

“They Shall Not Die!” Anarchists, Syndicalists, Communists, and the Sacco and Vanzetti Solidarity Campaign in Canada

Mikhail Bjorge

Volume 75, 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1030896ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Bjorge, M. (2015). “They Shall Not Die!”: Anarchists, Syndicalists, Communists, and the Sacco and Vanzetti Solidarity Campaign in Canada. *Labour / Le Travail*, 75, 43–73.

ARTICLE

“They Shall Not Die!” Anarchists, Syndicalists, Communists, and the Sacco and Vanzetti Solidarity Campaign in Canada

Mikhail Bjorge

IN THE SUMMER OF 1927, the two most famous men in the world were an unlikely pair of Italian-American anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both the unappreciative guests of the state of Massachusetts.¹ The two were arrested shortly after a paymaster and his guard were gunned down on 15 April 1920, during the height of the Red Scare and the concomitant anti-leftist, anti-foreign, anti-anarchist madness of 1919–20. In the later part of the Great War, “anti-foreign” feeling was conflated with violently hostile attitudes and actions toward anti-war militants, pacifists, revolutionaries, and radicals, including the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) who were subjected to concerted state repression, including mass trials in Chicago, Sacramento, and

1. If Sacco and Vanzetti had a rival in the sphere of international fame or notoriety, it would be Charles Lindbergh. The Sacco and Vanzetti case has been the subject of a tremendous amount of scholarship from nearly every conceivable angle. The documentary record is the multi-volume *The Sacco-Vanzetti Case: Transcript of the Record of the Trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in the Courts of Massachusetts and Subsequent Proceedings, 1920-1927* (Mamaroneck, NY: Appel, 1969); Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: Penguin, 2007). Other accounts include Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Michael Topp, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford: St. Martin's Press, 2004); Bruce Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders and the Judgement of Mankind* (New York: Viking, 2007); Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Story of a Proletarian Life* (Edmonton: Black Cat, 2005); Lewis Joughin and E.M. Morgan, *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948); for a semi-fictionalised and very readable account, see Upton Sinclair, *Boston* (Boston: Bentley, 1978).

Wichita.² Widely perceived to be the victims of judicial lynching, Sacco and Vanzetti, and their trial, conviction, and sentencing to death, gave rise to a global solidarity movement forged by a loose coalition of anarchists, socialists, communists, Italian émigrés (including nationalists), and liberals. This solidarity network expanded to Canada and, in 1926 and 1927, galvanized Canadian sympathizers to action, not just in demands sent to various state actors, but materially, in marches, pickets, and occasional strike action.

The global Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity movement was the largest and most militant transnational campaign of the left in the 1920s. The Canadian solidarity movement has received little attention from Canadian commentators, be they writers on the left or scholars. One reason is that solidarity action came late, and was, in the case of some participants, lacklustre. Indeed, solidarity actions split among differing factions on the left. They were sporadic and often muted. Publications of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) as well as monographs and articles by Canadian historians of labour, ethnicity, and race have presented little substantial comment on the Canadian mobilization to free Sacco and Vanzetti.³ The topic is essentially historiographically absent, save for some peripheral discussion in Theresa and Albert Moritz's biography of Goldman's decades in Canada, interviews with anarchists by Paul Avrich, and a line or two in works on the CPC.⁴

In Canada, there was a response to the trial and death sentence of the anarchist duo. Although it was often disjointed, fractured along sectarian lines, and ultimately unsuccessful, it is a history worthy of note and attention. Defence work conducted within particular groups on the left did exhibit clear dissimilarities, sectarian fighting, and differing opinions on tactics. Indeed, the various weaknesses in the movement are telling. They exhibit the limits of

2. William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters; Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 267–271; Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, CounterPower Vol. 1* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), 218; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 243–255. Hundreds of prominent anarchist agitators, workers, and writers were deported on dubious charges. *New York Times*, 21 December 1919; Todd Pfannestiel, *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade against Radicalism, 1919–1923* (London: Routledge, 2003).

3. Travis Tomchuk, "Transnational Radicals: Italian Anarchist Networks in Southern Ontario and the Northeastern United States, 1915–1940," PhD Thesis, Queen's University, 2010, contains little that is not available in the work of Paul Avrich. For an overview of the CLDL, see Jaroslav Petryshyn, "AE Smith and the Canadian Labour Defense League," PhD Thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1977. The official history of the Communist Party of Canada, *Canada's Party of Socialism* (Toronto: Progress, 1977) also makes little mention of Sacco and Vanzetti beyond noting that the Socialist Party was involved in the defence campaign.

4. Theresa Moritz and Alberta Moritz, *The World's Most Dangerous Woman: A New Biography of Emma Goldman* (Vancouver: Subway, 2001), 92–93; Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005).

international solidarity movements in Canada: the apathy and inactivity of the masses of Canadian workers; the outright hostility of the mainstream labour movement to radical causes; the sectarianism of the CPC; the limitations and weakness of the One Big Union (OBU) and IWW; the conservatism of Canadian Italian organizations, and the limitations of anarchism in Canada, reflected in the lacklustre activity of Goldman. Despite its fragmented nature, the solidarity movement of the 1920s is an important part of the history of the radical left in Canada during the 1920s; its fragmentation is essential to understanding the praxis of the varying tendencies that championed the cause of two imprisoned anarchists.

Immediately following the cessation of the Great War, North American print media constantly stoked the fires of anti-Bolshevik ideas. There were diverse and frequent calls for Red blood to run in the streets, for Bolsheviki of all types to swing from the gallows.⁵ The period was a clear example of Carl Schmitt's ideas on the "state of exception," that liberal democracies have latent within them intrinsically dictatorial propensities that come to prominence when civil society and the state are provoked by even the most minor of existential threats.⁶ The galvanizing factor for the massive repression was the rise of militant, organized class agitation in the United States (US) and Canada, with the Russian Revolution hovering in the background. The press utilized "foreignness" and racism with aplomb in response, expediting and catalyzing the state and capital's drive to crush the militant proletariat.

It was within this milieu of intensified anti-foreigner, and in conflation, anti-leftist sentiment that Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested. Before the payroll robbery, which precipitated their incarceration, the United States had been the subject of an anarchist bombing campaign. In late April 1919, nearly 40 letter bombs were sent to various public officials. A chance discovery by a postal worker kept the bombs from finding most of their attempted targets. With the failure of the mail bombing campaign, anarchists changed tactics. On 2 June 1919, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer had his house bombed by an Italian anarchist. A church in Philadelphia saw two explosions destroy its façade. Numerous houses – mainly mansions – all through the eastern United States were successfully attacked. The targets all had one thing in common: they housed officials who had suppressed and attacked radicals generally and anarchists in particular.

5. Louis Adamic, *Dynamite! The Story of Class Violence in America* (1931, London: Rebel, 1984), 174–175.

6. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 35–37. Schmitt's criticism of liberal democracy, *Die Diktatur*, has finally been published in English, although my readings come from the German. In English, see Carl Schmitt, *On Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, [Forthcoming] 2014).

The pink notes titled *Plain Words* that attended the planted bombs were all the same, and came from a group called “The Anarchist Fighters.” A part of the note read:

We are not many, perhaps more than you dream of, though but are all determined to fight to the last, till a man remains buried in your Bastilles, till a hostage of the working class is left to the tortures of your police system, and will never rest until your fall is complete, and the laboring masses have taken possession of all that rightly belongs to them.

