

Industrial Relations and Social Security

CANADIAN STRIKE TRENDS

By J. I. GRIFFIN

WHAT can be gained from an examination of the record of strikes and lockouts in Canada for the past four decades? Is it possible to obtain an understanding of so dynamic a phenomenon as the modern labor movement from a study of the columns of statistics published monthly by the Department of Labour? Fortunately, governmental agencies in almost all the nations of the world and leading students of labor problems have recognized that strike data provide about the only accurate record now available of the reactions of labor, and particularly organized labor, to changing economic and political conditions. From a close study of strike statistics, an excellent picture of the ebb and flow of business activity can easily be obtained, and from these data one can assess the efficiency with which the leaders of organized labor have seized strategic opportunities and the extent to which success has crowned the efforts of government to limit and guide labor unrest. Perhaps, when the statistical records have covered a longer period and have been more intensively analyzed it will become possible to forecast the effects of specific economic changes and public policy upon the number and magnitude of strikes.

Even now, the general patterns are clear. The two great wars show remarkably similar effects on strike activity in both Canada and the United States. The business cycle movements can be traced in the rise and fall of strikes. Generally, periods of expanding business, especially if the expansion is from un-

usually low levels, are periods of increasing strike activity. Viewed from a different angle this means that strikes rise when prices are rising and fall when prices decline. These relationships do not show exact coincidence but are useful generalizations. Among the many hypotheses advanced in regard to strike fluctuations there is one which finds an explanation for the increased number of strikes in the last few decades in the simple growth of population, or more precisely in the growth of the labor force. While it is obvious that with an increased labor force, due to the growth of population more workers are "exposed" to the risk of a strike, this secular trend is not as important a matter for study as the movements of a shorter duration, such as cyclical and season changes. Political influences also exert pressure upon strike trends but this is difficult to assess because of the interrelation of politics and prevailing economic conditions. The Wagner Act of 1935 in the United States, which in effect put a premium on vigorous unionization of the basic industries, pushed up to unusually high levels the expected peak of strikes in the recovery phase following the great depression. What would have happened in this period in the absence of the Wagner Act has proven a fruitful subject for debate. One particular interpretation of the strike statistics was accepted in the writing of the new Taft-Hartley Act, designed to bring about labor peace by a substantially different approach than that of the Wagner Act.¹

In Canada the Department of Labor has published, since 1901, a complete record of strikes occurring in the Domi-

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1. For a detailed examination of the United States data consult John I. Griffin, *Strikes, A Study in Quantitative Economics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1939; and Dale Yoder, *Economic Changes and Industrial Unrest*, *The Journal of Political Economy*, April 1904.

nion. Table I shows the three fundamental series reduced to index number form in order to facilitate comparisons.¹ No attempt is made to distinguish between strikes and lockouts, on the ground that "an industrial condition which is undoubtedly a lockout, is not often encountered."

of the three will depend in large measure on the purpose of the analysis and the time at which it is made. Thus, during the war, when the most critical aspect of strikes was the loss of essential production which they caused, the time loss of workers involved, measured in the number of man days, was the most im-

TABLE I
Canadian Strike Statistics
1901-1947
(Index Numbers 1935-1939=100)

Year	Number of Strikes	Number of Workers Involved	Time Loss in Man-Working Days	Year	Number of Strikes	Number of Workers Involved	Time Loss in Man-Working Days
1901	60	60	203	1924	42	85	354
1902	75	32	56	1925	53	72	327
1903	107	95	235	1926	47	59	73
1904	62	28	53	1927	45	55	42
1905	58	31	67	1928	59	44	61
1906	91	58	104	1929	55	32	42
1907	114	84	142	1930	41	34	25
1908	46	65	193	1931	53	27	56
1909	55	45	241	1932	70	58	70
1910	61	55	200	1933	75	66	87
1911	61	73	499	1934	116	114	157
1912	110	106	311	1935	73	82	79
1913	92	100	284	1936	95	86	76
1914	38	24	134	1937	169	178	243
1915	38	28	26	1938	90	51	41
1916	73	66	65	1939	74	101	62
1917	97	125	308	1940	102	150	73
1918	139	198	177	1941	140	216	119
1919	204	369	931	1942	215	282	123
1920	195	149	219	1943	244	542	285
1921	102	70	287	1944	121	187	134
1922	63	109	419	1945	119	238	399
1923	52	85	184	1946	138	346	1,237
				1947*	133	194	663

