

British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922

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Article abstract

In early 1919 a new union was created in British Columbia, an organization that brought together provincial loggers for the first time. Despite much initial success, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union was moribund by 1922, and it soon disappeared completely from provincial logging camps. As well as examining the grievances of the loggers, the changing nature of the logging industry, and the actions of employers, this history of the LWIU also offers insights into the character of the Canadian working class in the post-War years by highlighting the struggles of the Socialist Party of Canada, the One Big Union, and the Industrial Workers of the World to dominate the LWIU. Furthermore, this article draws out and assesses the divergent programmes of the LWIU leaders, who were aligned with the Socialist Party of Canada, and the men in the camps, exposing a fundamental gap in the post-War socialist agenda.

British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922

Gordon Hak

IN JANUARY 1919 A NEW UNION was founded in British Columbia, an organization dedicated to bringing loggers into the house of labour. Although there had been sporadic attempts by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners to organize workers in British Columbia's most important industry between 1903 and 1919, the formation of the B.C. Loggers Union in early 1919 launched the most ambitious campaign. The union was an immediate success; over the next 12 months the organization grew dramatically and by the end of the year membership had reached 15,000. The Loggers Union, which changed its name to the Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) in July 1919, expanded geographically from its Vancouver base to include workers throughout British Columbia and in Saskatchewan and Ontario. The loggers were militant in 1919 and 1920, engaging in a spate of strikes against employers, and with some 70 per cent of the province's logging work force belonging to the union, its success seemed assured. Yet, within two years the district offices were bankrupt, membership had declined to a negligible number, and the LWIU had all but disappeared. After the demise of the LWIU it took over a decade before the union movement began to reassert itself in British Columbia forests, leading to the creation of the International Woodworkers of America in 1937.¹

The rise of the loggers' union coincided with a worldwide increase in working-class radicalism and militancy in the years after 1917 of which Canada was a

¹The LWIU is frequently mentioned in accounts of post-war working-class history, but it has not been examined in depth. Surveys of labour radicalism give the LWIU short shrift, remembering it only as an adjunct of the One Big Union, or as an arena for the factional intrigues of the remaining militants of the Industrial Workers of the World. See Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1967), 82-86; David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978), 135-136, 165-170, 262; Dorothy G. Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel: Ernest Winch and the Growth of Socialism in Western Canada* (Vancouver 1969), 44-60. Myrtle Bergren incorrectly refers to the LWIU as an IWW organization, *Tough Timber, The Loggers of B.C.—Their Story* (Vancouver 1979), 27. In the most recent and fullest history of the International Woodworkers of America the loggers' uprising in the years 1919 and 1920 merits only one sentence, Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madeira Park, B.C. 1984), 22.

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part. Increased job action, the formation of the One Big Union (OBU), the Winnipeg General Strike, and the accompanying sympathetic strikes across the nation put the question of the relations between capital and labour at the centre of a stage that stretched from the Maritimes to British Columbia.² Workers struggled to improve their working conditions, and for many the dream of the creation of a socialist society seemed close at hand. Political activists and labour unionists appeared united in carrying forward working-class aspirations. However, the upheaval soon abated; in Canada, as elsewhere, union membership dropped precipitously in the 1920s, as did strike activity. Strong action by the state, a ruthless anti-union campaign by employers, and the post-war depression all contributed to undermining the momentum of the union movement and the hopes of revolutionary socialists. The LWIU also faced insurmountable obstacles. The logging operators developed an effective anti-union programme and the economic slump of the early 1920s exacerbated the pressure on the workers in the camps. Furthermore, the LWIU was plagued by a bitter conflict with the OBU and an internal challenge from members of the IWW. A final and significant aspect of the history of the LWIU was the relationship between the leaders and the membership, especially the divergent agendas of the union's socialist leaders and the job-action oriented rank and file.

As was common in many parts of North America and Europe in the years 1917 to 1920, revolutionary socialists provided the leadership of industrial unionism. Members of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) headed the loggers' union, and although socialism and industrial unionism had deep roots in western Canadian working-class experience, their coming together in the LWIU posed problems which were not satisfactorily resolved.³ To the socialists, the massive organizational drives of the late war years seemed to presage the cementing of working-class solidarity and the arrival of socialist society. The unions that they led were vehicles which, when supplemented by propaganda and agitation, would ultimately help usher in the new order.⁴ For workers, on the other hand, engaged in day-to-day confrontation with employers, wages, working conditions, and hours of work were palpable realities. They looked to the dynamic, articulate socialist leaders to improve their daily plight. The goals and tactics of the leaders and the membership were grounded in separate orientations, one emphasizing the political struggle of revolutionary socialism, the other leaning towards the economic struggle and militant industrial unionism. Within the LWIU these divergent traditions did not come together to create a new type of working-class institution which could take advantage of the opportunities at hand. While the calculated actions of the logging operators and the economic depression of the early 1920s spelled the demise of the

²Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 11-44.

³This issue was by no means peculiar to the LWIU. See Larry Peterson, "Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike: The Origins of Communist Labour Unionism in Europe and North America," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 115-131.

⁴Gerald Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt': The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 139-157.

LWIU, and conflict with the OBU and IWW undermined solidarity, the major lesson of the LWIU was the necessity of integrating the political and economic struggles in a militant union.

I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LWIU was shaped by the character of the provincial logging industry. The British Columbia forest industry is divided into two main regions: the coast district (west of the Cascade Mountains) and the interior. The coast district was by far the most significant, producing 75 per cent of the province's lumber in 1920.⁵ The nature of logging was also different from that in the interior. Large, high-volume and high quality Douglas Fir and Cedar trees were plentiful in the rugged coastal terrain; the moderate climate allowed logging operations to run year-round, stopping only during fire hazards, the occasional snowfall, and market depressions; and machine power, in the form of logging railroads and donkey engines, was employed extensively. In the interior of the province, significant lumber production took place in the Kootenays and along the Canadian National Railway line between the Alberta border and Prince Rupert. Trees were smaller and of poorer quality than those found on the coast; logging was a seasonal occupation; and horses remained the main source of power for yarding logs from the woods and transporting them to the sawmills.

The size and ownership of logging operations also differed in the two regions. In the interior there were just over 90 logging camps in 1920, ranging in size from ten to one hundred men, and logging shows were run almost exclusively by the same companies that owned the sawmills. On the coast, on the other hand, of over 270 logging camps, only about 25 per cent were owned and operated by sawmill companies. The rest were independent logging companies that held timber, harvested it, and sold the logs in a competitive market to sawmills, situated in places such as New Westminster, Vancouver, Chemainus, and Victoria. Many large timber-holding and logging companies, including Bloedel, Stewart & Welsh; Brooks, Scanlon, O'Brien; Capilano Timber; Merrill, Ring & Moore; and Comox Logging and Railway, employed over 200 men each and had no affiliations to any sawmill company.⁶

There was also a regional dimension to the provincial woods work force. Coastal loggers were tied to Vancouver. Hiring was done in Vancouver for all the camps stretching north up the coast, and when loggers were unemployed they congregated in the city to socialize and seek new jobs. Vancouver served as a reference point, as a home, and as a place of entertainment for loggers working in isolated coastal camps. The interior logging industry, however, had little connection to Vancouver but was rather intertwined with the prairie labour market. For example, from July 1923 to February 1924 the government employment Bureau

⁵British Columbia, Forest Branch, *Annual Report 1940*, F63.