There will be bloodshed; we will not dodge; there will have to be murder: we will kill, because it is necessary; there will have to be destruction; we will destroy to rid the world of your tyrannical institutions.

We are ready to do anything and everything to suppress the capitalist class; just as you are doing anything and everything to suppress the proletarian revolution.

Long live social revolution! Down with tyranny!⁷

The prime suspects of the bombing campaign were the *Galleanistas*, a militant Italian-American anarchist cadre centred on Luigi Galleani and his paper, the *Cronaca Sovversiva*. Galleani advocated “propaganda by the deed” or *attentat*. The magazine contained instructions on everything from advancing the struggle to constructing dynamite.⁸ Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists closely tied to the *Galleanistas*. Both committed revolutionaries, they were members of *Gruppo Autonomo*, an Italian-American anarchist sect centred in Boston. Although there is no evidence to connect Sacco and Vanzetti with planting the bombs, “their ties to the bombers gave them inside information and may have rendered them legally complicit in the conspiracy.”⁹

Sacco and Vanzetti had substantial alibis and no previous convictions. Whatever evidence was presented in court was weak and generally thought unconvincing by many observers. The consensus among radicals was that they were framed by an “unscrupulous prosecution,” who withheld significant “exculpatory evidence from the defence,” and most probably tampered with physical evidence. Prosecutors coached and badgered witnesses.¹⁰ Faced with a hanging judge and a vicious prosecutor, and occurring within a period of anti-foreign and anti-anarchist sentiment, the defence had little faith in a fair trial. Their fears were confirmed when Sacco and Vanzetti were found guilty

7. The bombers were never caught. See Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Charles H. McCormick, *Hopeless Cases: The Hunt For The Red Scare Terrorist Bombers* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2005), 53–57; *Plain Words*, partially reprinted in Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 81.

8. Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 27–28. For more on the *Galleanistas*, see Nunzio Pernicone “War Among the Italian Anarchists: The Galleanisti’s Campaign Against Carlos Tresca” in Phillip Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, eds., *The Lost World of Italian American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 77–98.

9. Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 15.

10. Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 3.

on 14 July 1921. Almost immediately, anarchists, radicals, and allies in the labour movement moved to protest what was widely perceived as a judicial travesty, a blatant case of “class justice” dispensed against critics of bourgeois order. From their imprisonment to their execution in 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti received over \$300,000 from workers across the world. Millions marched in their cause, and hundreds of thousands struck, picketed, and rioted against their imprisonment. As *The Nation* noted, “Talk about the solidarity of the human race! When has there been a more striking example of the solidarity of great masses of people than this?”¹¹

The Sacco-Vanzetti Solidarity Committee was formed on 9 May 1920 by Italian-American anarchists affiliated with the *Gruppo Autonomo* and headed by noted anarchist Aldino Felicani.¹² At first, the Solidarity Committee limited itself to the IWW and anarchist organizations, mainly within the Jewish, Spanish, and Italian communities. The committee branched out into liberal areas as well, inclusive to the Harvard Student Liberal Club as much as the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*. Ironically, by the time the Canadian solidarity movement emerged, a shift had occurred within the American solidarity campaign. The original legal counsel, Fred Moore, was an IWW lawyer and had long advocated a militant solidarity approach. Moore was ousted in 1924, and thereafter an ecumenical alliance took control. This alliance’s “liberal literature replaced capitalism with nativism as the source of terror,” and they moved from a militant solidarity grounded on the importance of workers’ power to one of moralistic pleading.¹³

Thus, there were various groups that would come to the aid of the imprisoned anarchists, but in the Canadian context, three stand out: militant workers associated with the OBU and IWW; anarchists, specifically those surrounding Goldman in Toronto; and communists, whose organized expression was increasingly the Canadian Labour Defense League. Furthermore, the ideas and tactics to free the anarchists were as varied in Canada as in the United States. Goldman believed in the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti, insisting that they were the victims of a specifically anti-anarchist and racist/nativist “witch hunt.” She demanded a new trial, but thought any talk of a general

11. Lisa McGirr, “The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History,” *Journal of American History* 93, 4 (March 2007): 1086.

12. Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti*, 64; Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 91, 110–111.

13. Furthermore, these liberals drew from their experience in the “progressive campaign against Palmerism” and “described the First World War crackdown against aliens and radicals as a spasm of hysteria that would soon be corrected by a return to rationality.” Rebecca Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 188. The deep nuances of the solidarity campaign, between anarcho-syndicalist, Italian anarchist, IWW, Communist Party, and various liberal elements are far too intricate to expand on here, but excellent overviews are Hill, 162–208; and Bryan Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 254–279.

strike arrogant, foolhardy, and certain to fail. The OBU regarded the anarchist duo as victims of the stepped-up attack on the working class. Militants in the OBU had a jaundiced view of “class justice” in general and thought that Sacco and Vanzetti deserved at least a “new trial,” and failing that a “free pardon.”¹⁴ In the absence of such developments, the OBU argued that workers should organize a general strike to free the men, a notion shared by the anarchists in the United States associated with Carlo Tresca and the IWW. Communists in Canada agreed with the CPUSA, arguing that the men were class struggle prisoners, and their conviction was a manifestation of the class nature of the judicial system. For the CPC, nothing but the “unconditional release” of the two working-class men was warranted.¹⁵ The CPC was concerned with making the anarchists victims of “class justice” so as to obfuscate their anarchist origins. A more sympathetic reading would place the communists as perceiving the anarchists as fellow, if misguided, revolutionaries; a line that would be impossible in the later party. With such differing understandings in regards to the anarchists and the nature of their imprisonment, a united front was perhaps possible, but not likely.¹⁶ In Canada, non-interference between the factions ruled the campaign; the communists may have been mendacious and opportunistic, but they were also not actively meddling in the actions of the anarchists and syndicalists.

Canadian solidarity was slow to germinate. There were scattered anarchist organizations in the country, mainly centred in the Jewish neighbourhoods of Montreal and Toronto, but they were quite small and have received poor attention by historians.¹⁷ The first manifestations of organized anarchism in Canada are largely evident in the anti-Yom Kippur balls held by Yiddish speaking anarchists, but such events had largely ceased by 1905.¹⁸ The organization

14. *Labour Gazette*, 1927 (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1928), 740.

15. *Fifth Convention of the Communist Party of Canada*, 105.

16. As will be examined, the CPC went as far as to claim the anarchists for their own, although this only leaked out through the children’s press.

17. A notable exception is Mathieu Houle-Courcelles, *Sur les traces de l’anarchisme au Québec: 1860–1960* (Montréal: Lux Editeur, 2008). There were anarchists throughout Canada, and in this period Emma Goldman especially looked to Edmonton and Winnipeg as the most “receptive” to her talks. However, the anarchists in these cities were small in number and their main activity was not explicitly organised in anarchist ways but rather often involved participation in “the English labour movement.” In Edmonton specifically, which Goldman called “the best place in Canada,” there were two anarchist Swedes (one being Carl Berg, who led the Edmonton General Strike) and two Jewish anarchists, the latter being “not of much count.” A RCMP agent noted that Goldman’s circle in Toronto was not more than 30 people. Emma Goldman Papers (Microfilm), University of Toronto Library Media Collections, Emma Goldman (EG) to Alexander Berkman, 4 April, 1927. Hereafter EGP. A note on the EGP: Although the collection is largely in English, there are significant portions in German and Latinised Yiddish, which have been translated by the author.