Source: *The Labour Gazette*, Department of Labour. The base period values are: strikes 166 workers involved 40,284; time loss in man-working days 365,072.

*Preliminary figures for first 11 months and estimate for December.

The statistics on strikes must be presented in three dimensions in order to grasp a proper perspective of the problem. The three basic variables are the number of strikes, the number of workers involved, and the time loss of the workers on strike. All these three are capable of varying independently of one another and the relative importance of any one

portant. In normal times, when there usually is some unemployment and short time, the days lost due to strikes may merely redistribute the unemployment, and therefore not greatly affect total working time in particular industries. To take a dramatic example, in the coal mining industry in the United States, between 1900 and 1920, the loss of time due to strikes amounted to the enormous figure of 747,000 man days. This total can, however, be seen in its proper perspective when it is pointed out that only 12% of the total idleness in this industry was due to strikes.

1. Strike data is published monthly in the *Labour Gazette*, with the annual review appearing in the March issue. Data for the period 1901-1930 were revised in 1931 and the results published in the February 1931 *Gazette*. A strike is defined as, "a cessation of work involving six or more employees and lasting one working day or more." The small strikes are included in the figures only if the time loss is ten days or more.

Examining the data in Table I the year 1919 shows the effect of the general strikes quite clearly in terms of the peak in time loss. The World War II upheaval shows its influence in the record number of strikes and workers involved in 1943, although the time loss was greatest in 1946. Over the entire period covered by this table more than 1,000 of the total number of strikes were in coal mining, involving 566,000 workers and accounting for slightly less than one-third of the total time lost for the whole period. The time lost in coal mining strikes was especially heavy in the years 1909, 1911, 1913, 1917, 1922, 1924 and 1925.

Strike and Labor Legislation

The influence of Dominion and Provincial labor legislation on the annual fluctuations of strikes is hard to assess properly in a brief survey of this type. The most important legislation is the Dominion Industrial Disputes Investigation Act passed in 1907. This law resulted from public reaction to a strike of coal miners in Alberta, which caused a serious fuel shortage in the Prairie Provinces on the eve of an unusually cold winter. Although declared "ultra vires" in 1925, all the Provinces, except Prince Edward Island, enacted laws between 1925 and 1932 bringing the Dominion statute into force in their respective jurisdictions. The fundamental principle of the I.D.I. Act is that no strike or lockout shall be declared in certain defined industries affected with a public interest, until a board of conciliation and investigation has reported on the dispute. Dr. Ben M. Selekmán, the outstanding student of the act, has pointed out that the administration has achieved substantial success. Of the 817 disputes submitted to the machinery of the act between 1907 and 1935, 78% were referred to boards, which succeeded in averting or ending strikes in 92% of the cases.³

Meantime, or within a few months, four Provinces had repealed the Acts enabling the application of the I.D.I. Act, and they and other Provinces enacted statutes applying to all industries, or to all except those covered by the I.D.I. Act, the same principle of compulsory investigation before a strike or lockout can take place. These statutes were only of limited application until March 31, 1947, when the Wartime Labour Relations Regulations ceased to apply to "War Industries." Since that date these Regulations, now to be replaced by a statute of 1948, have applied only to transport and communication agencies extending beyond one Province, and each Province has its own statute incorporating similar principles with some variations or declaring the provisions of the Regulations to apply in the Province. In Quebec there is a compulsory arbitration Act applying to public services such as certain municipal utilities and charitable institutions.