⁶"ABC" *Lumber Trade Directory*, Vancouver, 1920.

supplied interior lumber operators with 5,078 men. Of this number, only 376 came from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia; 4,672 were drawn from prairie centres.⁷ Interior operators had to compete with prairie farmers in obtaining workers in the late fall when logging began, and it was only after the end of the harvest in November that the labour requirements of the interior forest industry were fully satisfied.

For union organizers the two districts posed different problems. Interior workers were transient, seasonal workers, often prairie farmers and their sons eager to earn hard cash to sustain their agricultural enterprises. Logging camps were small, and there was no urban centre which drew workers in the off-season. The obstacles to unionization were less overwhelming on the coast. Woods workers here were full-time loggers, and though they travelled from camp to camp, their home base was Vancouver. Over Christmas or during times of fire hazard in the summer, coastal loggers were drawn to Vancouver where they met in the beer parlours on Cordova and Powell Streets to discuss camp conditions, wages, unions, and socialism. It is not surprising that the B.C. Loggers Union was founded in Vancouver, the headquarters for the heavily-capitalized coastal logging industry.

The development of the coastal logging industry was instrumental in shattering the image of the legendary lumberjack that at one time defined relations between workers and operators. In the popular mind, loggers were characters, individualistic, even idiosyncratic, physically strong, carefree, expert with an axe, beholden to no man. They worked hard and played hard, consuming alcohol with abandon and frequently coming to blows in the drinking establishments that they patronized. Logging operators tried to perpetuate the image of the logger as hardy, carefree, and unlike other industrial workers. E.J. Palmer, of the Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing Company, reacted strongly to the government plan to impose semi-monthly paydays on the logging industry in 1917:

I have known the logger for forty years now. I know he just can't work if he has a dollar in his jeans. He is better off physically, morally and financially if he is broke. The loggers are in a class by themselves. A semi-monthly payday in cash will mean still greater disorganization of the camps. With it in operation a man might better be a politician than a logging camp operator.⁸

Such sentiments, of course, were advantageous to logging operators. Broke, transient, tough, and individualistic, loggers would endure, and even revel in filthy camps, work for low wages, and remain aloof from union movements.

By the 1910s the lumberjack image was no longer plausible in the forests of coastal British Columbia, where the logging industry bore little resemblance to its counterparts in the interior or in central Canada. Coastal camps were able to operate year-round and made extensive use of machinery. Companies were becoming larger and direct relations between bosses and workers were almost impossible in

⁷Public Archives of British Columbia (PABC). Attorney General Records, GR 1323, B2197, f. L-327-13, Memorandum to the Honourable Minister of Labour, April 1924.

⁸Western Lumberman, September 1917, 36.

the large outfits. Foremen, managers, and accountants separated the employees from the employers. J.H. Bloedel, of Bloedel, Steward & Welsh, attributed the rise of union agitation in his operations in the late 1910s to the breakdown of personal contact between himself and his men. A fictionalized account of Bloedel's life put these words in his mouth: "If we had been able to talk things over among ourselves, as we used to do when we were small, it never would have happened; and we must see that it never happens again."⁹ While the conversation was apocryphal, the sentiment expressed was certainly true. The paternalistic relationship between small logging contractors and their seasonal workers had disappeared in coastal British Columbia. Loggers were industrial workers, subject to the regimen of corporations engaged in large-scale capital accumulation. In 1919 both companies and employees came to recognize this transformation.

British Columbia loggers had visible material grievances in 1919. The logging industry was experiencing a boom period. Production increased steadily after 1915 and output peaked in 1920. Just over one billion board feet of lumber were produced in 1915; in 1920 the total eclipsed two billion board feet.¹⁰ Lumber prices also rose, doubling from an average of about \$14 per thousand board feet in 1915 to nearly \$30 in 1920.¹¹ The prosperity of logging operators, however, was not evident in the daily lives of British Columbia loggers. While wages rose by about 50 per cent between 1915 and 1920, inflation negated the increase and wage increases did not correspond to the rising price of lumber.¹² But the main complaint of the loggers was the condition of the camps that they lived in, and their assessment of the situation was supported by the provincial Board of Health. In 1917 the board reported that while climatic conditions and water supply favoured the establishment of a healthy living environment, these natural advantages were nullified "by the lack of observance of the primary rules of sanitation in camps."¹³ Two years later the board noted that "one of the most generally needed and very necessary wants of the logger is some manner of having his blankets laundered.... The average logger possesses only one pair. These he gets laundered every time he quits and goes to town ... consequently, very often his blankets become infested with vermin."¹⁴ In 1919 a logger working at a Vancouver Island camp voiced his complaints: "The health inspector should call at camp. Bunk houses not properly lighted or ventilated. Floors are not tight, which means the building cannot be

⁹*Ibid.*, October 1924, 38.

¹⁰British Columbia, Forest Branch, *Annual Report 1940*, F63. One board foot is the equivalent of a piece of lumber measuring 1"x12"x12".

¹¹PABC, Department of Lands Records, Roll 1237, f. 027636, Vancouver Forest District, *Annual Management Report, 1920*; PABC, Department of Lands, GR 1441, B3401, f. 027391, Fort George District, *Annual Management Report, 1920*; Gordon R. Munro, "The History of the British Columbia Lumber Trade, 1920-1945," B.A. essay, University of British Columbia, 1956, 142.

¹²PABC, GR 1441, Fort George Forest District, *Annual Management Report, 1920*; PABC, Pattullo Papers, Add MSS 3, v.17, f.6, *Detailed Cost of Logging, 1913-1923*.

¹³British Columbia, *Sessional Papers, 1917*, v. I, H11-H13.

¹⁴British Columbia, *Sessional papers, 1919*, vol. I, A17.

properly heated, no place to wash clothes except in bunk houses, and no dry room."¹⁵ Workers in a northern interior camp complained of the lack of a laundry and drying room, poor lighting and ventilation in the bunkhouses, the fact that the cookhouse staff had to sleep in the kitchen, and the failure of the company to provide a proper refuse pit away from the kitchen to hold garbage.¹⁶ After a day of hard, physical labour, workers spent their time in cramped, dim, cold quarters, reeking of sweat and dirty clothes.

Camp conditions, wage issues, and the changing structure of the logging industry made loggers receptive to an organization drive initiated by the British Columbia Federation of Labour in 1918. A year previously the International Union of Timberworkers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, had begun to organize among British Columbia lumber workers.¹⁷ The drive was primarily an attempt to forestall the Industrial Workers of the World which was also active among provincial loggers.¹⁸ Neither organization made lasting gains. In response to their failure the British Columbia Federation of Labour launched a campaign to organize forest industry workers in the spring of 1918. Coastal logging operations traditionally closed for a short period in July and over Christmas and New Year, and loggers flocked from their isolated camps to Vancouver during these times. Over the 1918-1919 Christmas break two British Columbia Federation of Labour organizers aggressively campaigned in Vancouver loggers' haunts and their effort bore fruit when 800 loggers met in January 1919 to form a new union.¹⁹ Soon an office was rented, legal advisors and accountants secured, and an executive committee elected.

The loggers' union grew by leaps and bounds. In May 1919 the organization could claim 4,000 members, and district offices had been established at Princeton, Cranbrook, Prince George, Kamloops, and Prince Rupert.²⁰ By the fall of 1919, 11,000 out of a total of some 15,000 woods workers in British Columbia belonged to the union.²¹ In January 1920 the LWIU set its sights even higher, adopting the slogan "50,000 in 1920," a goal that could only be met by bringing the large Ontario lumber work force into the union. In the heady days of 1919 and early 1920 this did not seem unrealistic; a new LWIU district office in Port Arthur in late 1919 attracted 500 members in its first week of operation.²² By February 1920 the LWIU had district offices in Vancouver, Victoria, Cranbrook, Kamloops, Merritt, Princeton, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Edmonton, Prince Albert, Sudbury, Port Arthur, Fort Frances, and Cobalt.²³ Over the next few months further offices were

¹⁵*British Columbia Federationist*, Vancouver, 26 December 1919.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 12 December 1919.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 24 August 1917.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 26 April 1918.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 24 January 1919; Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*, 46.

