹²⁵

Given the fundamental differences between the CLC and SORWUC and the latter's decision to not become a congress affiliate, relations between the two organizations did not proceed smoothly. Prior to the bank campaign, SORWUC's interaction with the CLC had been limited. Following the CLRB ruling, however, the situation quickly changed. On 5 July 1977, SORWUC wrote to numerous unions and labour and women's organizations, including the CLC and its affiliates, requesting financial assistance to support further bank worker organizing.¹²⁶ Secretary-treasurer Donald Montgomery replied on behalf of the executive council, informing SORWUC that the executive council would consider their request at its next meeting.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, a CLC affiliate, OTEU, had begun organizing in BC, in many of the same areas as SORWUC. According to newspaper reports, OTEU already represented 16 credit unions in BC but had shied away from organizing bank workers due to the 1959 CLRB ruling. Nevertheless, OTEU Local 15 president Opal Skilling stated, "It's our jurisdiction . . . We think we can do it (organize) better."¹²⁸ In late July, SORWUC president Jean Rands wrote to the CLC to complain about OTEU's leafleting of BC bank branches, including those organized by SORWUC. According to Rands, management was using the materials to encourage union members to cancel their membership. Rands

¹²⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 55, Charlotte Johnson, "SOME EXPERIENCES WITH THE CLC," *The Monthly Statement* 1, no. 9 (November/December 1977): 4, original emphasis.

¹²⁶ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Elizabeth Godley to Donald Montgomery, July 5, 1977.

¹²⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Donald Montgomery to Elizabeth Godley, July 19, 1977.

¹²⁸ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 5, Jeannine Mitchell, "Second union joins bank organization drive," *Vancouver Sun*, August 6, 1977.

emphasized, “If our organizing campaign is to be successful, we need support from organized labour.”¹²⁹

While SORWUC waited for the CLC to respond, members took steps to counter OTEU’s actions. The UBW sent letters to employees at branches the OTEU was organizing.¹³⁰ As well, representatives for SORWUC and OTEU met in Vancouver to discuss the issue. Handwritten notes by SORWUC members indicate it was less than productive: “General gist of whole discussion was – you girls are doing a great job but you’re going to have problems organizing all the banks . . . and you won’t be able to service them after organizing. . . . OTEU will go ahead and organize the banks. If you join us, we’ll give you lots of help – if you don’t, none.”¹³¹

SORWUC also encountered issues with CLC affiliates in Saskatchewan. In November 1977, the SORWUC coordinator for Saskatchewan wrote to CLC president Joe Morris to protest the actions of a congress representative in Saskatoon and to ask the CLC to clarify its policy on relations with SORWUC. She claimed that the CLC rep was actively campaigning against SORWUC and helping the USWA raid SORWUC branches. According to the SORWUC coordinator, when she informed the CLC rep of her objections, he told her that the congress “intended to actively oppose” SORWUC and “would use whatever means necessary to sign up bank workers into an affiliate union.” The USWA representative stated “that he had ‘CLC orders’ to sign up bank workers; that Steel did not intend to represent the branch in bargaining; that he was getting involved

¹²⁹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to Canadian Labour Congress, July 25, 1977.

¹³⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 5, letter from Jackie Ainsworth to Employees at the Bank of Nova Scotia Port Hardy Branch, July 25, 1977.

¹³¹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 5, Liz Godley, minutes of a meeting between SORWUC and OTEU, Vancouver, July 29, 1977, original emphasis.

mainly to prevent S.O.R.W.U.C. from representing bank workers.”¹³² In his response to SORWUC’s complaint, the CLC regional director of organization for the Prairies defended the actions of the congress representative in question. He assured SORWUC that the behaviour of the CLC and USWA representatives was “in accord with the C.L.C.’s intentions and plans to organize bank workers into the C.L.C.”¹³³ In his opinion, conflict was bound to occur unless SORWUC joined the CLC.

In September, CLC president Joe Morris finally responded to SORWUC’s complaints about the actions of the OTEU in BC. He acknowledged the work SORWUC had done to date but insisted that as a CLC affiliate the OPEIU “is entitled to our full support in their efforts to organize within their jurisdiction and we are cooperating with them.” Should SORWUC be willing “to enter into serious discussions with a view to entering the main stream [*sic*] of labour,” Morris explained, congress “staff would be happy to discuss the possibilities.”¹³⁴ Rands responded immediately, explaining that if the CLC would promise “substantial financial support,” the SORWUC executive would recommend congress affiliation to members.¹³⁵ By the end of November, Morris had still not responded to Rands’s letter and so she wrote to him again. She repeated her appeal for funds to offset the legal costs of the CLRB decision on branch certification, and she

¹³² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Burgess to Joe Morris, November 2, 1977, original emphasis.

¹³³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from E.W. Norheim to Jean Burgess, November 16, 1977.

¹³⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Joe Morris to Jean Rands, September 13, 1977.

¹³⁵ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to Joe Morris, October 6, 1977.

asked for a meeting so that the two sides could clarify their positions on bank worker organizing and SORWUC-CLC relations.¹³⁶

While the CLC and SORWUC exchanged letters, congress officials continued to develop plans for a national bank worker campaign. By early December, they had decided that the larger unions in each city would undertake local organizing campaigns; once enough bank workers had been organized nation-wide, bank workers would be “offered” the option of creating a separate union of bank employees.¹³⁷ The Bank Workers Organizing Committee (BWOC) would oversee the drive. The committee was comprised of a number of prominent figures in the Canadian labour movement, including CUPE president Grace Hartman, USWA national director Gerard Docquier, International Woodworkers of America District 1 president Jack Monroe, Public Service Alliance of Canada president Andy Stewart, president of the Canadian Paper Workers Union Henry Lorrain, United Auto Workers Union president Dennis McDermott, Service Employees International Union representative Al Hearn, and Mike Rygus of the International Association of Machinists. The campaign would be coordinated by Laraine Singler, seconded to the CLC for two years from her position as assistant general secretary of the British Columbia Government Employees’ Union (BCGEU).¹³⁸

At the time of the bank campaign, Singler was only in her early thirties but had already garnered a considerable amount of experience within the BC labour movement. She had come to unionism through her work at BC Hydro. Hired as a clerk in 1963,

¹³⁶ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to Joe Morris, November 29, 1977.

¹³⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Peter Silverman, “CLC all set for national bank unionization drive,” *Financial Post* (Toronto), December 3, 1977.

¹³⁸ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” letter from John L. Fryer to Donald Montgomery, December 2, 1977.

Singler became involved in her union, OTEU, after experiencing gender discrimination in hiring and promotion. After serving as a steward and second vice-president, Singler returned to university to study economics and industrial relations. In 1970, she was hired as a research assistant for the BCGEU, having met the general secretary at Canada Labour College a year earlier. Since then, Singler had risen up the ranks, sitting on a number of arbitration boards and serving as the lead negotiator for 8,000 BCGEU clerical workers in 1974.¹³⁹

Despite Singler's personal experience of gender discrimination and her belief that unions could help women, she did not publicly identify as a feminist. As one journalist noted, "Unlike other female leaders in the labor movement, Miss Singler is decidedly uncomfortable with the feminist label."¹⁴⁰ That Singler's approach to feminism differed drastically from SORWUC's undoubtedly contributed to the rising tensions between the union and the CLC.

Though congress officials like Larry Wagg had expressed concern that SORWUC would split the labour movement, as the campaigns progressed the CLC appeared to be the one causing divisions. Soon after announcing the congress's plan, Singler and other CLC representatives began to wage a public war against SORWUC and its request for financial assistance. In a letter to the editor of *The Vancouver Sun*, Singler insisted, "[T]he CLC is the logical (and only) organization able to generate the kind of co-operation and co-ordination among trade unions that is necessary to succeed in giving

¹³⁹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 7, "Former local rep joins CLC," *Kamloops News*, January 13, 1978; UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 8, Rosemary Speirs, "Quiet struggle to unionize bank tellers," *Toronto Star*, June 20, 1978; UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Jane Davidson, "Organizing's war of nerves challenge for UBE director," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 3, 1979.