The seasonal pattern of strikes in Canada indicates that the months of greatest activity are July and August, and the period of few strikes is the winter, November through March. The data on time lost due to strikes show a dominating peak in August, with the winter months, particularly February, showing very low levels. The figure for February is usually one-tenth of the August peak. This seasonal pattern is a reflection, not only of the obvious influence of climatic conditions, which affect all economic activity, but also of the expiration dates of written collective bargaining contracts. In the United States in recent years the effect of writing a large number of contracts, in important industries, which expire at or around the same date has been clearly seen. It frequently brings a major crisis once a year, which may result in sensational levels of work-

3. Ben M. Selekmán, *Law and Labor Legislation*, Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1936, p. 44.

ers' idleness. This is what happened in January and February of 1946 when strikes were in progress in the automobile, electrical manufacturing, meat packing and steel industries in order to determine a favorable national pattern of settlement. There are other cases, however, where a piecemeal approach may yield better results, particularly if the paralyzing effect of several major strikes results in overwhelming public criticism with the threat of drastic governmental action.

The Role of Labor Unions

Although strikes are not necessarily called and directed by labor organizations, modern industrial conditions have made strikes almost exclusively the weapon of unions. A strike called after careful planning and with a reasonable chance of a successful outcome for the strikers involved, is usually the result of sponsorship by an organized group of workers. Unfortunately the Canadian statistics do not present data on the affiliations of workers on strike and the organizations directing them. In the United States, during the formative years of labor organizations, between 1880 and 1905, the percent of strikes ordered by labor organizations was as low as 50% in some years. In 1946, on the other hand, figures for the United States show that only 1.9% of the strikes were not union strikes and .3% of the workers involved were not affiliated with a union. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, in its annual survey of strikes, offers a very interesting tabulation of strikes classified by labor organizations involved. In 1946 for example, American Federation of Labor unions called 54.8% of the strikes, involving 33.9% of the workers, and the corresponding figures for the Congress of Industrial Organizations' unions were 33.3% and 41.8%. No doubt the pattern is similar in Canada and we may regard strikes as essentially a union weapon.⁴

The Canadian labor movement, the basis for strike activity, consisted of one

dominion-wide organization in 1901 at the time strike data became available. This was the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, which traced its origin to a parent group organized in 1883, two years later than the official foundation of the American Federation of Labor in the United States. There were also the Provincial Workmen's Association of Nova Scotia and the Four Railway Brotherhoods affiliated with the so-called "Big Four" unions in the United States. Lastly, some local Catholic syndicates were in existence from 1901 until a federation was formed at Chicoutimi in 1907, which by 1921 grew into the Canadian and Catholic Federation of Labour. The labor movement was small in this embryonic period with 1,078 local unions throughout Canada in the middle of 1902. The Trades and Labour Congress had a membership of only 8,381 in 1901.

By 1902 the T. & L. C. had committed itself to a policy of working with the "international" unions affiliated with the A.F. of L. and restricting its membership to unions which were not rivals of the internationals. As a result of this policy some 23 organizations, expelled from the T. & L. C., formed the National Trades and Labour Congress, which, together with the One Big Union and the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, formed the All-Canada Congress of Labour in 1927. Part of this group became the Canadian Federation of Labour in 1936. The T. & L. C., after losing in 1919 the dissidents of Western Canada, who had organized at Calgary as the One Big Union, faced its next major internal crisis in 1939. In this year, after seeking for some time to avoid an open break, the seven unions affiliated with the C. I. O. movement in the United States were finally expelled.

4. Dr. Esdras Minville in his report published in 1939 on "Labour Legislation and Social Services in the Province of Quebec," has gathered a list of strikes participated in by the Catholic and National trade unions, a group whose philosophy does not favor the frequent use of the strike. This list shows only ten strikes during the period 1915-1937.