²⁰*British Columbia Federationist*, 18 April 1919; 30 May 1919.

²¹*Ibid.*, 3 October 1919.

²²*One Big Union Bulletin*, 29 November 1919.

²³*British Columbia Federationist*, 20 February 1920.

established in Winnipeg, The Pas, Timmins, and Montreal, and organizers had made forays into the Maritimes. The LWIU was so optimistic that it intended to hold the July 1920 convention in Winnipeg, expecting that the Manitoba city would be the geographic centre of the organization by that time.²⁴

If British Columbia loggers were pleased by the numerical expansion of their organization, they were also active on the industrial front, trying to improve working and camp conditions through battles with employers. The loggers had not participated in the wave of strikes that swept Canada in 1917 and 1918, though they presumably had registered their discontent in the traditional manner of quitting jobs and moving on when conditions became unbearable. In 1919 this changed and strike action became a common tactic in British Columbia logging camps, and the number of strikes increased in 1920. There were no recorded logger strikes in 1917 and 1918, but in 1919 there were 31 strikes and in 1920 loggers struck 50 times. The peak was 1920, for in the following four years there were fewer than four strikes in each year.²⁵ The strike action began in earnest in August 1919, after the coastal loggers returned to the camps following the July break, and of the 81 strikes in 1919 and 1920, 74 occurred in the period from the beginning of August 1919 to the end of November 1920.

The strike action was also notable for the geographic dispersity of the walkouts. The majority of the walkouts were in the coast district where there were the greatest number of loggers. On Vancouver Island and along the rugged mainland coast, camps, both big and small, were struck, sometimes more than once. Yet strikes were not restricted to the coast region. Along the Canadian National Railway line to the east of Prince Rupert, in the Kootenays, in the Kamloops region, and along the Canadian National Railway line east of Prince George, lumber camps were involved in strikes. Every area in the province with a significant logging work force was affected by strike action in 1919 and 1920 (see Appendix A).

The loggers were very clear about what they wanted to achieve through strike action. In the spring of 1919 the loggers formulated a list of demands which was distributed to all coastal logging operators, and the state of camp conditions was the most common grievance.²⁶ The quality of food, the lack of laundry facilities, the cleanliness of bunkhouses, the desire for regularly cleaned bedding, and chipped eating utensils were important issues for loggers. As well as camp conditions there were three other main issues that forced job action: discrimination, usually the dismissal of a logger for union agitation, wages, and the demand that employers recognize the union camp committees.²⁷ The prominence of striking over discrimination and the recognition of camp committees showed the commitment of loggers to the establishment of a permanent union, their recognition that

²⁴*Ibid.*, 18 June 1920.

²⁵*The Labour Gazette*, 1917-1925; British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour*, 1918-1925; *British Columbia Federationist*, 1917-1925.

²⁶*Pacific Coast Lumberman*, August 1919, 34.

²⁷*The Labour Gazette*, 1919-20; British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour*, 1919-20.

only with a strong union could they improve their lot over the long run.

In 1919 and 1920 a militant industrial union had emerged in the logging camps of British Columbia. All members of the logging work force were welcomed into the LWIU, the men had specific grievances with employers which they wanted resolved, and there was a clear tactic to achieve these ends, namely, job action. In many ways the LWIU was a typical industrial union, seeking to better the position of its members in the face of recalcitrant employers, concentrating on immediate gains, and emphasizing economic achievements. However, industrial unionism only partially explains the LWIU, for the loggers were also caught in the web of radical working-class politics which encompassed the western Canadian labour movement in the post-war years. This aspect of the loggers' union is best understood by looking at the leadership of the LWIU.

II

THE DOMINANT PERSONALITY in the LWIU was Ernest Winch, who became secretary of the loggers' union in January 1919 and, despite internal and external challenges, remained at its head for the next two years. Born in England in 1879, Winch migrated to Canada in 1898, but he did not become a permanent resident until 1910, when he began working in the Vancouver building trade. In 1911 he joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and was soon active in local politics. Six years later Winch went to work on the waterfront, joined the longshoremen's union, and in 1918 became president of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. That same year Winch changed his political allegiance, withdrawing from the SDP to join the more radical SPC. When Winch took control of the loggers' union he had no experience as a logger, but he had intimate connections with the union movement and socialist politics, as well as the solid support of the British Columbia Federation of Labour. After his tenure at the head of the LWIU, Winch returned to longshoring and bricklaying; however, it was politics, not union organizing, that became his prime concern. In the 1930s he was deeply involved with the SPC and the new Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), becoming a member of the provincial legislature in 1933. Winch served the CCF and the people of British Columbia for 23 years in the legislature, and by the time of his death in 1957 he was highly regarded as one of the province's most illustrious socialist politicians.²⁸

Winch played a key role in shaping the direction taken by the loggers' union, but there are difficulties in understanding his course of action. For one thing, Winch was not a socialist theoretician on the order of E.T. Kingsley, W.A. Pritchard, or Jack Kavanagh, and as such his positions were never clearly explained in print. Winch was more of a practical socialist, and while the theoreticians could question his knowledge of socialist doctrine, he earned their respect with his organizational skills and commitment to the cause.²⁹ Further complicating an assessment of

²⁸Steeves, *Compassionate Rebel*.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 29.

Winch's leadership was the nature of his personality. By all accounts Winch was a cantankerous individual, an impatient, ambitious, individualistic man who was ruthless in dealing with those who opposed him.³⁰ Even by the 1930s, when with much reservation he took the SPC into the CCF fold, he had not mellowed. As Walter Young has noted, Winch was unwilling to see the CCF "shaped in any image but his own, and this was a position which took precedence over his much-trumpeted concern for the working class, although his sentiments on the matter were undoubtedly valid."³¹ As leader of the LWIU from 1919 to 1921, especially in the conflicts with the OBU and IWW, it is at times difficult to separate personal intrigues from policy and organizational decisions. Yet, while Winch was personally ambitious and concerned with empire building, he did not pursue an erratic, illogical course at the helm of the LWIU, and his basic outlook was informed by the tradition of western Canadian socialism.

In joining the SPC in 1918, Winch came into close contact with a group that was at the cutting edge of working-class politics, a group that was to rise to even greater heights in the western Canadian labour movement in 1919. The SPC had been formed in 1904, building from its base in British Columbia. The SPC was dedicated to overthrowing the capitalist system and establishing a socialist society. The tactical emphasis of the SPC was on the political struggle; education and the development of class consciousness among workers would eventually bring the revolution through the ballot box. Theoreticians in the SPC were skeptical, even contemptuous of the efficacy of unionism in furthering the revolutionary cause. They felt that labour unions undermined the socialist movement, arguing that the struggles for short-term material gains weakened the revolutionary ardor of workers and led to accommodation within the capitalist system. As such the SPC heaped scorn on the SDP and various labourist groups, organizations with more of a reform orientation and a willingness to work with labour unions. Despite the party line, many SPC activists were involved with unions, but their primary commitment was to the political struggle and the furthering of "scientific socialism" through education.