¹⁴⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Jane Davidson, "Organizing's war of nerves challenge for UBE director," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 3, 1979.

bank employees a strong organization.” Therefore, Singler urged SORWUC to “set aside its broader interest and support a separate bank-worker affiliation in order that they may receive this much-needed backing.”¹⁴¹ CLC secretary-treasurer Donald Montgomery took a more hostile approach, declaring that the congress was “not going to bail out a union which is not an affiliate and isn’t ready to play by the rules and join the organizing committee.”¹⁴² Elsewhere in the province, CLC affiliates also took shots at SORWUC. In Kamloops, following the local labour council’s decision to support the CLC campaign, a USWA representative described SORWUC as “a little independent union that can’t do the job.”¹⁴³

While some affiliates supported the CLC’s decision to intervene in bank worker organizing, others were confused. For instance, upon learning of the congress’s plan, the secretary of the Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council wrote to the CLC representatives seeking clarification. The council was eager to support organizing efforts but had already endorsed the SORWUC and OTEU campaigns. The secretary expressed confusion as to how the latest campaign fit with the others already underway.¹⁴⁴

Other affiliates chastised the CLC for not supporting SORWUC. On 2 November 1977, *The Province* newspaper reported that affiliates had criticized officials of the British Columbia Federation of Labour after the organization congratulated OTEU on its

¹⁴¹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Laraine Singler, “Separate bank-worker union backed,” *Vancouver Sun*, December 1977.

¹⁴² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Peter Silverman, “CLC all set for national bank unionization drive,” *Financial Post* (Toronto), December 3, 1977.

¹⁴³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, newspaper clipping, “Steele knocks SORWUC,” n.d., ca. December 1977.

¹⁴⁴ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 15, file 12, letter from N. Chernoff to T. C. Gooderham, December 28, 1977.

one bank certification while “ignoring” the 15 obtained by SORWUC.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, on 20 December 1977, the president of Local 400 of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport and General Workers wrote to the CLC regional director of organization to criticize the congress’s approach to white-collar organizing and SORWUC. Recalling the failed ACTE campaign, he reminded the CLC that “a hell of a lot of money was spent and the results were next to nothing”; SORWUC, meanwhile, had “done a first class job in organizing banks.” In light of SORWUC’s success, his union would be supporting the UBW.¹⁴⁶ Congress affiliation did not necessarily translate into support for the CLC.

The Banks Respond

While the unions bickered with one another, the banks went on the offensive. Most banks refrained from publicly commenting on bank unionization. Internally, however, they took steps to thwart the drive. One of the banks’ primary tactics was to hinder collective bargaining. They attempted to do this in several ways, including refusing to engage in multi-employer bargaining and insisting on bargaining for each branch separately. In a circular to managers, the executive vice-president and chief general manager of the Bank of Montreal wrote, “We do not feel a master agreement or industry bargaining would be practical or would serve the best interest of the Bank’s employees in total or our customers. In view of this plus the fact that the Labour Relations Board ruled that a single branch is appropriate for collective bargaining, it

¹⁴⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 22, “B.C. Fed sour grapes? Bank drive ‘deserved praise,’” *Province* (Vancouver), November 2, 1977.

¹⁴⁶ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 7, file 4, letter from Tom McGrath to T. C. Gooderham, December 20, 1977.

follows that we should bargain separately for each branch that has been certified.”¹⁴⁷

Representatives for the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Bank of Montreal echoed these sentiments.¹⁴⁸

The banks used several other tactics to delay negotiations. In terms of scheduling, they complicated matters by insisting on using the same group of negotiators to meet with CUBE and SORWUC.¹⁴⁹ When meetings did occur, the banks did everything possible to hinder the proceedings. SORWUC members explained:

A favourite bank tactic is to notify SORWUC they are willing to meet with the union for contract talks regarding bank branches A, B, and C. When SORWUC’s negotiators attend the meeting the bank’s representatives enter the room, remove their coats, slowly and deliberately, unpack their briefcases slowly and deliberately and exchange introductions with the SORWUC negotiating team. At the end of this ritual they announce that the time reserved for branch A’s negotiations has elapsed. The bank negotiators then re-pack their briefcases, put their coats back on and leave.

¹⁴⁷ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 10, Bank of Montreal Circular No. 4011, September 23, 1977.

¹⁴⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 15, file 56, letter from F.M. Goddard to Jean Rands, October 31, 1977; UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 15, file 56, letter from E.S. Duffield to Jean Rands, November 2, 1977.

¹⁴⁹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Angela Barnes, “CUBE, Scotiabank negotiations considered far too slow by union,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 20, 1977.

Once they are out the door they turn around and come back into the room. The entire cycle starts over again – only this time they are the bank[']s negotiators for branch B.¹⁵⁰

In addition to impeding negotiations with union representatives, the banks took action against employees in the branches. Some banks made small improvements to wages and working conditions in an effort to make union membership appear unnecessary and even punitive. In October 1977, Scotiabank announced “significant improvements” to the bank’s vacation policy at its Canadian branches.¹⁵¹ The change, however, would only affect workers at non-unionized branches; management argued that under the Canada Labour Code, unionized employees had to negotiate vacation policy improvements through the collective bargaining process. In December, the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) announced a wage increase for non-unionized employees.¹⁵²

The banks also attempted to decrease the number of pro-union employees in certified branches and those in the process of certifying. In November, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the USWA had filed a complaint against Toronto-Dominion claiming that the bank had interfered with the formation of a union at a branch in Saskatoon by transferring pro-union employees and bringing in anti-union employees.¹⁵³ In January,

¹⁵⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 20, Esther Shannon, “SORWUC: A Union for Working Women,” *Upstream* (April 1978): 8–9.

¹⁵¹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 10, letter from F. M. Goddard to “CANADIAN BRANCHES,” October 5, 1977, original emphasis.

¹⁵² UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 37, letter from Rowland Frazee to staff, December 20, 1977.

¹⁵³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Angela Barnes, “USW claims T-D Bank interfering,” November 5, 1977.

SORWUC filed an unfair labour practice complaint against CIBC, alleging that the bank laid off a teller at the Gibsons branch because of her union activity.¹⁵⁴

The banks turned to the courts as well. Though the Canada Labour Code prevented appeals of CLRB decisions in the courts, appeals could proceed if it was alleged that the board had exceeded its mandate and made an error in law. Scholars have shown that in the post-war period, employers consistently tested the boundaries and powers of labour relations legislation by appealing labour board decisions.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, in 1977, CLC officials had anticipated the banks would use court appeals to drag out organizing and negotiations.¹⁵⁶

Several banks appealed certification orders. The Bank of Montreal argued that stenographers should not be included in the bargaining unit; the bank felt that “the future implications of the confidential material relating to Industrial Relations matters which will have to be handled by stenographers was not given proper consideration.”¹⁵⁷ RBC launched the most significant appeal in November 1977, when it decided to challenge the CLRB’s decision to certify SORWUC as the bargaining unit for a branch in Gibsons, BC.¹⁵⁸ The Gibsons branch was the first group of RBC employees to apply for certification. As in the other cases, RBC immediately requested a hearing before the board, but unlike the other banks, who argued that the appropriate unit was a national

¹⁵⁴ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 58, SORWUC press release, January 27, 1978.

¹⁵⁵ Charles W. Smith, “‘Fairness and Balance?’: The Politics of Ontario’s Labour Relations Regime, 1949–1963” (PhD diss., York University, 2008); Charles W. Smith, “The Politics of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*: Business, Labour, and Government in the Consolidation of Post-War Industrial Relations, 1949–1961,” *Labour/Le Travail* 62 (Fall 2008): 109–151.

¹⁵⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from R. Lang to J. Morris and S. Carr, April 19, 1977.

¹⁵⁷ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 10, Bank of Montreal Circular No. 4011, September 23, 1977.