18. Rebecca Margolis, “A Tempest in Three Teapots: Yom Kippur Balls in London, New York,

of anarchists in Canada in this period remains murky, restricted to those with access to the largely lost – and often profoundly transient – publications in Yiddish, Russian, Spanish, and Italian. The anarchist-communist, and later anarcho-syndicalist, Union of Russian Workers were active in Canada, as was the Federated Anarchist Groups of Canada (and their paper *The Awakener*), but apart from the IWW, there was never a strong, permanent anarchist organization in Canada.¹⁹ Whereas in the United States, Italian-American organizations eventually joined the Sacco-Vanzetti agitation during the “liberal” period of the solidarity movement, the major scholarly writings on Italians in Montreal and Toronto are silent on the campaign.²⁰

The Canadian labour movement was deeply divided in the early 1920s. Partially continuing the role started by the IWW in 1905, the OBU had launched a massive challenge to complacent, relatively conservative craft unionism in 1919. The general strike wave of that year led to similar sorts of repression as seen in the United States. Deportations, imprisonment, and demonization of “foreigners” was commonplace, directed especially at southern European immigrants, Jews, Finns, and Ukrainians, such ethnic groups being racialized as alien “Bolsheviks.”²¹ The most militant sections of fighting unions, found largely in the Canadian west, were locked into deeply bitter internecine

and Montréal,” *Canadian Jewish Studies* 9 (2001): 39, 52–58.

19. For *The Awakener* see Library and Archives Canada, RG-18-3531; for a then-contemporary introduction to the Union of Russian Workers, see Edgar Speer, “The Russian Workingmen’s Association, sometimes called the Union of Russian Workers (What It Is and How It Operates) – A Bureau of Investigation Internal Report,” 1919. Retrieved from: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/urw/1919/0408-speer-unionrusworkers.pdf>. Although the URW is woefully understudied, a great deal of primary documents were compiled and translated by the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities (the Lusk Committee), at the New York State Archives.

20. Roberto Perin and Franc Sturino, eds., *Arrangiarsi: The Italian Immigration Experience in Canada* (Montréal: Guernica, 1988); John Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875–1935* (Kingston: MQUP, 1988); Nicholas Harney, *Eh, Paesan!: Being Italian in Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Filippo Salvatore, *Fascism and the Italians of Montreal: An Oral History, 1922–1945* (Montreal: Guernica, 1995); Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). During this period Italians often worked in labour gangs, and the class nature of this system as well as the peripatetic nature of working life undoubtedly imposed constraints on the formation of ethnic associational life. See Robert Harney, “Montreal’s King of Italian Labour: A Case Study of Padronism,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 4 (1979): 25–56.

21. For the racialization of “foreign” workers in Canada as “radicals,” see Donald Avery, *‘Dangerous Foreigners’: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896–1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979); for work on deportation, see Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540–1997* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1997), 105, 116; in relation to nativist responses to the foreign “other,” see Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982).

struggles that pitted the IWW, the OBU and the international-craft oriented Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) union affiliates against one another.²² The TLC was loathe to enter into solidarity with anarchist “foreigners,” specifically when they were tried and then convicted of murder.²³

Although the IWW was not as crippled and weak in the 1920s as the extant historiography suggests, by 1927 wartime illegalization and continued state repression had shrunk its Canadian numbers to around 4,400.²⁴ Like the IWW, the OBU was not as vitiated as the limited historiography suggests.²⁵ Even so, OBU papers were also limited in their coverage of the Sacco and Vanzetti case in the early 1920s, perhaps due to the triumvirate of state, capital, and business unionism allied against them in waves of massive repression.²⁶ The OBU counted 19,245 members but was able to mobilize very few for the cause of the anarchists, with the possible exception of the miners in Nova Scotia. Even there, the evidence of OBU involvement is tangential, although there was significant communist activity. The lack of support from the Canadian labour movement, with nearly 300,000 members, was much the same as the situation in the US, where the American Federation of Labor only managed to pass two timid resolutions in favour of the prisoners, offering little (if any) material support.²⁷ Indeed, the only significant support from American labour came from the IWW, which from the outset championed the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti. As early as 1921, the *Industrial Pioneer* explicitly linked the prisoners’ “foreignness” to their plight. The American organizer Jim Seymour, parroting a

22. There were also pockets of militant unions in northern Ontario logging camps, in the collieries of Nova Scotia, within the needle trades in Montreal and Toronto, and other places in kind.

23. For more on the First Red Scare see Daniel Francis, *Seeing Reds: The Red Scare of 1918–1919, Canada’s First War on Terror* (Vancouver: Arsenal, 2010).

24. Canada, *Labour Gazette: 1926* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1927), 440. The IWW is notoriously difficult to study, as their newspapers (with a few larger ones excepted) and records are largely lost, destroyed, or lost in the basements of one intelligence agency or another. The IWW plays a much smaller role in this paper than the author would like. For a concise overview of IWW historiography in the Canadian context, see Peter Campbell, “The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919–1934,” *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 117–120; and Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990).

25. David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1978) is the standard treatment of the OBU, but the subject cries out for reinterpretation.

26. For more on the OBU and the fight against American based ‘craft reaction,’ see A.B. Woywitka, “The Unholy Alliance Against the OBU: The Drumheller Strike of 1919,” in Irving Abella and David Miller, eds., *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), 218–225.

27. Canada, *Labour Organization in Canada, 1927* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1928), 8.

nativist voice and speaking to the racism that animated their incarceration, wrote in his poem *Sacco and Vanzetti*: “But they’re nothin’ but God damn dago / Now me: I’m an American ... Send ‘em up I say / Show ‘em that our courts is American / We don’t care whether they done it or not / To hell with ‘em! / They’re dago.”²⁸ The question of whether to represent the anarchists as anarchists, workers, victims of nativism, political prisoners, targets of class justice, or some combination of the above would simultaneously permeate and divide the solidarity movement. In the United States, the early communist movement was promoting the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti as early as January 1921, with the Ohio-based forerunner of the *Daily Worker*, *The Toiler*, commissioning an article on the two anarchists by Mary Heaton Vorse. *Toiler* editor and Workers’ Party founding Chairman, James P. Cannon, was reported by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents to have spoken on Sacco and Vanzetti in Massachusetts in 1923, urging the freedom of the imprisoned anarchists, describing them as “red-blooded workers with communistic principles, needed for work in the future.” Whether these were Cannon’s words, or those placed in his mouth by those spying on the meeting for the state, this description fits well with repeated future descriptions of Sacco and Vanzetti by communists, who could not quite bring themselves to publicly acknowledge the anarchist politics of Sacco and Vanzetti.²⁹ During the 1920s, the world saw marches on American consulates and solidarity strikes in South America and Europe. Although Canadian newspapers were rife with information on the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti, solidarity actions were perfunctory and minor.³⁰

The CPC was still in inchoate form in the early period of the Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity campaign. Although there was some organizing among underground communists during 1919 and 1920, the Workers Party, as the first aboveground Communist Party in Canada, was founded only in late May and early June of 1921.³¹ Indeed, in this early period, the history of Canadian communism is that of “a relatively small number of men and women busily carrying out COMINTERN directives and dodging the watchful eye of the security services while trying to convert their compatriots.”³² *The Worker*, the official organ of the Party, had almost nothing to say between 1922 and 1926 on Sacco and Vanzetti. Likewise, its junior partner, the *Young Worker* (“The Official Voice of the Communist Youth League of Canada”) did not mention Sacco

28. Jim Seymour, “Industrial Pioneer,” in Joyce Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: an IWW Anthology* (Ann Arbor: PM Press, 1965), 358.

29. Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 123, 274–275, 490.

30. In July and August of 1927 Sacco and Vanzetti were on the front page of every major newspaper in Canada.

31. For analysis of the early groupings of the CPC/Workers Party of Canada, see Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks* (Victoria: Trafford, 2004), 25–60.

32. Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party of Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), 22.

and Vanzetti until 1927, the year the anarchists were murdered.³³ Indeed, the Canadian communist solidarity movement, at least as reflected in the English speaking press, failed to be active beyond raising money until the summer of 1927. A leading communist supporter of Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States, James P. Cannon, would found the International Labor Defense (ILD) organization in the mid-1920s and edit its newspaper, the *Labor Defender*. Facing factional roadblocks within a divided communist movement in the US, Cannon and the ILD nonetheless pushed the necessity of defending and freeing Sacco and Vanzetti, especially in the 1926–27 years when the organization and its press were on a sure organizational footing. One aspect of the work around the Sacco and Vanzetti campaigns that Cannon and his partner Rose Karsner insisted on was transparency, and they published a regular list of monies received for the Sacco and Vanzetti cause from organizations and individuals. Canadian donations were exceptionally thin, even as late as 1927.³⁴

The lack of an organized solidarity apparatus within the Canadian communist movement certainly made it difficult for revolutionary leftists to sustain effective support for Sacco and Vanzetti, just as it obscures whatever efforts were made in this cause for later historians trying to uncover evidence of defence efforts. In 1924, “George Brown” (the *nom de guerre* of Mikhail Boroden, itself the pseudonym of Mikhail Grusenberg, who went by “Bratwein” while in North America) contacted the CPC/WPC. An Old Bolshevik who emerged out of the *Bund*, Brown was best known for translating Lenin’s polemic “Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder” into English, and his primary task in 1924 for the COMINTERN was to build the International Red Aid (commonly referred to by its Cyrillic acronym MOPR) globally. In his first letter to the CPC, Brown demanded that it organize a chapter of the International Red Aid as quickly as possible.

The result would be the formation of the Canadian Labor Defense League (CLDL), founded in 1925. Canadian historiography has perceived the CLDL as only a communist-aligned organization led by Reverend A.E. Smith.³⁵ This is only nominally true. Moscow wanted the organization to be as broad as conceivable, not only within the “party,” but within “labour and all sympathetic press.” Brown demanded that not only “sympathetic” farmer and labour organizations be included, but the organization “must endeavor to draw in all liberal

33. *The Worker*, 10 March 1923–15 October 1927; *Young Worker*, March 1924–September 1927.

34. The *Labor Defender* has been digitised by the Marxist Internet Archive, and is now searchable. James P. Cannon’s writings on the case have partially been collected in James P. Cannon, *Notebook of An Agitator* (New York: Pathfinder, 1993), 3–27; for his magazine, see *Labor Defender: International journal of Labor Defense* (Online Resource: MIA), <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/labordefender/>. See also, Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, for a full discussion of Cannon, communist factionalism, and the ILD in the 1920s.

35. The A.E. Smith archives in the University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books, Robert S. Kenny Collection, which house Smith’s papers, have very little to say regarding Sacco and Vanzetti. See boxes 30–40.

elements ... while taking good care that the national committee remains in our hands.”³⁶ Brown demanded that the Canadian MOPR was to form a seeming non-partisan defence organization, but that a communist shadow committee must retain “firm and complete control.”³⁷ If the CPC missed the point, Brown later reiterated that “the party, we repeat, should be in control ... but not carry the whole burden on its shoulders.” Then known as the “Canadian Provisional Central Committee International Red Aid,” this shadow control would remain until the Canadian state banned the organization by fiat in 1940.

The provisional committee was renamed the CLDL by its committee. Its constitution stated that the “CLDL aims to fraternally unite all forces willing to cooperate in the work of labor defense into a broad national organization.” It continued that “every ready champion for the defense and support of the industrial and agricultural workers, regardless of their political or industrial affiliations, race, color, or nationality” should be encouraged to join.³⁸ The COMINTERN realized that it was “very easy, and therefore necessary to organize the wide masses on” solidarity issues, and these campaigns had the side benefit of “drawing [people] by such means into the communist party.”³⁹ The CLDL was not moving as fast as Moscow would like, however, and in November 1925, Brown scolded “comrade Tim Buck” for the “retarded” development of the CLDL. Brown “was at a loss to understand why there has been so little progress in the development of CLD.”⁴⁰ Worried that the CLDL could be perceived as only a Soviet front, Brown reminded Buck and Buhay to write to Moscow through the front office and redelivery point in Berlin.⁴¹ The CLDL was off to a glacial beginning in 1925, partly because of the makeup of the communist movement itself. Buck complained that as late as 1927 “the Party has no foothold among [Québécois] Workers,” and that “85% of our memberships are foreign speakers.”⁴² CLDL membership in Montreal consisted of 22 Poles, 40 Russians, 80 Ukrainians, and 150 Jews, and “no functioning English or French branches.”⁴³ Toronto was similar, but with no Russians, some Poles,

36. Library and Archives Canada, Communist International fonds (COMINTERN Files). Reel K-315 (47): George Brown from “Moscow” to “The Workers Party of Canada,” 8 March 1924. Hereafter, COMINTERN Files.

37. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): George Brown from “Moscow” to “The Workers Party of Canada,” 8 March 1924.

38. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): CLDL *Constitution*. ND.

39. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): Moscow to WPC, 4 March 1925.

40. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): Brown to WPC, November 1925.

41. The COMINTERN paper only uses last names in this instance, but this was probably Michael Buhay.

42. This is Buck being loose with numbers; the reality was probably much higher. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-219 (1): Report of Tim Buck to the COMINTERN, January 12 1927.

43. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): WPC Report, 15 July 1926.

and a “small” English section.⁴⁴ As late as September 1925, William Moriarty noted that “Canadian Labour Defense has not yet got down to real work.”⁴⁵

By 1926, the CLDL had achieved a measure of organizational stability. It also issued its first circular on Sacco and Vanzetti. On 8 June 1926, the CLDL informed all branches of the “cruel fate” awaiting Sacco and Vanzetti, the “two valiant fighters of the labour movement” who were “framed up” to “rid the employers of their thorn in the side.”⁴⁶ This circular also contained a form letter to be sent to Governor Fuller written by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers.⁴⁷ It was not until later, in 1927, that the CPC/CLDL would begin its campaign of direct action, defending Sacco and Vanzetti as “working class martyrs.”

The OBU and its official paper the *Bulletin* – then still publishing articles penned by the noted anarchist Rudolf Rocker (translated by Alexander Berkman) – did cover and comment on the “dastardly frame up” of their imprisoned comrades.⁴⁸ Indeed, the OBU produced a number of reports on the plight of Sacco and Vanzetti in the early-to-mid 1920s. By 1925, there were nearly constant updates on the two anarchists. However, until the months leading up to their ultimate death, this coverage in the *Bulletin* was largely reprinted from American sources – and editorial outrage notwithstanding – limited in domestic scope.⁴⁹ It would not be until March of 1926 that the OBU would float the idea of extending material support by participating in a “General Strike” to free the imprisoned men. This was all the more disappointing because the OBU was still an independent, fighting body, although Goldman and other anarchists were wary of communists attempting to infiltrate and seize the union.⁵⁰

Reflecting their vaguely syndicalist roots – the IWW famously called the OBU “not red but a pale pink” – the *OBU Bulletin* argued in April of 1927 that “the judicial murder of our two comrades” could only be stopped by “organized labour” and “the general strike.”⁵¹ The IWW, active in northern Ontario in 1926, took a break during a particularly long and difficult strike to “send circulars to all labour bodies in Port Arthur and Fort William seeking support

44. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): WPC Report, 15 July 1926.

45. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): Moriarty to Moscow, 28 September 1925.

46. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): Moriarty to Moscow, 28 September 1925.

47. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-315 (47): CLDL to All Branches, 8 June 1926.

48. EGP, Alexander Berkman to EG, 5 September 1927.

49. *One Big Union Bulletin*, Winnipeg. Articles appear on 25 March 1925; 21 January 1926; 5 August 1926; 4 November 1926, 30 December 1926; 20 January 1927; 10 March 1927.

50. *OBU Bulletin*, 11 March 1926.

51. Marion Savage, *Industrial Unionism in America* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1922), 195. *OBU Bulletin*, 14 April 1927.

for Sacco and Vanzetti.”⁵² Hoping for more than amorphous solidarity, the OBU continued that “over a year ago the *Bulletin* stated that the general strike would be the only weapon to liberate our two comrades,” and they found “delight in the news” that this idea was (re)gaining traction in America. As the OBU articulated, “labour can only succeed in righting its wrongs by applying pressure on the industrial field.”⁵³

The Worker started to agitate in significant fashion for Sacco and Vanzetti later in the spring of 1927. By this time, all appeals had been exhausted and it appeared to the Communists that only international solidarity could save the lives of the two anarchists. *The Worker* noted how in 1921 “Sacco and Vanzetti stood in danger of lynching because of war hysteria, prompted by a blood-thirsty press,” but in 1927 “their pictures on the cinema screen calls for bursts of applause.” *The Worker* tied this to the better education of workers about the “class nature of the courts.” The broadsheet juxtaposed the mounds of “cables, letters and telegrams” on Governor Alvan Fuller’s desk demanding clemency and a new trial with that of a “reverend pastor” who called for the blood of “these Bolsheviks.”⁵⁴

The organized anarchist movement in Canada was of little note, at least to the radical-obsessed RCMP.⁵⁵ The commander of “O” Division, closely following the Sacco and Vanzetti affair in general and the anarchist movement in passing, noted that “it has been some time since we heard anything of these [anarchists]” and was desirous of more information.⁵⁶ Another spy reported back that Goldman was the “leader” of a “small group of anarchists,” who were “chiefly Jewish” and generally former members of the (presumably Left) Social Revolutionary Party of Russia. Agent 30 thought it prudent to note that “in public, the organization is little, if at all active” because it had not more than 30 members.⁵⁷ It seems that Agent 30 was correct in his analysis of the anarchist movement in Toronto. Throughout Goldman’s stay in Toronto, she was deeply displeased with both the city and its intellectual climate. She refers to Toronto

52. Peter Campbell, “The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919–1934,” *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 136.

53. *OBU Bulletin*, 14 April 1927.

54. *The Worker*, 7 May 1927.

55. The RNWMP transmogrified into the RCMP as a direct response to the “leftist threat.” For an excellent engagement with the construction of the RCMP in relation to the left, see Steve Hewitt, *Riding to the Rescue: The Transformation of the RCMP in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). For a broader analysis, see Reg Whitaker, Gregory S. Kealey and Andrew Parnaby, *Secret Service: Political Policing in Canada From the Fenians to Fortress America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 93–116.

56. EGP, Cortland Starnes (Commissioner) to H.M. Newson (Commanding Officer), 7 September 1927.

57. EGP, Agent No. 30, *Report*, 20 September 1927.

as, among other things, “priest ridden” and “terrible.” She further commented how Toronto suffered from “the deadening influence of the churches” on every corner.⁵⁸ To the latter, she often lamented that she felt “isolation from intellectual friends” and did not know “one kindred spirit to [anarchist] ideas.”⁵⁹ She spoke of how she was “wretchedly depressed.”⁶⁰ Goldman had previously worked with Italian anarchists and unionists in the past. If there were any organized in Toronto, the idea that in her intellectual loneliness and fervent adherence to “the idea” she would not have found them is nigh impossible to believe. Goldman was living the impoverished life of one refusing to have surplus value extracted. She subsisted on the meagre earnings of her writing and often unsuccessful speaking tours. Indeed, her primary concern during 1927, if one did a cold mathematical count of the concerns of her correspondence, was of how she was unable to earn enough to pay her rent, even if it was subsidized by comrades. Her pecuniary problems littered nearly every letter. Nevertheless, the reason that Goldman did not throw herself into the solidarity campaign, as arguably one of the world’s leading English and Yiddish speaking anarchist intellectuals and agitators, is surely curious. In April of 1927, Goldman talked to Berkman about doing solidarity work with the imprisoned anarchists. She “wished that [she] could have a meeting on Sacco and Vanzetti” when she spoke at the May Day events. Goldman concluded that anything she would say would have no “weight,” and any agitation could only serve to appease her “state of mind.”⁶¹ Goldman was quite obviously interested in the imprisoned anarchists and talked about their plight often in private. In a letter to Vanzetti, she argued that “the consciousness that [her] name may be used against you made it impossible to write” on the case.⁶²

This argument seems thin, however, as the IWW, Yiddish speaking and Italian anarchists, and later communists, had all been at the forefront of the solidarity campaign. The question as to why she was reluctant to lend experience, notoriety, and a voice to a cause so inclined to her current position warrants investigation. After being first expelled from the US (1919) and then Soviet Russia (1921), Goldman was in Canada twice-exiled. A marriage of convenience to a Welsh miner procured her British citizenship, which she used to settle in Canada, near to the US where she desperately wished to return. In 1927, Goldman was still trying to obtain permission to relocate to the US through her counsel Don Levine. Indeed, in April, just before Goldman was about to break her silence on the Sacco and Vanzetti case, Levine noted that the “bitter facts” were that her exclusion was likely permanent, and that if

58. EGP, EG to George Nathan, 27 September 1927.

59. EGP, EG to Leon Malmed, 4 August 1927.

60. EGP, EG to Van Valkenburgh, 14 July 1927.

61. EGP, EG to AB, 11–12 April 1927.

62. EGP, EG to Vanzetti, 19 July 1927.

she were to attempt to enter America, all previous attempts at gaining a visa would be “wasted.”⁶³ Resigned to her fate, Goldman was in no mood to “appeal to people we know to be rotten.”⁶⁴ It may be too brazen to say that Goldman was worried to speak out on the anarchists while her appeal was working its way through the American state and judicial apparatus, but only a few days following the notification of near-permanent banishment, she made her first speech on Sacco and Vanzetti on May Day. Previously, she was not sure if she “could mix [Sacco and Vanzetti] with the first of May,” an absurd notion from someone who often noted that the Haymarket Martyrs (the execution of whom brought May Day as an international day of celebration of the working class into existence) had brought her to anarchism – had “brought me to life ... made me what I am.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, her letters following the state murder of Sacco and Vanzetti are replete with comparisons between the Haymarket Martyrs and the two anarchists, a point she reiterates in her letter to Rosa Sacco.⁶⁶ It seems that Goldman only took up the cause of the American imprisoned anarchists after her own application to return to the US was firmly, and definitively, denied.