Events during World War I, however, brought the SPC and the union movement much closer together, especially in western Canada. For workers, the war years were trying times. Inflation cut away at the buying power of workers, profiteering by businesses made many wonder just who was making the greatest sacrifices for the war effort, as did the conscription issue, and government suppression of labour and left-wing organizations angered many workers. These grievances, coupled with manpower shortages after 1916, increased union membership to new heights in western Canada. Westerners also became increasingly dissatisfied with their position in the national house of labour, the Trades and Labour Congress. More radical than eastern leaders, prone towards industrial rather than craft

³⁰*Ibid.*, 29 and 35.

³¹Walter D. Young, "Ideology, Personality and the Origin of the CCF in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, 32 (Winter 1976-77), 140.

organizational structures, and numerically weak in comparison to eastern organizations, western labour leaders began to search for new institutions to embody their needs and aspirations.

In the years after 1916 western workers became increasingly militant and radical, looking for new leadership to represent their concerns, leadership which they found in the SPC. By 1918 the SPC had come to believe that the union movement could play an important role in the class struggle. Unions were now seen as means by which workers could be prepared for the impending revolution, an event that in 1918 and early 1919 seemed to be just around the corner. Industrial organizations could be used for political purposes, and SPC activists were prepared to offer their considerable organizational and agitational skills to western workers. In January 1919 the influential Vancouver Trades and Labour Council came under socialist control when three SPC members, Ernest Winch, Jack Kavanagh, and Victor Midgley, were elected to the key executive positions. Two months later SPC members dominated in the creation of a new labour body which sought to represent all Canadian workers, the One Big Union. The OBU was launched in Calgary by westerners, and it incorporated syndicalist tendencies, sympathy with the Russian Revolution, and a dedication to industrial unionism rather than the exclusionist craft unionism that reigned supreme in the Trades and Labour Congress. In the first half of 1919, then, the SPC had come into its own in the western Canadian labour movement.³²

The ascendancy of the SPC brought revolutionary socialists into the day-to-day struggles between union members and their employers, and the revolutionary agenda of the socialist had to be reconciled with the immediate demands of the rank and file, an issue which rose in importance as the vision of capitalism's impending collapse dissipated over the course of 1919. Although the SPC members were leaders of a union movement, they remained committed to political action, the SPC, and the eventual revolution.³³ Moreover, in advocating both radical politics and industrial unionism, the SPC was forced to try and develop new institutional structures to encompass two traditions which had long been seen as incompatible. The challenge for the SPC and western Canadian workers in 1919 was to create new working-class institutions which incorporated both revolutionary socialism and militant industrial unionism, institutions in which the economic militancy of workers would enhance the revolutionary programme and in which the socialist leadership would remain relevant to workers concerned about wages and the distance of the latrine from the cookhouse in a remote logging camp.

For Ernest Winch and British Columbia loggers these issues were not mere theoretical musings in 1919 and 1920. Winch was a prominent member of the SPC

³²For consideration of the SPC and western Canadian workers in the first decades of the twentieth century, see Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968); A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto, 1977); David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*; Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater*.

³³Friesen, "'Yours in Revolt.'"

and the leader of a rapidly-growing industrial union. The position of the union in political struggles and job action had to be worked out, the organizational structure had to be defined, and the functions of the leadership and the rank and file had to be clarified. Winch and his supporters, who dominated the union's central executive committee, were preoccupied with three main themes as they watched the organization grow in numbers throughout 1919 and 1920. First, the loggers' ill-starred affiliation with the OBU was a highly visible issue, illustrating the fragility of socialist and union solidarity, as well as the problems in developing a clearly-defined organizational structure. Second, the executive was concerned with limiting the influence of the IWW within the loggers' union, both to ensure the dominant position of the SPC and to thwart what was perceived as undue emphasis on job action and economic confrontation. Third, the executive had to cope with the obvious militancy of the membership and the short-term goals of improving camp conditions, increasing wages, and securing employer recognition of the new union.

The B.C. Loggers Union sent three delegates—Harry Allman, Tom Mace, and Alex McKenzie—to the March 1919 conference in Calgary which launched the One Big Union. Winch had been elected to serve as a delegate, but because he was busy at the union office, Allman went in his stead.³⁴ The loggers' delegates fully endorsed the initiative by the western Canadian union movement to divorce itself from the Trades and Labour Congress and were enthusiastic supporters of the OBU movement. At the official founding convention of the OBU four months later the Loggers Union formally affiliated with the OBU, changing its name to the Lumber Workers Industrial Union. The LWIU was a crucial component of the OBU, representing almost forty percent of the total OBU membership.³⁵

The close relationship between the LWIU and the OBU, however, soon dissipated. The size and organizational activities of the LWIU began to alarm OBU leaders, who feared that the LWIU would dominate the OBU. These fears were somewhat justified, as the scope of LWIU interests jumped occupational and geographic boundaries. The names "Loggers Union" and "Lumber Workers Industrial Union" were not adequate in describing the membership or the range of the union's activities. The first strike that the B.C. Loggers Union was involved in had no connection with loggers. In early April 1919, 600 construction workers in the Princeton area went on strike against the Kettle Valley Railway, Tierney Construction, and West Kootenay Light and Power. One week after the strike had begun the men joined the B.C. Loggers Union. The strike lasted until August 1919.³⁶ The union was also involved in miners strikes at Surf Inlet, British Columbia, and Taylorton, Saskatchewan, as well as a construction workers dispute at Prince Rupert. Further, LWIU delegates did organizational work among miners in northern Ontario and harvest workers in the prairies. While the leaders of the

³⁴*British Columbia Federationist*, 21 February 1919; 7 March 1919.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 2 January 1920; *One Big Union Bulletin*, 31 January 1920.

³⁶*The Camp Worker*. 26 April 1919.

OBU viewed these expansionist tendencies with alarm, it is important to note that the loggers' union was willing to relinquish non-logger locals to the appropriate OBU unit when membership numbers and circumstances were opportune. The Construction Workers Industrial Unit (OBU), for example, was not even formed until the fall of 1919.³⁷ In the enthusiasm of the organizational drive of 1919 the loggers' union saw itself as a repository for workers wanting to join the OBU, feeling that jurisdictional differences would be worked in due course. If there was a common theme that defined members of the loggers' union, it was that it appealed to camp workers, and this was reflected in the new name adopted by the union in January 1920, the Lumber and Camp Workers Union.

Noticeably absent from membership in the LWIU were saw and shingle mill workers. To be sure, there was some organizing in mills in the interior of British Columbia, northern Alberta, Ontario and on the Queen Charlotte Islands, but the union made few inroads among mill workers in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, a seemingly core constituency. The adoption of the new name, Lumber Workers Industrial Union, in July 1919 suggests that the union intended to organize mill workers, but this was not the case. A separate union, the Engineers and Millworkers Unit (OBU), was created to work among mill hands. It was not until January 1920 that the Millworkers Unit affiliated with the LWIU, becoming a distinct branch within the LWIU. The new arrangement, however, did not lead to the rush of mill workers into the loggers' union. By November 1920, a long-time activist in the mills and the LWIU mill organizer, W.A. Alexander, admitted that the drive was a failure.³⁸

The inability of the LWIU to attract mill workers, at first glance, seems peculiar, considering the militant tradition of mill hands. Yet, upon closer examination the lack of mill worker participation is understandable. From the beginning the loggers' union was dedicated to improving the lot of camp workers. Bunkhouse conditions, laundry rooms, clean bedding, and transportation to and from work sites had no relevance to mill hands. In the post-war years mill workers had their own organizations to represent their interests; the International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers, the Sawmill Filers and Sawyers Association, the International Timberworkers Union, the International Union of Shingle Weavers, and the Mill and Factory Woodworkers Union all had connections to the mill work force. Further, the provincial legislature was initiating measures to improve the lives of mill workers, thus undermining the need for a union. In February 1920 a bill was introduced to provide for an eight-hour work day in British Columbia lumber mills, and it finally came into effect in 1925.