¹⁵⁸ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Roger Worth, “Banks to fight union ‘open door,’” *Financial Post* (Toronto), November 9, 1977.

one, RBC contended that it should be regional, in this case BC and Yukon. The CLRB rejected the bank's argument and upheld the single branch decision. RBC filed an appeal with the Federal Court of Appeal.¹⁵⁹

The counsel for SORWUC, Ian Donald, felt confident that the appeal would fail. He argued that RBC had not "demonstrated any error of law or other defect in the Board's reasoning." As well, in two earlier appeals involving the banks, the court had already demonstrated that it "was not prepared to substitute its own judgment on the matter."¹⁶⁰ Yet it is not surprising that wealthy corporations like the banks pursued court challenges, even when it appeared unlikely they could win. All the banks had to lose was money, of which they had plenty. The banks could thus afford to file endless appeals on the chance that one might succeed. If not, they could at least delay negotiations and hope that the unions ran out of money.

Moreover, though RBC was appealing a certification order granted to SORWUC, the case had implications for the entire labour movement. An RBC victory had the potential to overturn every single-branch certification order granted by the CLRB. As Donald explained to a CLC official in his letter requesting financial support from the congress, "You are, no doubt, aware that an adverse ruling in this case would have a very deleterious effect on the organizing attempts that are currently underway by your affiliates."¹⁶¹ All of the workers, unions, and labour organizations involved in bank employee unionization had a stake in the RBC case. Their unwillingness or inability to

¹⁵⁹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 55, "THE ROYAL BANK APPEALS THE BRANCH AS BARGAINING UNIT DECISION," *The Monthly Statement* 1, no. 9 (November/December 1977): 4, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁰ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 18, file 15, letter from Ian Donald to Donald Montgomery, September 11, 1978.

¹⁶¹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 18, file 15, letter from Ian Donald to Donald Montgomery, September 11, 1978.

work together to counter the banks' anti-union behaviour would have devastating consequences for all of the organizing campaigns.

The Collapse of the Campaigns

In light of the significance of the RBC appeal, Rands immediately wrote to the CLC and to the other unions representing bank workers to ask for financial assistance to cover the costs of defending the CLRB decision in court. Rands underscored the significance of the appeal, explaining that it risked overturning certification orders and that it forced SORWUC "to divert our resources from organizing to the courts." She emphasized that "without substantial financial assistance from" other groups, SORWUC would "not be able to contest this appeal."¹⁶² In her letter to the CLC, Rands reminded the congress executive of SORWUC's position on affiliation. SORWUC wanted "to affiliate like any other national union"; the union was neither "asking for special treatment or special terms and conditions" nor "for exclusive jurisdiction in the banking industry."¹⁶³

Morris responded to Rands on 14 December. In his letter, he reiterated the CLC's stance on independent unions and bank worker organizing. The congress believed "that the job to be done on behalf of bankworkers . . . will require the total resources of the movement." Though Morris conceded that "small independent groups will make some initial progress," he insisted that "in the long term the lack of a strong and well organized movement to deal with the strongly entrenched banking industry could be detrimental to

¹⁶² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 11, letters from Jean Rands to the United Steelworkers of America, the Office and Technical Employees Union, and the Retail Clerks International Association, December 8 and 9, 1977.

¹⁶³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to the CLC Executive, December 7, 1977.

the best interests of the workers involved.” Thus, Morris urged the UBW to break with SORWUC and join the CLC committee. If it did, the CLC “would be prepared to look at the financial obligations outstanding in connection with the applications for certification of United Bank Worker units.” As for the rest of SORWUC, Morris explained, any application for affiliation “would require a detailed examination of the units involved in relation to the question of jurisdiction granted to affiliates of the Congress.”¹⁶⁴ In essence, the CLC would only help SORWUC defend the CLRB decision if the union turned over its bank units.

SORWUC members did not take kindly to the Morris’s offer. In her response, UBW president Charlotte Johnson informed Morris that the UBW executive unanimously rejected his proposal. She added, “We find it reprehensible on your part that you would suggest we should divide our Union in order to affiliate to the Congress.” Johnson reiterated, yet again, that SORWUC was willing to consider affiliating as a national union. If the CLC was not interested in that option, then SORWUC members saw “no purpose in continuing correspondence.”¹⁶⁵ Morris sent a short response on January 31, stating that the CLC “will respect the decision of your Executive and cease all correspondence on the subject.”¹⁶⁶ Relations between the two organizations were no longer just hostile; they were over.

The end of direct communication between SORWUC and the CLC did not end tensions between the two groups. Rather, as the weeks wore on, CLC representatives

¹⁶⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Joe Morris to Jean Rands, December 14, 1977.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from C. Johnson to Joe Morris, January 17, 1978, reprinted in Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 123.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from Joe Morris to C. Johnson, January 31, 1978, reprinted in Bank Book Collective, *An Account to Settle*, 123.

worked to undermine SORWUC and challenge the union's position on jurisdiction. The CLC director of organization told *The Globe and Mail* that SORWUC was "not really a bank workers' organization" and claimed that the union had "asked for money to do as they will, to build their own organization," a clear misrepresentation of the union's request for assistance to offset the cost of legal fees.¹⁶⁷

With negotiations proceeding slowly, the RBC appeal pending, and the CLC preparing to launch its own drive, SORWUC members decided to re-evaluate their strategy. The UBW scheduled a special convention for 29 January 1978 to discuss whether to continue organizing on a branch basis or to change course and attempt to secure a provincial bargaining unit.¹⁶⁸ It had seemed easier to secure certification for one branch, but organizers had quickly learned that single-branch bargaining presented significant problems. The banks could penalize unionized branches, non-union branches could hold off on organizing until the unionized branches secured an agreement, and employees who wanted to unionize but could not sign up a majority of their workplace could not secure the benefits of unionization.¹⁶⁹ At the convention, UBW members voted to stop applying for individual branch certifications and instead apply for province-wide bargaining units.¹⁷⁰ They announced the change of strategy in early February, along with news that the union would hire three more full-time organizers, all of them bank workers.

¹⁶⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 6, Anne Roberts, "Small B.C. union is busy organizing women bank workers," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 20, 1977.

¹⁶⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 58, letter from Charlotte Johnson to UBW members, January 3, 1978.

¹⁶⁹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Dodie Zerr and Jackie Ainsworth to UBW members, January 10, 1978.

¹⁷⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 10, newspaper clipping, "Bank union switches tack in strategy for organizing," n.d., ca. January 30, 1978.

They set a goal of signing up the required 51 per cent of one bank's employees in the province over the next six months.¹⁷¹

In the following weeks, SORWUC continued to clash with CLC representatives. A particularly heated situation developed in Kamloops. SORWUC accused OTEU organizers of raiding and claimed that CLC representatives had been "bragging about how they got some SORWUC members to leave."¹⁷² In another instance, a CLC representative told a local newspaper that "the banks will break" SORWUC in the upcoming federal court appeal.¹⁷³

Meanwhile, within the CLC, affiliates continued to fight over jurisdiction and bank workers. Both the RCIA and the OPEIU had indicated that they did not support the CLC's plan for an inter-union committee. When Singler wrote to Montgomery in early February to update him on plans to set up an affiliate organizing committee in Toronto, she explained that affiliates would be invited "on a select basis" and stressed that "under no circumstances" were the OPEIU or the RCIA to be included.¹⁷⁴

While the CLC and the unions involved in bank worker organizing seemed unable to recognize the importance of overcoming their differences, their lawyers had no difficulty pointing out the harm they were doing. In the lead-up to the RBC appeal hearing, the lawyer for the CLC bank worker organizing committee met with the lawyers for SORWUC and OTEU. In his report to Montgomery, he wrote, "It is regrettable that

¹⁷¹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 7, John Schreiner, "UBW gambles on all-out B.C. drive," *Financial Post* (Toronto), n.d., ca. February 1978.

¹⁷² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 7, Jamie Bowman, "CLC 'RAIDING' ADDS TO TROUBLES: Workers being scared off," *Kamloops News*, n.d., ca. February 1978, original emphasis.

¹⁷³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 7, "Court 'to break' union," *Kamloops Daily Sentinel*, March 7, 1978.