Another reason that Goldman may have been late to the solidarity movement was her wariness, indeed loathing, of communists. During the entirety of the solidarity campaign, Goldman was mainly in contact with W.S. van Valkenburgh, an American anarchist and the editor of *Road to Freedom*, an exceptional anarchist English-language periodical. Goldman had witnessed the barbarity of Lenin’s early government with regards to anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists and penned a monograph and articles in relation to what she saw.⁶⁷ She also maintained contact with outstanding anarchists who were deeply involved in the Russian Revolution.⁶⁸ Valkenburgh referred to the “Communist conspirators who labor 24 hours a day to secure everything under their control” within the American Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity

63. EGP, Don Levine to EG, 10 April 1927.

64. EGP, EG to Don Levine, 15 April 1927.

65. EGP, EG to Arthur Ross, 5 September 1927.

66. EGP, EG to Rosa Sacco, 3 September 1927; see also EG to Evelyn Scott, 3 September 1927; EG to Arthur Ross, 5 September 1927; EG to AB, 7 September 1927; EG to John Turner, 17 September 1927.

67. Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923); Emma Goldman, “There is No Communism in Russia,” in Alix Shulman, ed., *Red Emma Speaks* (New York: Humanity, 1998), 421-432.

68. The most prominent was obviously long-time comrade Alexander ‘Sasha’ Berkman, but also G.P. Maximoff, the Russian anarchist, author and theorist, and Voline (V.K. Eikhenbaum), an influential historian of anarchism and adviser to Nestor Makhno. For other work on this topic, from anarchist exiles within Goldman’s circle see Voline, *The Unknown Revolution* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1974); G.P. Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1975); Alexander Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy* (London: Phoenix, 2002).

movement, and how the communists were “determined to make propaganda on their own account out of any cause.”⁶⁹ He continued that they were “the scum of the earth, ruthless as pirates and scoundrels without compare.”⁷⁰ To be fair, the communist movement in the United States was highly factional in the 1920s, but the nuances of the movement were not the central concern of the anarchists.

Goldman, Berkman, and Valkenburgh were livid that “Communist gangsters,” whose leadership (on whatever gradation of slavishness to Moscow) “used the lives of Sacco and Vanzetti in order to gain prestige and glory” and furthered their own movement and its ends.⁷¹ This was especially grating as Moscow had oppressed and killed anarchists in the recent past and concurrently held anarchist political prisoners in their jails.⁷² Goldman argued that the communists “are interested in their schemes first then in human life. The irony is that they are making a splurge for the two anarchists while they drive and persecute the A. at home.”⁷³ She continued that the “rotten Communists” were using “everybody and everything for their purposes” and with obvious implications for the present and past, that “the Moscow gang can get away with murder” in relation to the campaign.⁷⁴

There is not much in the way of convincing evidence to show how, specifically, the communists tried to assimilate the anarchists into “their” movement. The tangential evidence is clear and unequivocal. Communists clearly took the campaign as their own and tried to use the movement to gain members and obfuscate the anarchism of Sacco and Vanzetti, but evidence where communists specifically stated that the anarchists were “theirs” is thin. In Canada, an editorial in a children’s newspaper from a summer camp – *The Beaver Lake Red Youth: “Organ of the Central Ontario Communist Summer School”* was the pithy title – explicitly stated that “S&V are to go to the electric chair to appease the blood thirst and lust for revenge of the capitalists. These comrades are to be offered as sacrifice to the altar of international capitalism.”⁷⁵ Aping the slogan of the IWW they argued that “it should be considered also that an attack on one of us is an attack on us all ... we MUST save the two brave fighters.” To

69. EGP, Valkenburgh (V) to EG, 2 June 1927; V to EG, 11 May 1927.

70. EGP, V to EG, 11 June 1927.

71. EGP, EG to Augustine Souchy, 20 July 1927; EG to V, 7 June 1927.

72. The Soviets had violently eliminated their anarchists by 1922 and continued to imprison some in work camps and prison. For more on the elimination of the anarchists in Russia by the Bolsheviks, see Voline, *Unknown Revolution*; Maximoff, *The Guillotine at Work*; Berkman, *Russian Tragedy*.

73. EGP, EG to V, 14 May 1927.

74. EGP, EG to V, 11 July 1927.

75. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-294 (26): *The Beaver Lake Red Youth – “Organ of the Central Ontario Communist Summer School”* 18 August 1927.

further simplify the record and amalgamate the anarchists into their camp, communists often posited that the crime of Sacco and Vanzetti was “that they are members of the left wing of the American working class movement.” Communists, as Goldman insisted, represented Sacco and Vanzetti as class war prisoners and, in doing so, clearly wanted to bring those supporting them into what they presented as the largest movement opposing capitalism as a class-based system.

In light of the actions of the communists, Goldman continued her agitation. In a letter to noted anarcho-syndicalist organizer and militant Augustine Souchy, Goldman spoke of how communists “employ every foul means to make [it] impossible” to speak on matters relating to Lenin’s coup, as her talks on Russia were still being attacked by communists.⁷⁶ Goldman was incensed about the “rotten tricks of the Communists in the Sacco and Vanzetti case ... It is tragic that one must have anything to do with the Jesuits,” but in a spirit of duty toward the imprisoned anarchists, she knew that “a scandal would not do now.”⁷⁷ Indeed, Goldman was not interested in helping the “reactionary sheets inciting against Russia.”⁷⁸ In a letter to Berkman, she reiterated that “it is rather hard to talk about Russia ... with the whole white pack at its throat ... I do not want to hide anything about Russia, but nor do I want to add fuel to the present situation.”⁷⁹ Goldman thus wrestled with the difficult realities of the situation. In a solidarity campaign whose purpose was to free Sacco and Vanzetti, anarchists realized that perhaps ecumenical *détente*, no matter how distasteful, was preferable to moral and revolutionary invective, however correct. The “very difficult and very disheartening” praxis of strategy and tactics made Goldman momentarily sit out a fight in which the anarchists would ultimately be proven to be correct.⁸⁰ Goldman was willing to temporarily overlook her personal displeasure of working with the communists. On the OBU, while she thought the organization published “some good material,” she nonetheless believed that the leadership was full of “crooks and politicians just as in every large labour organization.”⁸¹ With the quiet anarchist waging solidarity via the pen, the OBU and the Party continued their own campaigns.

By 1927, both the Young Communist League and the CLDL had issued circulars on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. At the National Convention of the Young Communist League of Canada, a resolution was passed (on page 17), which stated in part: “It is now publically known that all the charges against these two class-conscious workers were framed by the capitalist class through

76. EGP, EG to Augustine Souchy, 20 July 1927.

77. EGP, EG to AB, 6 June 1927.

78. EGP, EG to Augustine Souchy, 20 July 1927.

79. EGP, EG to AB, 19 August 1927.

80. EGP, EG to Augustine Souchy, 20 July 1927.

81. EGP, EG to AB, 4 April 1927.

their police in order to rid themselves of two workers who were organizing their fellow-workers against exploitation and slavery ... the YCL places itself on record for the immediate release of these two workers who have already suffered so much in the struggle for freedom and liberty for the working class.”⁸² The communists had a unified line on the nature of the struggle, and amidst paeans to the Chinese revolution, the defence of the Soviet Union, anti-war work, and schlepping for CPC aligned unions and political parties, the YCL did not deviate from it. Likewise, at the 5th Congress of the Communist Party of Canada, the CPC passed a resolution that as “S&V” are “facing electrocution at the hands of the American capitalist class ... All party units shall in conjunction with the CLDL launch a dominion wide campaign to express their abhorrence at the impending judicial murder of the two workers and at this latest exhibition of capitalist class justice.”⁸³ The communists were involved in the case, and they would translate this to the streets by 1927.