But the main reason for the passivity of mill workers was the timing of the rise of the loggers' union. The loggers were gaining momentum just after Lower Mainland mill workers had suffered a series of crushing defeats. In July 1917, 800 shingle weavers in New Westminster, Port Moody, and Eburne struck; one year

³⁷*British Columbia Federationist*, 11 July 1919; *The Worker*, 3 October 1919.

³⁸*British Columbia Federationist*, 9 January 1920; 12 November 1920.

later steam and operating engineers led a one-month strike of 1,000 mill workers against 26 employers; and in March 1919, 1,200 shingle weavers and packers struck 40 Lower Mainland employers.³⁹ In June 1919, Lower Mainland mills were again closed by a massive strike called to show sympathy with workers involved in the Winnipeg General Strike. Vancouver mills closed first and two weeks later New Westminster mills followed suit. The walkout closed almost all plants in the Lower Mainland. When workers returned to the plants in late June and early July, it was evident, as it was in the March 1919 strike, that the mill workers had won little, if anything.⁴⁰ Coastal loggers, meanwhile, did not participate in the events of June 1919; they were away working in the camps, and when they returned to Vancouver during the traditional July break, the Lower Mainland strikes had ended. It was only after the July break, when the loggers returned to work, that the strike wave swept through coastal forests. Thus, the militancy of the loggers and the mill workers was not synchronized, and as the momentum of the LWIU grew after August 1919, the mill workers were a defeated group with little energy for a new crusade.

Though the LWIU was almost exclusively a loggers' union, its willingness at times to include other workers concerned OBU leaders, but even more threatening was the territorial ambition of the LWIU executive. As we have seen, in the heady days of 1919 the opportunity for creating a nation-wide union of lumber workers seemed at hand, and early successes reinforced this perception. By the end of the year some 70 per cent of British Columbia loggers were organized, and the LWIU was preparing to incorporate lumber workers across Canada, especially those in northern Ontario. In the first months of 1920 the ambitions of the LWIU did not seem beyond the realm of possibility.

Within the OBU the growing presence of the LWIU was becoming a problem. At the outset the OBU had a loose organizational structure and was able to affiliate unions that were geographically based, as well as those, like the LWIU, that were organized on an industrial basis that crossed geographic boundaries. Victor Midgley commented on the flexible framework that early OBU leaders felt was appropriate:

We have discussed here several times the idea of drawing up some concise plan of organization, and also the idea of drawing a diagram of the proposed plan of organization, but we always come back to the idea this new form of organization is not something that is going to be wrapped around the Labor Movement like a new suit of clothes. It will necessarily be a matter of growth and you can no more draw the plan of the growth of it than you can draw the plan of the growth of a tree. Conditions and circumstances will determine what form the organization will ultimately take.⁴¹

By the spring of 1920 the fear of the LWIU convinced OBU leaders that the

³⁹*The Labour Gazette*. 1917-1919: British Columbia, *Annual Reports of the Department of Labour*, 1918-1919.

⁴⁰*Western Lumberman*, July 1919, 37; *Pacific Coast Lumberman*, July 1919; *The Vancouver Daily Sun*, 20 June 1919; 21 June 1919.

⁴¹Cited in *One Big Union Bulletin*, 3 July 1920.

geographic form of organization had to be imposed. For the LWIU central executive committee this had serious implications. Under the new proposal LWIU members would pay dues directly to the OBU and not to the LWIU head office in Vancouver. The LWIU executive committee would have no power, no money, and no reason for existence.

The conflict came to a head at the Port Arthur convention of the OBU in September 1920. The lumber workers sent ten delegates, but problems quickly developed when the delegates faced the convention credential committee. The LWIU was in arrears in its June and July per capita payments to the OBU and the credential committee used the issue to restrict the voting power of the LWIU. Seven LWIU delegates were seated but they were only given the voting strength of 3,670. The LWIU rightly claimed to represent over 15,000 members. Further, the three remaining delegates, including Winch, were refused accreditation on the grounds that the credential committee was "unable to discover what district they represented, or who had elected them."⁴² In protest, all but one of the lumber workers' delegates withdrew from the convention. A strict reading of the OBU constitution supported the position of the credential committee, but what was exceptional about the Port Arthur convention is that there was no attempt at negotiation or compromise between the OBU and its largest constituent union and biggest financial supporter. In the ensuing months the loggers in British Columbia supported Winch and the executive and formally withdrew from the OBU.⁴³

The debate over the organizational form of the OBU, which was exacerbated by an acrimonious personality conflict between Winch and the general secretary of the OBU, Victor Midgley,⁴⁴ had ended in a messy fashion with the departure of the loggers. Yet if Winch had kept the loggers' industrial union intact in British Columbia, his campaign to bring Ontario lumber workers into the fold was a failure. In Ontario, LWIU organizers confronted AFL unions, a depression in the economy, and workers who were more sympathetic to OBU leaders. When the LWIU left the OBU, Ontario lumber workers did not follow the lead. Only two districts outside British Columbia sent delegates to the next LWIU convention. These were the small offices in The Pas and Edmonton. The union was again overwhelmingly a British Columbia concern.

In the early days of the union Winch also had to face an IWW insurgency within the LWIU, and again the conflict generated intense personal animosity among the participants. IWW delegates could rightly claim the loggers as part of their jurisdiction; they had been organizing British Columbia loggers since 1907, and in 1917 and 1918 they had played a prominent role in achieving gains for

⁴²University of British Columbia. Special Collection Division (UBC), v.f. #213, Report of the Convention of the One Big Union, 1920.

⁴³UBC, v.f. #235, Lumber Workers Industrial Union, General Convention Report, January 1921.

⁴⁴Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 166. In a speech to British Columbia loggers in September 1921, W.A. Pritchard commented that the squabble at Port Arthur "was more a clash of personalities, than a clash of principles," *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 September 1921.

loggers in the American Pacific Northwest.⁴⁵ The IWW had developed a fighting tradition since its birth in 1905, and as well as stressing revolutionary industrial unionism, the merits of struggle at the point of production, and the final general strike to destroy capitalism, the organization was leery of union bureaucracies, demanding that all union power be in the hands of the workers at their job sites. Moreover, the IWW had no faith in a political solution to the predicament of workers under capitalism, and IWW delegates stridently attacked working-class political parties, including the SPC.