¹⁷⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from Laraine Singler to Donald Montgomery, February 2, 1978.

on a matter of such importance the efforts have been diffused.” Given the importance of the situation, he explained, “unions cannot afford the luxury of indulging in old-style union politics to deal with a situation which is as pervasive as the one confronting the organization of bank employees.” He cautioned, “If the unions continue as they have, then I think it will be many years before you will see any agreements. The Banks are obviously stopping at nothing in terms of making counter-moves to combat attempts at organization and they are wrapping old-fashioned ideas in sophisticated packages. What is required now is a determined unified approach unless, of course, the politics of the situation are more important.”¹⁷⁵

In April, the CLC underwent a change in leadership, as Morris retired and former United Auto Workers Union president Dennis McDermott assumed the presidency of the congress. Believing a new president might take a new approach to bank worker organizing, SORWUC president Jean Rands wrote to McDermott to ask the CLC to support the union’s latest effort, a boycott of CIBC.¹⁷⁶ McDermott responded immediately but simply reiterated the CLC’s previous stance: “the job of organizing bank workers will be a long hard struggle that will require the concerted efforts of all those interested in seeing bank workers organized into a strong effective union capable of dealing with the powerful banking interests.” Still, he offered “to set aside the time necessary for full consideration of the avenues for the development of a co-operative and unified effort.”¹⁷⁷ Encouraged by McDermott’s letter, Rands asked, yet again, for a

¹⁷⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” letter from Maurice W. Wright to Donald Montgomery, March 20, 1978.

¹⁷⁶ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to Dennis McDermott, April 21, 1978.

¹⁷⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Dennis McDermott to Jean Rands, April 27, 1978.

donation to cover the legal fees incurred dealing with the RBC appeal.¹⁷⁸ In his response, McDermott was more conciliatory than his predecessor, but he remained unwilling to assist SORWUC with its legal costs unless the union agreed to join the CLC effort.¹⁷⁹

Faced with the legal appeal and with negotiations at a standstill, SORWUC members began to lay the necessary groundwork for a strike. In May, the union submitted several applications for conciliation.¹⁸⁰ Rather than see the move as a sign of SORWUC's desperation, Singler viewed it as manipulative. In a confidential memo sent to McDermott, Montgomery, and Johnston, Singler posited that SORWUC intended "to go to the wire" so they could ask the Minister of Labour to impose a settlement. Describing Rands as "reasonably competent at manipulating the labour movement into supporting her stance," Singler speculated that the SORWUC president was counting "on the Congress and the rest of the Labour movement to come out in support of her position and exert the necessary political pressure she needs to get an imposed settlement."¹⁸¹

In July, the UBW held a series of special conferences to discuss the union's strategy moving forward. On 31 July 1978, the UBW announced that members had voted to stop negotiating with banks in BC and to instead focus on building the union. In their press release, UBW members cited the banks' anti-union behaviour and the conflict with the CLC as deciding factors: "Our union is not yet strong enough to take on the banks

¹⁷⁸ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Jean Rands to Dennis McDermott, May 1, 1978.

¹⁷⁹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 15, file 15, letter from Dennis McDermott to Jean Rands, June 6, 1978.

¹⁸⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," "SORWUC'S STRIKE STATEMENT A SURPRISE FOR BANK OFFICIAL," *Vancouver Sun*, May 29, 1978, original emphasis.

¹⁸¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from Laraine Singler to Dennis McDermott, June 12, 1978.

and the Canadian Labour Congress together.”¹⁸² UBW president Charlotte Johnson encouraged members to “stay with SORWUC and work with us to build the UBW” but explained that the UBW “will not stand in their way” if they wish to join another union.¹⁸³ By 15 August, 22 of SORWUC’s 24 certified branches in BC had applied for decertification.¹⁸⁴

SORWUC’s withdrawal from negotiations and organizing struck a major blow to bank union organizing during this period. Though other unions were involved in the field, SORWUC had been the most successful. By the end of July 1978, SORWUC had filed 45 applications for certification and been granted 26 certification orders. The RCIA came in at a distant second with 25 applications filed and only 9 granted.¹⁸⁵

Various commentators weighed in on SORWUC’s withdrawal from negotiations. In the CLC’s opinion, SORWUC had behaved recklessly and was “leaving a lot of people in the lurch.”¹⁸⁶ CLC president Dennis McDermott described the union’s claims that the congress had refused to support it and had interfered with its organizing efforts as a “cop-out.” He insisted that “CLC affiliates had supported the union, ‘but it wanted complete command of the CLC treasury and retention of its autonomy.’”¹⁸⁷ Other commentators echoed McDermott, criticizing SORWUC for not joining the CLC effort.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 35, UBW press statement, July 31, 1978.

¹⁸³ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 34, letter from Charlotte Johnson to all members, United Bank Workers Section, August 9, 1978.

¹⁸⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, “Bank workers ask union to cancel certification,” *Vancouver Sun*, August 15, 1978.

¹⁸⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 1, file 53, “Summary of Applications for Certification (CLRB),” July 28, 1978.

¹⁸⁶ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Wilfred List, “Pioneer bank union to quit the field; says CLC, employers both to blame,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), August 1, 1978.

¹⁸⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Wilfred List, “Pioneer bank union to quit the field; says CLC, employers both to blame,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), August 1, 1978.

¹⁸⁸ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 9, file 16, Jack Phillips, “Bank employees should come first,” *Pacific Tribune*, August 11, 1978.

Bringing the history of bank worker organizing full circle, on 8 August 1978, Eileen Tallman (now Sufrin) – one of the lead organizers in the 1940s campaign to unionize bank workers – wrote an open letter to the UBW secretary. Tallman had moved to BC in 1972 where she became involved with the New Democratic Party, editing their monthly bulletin, *The Rock*, for a number of years. Throughout the remainder of her life, she continued to follow labour issues, often writing letters of support and criticism to various individuals and organizations.¹⁸⁹ In her letter to the UBW, Tallman chastised the union for criticizing the CLC and remaining unaffiliated. According to Tallman, a union that chose to remain outside of the CLC was “similar to an employee of a unionized company who refuses to join or pay dues.” Furthermore, she argued, the UBW’s claim “that the CLC has done nothing to help women workers is pretty farfetched, and sounds more like the pronouncement of a Maoist sect of women’s lib than a union.” As evidence of how the CLC helped women workers, Tallman pointed to the congress’s recent support for striking women workers at Fleck Manufacturing Co. in Centralia, ON and the fact that the CLC vice-president and the president of Canada’s largest union, CUPE, were both women.¹⁹⁰

Tallman’s focus on women’s involvement in the CLC and her efforts to paint SORWUC as a group of radical feminists indicate that during this period women held different views on the relationship between feminism and unionism. In the case of the drives to organize banks workers, on the one hand some people claimed that “feminism

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, LAC, Eileen Sufrin (Sufrin) fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 2, file 14A, letter from Eileen Tallman Sufrin to Elizabeth Godley, August 8, 1980; LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 2, file 14A, letter from Eileen Sufrin to Don Collins, May 4, 1985. Tallman died in White Rock, BC in 1999.

¹⁹⁰ LAC, Sufrin fonds, MG 31 B 31, volume 1, file 1, letter from Eileen (Tallman) Sufrin to the secretary, United Bank Workers, SORWUC, August 8, 1978.

got in the way of trade union principles.”¹⁹¹ On the other hand, others argued that the CLC’s “inability . . . to accommodate S.O.R.W.U.C. – a union of women, by women, for women – and its failure to keep the fledgling United Bank Workers Union alive, may well prove a grievous self-inflicted wound to the prospect for collective employee action in the fastest-growing sector of the Canadian workforce.”¹⁹²

Additionally, though the CLC publicly stated that “CLC staff assigned to bank organizing had been instructed not to interfere with the activity of any other union,”¹⁹³ congress documents indicate that high-ranking CLC officials were aware that representatives were interfering with SORWUC. In a memorandum sent to Montgomery on 4 August 1978, just 4 days after SORWUC announced it was withdrawing from negotiations, a CLC representative in the Kootenay region of BC explained that he had spent the past few months actively campaigning against SORWUC: “Much of the thrust had to be to stop support for SORWUC; e.g. while many of us were attending a ratification vote meeting of Cominco negotiations, the Nelson-Trail Labour Council voted to give moral and financial support. . . . this I was able to get over-turned, after calling a meeting of the executive and making a fight of it at the next meeting.”¹⁹⁴ Such evidence challenges CLC officials’ claims that representatives did not interfere with SORWUC.