May Day in 1927 saw an upsurge in Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity and an intensifying agitation within the communist camp. Beside a column that noted the opinions of “agitated super-patriots, businessmen, small-town lawyers, politicians, bond salesmen and preachers” – who inevitably thirsted for foreign, anarchist blood – Communist theoretician Maurice Spector recounted tales of the May Day marches in Toronto and Montreal. In Montreal, rallies were subject to “an outbreak of administrative fascism” wherein the police “trample[d] down people unscrupulously.”⁸⁴ The police attempted to shutter the gathering. With little regard for the “blue men [police],” workers “climbed over sheds and fences etc.” to attend speeches pertaining to the coming global revolution and the necessity of building solidarity to free Sacco and Vanzetti. The Montreal *Star* reported 200 or so “reds” at the Port Arthur Hall. Communist “youths” and “girls of flapper age” faced off against police and “fascisti,” which included “20 blackshirted members ... ready for action upon provocation.” The fascists were shown in an admirable light, defending King and Country.⁸⁵ “Several old women heaped imprecations against the capitalistic police force as they passed,” but “their strange tongues” obscured their specific implications. Montreal capitalists complained about “strange languages” in the crowd.⁸⁶ The article contained anti-Semitic overtones, and the *Star* was littered with pro-fascist articles.⁸⁷ Indeed, the paper reprinted

82. COMINTERN Files, [K-275] (27): *Proceedings of the 4th National Convention of the Young Communist League of Canada*, 22–23 June 1927.

83. COMINTERN Files, [K-275] (7): *Minutes of the 5th Congress of the CPC*.

84. *The Worker*, 14 May 1927.

85. *Star* (Montreal), 2 May 1927.

86. *Star* (Montreal), 2 May 1927.

87. The *Star* talked disparagingly about “Mile End,” a Jewish neighbourhood in Montreal and commented on the foreign character of the radicals in a way that insinuated negativity

(later popular Nazi and Fascist apologist) Viscount Rothermere's lauding essay on how "Mussolini Leads Italian Nation to Resurrection." However, the reporting of the *Star* does complement the communists' reporting on the Montreal march. Oscar Ryan, the CPC organizer of the Young Communist League, wearily noted that although Quebec "was almost completely inhabited by French Canadians," the YCL (mirrored by the CLDL) "is composed entirely of Finns, Ukrainians and Jews. None of them speak French ... they are unable to make contact with the young workers of Montreal."⁸⁸ He noted that there was no CPC paper, but the OBU was publishing a French language one, which he thought "very poor," but unfortunately "French workers were responsive to it."⁸⁹

In Toronto, the crowd passed a resolution at the May Day meeting "demanding freedom for Sacco and Vanzetti." Truncheon free, a "sea of hands among which blazed hundreds of red May Day ribbons ... flew up when the vote on the resolution was called," reflecting the "mood of the meeting."⁹⁰ Organizers noted that the turnout in Toronto was double that of the previous year. As the CPC was not terribly active in the interim year, a significant portion of this inactivity can probably be attributed to the rising consciousness of solidarity movements for the imprisoned anarchists. This is further bolstered as Goldman spoke at a competing May Day rally. She noted that it was "our meeting," ergo one can suppose it was in the *mame loshn* and anarchist inclined. Nevertheless, she believed it a "dismal failure," the meeting drawing only 300 people.⁹¹

Resolutions would not free the two anarchists. The headline of *The Worker* on 6 August, when Sacco and Vanzetti were nearing their execution date (or the potential for clemency), cried out that "SACCO AND VANZETTI SHALL NOT DIE," a rallying cry now voiced in scores of languages. The CPC called for workers to "prepare immediately for mass protest meetings on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti."⁹² With the execution date of the anarchists set for 10 August, the CPC ominously, and ambiguously, noted that "even desperate measures may have to be adopted" to save the men from the electric chair.⁹³ This was mirrored by the OBU, which had consistently advocated for the general strike to save the men, a call that was reiterated in August. Spector – editor of *The Worker* and soon-to-be-expelled Trotskyist heretic – attempted to use the Sacco and Vanzetti case to expose the class bias of the legal process. Spector

toward Jews.

88. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-274 (6): Oscar Ryan in *CEC Meeting Minutes*. 31 September 1926.

89. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-274 (6): *Organizational Meeting*, 13 April 1926.

90. *The Worker*, 14 May 1927.

91. EGP, EG to AB, 15–16 May 1927.

92. *The Worker*, 6 August 1927.

93. *The Worker*, 6 August 1927.

argued that despite members of the capitalist class crying out for clemency, the anarchists were “to die to further the ends of American capitalism.” The point about Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s victimization, according to communists like Spector, was not to crush and intimidate the anarchist movement but to wage a wider war against the working class. Sacco and Vanzetti simply had to die, as now the state had to show that it was “impervious to the protests of world labour,” Canada included. Spector eloquently tied ideas and tropes of “democracy” to that of this rather blatant class murder. Indeed, their names were to “go down in history as the victims of the blood-lust of the bourgeoisie. They will be victims of the same class that murdered thousands of the Paris Communards, the same class that made the war ... the same class that lives by the exploitation and suppression of the working class everywhere.”⁹⁴

Like Goldman and the OBU, the communists saw the case as within the trajectory of American judicial repression, but obscured the political, ethnic, and social position of the anarchists. The Communist Party leadership approached the issue of how to propagandize around the necessity of freeing Sacco and Vanzetti differently than did the IWW, and, indeed, the two organizations found themselves at loggerheads in the 1920s. In 1926, the “Organization Committee of the CP of C” was tired of the “disruptive tactics” of the IWW. The OC-CPC declared that the building of the IWW “meant in fact building a weapon for the disruption of working class forces.” They banned CPC members from working with or joining the IWW.⁹⁵

The state was not all powerful. The two anarchists won a reprieve due to the “mobilization of millions of workers throughout the world.” This was by no means empty rhetoric, and the masthead of *The Worker* argued with only a touch of hyperbole: “Workers Stay[ed] the Hand of Capitalist Murder.”⁹⁶ Workers the world over had picketed “embassies and consulates,” not only drafting and sending “resolutions and petitions” to the state of Massachusetts, but had struck workplaces, rioted, and attacked consulates.⁹⁷ The OBU continued their calls for “renewed vigor” in the struggle to bring light to their “comrade’s innocence.”⁹⁸ The OBU believed as late as 11 August that “hope is not lost.” They sent another telegram to Governor Fuller, arguing that “if the sentence is carried out” they would see the “state of Massachusetts as legal murderers” who were “sacrificing” the anarchists “for their ideas and not for their crime.” Furthermore, if they went through with the verdict, it “would convince millions of workers in and out of America” that the republic has

94. *The Worker*, 13 August 1927.

95. COMINTERN Files, Reel K-274 (6): *Minutes of the OC-CPC*. 13 April 1926.

96. *The Worker*, 20 August 1927.