There was a sizeable IWW contingent within the LWIU from the beginning. The first executive of the B.C. Loggers Union had nine members, at least two of whom, Harry Allman and Ernie Lindberg, were IWW proponents. Lindberg became editor for the union's Vancouver-based newspaper, *The Industrial Worker*, later *The Worker*, and the organ was unabashedly pro-IWW. An election in the fall of 1919 for the purpose of selecting delegates for an upcoming OBU convention also gives an indication of the strength of the IWW within the LWIU. Winch was by far the favorite candidate, securing 1656 votes. He was followed by two colleagues, Alex McKenzie and J.M. Clarke, who shared his anti-IWW position, and who received 1240 and 962 votes, respectively. Next in the voting came two candidates with pronounced IWW sympathies: Harry Allman got 637 votes and N. Hatherly received 546 votes.⁴⁶

The IWW insurgency gathered steam in the fall of 1919 when Harry Allman published 16 points in the union's paper. The 16 points were proposals to be considered by the membership, and as well as clearly exhibiting the IWW fear of becoming caught in a union bureaucracy, where the rank and file had little control of union business, the discussion points could also be interpreted as a direct attack on Winch and his leadership. Allman suggested that no paid official should hold a position for longer than six months (Winch had already exceed that limit); that no paid official be allowed to vote; that all union officials be wage workers in the lumber industry (Winch was not); that the secretary-treasurer be elected by the full membership (Winch had been elected by convention delegates); and that the secretary-treasurer be paid \$5.00 per day (Winch received \$50 per week). Allman was also suspicious of the political affiliation of Winch and his supporters, proposing that no LWIU organizer be allowed to advocate any political party or political party platform, that no union officer could hold office in any political organization, and that the union should not form any political alliances.⁴⁷ Winch and his associates countered the 16 points, labelling them idealistic and suggesting that a union could not remain viable if the executive was replaced by inexperienced

⁴⁵A. Ross McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada: 1905-1917," Canadian Historical Association, *Papers* (1975), 167-190; Norman H. Clark, *Mill Town: A Social History of Everett, Washington* (Seattle 1970); Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene 1967), 85-115.

⁴⁶*British Columbia Federationist*, 7 November 1919.

⁴⁷*The Worker*, 30 October 1919.

new members every six months. More importantly, the Winch forces moved to ensure that socialist delegates were elected to represent districts at the next LWIU convention.

In January 1920 the socialists purged the IWW delegates from positions of influence. *The Worker* was disbanded and the LWIU purchased pages in the *British Columbia Federationist* to disseminate news and views. The *Federationist*, a socialist, pro-OBU paper, was the organ of the British Columbia Federation of Labour and here Winch could retain tight control over editorial content. At the January LWIU convention Winch was returned as secretary-treasurer and anti-IWW delegates were elected to the central executive committee. The convention also made it official that no IWW card carrier could hold office in the LWIU.⁴⁸

The LWIU had clearly defined itself as an anti-IWW organization, but this did not mean that the socialists were intent on building a bureaucratic trade union structure, as the Wobblies argued. Rather, the LWIU, and indeed the OBU as well, looked to the British Shop Stewards' Movement in groping for an appropriate organizational model.⁴⁹ Radical socialists had assumed the leadership of the Shop Stewards' Movement, which had originated on the Clyde in 1915, and the principle of independent rank-and-file control was the cornerstone of the organization. The constitution of the Clyde Workers' Committee stipulated that "No Committee shall have executive power, all questions of policy being referred back to the rank and file."⁵⁰ A national leadership developed by early 1918, and although the Shop Stewards' Movement was short-lived, it was noteworthy in that it attempted to unite independent rank-and-file unionism with the larger goals of revolutionary socialism.⁵¹

The Shop Stewards' Movement model held much appeal for the LWIU. There was provision for the independence of workers in the primarily economic struggle with employers over wages and camp conditions, there was a role for the socialists, who wanted to create a class-conscious work force, on the executive of the union, and there was a place for a national organization, such as the OBU, to complete the long-term socialist agenda. One part of the master plan became unstuck when the LWIU left the OBU. A second aspect, the independence of the men in the camps in matters of job action, was maintained religiously, but arguably this position was perfect to a fault.

As we have seen, the loggers were militant in 1919 and 1920. They had

⁴⁸*British Columbia Federationist*, 16 January 1920; UBC, Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, v.33, f.6, *Constitution and Laws of the Lumber & Camp Workers' Industrial Union of the One Big Union, Amended, January 1920*.

⁴⁹*The Camp Worker*, 26 April 1919; *British Columbia Federationist*, 29 October 1920; 10 December 1920; 28 January 1921.

⁵⁰Branko Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922* (Oxford 1959), 98.

⁵¹For the history of the Shop Stewards' Movement, see Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement*; James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London 1973); Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh 1983).

concrete grievances and they were willing to take job action. Ernest Winch and the central executive committee, however, seemed embarrassed by the militancy in the camps. The executive frowned on strikes and no attempt was made to coordinate the job action that took place throughout the province. For example, a strike by loggers near Port Alberni in early August 1919, at the camp of the Alberni Pacific Lumber Company, prompted company officials to approach LWIU headquarters in Vancouver with a view to negotiating an end to the dispute. A major company was recognizing the existence of the LWIU, but the union executive, in line with the principle of rank-and-file independence, refused to discuss the dispute, referring the company back to the men on strike in Port Alberni.⁵²

Not only did the union executive distance itself from individual strikes, it actively discouraged job action. An amendment to the LWIU constitution in January 1920 stated: "All Walk-outs and hunger strikes shall be discouraged as much as possible and before such strikes take place they must be decided by a two-thirds majority of the members in a camp."⁵³ Six months later the central executive committee further reinforced this stance by recommending that "walk-outs be discouraged and that no official notice be taken of them, except that, when a report giving the reasons for the action is handed into the office, this shall be published for the information of the members."⁵⁴ The adjurations of the executive, however, had little impact, and the men continued to strike until they were defeated by employer repression and a downturn in the economy.

The position of the executive on strikes and organization was clear in a lecture aimed at a group of unorganized sawmill workers in New Westminster who had gone on strike in the fall of 1920 to protest a wage cut only to watch the employer close the plant for the duration of the year:

During the period the former employees at this mill will have lots of time to study the aims and objects of the One Big Union, and when they do start again, should they have the mental capacity to absorb the idea of the OBU, they will have realized the futility of a few workers trying to buck organized capital, especially on a falling market.

Had these workers been members of the Lumber Workers department of the OBU and taken an active interest in the organization, they would have known that to go on a hunger strike in the face of a falling market, was the last recourse of its members.

Many mill workers who have not yet realized the necessity for the One Big Union of Workers, will no doubt, after their experience this coming winter, be willing to admit that they were foolish in not taking advantage of organizing with their fellow workers on a class basis, for they will be made to realize through actual experience that the only way workers can successfully fight against the onslaughts of organized capital, in future, is through a class organization, class against class.⁵⁵

The LWIU executive executive was intent on building a numerically large

⁵²*British Columbia Federationist*, 8 August 1919; *Port Alberni News*, 6 August 1919.

⁵³UBC, MacInnis Collection, v.33, f.6, *Constitution and Laws of the Lumber & Camp Workers' Union, Amended, January 1920*.

⁵⁴*British Columbia Federationist*, 23 July 1920.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 23 July 1920.

union of lumber workers, but it was a vision that stressed workers educating themselves to class consciousness in preparation for the revolution. The union was not to be forged in struggle at the work-place, with workers and the LWIU executive united in the confrontation with employers over wages, living conditions, and union recognition.

In retrospect, an industry-wide confrontation with logging operators might have secured lasting gains for both the loggers and the socialist executive. In 1919 and early 1920 circumstances were propitious for a general strike. Logging operators were unprepared for the sudden rise of the LWIU, market conditions were strong, and British Columbia loggers were largely organized and militant. A major, coordinated strike might have gained union recognition from employers, better material gains for workers, and legitimacy for the socialists as union leaders. However, in the context of 1919 and 1920 such an action was not even considered, neither by the executive nor by the rank and file. The socialists on the executive were preparing for socialism by educating workers and creating a mass organization, and they were suspicious of job action in developing a mass organization. Moreover, there was a sense that centralized collective bargaining tended to create oligarchy in unions and force compromises with capitalism. Radical westerners considered both of these traits to be weaknesses in the established unions which they fought against, and the LWIU leadership did want to repeat the errors of the past. Nor was the rank and file eager to pursue centralized action. The general outlook of OBU and LWIU leaders and the fierce independence of the Wobbly tradition under-pinned their wish to retain control of job action in individual camps. Revolutionary socialism and rank-and-file industrial unionism co-existed in the LWIU, but they did not come together to form a united programme.