¹⁹¹ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Jan O’Brien, “Bankers probably laughing at union’s defeat,” *Province* (Vancouver), August 29, 1978.

¹⁹² UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 19, file 12, Weiler, *Reconcilable Differences*, 24.

¹⁹³ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Wilfred List, “Pioneer bank union to quit the field; says CLC, employers both to blame,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), August 1, 1978.

¹⁹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file “Organization of Bank Workers 1972–78,” memorandum from Bob Buchanan to Don Montgomery, August 4, 1978, original ellipses.

With SORWUC out of the way, the CLC and its affiliates became the major force in bank union organizing. By the end of August 1978, the number of certifications held by SORWUC had dropped from 26 to six. Among the unions still organizing, the RCIA topped the list, with nine certifications; the CSN had five, CUBE and OTEU Local 15 each had three, and the USWA had two. The CLC's Union of Bank Employees (UBE), chartered in March, had just one certification.¹⁹⁵

By the fall of 1978, the CLC had finally firmed up its plan to organize Canadian bank workers into one national union, the UBE. BWOC would serve as an advisory committee, Singler would oversee the campaign, and organizers, CLC representatives, and affiliate unions would organize in particular regions and cities: the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) in Ottawa, the United Autoworkers of America in Oshawa, the USWA in Toronto, CUPE in Sault Ste. Marie, and CLC representatives in Hamilton-Niagara, Windsor, and the Prairies.¹⁹⁶ All bargaining materials would go to the CLC so that the congress could "serve as a 'clearing house' for bank negotiations."¹⁹⁷

CLC officials in charge of the UBE drive attempted to design a campaign that would appeal to bank workers, especially women. A key difference from earlier campaigns was the decision to hire young female organizers, such as Robyn Alexander and Rosemary Warskett. By the time that they became involved in the bank campaign, both women had experience organizing around issues of women and work. Alexander

¹⁹⁵ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 1, Angela Barnes, "Retail Clerks top union in banks," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 1, 1978; UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 10, Angela Barnes, "Unions now more successful organizing chartered bank branches," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 26, 1979.

¹⁹⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 149, file "Organization of Bank Workers 1972-78," memorandum from Ed Johnston to D. Montgomery, August 17, 1978.

¹⁹⁷ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file "Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing)," letter from Laraine Singler to Gerard Docquier, Cliff Evans, and Romeo Corbeil, August 18, 1978.

had helped unionize the women clerical workers at the Halifax labour law firm she worked at in the mid-1970s. After completing a trade union certificate at the London School of Economics, she returned to Canada and contacted the CLC about employment. In January 1978, the congress hired her to work as the BWOC information officer in Ottawa.¹⁹⁸ Warkett was seconded from PSAC in September 1978 to work on the UBE campaign. She was a feminist and a unionist who was actively involved with organizing around equal pay for work of equal value.¹⁹⁹ Both women worked on the UBE campaign throughout 1978 and 1979.

By hiring young female organizers and producing materials that emphasized the need for bank workers to organize themselves, the CLC tried to construct a grassroots campaign. In reality, however, few of the organizers had experience working in a bank and congress officials controlled the campaign. For example, in a memo from Singler to Montgomery and Johnston, sent on 6 December 1978, Singler outlined the proposed bylaw changes for the UBE.²⁰⁰ The language used by Singler makes it clear that officials had drawn up the bylaws and the changes, not the members. As well, CLC officials continued to display a paternalistic attitude toward bank workers. In a letter to a congress representative, the director of organization explained that one of the “important elements for success” was “baby sitting the new members until they felt confident in the union structure.”²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Robyn Alexander (former CLC bank union organizer), interview by Julia Smith, December 10, 2015.

¹⁹⁹ Warskett, interview.

²⁰⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Laraine Singler to D. Montgomery, December 6, 1978.

²⁰¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” letter from Ed Johnston to Raymond Murray, March 22, 1982.

The top-down structure of the campaign combined with several other issues to hamper the CLC effort to unionize bank workers. As had been the case with SORWUC, a major problem for CLC organizers was their inability to secure significant improvements in wages and working conditions at the bargaining table. In September 1978, CUBE announced that members at three Ontario branches of the Bank of Nova Scotia had reached a tentative deal with the employer. Though Singler hailed the contracts as “a major breakthrough,” when revealed, the results were less than impressive.²⁰² The agreements provided some important language around union security and grievance procedures, but, in terms of wages and benefits, they provided the same increases granted to non-unionized employees one year earlier.²⁰³ As well, the contracts were set to expire less than one month after their ratification. The two agreements signed by the OTEU in BC in December 1978 had the same problem; the salary increases matched those brought in for non-union employees several months earlier.²⁰⁴

Organizers were also beginning to identify major problems with the campaign. In terms of strategy, organizers expressed doubts that the branch-by-branch strategy could succeed. In November 1978, an organizer wrote to Singler, “We are acutely aware that the branch by branch organizing will kill us if we continue to have isolated groups of members.”²⁰⁵ Alexander and Warskett both recall feeling that the branch-by-branch

²⁰² UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, “Tentative contracts reached at 3 banks,” *Province* (Vancouver), September 29, 1978.

²⁰³ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Angela Barnes, “Union, Scotiabank reach first contracts,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), October 10, 1978.

²⁰⁴ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Peter Comparelli, “Bank pact first in B.C.,” *Vancouver Express*, December 20, 1978; UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Angela Barnes, “Collective pacts with B of M signed this week,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 22, 1978.

²⁰⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Linda Michaels to Laraine Singler, November 11, 1978.

strategy was futile.²⁰⁶ As Warskett put it, “It became crystal clear that we could not negotiate good agreements on a branch by branch basis and we had had to organize on a larger basis.”²⁰⁷

The structure of the campaign also presented problems. Though the substantial media coverage gave the appearance that it was a massive effort involving many people, in reality it consisted of a few organizers working across the country with limited resources and support.²⁰⁸ In March 1979, CLC officials acknowledged that there was a lack of supervision in BC and that the “present mode of operation” had contributed to “real frustration and confusion.” Director of organization Ed Johnston believed that the BC campaign had “no realistic direction . . . and that this is due to absentee management.” Meanwhile, in Oshawa, the decision to appoint a lead organizer with “absolutely no previous experience, no training period, and no supervision” had proved to be “a disaster.”²⁰⁹

By May 1979, the CLC campaign was struggling. Regional representatives complained that the congress had not paid several workers,²¹⁰ and CLC leaders began to bicker with one another. A particularly tense situation developed between Singler and Johnston. In mid-May, Johnston wrote to Singler to criticize a decision she had made. In her response, Singler accused Johnston of having an “underlying motive,” behaving in an “underhanded fashion,” and engaging in a “childish ‘war of words.’” Singler made her feelings towards Johnston crystal clear: “The resentment you perhaps may read between

²⁰⁶ Alexander, interview; Warskett, interview.

²⁰⁷ Warskett, interview.

²⁰⁸ Alexander, interview; Warskett, interview.

²⁰⁹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Ed Johnston to Don Montgomery, March 12, 1979.