These seven unions, together with some others, formed the Canadian Congress of Labour, in 1940. In broad terms then, the International Unions, affiliated with the A.F. of L., are organized in the T. & L. C., and the C. I. O. unions are organized in the C.C.L. The Coal Miners union, unlike the experience in the United States where the United Mine Workers recently returned to the A.F. of L., had remained with the C.C.L. The Machinists Union, which left the A.F. of L. in 1943, has retained its Canadian affiliation with the T. & L. C.

There are now functioning in Canada the T. & L. C. with 356,000 members in 1946; the C.C.L. with 314,000; the C.F. of L. with 3,000; the Four Railway Brotherhoods with 38,000; the C. & C. of L. with 70,000, and the One Big Union with 11,000 members, which since 1940 has again been an independent union. The historical development of the labor movement, as reflected through membership figures and the number of locals is presented in table II for certain critical years for the Dominion as a whole. The year 1911 is shown because this is the earliest date for which these data are available; 1914 marks the beginning of World War I; 1919 the peak of the war-induced membership rise; 1924 the post-war slump; 1930 the peak of membership prior to the great depression; 1935 the ebb of union strength; 1937 the peak achieved as a result of intensified organization largely on industrial lines; and the years 1939 and 1944 are presented in order to show the phenomenal increase under the pressure of war-expanded industries. The 1945 figure showed a small decline in membership but this proved not to be significant as the figure for 1946, 832,000, revealed a sharp increase. Dr. Jean Pierre Despres, in his recent study on the Canadian labor movement, correctly anticipated that the growth of membership would continue after the end of the war. It is noteworthy that Canadian union membership was rather well maintained dur-

ing the 1920's and early 1930's, in a period when union membership in the United States declined from 5,000,000 in 1920 to 3,000,000 in 1933. The growth of union membership, shown in table II,

TABLE II
Union Membership and Local Unions
in Canada
(Index Numbers 1939 = 100)

Year	Union Membership	Locals
1911.....	37	51
1914.....	44	60
1919.....	105	84
1924.....	73	72
1930.....	90	84
1935.....	78	81
1937.....	107	97
1939.....	100	100
1944.....	202	124
1945.....	200	130
1946.....	232	140

Source: 36th Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1948, p. 10, Department of Labour. Base period values are: Membership 359,000; Locals 3,300.

when compared with the strike data in Table I, indicates quite clearly that the increase of unionization is both a cause and effect of the growth of strikes. In the period of world War II and the immediate post-war readjustment, union membership more than doubled, the number of strikes increased in almost the same proportion, the number of workers involved increased fivefold, whereas the time loss increased more than ten times.

The exact relationship between the centers of unionization and the centers of strike activity, cannot be shown for Canada because, as has been mentioned previously, the union and non-union strikes are not distinguished in the governmental reports. However, a comparison of the industrial distribution of strikes and union membership reinforces the conclusion that strikes are largely a union weapon. Unfortunately the statistics of strikes and union membership do not use the same industrial

classification. It can be seen, however, that in 1946 the manufacturing industries accounted for approximately 27% of the union membership and for 63% of the workers involved in strikes in that year. In the same year mining, which included 5% of the union membership, contributed 20% of the workers involved in strikes. However, in steam railway transportation, a traditional center of union organization, with 16% of the total membership, there was an insignificant number of workers on strike. Building construction, with 8% of the union membership, contributed a less than proportionate share of strikers, as did the service industries. In the United States seven industries, including mining, building construction and five manufacturing industries, normally account for three-quarters of the union membership and the same proportion of workers involved in strikes.

Among the detailed aspects of strikes, which are of considerable interest, one is the size distribution. A perspective of the magnitude of disputes can be gained from Table III which shows strikes in recent years classified by the number of workers involved. It may be observed that most disputes are small, being a reflection no doubt of the prevailing scale of industry. However, the few very large disputes, that is those involving over one thousand workers, account for the greatest proportion of

TABLE III
Percentage of Strikes in Canada Classified
by Number of Workers

Number of Workers Involved		1937	1939	1943	1946
Under 10.....	6.0	7.4	3.2	3.9
10 and under..	50	31.7	28.7	26.9	27.6
50 and under..	100	15.5	14.8	18.7	18.9
100 and under..	500	35.3	31.1	33.6	29.8
500 and under..	1000	6.5	9.0	6.7	11.0
1000 and over...	5.0	9.0	10.9	8.8