III

BRITISH COLUMBIA LOGGING OPERATORS were initially confused by the rapid rise of the LWIU, but they soon marshalled their forces, effectively and ruthlessly crushing the loggers' union. In the spring of 1919 logging operators were not overly concerned about the loggers' union, and even as the summer wore on they were still confident that small wage increases and minimal improvements in the camps would be sufficient to stem the union tide.⁵⁶ The logging operators, used to dealing with their workers on an individual basis, had difficulty accepting the fact that the loggers were committed to the union. By the fall of 1919 the operators had adjusted to the new circumstances. The B.C. Loggers' Association, an organization that included almost all coastal logging companies, decided to make a firm stand against the LWIU and began planning "for the battle which is inevitable."⁵⁷ In early 1920 the logging operators declared their unequivocal adherence to the principle of the

⁵⁶UBC, C.D. Orchard Papers, v.1, f.6, Excerpts from the Minutes of the B.C. Loggers' Association, 1907-1933; *Pacific Coast Lumberman*, August 1919, 34.

⁵⁷UBC, Orchard Papers, Minutes of the B.C. Loggers' Association, 1907-1933.

open shop, posting a statement in every coastal camp that gave notice that they would have no truck with the union.⁵⁸

The Loggers' Association was resolute in its position and implemented measures to ensure its enforcement. In the autumn of 1919 the association established the Loggers' Agency at 313 Carrall Street in Vancouver. The agency was an employment office, placing men at jobs in the association's camps. At least 75 per cent of coastal loggers were hired through this office, and in the first year of its operation the agency placed 14,995 men in camps. For the year ending 30 September 1922, 17,391 men were shipped to logging camps from the agency.⁵⁹ By closely monitoring its work force, hiring only men it felt were acceptable, the Loggers' Association was able to keep union activists out of their logging camps.

The key to the success of the agency was its exhaustive, well-organized filing system that kept records on coastal loggers: "The working record of any man is there and his card is his history. Any card can be located in an instant."⁶⁰ When an employee left a job in the woods, the employer filled out a report form and sent it to the agency. This form noted the reason the man left (quit, laid off, discharged), his work ability (good, fair or poor), his speed (rapid, medium or slow), and his conduct (reliable, unreliable or agitator). The employer also noted whether the man was temperate and if he would be re-employed by the same company again.⁶¹ Any suspicion of union sympathy was dutifully recorded, and the union estimated that by 1922, 1,500 members of the LWIU had been blacklisted.⁶² These were the best organizers that the union had, and the inability of these men to secure work in coastal camps certainly convinced other union sympathizers to keep their own counsel.

While the blacklist and the refusal to deal with the union camp committees were the most effective weapons employed by the coastal companies during 1920 and 1921, operators also experimented with other strategies. The Loggers' Association attempted to create a common front in setting a wage schedule so as to avoid workers playing one company off against another.⁶³ Further, in line with new corporate employee-management techniques that swept across North America after World War I, some firms supplemented their open-shop campaign with innovative programmes such as industrial councils, extended piece-work payment systems, and bonus plans. The Capilano Timber Company set up an industrial council where representatives of management and the company's employees met, supposedly to discuss issues relevant to company operations. Wages and other concerns that the company felt were its sole prerogative were exempt from the

⁵⁸*Ibid.*; *Western Lumberman*, March 1920, 38.

⁵⁹*Pacific Coast Lumberman*, April 1924, 46.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹*British Columbia Federationist*, 13 April 1924.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 10 November 1922.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 13 April 1923; UBC. Council of Forest Industries of British Columbia Papers, v.1, f.1, Minutes of Meeting of Directors of B.C. Loggers' Association, 3 October 1922.

discussions. Bloedel, Steward & Welch also experimented with industrial councils. The Bloedel operation at Myrtle Point also expanded the piece-work system beyond falling and bucking, a common practice, to include all logging jobs. Another company introduced a bonus system whereby loggers were paid an additional sum of money if production exceeded a level set by the company.⁶⁴

Camp operators also began to pay more attention to the time loggers spent in camp when not working. Reading rooms, sports activities, educational classes, religious exercises, moving pictures, and theatricals, all often supervised by a Young Men's Christian Association secretary, became part of life in some coastal camps.⁶⁵ Hjalmer Bergren, a militant union organizer in the 1930s who began working in logging camps in 1925, remembered: "Conditions when I started in the camps weren't too bad; there was all kinds of food. The main problems were safety, wages, and individual rights."⁶⁶ Thus, as part of the campaign to crush the LWIU the logging operators finally began to pay more attention to their workers. The LWIU had had an impact in the daily lives of coastal loggers.

By the fall of 1920 the LWIU was moribund in the coastal district, and the coming of the economic depression sealed the union's fate. The slump hit the sawmills in the summer of 1920, but logging companies maintained production and price levels until November, when they too entered a period of stagnation. At the end of 1920, according to an industry analyst, 50 per cent of sawmills and 80 per cent of logging camps in the province were closed.⁶⁷ The depression continued through 1921 and 1922, and it was not until 1923 that output surpassed the record of 1920. Lumber prices, however, did not reach the heights of 1920 at any time during the rest of the decade.⁶⁸

After 1920 jobs became scarce on the coast and depleted company coffers forced a series of wage cuts on loggers. Militancy declined, LWIU district offices sank into debt, and members left in droves. Winch withdrew from the union in January 1921, and the new central executive committee began to make overtures to both the OBU and the Seattle headquarters of the IWW in an attempt to forge alliances and arrest the rapid decline of the LWIU.⁶⁹ These initiatives to old enemies did not bring results. Then, in 1923, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, No. 120, of the IWW, which had its headquarters in Seattle, began organizing in Canada, setting up offices in towns that had previously held LWIU district offices.⁷⁰

⁶⁴PABC, Vancouver Forest District, Annual Management Report, 1920.

⁶⁵*Pacific Coast Lumberman*, June 1919, 34; September 1919, 30; October 1919, 42; *Western Lumberman*, December 1919, 29.

⁶⁶Cited in Donald MacKay, *Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story* (Vancouver 1982), 201.

⁶⁷*Pacific Coast Lumberman*, December 1920, 26.

⁶⁸PABC, Vancouver Forest District, Annual Management Report, 1921; British Columbia, Forest Branch, *Annual Report 1940*, F63.

⁶⁹*British Columbia Federationist*, 20 May 1921; 1 July 1921; 23 September 1921.

⁷⁰The LWIU, No. 120, of the IWW established offices in Vancouver, Cranbrook, Prince George, Sudbury, and Timmins during 1923 and 1924. Prominent members of the LWIU (OBU) such as Harry

In the interior of British Columbia, employers were less coordinated than their coastal counterparts, but in the short-log country less drastic procedures were needed. The LWIU was weaker in the Kamloops, Prince George, Prince Rupert, and Kootenay districts, where logging was seasonal, outfits were smaller, and firms more sensitive to sudden market fluctuations. Further, interior camps relied on a seasonal, transient work force that was especially hard to organize. Prairie farm workers and local farmers worked the land in the summer, travelling to bush camps for the winter. Their commitment to unionism was weaker than that found among full-time loggers, and their presence in the camps was the bane of union organizers.⁷¹ In the interior, employers resisted the union through an ad hoc blacklist system, increased piece work, and labour spies, but the depression which began there in the summer of 1920 severely curtailed production. The Prince Rupert LWIU office reported in the summer of 1921 that only one camp in the whole district was in operation, adding that this had been the case since the previous autumn.⁷² For the most part, conditions in the interior remained abysmal; the LWIU had forced no improvements.