²¹⁰ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” telegram from W Norheim to D Montgomery, n.d., ca. May 1979.

the lines is not imaginary, but a manifestation of my innate aversion toward office politics and the ‘protect-thy-ass’ memo game -- an idiosyncrasy [*sic*] of mine of which you are well aware -- that you seem to have a penchant for playing.”²¹¹ Relations between Singler and CLC leaders worsened in subsequent months. In July and August of 1981, Johnston and Singler fought over the details and costs of Singler’s relocation from Ottawa to Windsor.²¹² In September, Singler and Montgomery clashed after Montgomery ordered her to vacate her Ottawa office and relocate to Windsor.²¹³ In December, the CLC released Singler from BWOC.²¹⁴

Although Singler and CLC officials do not mention gender in their disagreements, gender undoubtedly shaped their relations with one another. Former organizer Rosemary Warskett recalls that Singler pushed CLC officials to adjust their attitude and strategy toward organizing women workers.²¹⁵ The mostly male leadership likely did not take kindly to reprimands from a young female unionist. Male representatives also questioned Singler’s ability. For example, in June 1982, six months after Singler had left BWOC, the CLC representative in Windsor blamed her for the failing campaign in that city: “I told Brother Ortlieb and yourself and Sister Singler that the Congress was making a major error in assigning Sister Singler to the Windsor area.” The representative did not blame Singler directly but rather insinuated that she did not do her job properly: “Sister Singler

²¹¹ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Laraine Singler to Ed Johnston, May 23, 1979.

²¹² LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Laraine Singler to Ed Johnston, July 27, 1981; letter from Ed Johnston to L. Singler, August 7, 1981.

²¹³ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” memorandum from Laraine Singler to Donald Montgomery, September 23, 1981; memorandum from Donald Montgomery to Laraine Singler, September 28, 1981.

²¹⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” letter from Donald Montgomery to Norm Richards, December 21, 1981.

²¹⁵ Warskett, interview.

was assigned to Windsor as a Servicing Representative . . . but during this entire period I was continually re-assigned to problems in Windsor and spent much of my time in Windsor working on those problems.”²¹⁶

The banks’ anti-union behaviour also made it difficult for organizers to recruit members.²¹⁷ The courts had dismissed the RBC appeal in October 1978, thereby upholding the branch-by-branch decision.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, the banks’ strategy of delaying negotiations and improving wages and working conditions in non-union branches made unionization less appealing to workers.²¹⁹ For example, on 2 August 1978, one day after SORWUC announced its withdrawal from negotiations, the executive vice-president and general manager of the Bank of Montreal sent a letter to branch managers informing them of the news and telling them that in light of the development, the bank would be “taking immediate steps in these 12 [certified] branches to implement the increases which were granted earlier to other bank employees.”²²⁰

Moreover, though the bank publicly claimed a position of neutrality, over time evidence surfaced that challenged this claim. In 1980, it was revealed that in January 1978 the president of CIBC had “instructed the bank’s entire management to fight the

²¹⁶ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file “Bank Wkrs. Org. Committee (standing),” letter from Raymond J. Murray to Ed Johnston, June 1, 1982.

²¹⁷ UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Peter Comparelli, “Bank pact first in B.C.,” *Vancouver Express*, December 20, 1978.

²¹⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 29, Peter Silverman, “Slow going for CUBE campaign despite ‘milestone’ contract,” *Financial Post* (Toronto), October 14, 1978. Though the CLC had refused to provide SORWUC with financial support to defend the decision, in the end the congress did pay the union’s lawyer for his work during the final stages of the appeal process. UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 15, file 17, letter from Ian Donald to Jean Rands, September 5, 1979.

²¹⁹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Gordon McCaffrey, “‘Ridiculous’ job takes city woman to Ottawa,” *Vancouver Sun*, July 13, 1979.

²²⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 4, file 10, letter from C. F. MacNaughton to managers, August 2, 1978.

unions tooth and nail ‘to the fullest extent possible.’”²²¹ According to the press, “His directive set the tone for a number of firings and other illegal labor practices during 1978 that crushed most organizing efforts in Commerce branches.”²²² The CLRB eventually ruled that several banks had engaged in a number of unfair labour practices designed to discourage union organizing among employees, but the rulings amounted to too little too late as the damage had already been done.

By November 1980, UBE members were calling on the congress to re-evaluate its strategy in the banking industry. That month, a group representing eight locked-out CIBC employees presented a brief to the CLC’s conference on equal opportunity and treatment for women workers. They explained, “We must have the courage to admit that we are in an impasse. We must recognize that we are regressing. We must measure the negative effect this situation is having and will have in the future not only on the chances of the movement breaking through in this important sector but also on the credibility of the Canadian trade union movement.” The workers called on the CLC to analyze the current campaign; to develop “an efficient, coordinated structure”; to petition the federal government to amend the Labour Code to assist bank worker organizing; and to launch a national boycott of CIBC, given the bank’s “leading role in the fight to a finish against unions.”²²³

By 1981, the CLC campaign was essentially finished. In August, the president of the National Union of Provincial Government Employees pointed out that BWOC had

²²¹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 17, file 15, John Deverell, “Banks’ double-edged tactics burst union’s bubble,” *Toronto Star*, March 18, 1981.

²²² UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 17, file 15, John Deverell, “Banks’ double-edged tactics burst union’s bubble,” *Toronto Star*, March 18, 1981.

²²³ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 8, “Brief Presented by Locked Out Employees of Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (East-Angus Branch),” November 28, 1980.

not met since 1979.²²⁴ In a letter written to the CLC president a few months later, the congress's director of organization stated, "[A]ny meeting at this time would be unproductive. A productive meeting would require new faces and new commitment by established unions."²²⁵ Johnston estimated that the CLC had spent \$1.5 million on bank worker organizing since 1978; the results, in terms of members, per capita, and new units, however, were negligible. Although a few unions carried on with organizing in the early 1980s, the collapse of the CLC campaign marked the end of the wave of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry that had begun in 1976 when CUBE and SORWUC filed their first certification applications. The most significant effort to organize Canadian bank workers was over.

Conclusion

In terms of the number of people involved and the press coverage received, the 1970s were an important period in the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry. As shown in this chapter, however, the drives of the 1970s ultimately failed due to the banks' anti-union behaviour and the Canadian labour movement's inability to overcome disagreements over ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy. Rather than support the efforts of smaller, independent unions like CUBE and SORWUC that had been successful, the CLC and many of its affiliates attempted to control bank union organizing. They established separate campaigns, and they worked to undermine

²²⁴ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file "Bank Wks. Org. Committee (standing)," letter from John L. Fryer to Dennis McDermott, August 17, 1981.

²²⁵ LAC, CLC fonds, MG 28 I 103, accession 1992/0195, BAN no. 120-020080-25, volume 188, file "Bank Wks. Org. Committee (standing)," memorandum from Ed Johnston to President McDermott, December 7, 1981.

SORWUC. Ultimately, the inter-union battles contributed to the failure of the campaigns and the victory of the banks.

The drives of the 1970s nonetheless remain significant to the history of labour organizing. On the one hand, they resulted in the significant ruling that bank workers could unionize on a branch-by-branch basis. Subsequently, in less than two years the CLRB issued 67 certification orders for individual bank branches.²²⁶ Furthermore, though many units decertified, a handful eventually negotiated agreements.²²⁷ On the other hand, the drives point to the disastrous outcomes that result when labour officials view new forms of organizing as a threat and refuse to support them. All of the unions and labour organizations involved suffered negative consequences, but bank workers were ultimately the biggest losers in the battle for Canadian bank workers in the 1970s. Some lost their jobs, others faced harassment and wage freezes, and, in the end, Canadian bank workers remained mostly unorganized. Commenting on the failure of unions to work together to organize bank workers in 1977 and 1978, a CLRB official told a Toronto newspaper in 1981, “That’s where the unions missed the boat. . . . The banks weren’t ready for them then, but they could not get their act together and take advantage.”²²⁸ Furthermore, the failures of the 1970s cast a long shadow over bank worker organizing. In the early 1980s, SORWUC regrouped and launched a new drive to organize bank and finance workers,

²²⁶ SORWUC led the way with 26 branches. The remaining certifications were held by the RCIA (16), the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (12), the CLC (5), CUBE (3), the OTEU (3), and the USWA (2). UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Angela Barnes, “Bank wage levels hamper union organizing,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 26, 1979.