Source: Derived from the Annual Summary on Strikes and Lockouts published in the *Labour Gazette*.

time lost, usually over one-half. From the detailed list published monthly in the *Labour Gazette* the extremely large strikes, involving over 5,000 workers may easily be identified. These strikes in the years shown in Table III were:

- 1937 Montreal Womens Clothing Workers.
Montreal Cotton Textile Workers.
- 1939—Glace Bay Coal Miners.
- 1943—Alberta and British Columbia Coal Miners.
Sydney Steel Mill Workers.
Windsor Motor Vehicle Workers.
Vancouver Aircraft Factory Workers
Montreal Aircraft Factory Workers.
Nova Scotia Steel Mill and Allied Workers.
Vancouver and Quebec Shipyard Workers.
Montreal Civic Employees.
- 1946—British Columbia and Ontario Loggers.
Alberta Coal Miners.
Ontario Rubber Factory Workers.
Montreal Textile Factory Workers.
British Columbia Saw Mill and Shingle Mill Workers.
Ontario and Nova Scotia Steel Mill Workers.

In 1947 the strikes of this magnitude were three in number, the coal miners in Nova Scotia, the meatpacking workers in several Provinces and textile factory workers in Quebec Province. The strike of saw mill and shingle mill workers from May 15 to June 20, 1946 was the largest strike in the Canadian records in terms of the number of workers involved, 24,000. The next largest with 22,860 workers involved, was back in 1919 on the occasion of the general sympathy strike May 15 to June 26 in Winnipeg. In terms of man-days idle the largest strike in the records is that of the coal miners at Glace Bay and Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, from Mar. 6 to Aug. 10, 1925, with a total idleness of 1,478,727 man-days. The next largest strike was that of the coal miners in Alberta and British Columbia from Apr. 1 to Nov. 20, 1911, with a total of 1,390,000 man-days lost.

Labour Goes to College

When in 1944 for the first time a course for trade union officers was held at Dalhousie University—then an unheard of pioneer venture in Canada—the National Film Board made a movie which was shown all over the North American Continent, under the title “Labour goes to College.” At the end of the course the Maritime Labour Institute at Dalhousie University was founded, a unique organization for workers’ education, in which the University and the major labour unions of the Maritime region co-operate. Both the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, and the Canadian Congress of Labour and their affiliates in the Maritimes are backing the Institute.

In the intervening years the Labour Institute has become a well established Maritime institution, holding annual conferences, organizing courses and discussion groups in the main industrial centres of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, maintaining a large circulating library whose book boxes are deposited in the local union offices, and boasting a monthly bulletin, “Labour and Learning”, with a circulation of five thousand.

When the annual course on Labour Relations of the Institute was opened in Halifax this spring seventy delegates were present, representing twenty-four T.L.C. and C.C.L. locals from all parts of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Mine and steel workers registered from Cape Breton, shipyard workers from Halifax, papermakers and sulphide workers from Northern New Brunswick, and delegates of crafts unions from the larger and the smaller industrial communities.

The gathering was welcomed by Dr. A. E. Kerr, President of Dalhousie, who spoke of the aim of the University not only to teach its own students, but also to render a service to the community. Honourable L. D. Currie, Nova Scotia’s Minister of Labour in addressing the delegates, praised the cooperation between University and Labour Unions

for the furthering of workers’ education; while Professor Richter, the Director of the Institute, gave a review of the activities of the organization during the last year.

A number of prominent speakers from Canada and the United States had been enlisted in the faculty of the school. Professor Lorne Morgan, Economic Historian of the University of Toronto, discussed “Canada’s Economic Dilemma” dealing especially with dollar crisis and inflation.