IV

BY THE MID-1920s neither the remnants of the original LWIU, which had affiliated to the Red International of Labor Unions in 1922, under the guidance of J.M. Clarke, nor the IWW-led LWIU had any organizational presence in the forests of British Columbia. But in the 1930s a militant industrial union, led by revolutionary socialists, re-emerged in the provincial logging industry. This time it was communists who were at the helm, having founded a revived Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada (LWIUC) in northern Ontario in 1928.⁷³ By the early 1930s the LWIUC had established a small office in Vancouver, and just as importantly, in line with the policy rethinking of the communist Third International, these revolutionary socialists had developed a new perspective on the relationship between the economic and political forms of struggle. They were prepared to unite the "political struggle with the economic militancy of workers in the industrial movements."⁷⁴ In 1934 coastal loggers were concerned about low wages, safety in the woods, and union recognition, and they launched a series of strikes that spread across Vancouver Island. Although the LWIUC leadership had neither

Allman, J.L. Peterson, J.D. Golden, W.D. McKenzie, N. Hatherly, Bert E. Smith, and Ernie Lindberg held positions in the LWIU (IWW). *Lumber Workers' Bulletin*, IWW, 1923 and 1924. The IWW made some gains in the Kootenays and led strikes in 1923 and 1924 against six major Kootenay lumber companies. The 1924 strike involved some 1,600 workers and lasted 52 days. The companies prevailed and thereafter the IWW disappeared from the province.

⁷¹*British Columbia Federationist*, 25 July 1919; 1 August 1919; 15 August 1919.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 8 July 1921.

⁷³Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto 1987), 120.

⁷⁴Larry Peterson, "Revolutionary Socialism," 121.

initiated nor expected the outbreak of the Vancouver Island loggers' strike, preferring to wait until more organizational work had been done, they quickly decided to take charge of the strike and lead the negotiations with the logging operators.⁷⁵ By fighting for the economic and immediate grievances of the men in the camps, the communists established a close relationship with the workers, a relationship which was extremely important in building the strong International Woodworkers of America and in maintaining a powerful left-wing political presence in British Columbia working-class circles. The lesson of the first LWIU had not been in vain.

I would like to thank Allen Seager and Robin Fisher for commenting on an early draft of this essay. Numerous anonymous readers were also very helpful.

⁷⁵Gordon Hak. "Capital and Labour in the Forest Economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George Districts, British Columbia, 1910-1939." Ph.D. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1986, Chapter V.

APPENDIX A. British Columbia Logger Strikes, 1919-1920

Month	Place	District*	Company	No. of Men	
May (1919)	Headquarters	C	Comox Logging & Railway	300	
	Stave Falls	C	Abernethy & Lougheed		
June	Cowichan Lake	C	Genoa Bay Lumber		
	Prince George	PG	Various camps along CNR		
	Gibson's Landing	C	Stoltze Manufacturing		
	Malino Cove	C	W.O. Perkett		
August	Port Alberni	C	Alberni Pacific Lumber	140	
	Duncan Bay	C	Merrill, Ring & Moore		
	Newton	C	King-Farris		
	Jackson Bay	C	Lapan Logging		
	North Vancouver	C	Capilano Timber		120
	Alert Bay	C	Nimpkish Lake Logging		161
	Beaver Creek	C	McGougan & McDonald		35
September	Thompson Sound	C	Mainland Cedar	225	
	Rock Bay	C	B.C. Mills, Timber & Trading		
	Headquarters	C	Comox Logging & Railway		429
	Chase	KM	Adams River Lumber		160
	East Wellington	C	New Ladysmith Lumber		123
	Sooke	C	Amicka		
	Knox Bay	C	P.B. Anderson		
October	Cowichan Lake	C	Hemmingsen Logging	24	
	Village Bay	C	Dahl & Falk		
	Stag Bay	C	Campbell River Lumber		40
	Hernando Island	C	Campbell River Lumber		
	Sechelt	C	Walker		
	Myrtle Point	C	Bloedel, Stewart & Welch		
November	Alert Bay	C	Nimpkish Lake Logging	200	
	Rock Bay	C	B.C. Mills, Timber & Trading	65	
	Alert Bay	C	Nimpkish Lake Logging	200	
	Sheraton	PR	(Tie Camp)	100	
	Foreman	PG	Blaine's Tie Camp	75	
January (1920)	Headquarters	C	Comox Logging & Railway	75	
	Port Alberni	C	Alberni Pacific Lumber	97	
	Waldo	KO		120	
	Chase	KM	Adams River Lumber		
	Lombard	C	Lombard Lumber		
February	Sechelt	C	Larson Logging	100	
	Stag Bay	C	Campbell River Logging		
	Alert Bay	C	Nimpkish Lake Logging		
	Drury Inlet	C	Dempsey-Ewart		
March	Port Neville	C	Mainland Cedar	80	
	Shawnigan Lake	C	Shawnigan Lake Lumber	50	
	Call Creek	C	Tack Logging		
	Homfray Channel	C	Murphy & Hanson	20	

90 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

April (1920)	Skookumchuck	KO		
	Ladysmith	C	Ladysmith Lake Lumber	8
	North Vancouver	C	Capilano Timber	65
	Qualicum Beach	C		65
	Raza Island	C	F.N. Norton	38
	Port Neville	C	Mainland Cedar	60
May	Usk	PR	Kleanza; Royal Lumber; Kenny Bros.	
	Union Bay	C	Canadian Robert Dollar	70
	Cowichan Lake	C	Genoa Bay Lumber	63
	Headquarters	C	Comox Logging & Railway	425
	Simoon Sound	C	Cargill	65
June	Buckley Bay	C	Masset Timber	400
	Penny	PG		30
	Meadows	KO	Lindsley Bros.	35
	CNR Line	PR		30
	Port Neville	C	Mainland Cedar	22
	Grassy Bay	C	Crowley	54
	Stillwater	C	Brooks, Scanlon, O'Brien	200
	Port Moody	C	Canadian Robert Dollar	97
	July	Whonnock	C	Firs
Simoon Sound		C		30
Ocean Falls		C	Pacific Mills	70
Meadows		KO		23
Thompson Sound		C	J.M. Murray	12
Barriere		KA	Northern Construction	50
Stag Bay		C	Campbell River Lumber	11
Carriden Bay		C		31
August	Myrtle Point	C	Bloedel, Stewart & Welch	
	Deep Bay	C		
September	Ocean Falls	C	Pacific Mills	70
	Jarvis Inlet	C	Johnston Brassmen	
October	Ladysmith	C	Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing	65
	Gambier Island	C	McLeod Logging	
November	North Thompson	KA	Northern Construction	150
	Topaz Harbour	C	Tahkina Timber	12
	Cowichan Lake	C	Hemmingsen Logging	40
	Jackson Bay	C	Lapan Logging	60
December	Mabel Bay	KA	Okanagan Sawmills	

*District abbreviations: Coast (C), Prince George (PG), Kamloops (KA), Prince Rupert (PR), Kootenays (KO).

Sources: *The Labour Gazette*, 1919-1920; British Columbia, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour*, 1919-1920; *British Columbia Federationist*, 1919-1920.