²²⁷ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 11, file 20, Peter Silverman, “Slow going for CUBE campaign despite ‘milestone’ contract,” *Financial Post* (Toronto), October 14, 1978; UBCL RBSC, SORWUC fonds, RBSC-ARC-1490, volume 3, file 9, Peter Comparelli, “Bank pact first in B.C.” *Express*, December 20, 1978.

²²⁸ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 17, file 15, John Deverell, “Banks’ double-edged tactics burst union’s bubble,” *Toronto Star*, March 18, 1981.

but it, too, struggled, and the union disbanded completely in 1986. Since then, there has been no concerted effort to unionize bank workers in Canada.

Finally, the failed bank drives of the 1970s serve as a reminder that employers continued to use all of the resources at their disposal to prevent employees from unionizing in the post-war period and that labour relations boards often did little to stop them. In the case of the banks, the employers engaged in many unfair labour practices and mounted a number of legal challenges, all in an effort to thwart union organizing. In January 1979, *The Globe and Mail* reported that of the 50 complaints of unfair labour practice received by the CLRB during the wave of bank organizing in the 1970s the board upheld only one.²²⁹ In 1981, *Chatelaine* reported that according to the 1977–1978 annual report of the CLRB, a third of the complaints received that year were against banks, more than any other sector under the board’s jurisdiction.²³⁰

The labour relations system that was constructed at the end of World War II and that continues to exist makes it appear as though employers and workers are equal. Yet in reality, the side with the most money usually wins. The current framework offers little support for workers trying to organize in the banking industry, a sector dominated by large multinational corporations with limitless resources. Future efforts to organize bank employees will thus require workers, unions, and labour organizations to mount a serious challenge to the current system of labour relations.

²²⁹ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 1, Angela Barnes, “Bank wage levels hamper union organizing,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), January 26, 1979.

²³⁰ UBCL RBSC; SORWUC, Local 4 fonds; RBSC-ARC-1491, volume 21, file 5, Charlotte Gray, “WHAT WILL UNIONS DO FOR WOMEN IN THE ’80S?” *Chatelaine* (May 1981): 91, original emphasis.

CONCLUSION

On 4 June 2007, Dara Fresco, a teller working at a Toronto branch of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), filed a \$651-million class-action lawsuit against the bank on behalf of 31,000 CIBC employees at more than 1,000 branches across Canada. Fresco claimed that over the course of a decade, CIBC regularly required her to work overtime and then denied her overtime pay by citing a bank policy that required prior approval for overtime. In the suit, Fresco argued that the problem of unpaid overtime was widespread and systemic; she also claimed that the bank had an inadequate record-keeping system for overtime. Six months later, in December 2007, Cindy Fulawka, a personal banker employed by the Bank of Nova Scotia in Saskatchewan, filed a \$350-million class-action lawsuit on behalf of 10,000 Scotiabank employees, also over the issue of unpaid overtime. Like Fresco, Fulawka pointed to the bank's pre-approval policy and poor records as key issues.¹ At the time, one lawyer stated that if the courts certified Fresco's suit as a class action, it would be "the largest employment-related class action ever to proceed in Canada."²

The class-action lawsuits filed against two of Canada's Big Five banks over the issue of unpaid overtime speak to the poor working conditions that continue to exist in

¹ Jeff Gray, "Supreme Court clears way for employees' overtime suits against banks," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), March 21, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/the-law-page/supreme-court-clears-way-for-employees-overtime-suits-against-banks/article10055109/> (accessed February 22, 2016).

² Trevor Lawson, "Employees Find Strength in Numbers: Overtime Class Actions Arrive in Canada," *McCarthy Tetrault, McCarthy Tetrault*, http://www.mccarthy.ca/article_detail.aspx?id=3796 (accessed February 22, 2016).

the Canadian banking industry in the twenty-first century. Today, bank workers face many of the same issues that they did in the previous century, including unpaid overtime, poor benefits, and a lack of job security.³ Also, then, as now, few bank workers are unionized. Without a union and a collective agreement, bank employees have limited means by which to improve their wages and working conditions and to compel their employers to address their grievances. Class-action lawsuits, though significant, can drag on for years. Almost nine years have passed since the plaintiffs first filed the suits, and both cases remain unresolved. The Bank of Nova Scotia reached a tentative settlement in 2014, but class members have yet to receive any money; the CIBC case appears to be ongoing.⁴ Furthermore, although a victory would provide workers with financial compensation and might lead to changes in the banks' policies and practices, it would do little to transform the unequal power relations between banks and their employees.

That bank workers turned to the courts to address their grievances rather than a union is not surprising given the current state of the labour movement in Canada and the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry. New government and employer attacks on unions and working people have once again placed the labour movement on the defensive. In such a climate, unions struggle to maintain members, negotiate collective agreements, and fight legal battles, leaving them with little time and few resources for organizing, despite the pressing need to do so. As well, bank workers considering joining a union or organizers thinking about mounting a campaign in the banks would likely have their hopes dashed after looking at the labour movement's

³ Zabeida Nazim, "Interrogating Restructuring: A Critical Ethnography of Ethno-Racial Women Bank Workers in Canadian Retail Banking" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2007).

⁴ Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP and Roy Elliott Kim O' Connor LLP, *UnpaidOvertime.ca*, Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP and Roy Elliott Kim O' Connor LLP, <http://www.unpaidovertime.ca/> (accessed February 22, 2016).

record in the banking industry. Over the course of the twentieth century, bank workers repeatedly expressed interest in unionization and several unions and labour organizations attempted to establish a bank union, but for the most part unions could not establish a permanent presence in the banks.

In Canada, between 1940 and 1980 bank workers sought to unionize and the labour movement made some effort to organize them. Most of these campaigns failed, however, due to several key issues, including the banks' anti-union activity, federal and provincial labour boards' action and inaction, and labour movement disputes over ideology, jurisdiction, and strategy. The banks consistently opposed unionization and used a variety of tactics to impede unions and discourage workers from organizing. The state, at times, compelled employers to recognize unions and negotiate contracts but more often worked to undermine union organizing. High-ranking labour movement officials also shaped the outcome of bank union drives. Though women comprised the majority of bank workers by the early 1950s, the predominantly male labour leadership often used a top-down approach and hired male organizers who had never worked in banks. Labour leaders' failure to alter their strategies to reflect the particular needs and interests of bank workers and to support alternative approaches hindered bank unionization.

During this period, class and gender intersected and shaped union organizing, the labour bureaucracy, and the relationship between labour and the state. Whereas earlier scholarship on bank worker unions argued that "in order to unionize, women must overcome the cumulative effects of a socialization process which emphasizes passivity," my research suggests that as the bank workforce became more feminized at the lower

occupational levels workers became more militant.⁵ Labour board members and CLC officials who thought of bank workers as “girls” underestimated women’s willingness to organize and challenge their employers. At the same time, women’s increased union activism and the establishment of feminist unions like SORWUC also reflected a changing political context, as the women’s movement and changes in women’s labour force participation stimulated new forms of resistance.⁶

In the early 1940s, the Canadian Congress of Labor set up the Office and Professional Workers Organizing Committee (OPWOC) after bank employees expressed interest in unionizing. OPWOC established several locals of bank workers in Ontario and Québec, including Local 5, which represented Banque Canadienne Nationale employees in Montréal. Frustrated by the bank’s refusal to recognize the union and the regional war labour board’s delay in deciding employees’ application for cost-of-living bonuses and wage increases, in April 1942 Local 5 members went on strike, launching the first strike in the Canadian banking industry. The bank’s anti-union behaviour, the war labour board’s delayed and disappointing decision on employees’ application for monetary increases, and labour leaders’ willingness to accept the board’s decision, however, ultimately undermined the strike and hindered further organizing. Given that some labour leaders accepted and encouraged militant actions in blue-collar, industrial workplaces during the war, their contrasting attitude towards white-collar workers is striking.⁷

⁵ Graham S. Lowe, “Causes of Unionization in Canadian Banks,” *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations* 36, no. 4 (1981): 872.