The Canadian Congress of Labour had contributed two speakers in the persons of Dr. Eugene Forsey, Research Director, and A. Andras, Chairman of the Educational Committee. Dr. Forsey reviewed various provincial labour codes which had been enacted in the preceding year, voicing sharp criticism of the recent P. E. I. Act. Mr. Andras outlined the functions which the educational committees of labour unions are expected to perform, and recommended that labour in Canada should make wider use of facilities offered by the Universities as it was the case at Dalhousie.

As a personal representative from American Federation of Labour headquarters, Glen Slaughter, a member of the Washington Research Staff, spoke to the meeting on “Collective bargaining and union-management co-operation in the United States and Canada.” The Taft-Hartley Act and other recent enactments of Congress came up for severe criticism in the address.

The great interest that trade unionists take in social legislation was evidenced by two comprehensive lectures on social security measures. Honourable James Thorn, High Commissioner for New Zealand in Ottawa, painted a vivid picture of the comprehensive system of social services which is enjoyed by the citizens of his dominion. What Canada is doing in that field was the subject of a lecture by Colonel H. S. Relph, Chief Claims Officer of the Unemployment Insurance Commission in Ottawa.

Answering numerous questions from the audience Colonel Relph dealt with the interpretation of ambiguous clauses in the Unemployment Insurance Act. While his explanations were not always approved, they contributed greatly to giving the union officers a better understanding of an important piece of legislation.

During one of the evening sessions a round table discussion on "Labour in Canada and the United States" was held, in which the main conference speakers, and in addition A. L. Hepworth, Executive Assistant of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees in Ottawa, and representatives of the Maritime unions participated. The audience was invited to formulate questions and to take part in answering them, and a lively debate which lasted for several hours, and covered a wide range of social and economic problems was proof of the active interest of the union delegates.

In the course of the conference, telegrams were received from William Green, President of the American Federation of Labour, and Philip Murray, President of the Congress of Industrial Organization, endorsing the work of the Maritime Labour Institute. Both large labour bodies have in the past shown repeatedly their interest in the Institute by sending representatives from their Washington headquarters to the conferences in Halifax.

Unions Combine Against Legislation

Last March the Provincial Legislature of Prince Edward Island passed a Trade Union Act, which has met with strenuous protest from union circles. The Canadian Congress of Labour announced its intention of petitioning the Federal Government to disallow the P. E. I. legislation, and the movement in this direction has since gained considerable following. A common front was formed consisting of the C.C.L., the Trades and Labour Congress of

Canada, and the Railway Brotherhoods, who jointly submitted a written request to the Dominion Government for disallowance of the P. E. I. Trade Union Act of 1948.

In the past, 112 provincial Acts have been disallowed by various Federal Governments, thus furnishing the labour organizations with ample material that they could use to substantiate their claims. In the introductory portion of the petition, it is stated that allowing the legislation to stand would be permitting a dangerous precedent to be set, since similar action in one of the major industrial provinces would be disastrous. It is further argued that the same legislation may be directed against agricultural and employer associations, although it is not ostensibly for that purpose. It is also felt that the legislation makes Canadian support of many I.L.O. declarations merely a gesture.

Among the twelve grounds presented for disallowing the Act the Congresses included the fact that unions were given no hearing before passage of the Act, and the Act virtually prohibits unions from appealing to the legislature for amendment or repeal of the act or to the electorate for the return of a more sympathetic legislature. In addition, the Congresses state that the Act discriminates between classes of workers and between workers and other groups of citizens; that the provisions of the Act are contrary to Federal Government policy; that legal opinion is being obtained to substantiate their claim that the Act is *ultra vires* the Provincial Legislature; and that the Act impedes the free functioning of unionism and is therefore detrimental to the public interest. Finally, they feel that the right of the Federal Government to judge the validity of Provincial legislation is supported by eminent authorities throughout Canadian history; that waiting for the courts to decide the validity of the Act would be too slow a process, and less effective; and that disallowance is, in the absence of a written constitution, perhaps the only protection against "provincial invasion of fundamental civil liberties."