⁶ Rosemary Warskett, “Women and Clerical Work: Revisiting Class and Gender,” *Studies in Political Economy* 30 (Autumn 1989): 179.

⁷ Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners’ Strike of 1941–42*, revised ed. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2001); Wendy Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939–45* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 72–76.

A decade and a half later, the newly formed Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) attempted to unionize bank workers as part of a broader campaign to organize white-collar workers; leaders were now more cognizant of the need to draw members from a burgeoning financial sector. Again, employer hostility, state intervention, and labour leaders' strategy hampered organizing. The failed 1956 and 1960 campaigns relied on high-ranking union officers and large international unions. In 1959, however, CLC support for a grassroots effort by three female bank workers in small-town British Columbia resulted in the first application for certification in the banking industry and a landmark ruling from the Canada Labour Relations Board (CLRB). The difference in strategy and results between the Kitimat case and the CLC campaigns highlights the need for labour leaders to consider and support alternative approaches to union organizing in which workers take the lead and the labour movement provides support.

The experience of the Syndicat des Employés de la Banque d'Épargne de la Cité et du District de Montréal (SEB) in the late 1960s underscores the importance of grassroots organizing and labour movement solidarity. SEB's experience differed from earlier bank union drives in that many employees joined the union, which already had a "base" as an employee association, upper-level employees (accountants and inspectors) led the campaign, and the union received significant support from the regional labour movement. SEB encountered some of the same issues that plagued other organizing efforts, but broad-based support helped the union to counter management's anti-union behaviour and secure a collective agreement. The SEB story thus demonstrates the power of grassroots organizing and labour movement solidarity, perhaps also aided by an

increasingly nationalist climate in Québec, in which French workers were eager to aid other francophone workers.

The contrasting experience of the SEB from other bank union organizing campaigns also underscores the need to assess theories of the labour bureaucracy in relation to specific Canadian contexts. Rather than assume the lead and attempt to control the SEB campaign, the Québec arm of the CLC, the Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec, played a key supporting role. By showing that specific historical circumstances shape the relationship between workers, unions, and labour federations, the SEB story thus challenges dichotomous understandings of the labour bureaucracy that pit workers and labour bureaucrats against one another.

In the 1970s, several groups became involved with bank union organizing after two new unions, the Canadian Union of Bank Employees and the Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), successfully challenged the 1959 CLRB ruling and cleared the way for branch-by-branch organizing. The banks' anti-union behaviour and the labour movement's inability and unwillingness to overcome ideological differences and jurisdictional issues, however, contributed to the failure of the 1970s drives. As an independent grassroots feminist union, SORWUC successfully organized hundreds of bank workers, but its ideological and strategic differences led CLC officials to view the union as a threat. Without support from the CLC and facing a legal challenge from the banks, SORWUC withdrew from negotiations and cancelled its certifications. The CLC continued organizing but struggled to sign up new members and maintain certifications. The bank union drives of the 1970s thus reveal the potential of grassroots feminist unionism and new ways of organizing, the problems caused by

jurisdiction and top-down organizing, and the need for labour solidarity rather than territorial ambitions.

By analyzing the history of union organizing in the Canadian banking industry in the post-war period, this dissertation builds on and contributes to the interdisciplinary scholarship that re-evaluates the Fordist accord. Although the post-war settlement between capital and labour led to less hostile relations in some sectors and significant advances for some workers and unions, it made little difference for others, especially those in feminized and racialized sectors. Banks, in particular, continued to oppose unions and to use a variety of tactics to stop employees from organizing. The immense power and vast resources of banks meant that they had little to lose by ignoring worker demands, breaking the law, and pursuing lengthy and expensive legal battles. The structure of the branch banking system compounded matters; unions struggled to picket multiple branches simultaneously, and they quickly learned that the single-branch certification strategy was futile.

At the same time, the new system of labour relations contributed to the development of a more conservative and bureaucratized labour leadership. Union leaders increasingly focused on negotiating agreements, filing grievances, policing members, and working to secure reforms from the government. As well, the anti-communism of the Cold War resulted in the purging of many activists and unions from the labour movement and led labour leaders to view independent unions and grassroots organizing efforts with suspicion. Though the Canadian labour leadership launched several significant union drives and supported organizing efforts by some workers, they appeared unable or unwilling to devise and support new ways of organizing that reflected the needs and

interests of key groups of unorganized workers, such as bank employees. Instead, many labour leaders concentrated on securing certifications from labour boards and pushing for legislative reforms from federal and provincial governments, perhaps believing it would be easier to take on the state rather than employers. This dissertation thus raises important questions about how the labour movement viewed and used the regime of industrial legality constructed during and after World War II. In particular, we need to question how an increasingly complex system of labour law played an ideological role in convincing labour leaders that the new industrial pluralism would offer them protection from the worst of employer offensives.⁸

The state did not always act directly on behalf of capital; yet, it often assisted employers indirectly, by delaying hearings, denying wage increases and cost-of-living bonuses, dismissing unfair labour practice complaints, and rejecting certification applications. At the same time, the state occasionally assisted labour, passing legislation that allowed workers to join unions, rejecting employers' attempts to appeal labour board decisions through the courts, and granting certification applications. My research therefore highlights the ways in which gender and class shape the state and how the state functions as a site of contest and struggle.

A number of areas require further research. We need more historical studies of private sector white-collar workers and unionization. Why do so many of these workers remain outside the organized labour movement? Why have specific organizing efforts succeeded or failed? What strategies or tactics might the labour movement use to assist these workers in their struggles to improve their wages and working conditions? We also

⁸ Judy Fudge and Eric Tucker, *Labour Before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 2001; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

need more historical analyses of the federal and provincial labour boards and their role in shaping the outcome of union drives. The boards have the power to decide the fate of hard-fought labour battles; yet to date, scholars have produced few historical studies of them. Closer analysis of the boards, including their structure and function and how they have changed over time, would strengthen our understanding of the relationship between labour and the state and contribute to efforts to re-evaluate the post-war settlement. As well, we lack a comprehensive and critical historical study of the Canadian labour bureaucracy, including the Canadian Labour Congress. As the largest labour federation in the country, the CLC plays a prominent role in shaping the ideology and strategy of the Canadian labour movement. A detailed historical analysis of the CLC and Canadian labour leaders would provide a better understanding of the relationship between workers, unions, and the labour bureaucracy and its effect on union organizing.

Though few of the drives examined in this dissertation succeeded, they remain important to the history of labour organizing in Canada. As Québécoise labour and feminist activist Madeleine Parent once stated, “Every labour battle teaches a worker how to fight. . . . Nothing is ever completely lost.”⁹ The repeated failure of the labour movement to establish unions in one of the largest unorganized sectors in Canada holds many important lessons that have been overlooked for too long. This dissertation is an effort to rectify that problem.

Moreover, the task of organizing the banking industry remains just as pressing as it was sixty-four years ago when OPWOC members staged the first Canadian strike bank.

⁹ Noreen Shanahan, “Madeleine Parent and me,” *Rampant with Memory*, <https://rampantwithmemory.wordpress.com/2012/04/05/madeleine-parent-and-me/> (accessed February 22, 2016).

In reflecting on the failure of the strike and the potential for future bank worker organizing, OPWOC members highlighted the need for optimism and commitment:

People said, “It can’t be done. The banks control the whole economy. They are too powerful.” But there were bank clerks who said, “The same thing was said of General Motors and Henry Ford’s and U.S. Steel, but still the workers in those giant industries finally won their rights. White collar workers need a protected standard of living, they need democracy in their working conditions, as much as any other workers. It may take time, but it can be done – IT MUST BE DONE!”¹⁰

If working people are to improve their lives, workers, unions, and labour organizations must develop and support new ways of organizing that reflect the needs and interests of unorganized workers. Documenting and analyzing past failures and losses is an essential part of formulating new strategies for success.

¹⁰ Library and Archives Canada, Canadian Labour Congress fonds, MG 28 I 103, volume 359, file 8, *The First Canadian Bank Strike: The Facts: The Banque Canadienne Nationale Strike*, n.d., ca. 1942, original emphasis.

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