97. *The Worker*, 20 August 1927.

98. *Bulletin*, 4 August 1927.

“sunk to a level lower than the despotism of old czarist Russia.”⁹⁹ Solidarity actions globally were starting to have an effect on the functioning of business, and American capitalist interests were being materially threatened. General strikes shuttered business in Montevideo, Uruguay and Guadalajara, Mexico on 9 August. Embassy staff members were threatened, and those in the Foreign Service were “heavily guarded.”¹⁰⁰ In response, the US government started producing circulars on the “realities” of the case to be given to the “friendly” press, shades of which probably came into Canada’s newspapers.¹⁰¹

In Canada, there were no solidarity strikes in early August. Protest marches were held on 6 August in Glace Bay, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, and probably elsewhere as well.¹⁰² These marches seem to have been organized by communists, through the inchoate CLDL. Local papers buried their coverage of the marches on the later pages, with little to no coverage excepting to note that they happened. As the execution date loomed ever closer, the “Communist Party of Canada urg[ed] the workers of this country not to slacken in their mass demonstrations or protest against the legalized murder of the two brave working-class fighters.”¹⁰³ Although Sacco and Vanzetti were “working class-fighters,” the minimizing of their connection and conviction as anarchists is again rather palpable. The united front included the Young Communist League of Canada. Around 30 youths plastered downtown Toronto with 6,000 stickers that read “Free Sacco and Vanzetti” and “Don’t let them murder Sacco and Vanzetti.”¹⁰⁴ “Well organized,” the action “gave the police considerable trouble,” and led to the imprisonment of four Young Communists.¹⁰⁵ The actions of the YCL reflected a broader trend of young Canadian militants at this time. The OBU camp at Gimli, Manitoba – alongside their “Sunday School” (revolutionary education for those aged “6–16” and its “Children’s Corner” space in the *Bulletin*) – agitated and educated in regards to the anarchists’ struggle.¹⁰⁶ A secular youth camp organized by women from the *Yiddishe Arbeiter Froyen Farein* had an official day of mourning when Sacco and Vanzetti were eventually killed.¹⁰⁷ Goldman complained about the endeavour, arguing that instead of ratcheting

99. *Bulletin*, 11 August 1927.

100. *The Worker*, 20 August 1927.

101. McGirr, “The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti,” 1108–1109.

102. *The Worker*, 20 August 1927.

103. *The Worker*, 20 August 1927.

104. *Young Worker*, September 1927

105. *The Worker*, 10 September 1927.

106. *Bulletin*, 19 February 1927; 25 August 1927.

107. Ester Reiter, “Secular Yiddishkai: Left Politics, Culture, and Community,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002): 133.

up solidarity organizing, “the Jews have wrapped themselves around a silly camp and have no time or interest for anything else.”¹⁰⁸ The camp would elicit disbursements for the movement, however, as the Yiddish youth choir that played the “funeral march” at the memorial was almost certainly drawn from these ranks.¹⁰⁹ As youth involvement deepened, so too did the action by militants.

As “the Sacco and Vanzetti case” had become “the cause of the working class of the world,” the US consulates in Toronto and Hamilton were picketed by hundreds of Canadian workers. Meeting first at Queen’s Park, the marchers stormed the US consulate. While a committee of five communists were inside the Toronto consulate delivering a petition to free the anarchists, “five comrades ... carrying banners and slogans ... were arrested.” Charged with disorderly conduct, the five arrested were all well-known communist militants: Oscar Ryan, J. Eselwein (an RCMP spy), T. Maguire, M. Buhay, and T. Hill. Buhay’s sign read “Stop the Hand of Capitalist Murder”; Ryan’s, “Sacco and Vanzetti Must Not Die!”; McGuire’s, “Down with Class Justice!”; and Eselwein’s, “Brothers. Save Your Class!”¹¹⁰ The paddy wagon speaks to the diversity of the CPC in this period, with various ethnic groups represented among those taken into custody.¹¹¹

The meeting on May Day notwithstanding, public anarchist response in Canada was rather tepid until August. Goldman moved in with a Jewish-anarchist family at 132 Lytton Boulevard in Toronto to avoid a rent increase at her old apartment on Spadina Avenue. It was at this house, on 12 August, during a meeting to plan her for-profit fall speaking tour, that Goldman was “surprised” when a “Canadian suggested a Sacco and Vanzetti meeting.”¹¹² Two days before, she wearily wrote to Senya Fleshin, the anarchist organizer of the Society to Help Anarchist Prisoners [mainly in Russia], that she felt “utterly helpless” in Toronto as there was no one to “even raise a protest meeting.”¹¹³ Following the meeting to plan Goldman’s lecture series cum solidarity organizing, the Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity meeting was planned and executed. It was held at the Labour Temple in Toronto on 18 August, a venue half the

108. EGP, EG to V, 13 August 1927.

109. EGP, *Report re: Sacco and Vanzetti Meeting*, Agent No. 30, 2 September 1927.

110. This is from *The Canadian Labor Press*, the “official organ” of international trade unionism. They were hostile toward the Communists and used their reporting to discredit the action. *The Canadian Labor Press* (Ottawa), 15 August 1927.

111. Andrew Parnaby and Gregory S. Kealey, “How the ‘Reds’ Got Their Man: The Communist Party Unmasks an RCMP Spy,” *Labour/Le Travail* 40 (Fall 1997): 256.

112. EGP, EG to V, 13 August 1927.

113. At this time, Fleshin and his partner were still advocating for anarchists imprisoned in Russia. EGP, EG to Senya Fleshin, 10 August 1927. For more on Fleshin, his life as an anarchist émigré from Russia, and his organising and agitation for anarchist political prisoners therein, see Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 214–228.

size that Goldman thought was needed.¹¹⁴ Her talk, titled “Sacco and Vanzetti, the Crime of the State of Massachusetts,” gave a history of the case. Goldman emphasized that the men were convicted “because they were foreigners, had opposed the war, spoke imperfect English and held unpopular social views.”¹¹⁵ Unlike other solidarity activists, Goldman was much more inclined to note the racialized and anarchist character of the two men, and insisting on the anarchist position of Sacco and Vanzetti’s innocence; she refused to call for clemency and demanded a new trial.

The crowd gathered to hear Goldman was “unanimous” in its support for the anarchists. Yet, only \$51 was raised, a “sad sum” even in 1927. Reiterating her common complaint, Goldman noted that “as usual, the collectors went about their business badly,” which contributed to the poor monetary return. Goldman thought that, although her circle “really did not know how to organize a mass meeting,” they had a “packed hall,” nonetheless.¹¹⁶ Whatever courageous face she put on in public, her long experience with the judicial system left her privately despondent. Her earlier thoughts on the “hopelessness” of the situation, of how she “felt thrown on the dungheap, paralysed, frozen to the heart” was reiterated after the meeting.¹¹⁷ For Goldman, “the meeting was only a plaster for one’s own aching heart, it can have no bearing on the fate of Sacco and Vanzetti.”¹¹⁸ There had been a small number of bombings in 1927 linked to the solidarity campaign. Goldman was adamant that the bombings were false-flag operations, and was sure that the other “bombs will be traced to the police.” Goldman continued that it was “not to be believed that real friends of Sacco and Vanzetti think that they can advance their cause by” such individual violence.¹¹⁹ Whatever her personal feelings, she continued the struggle, as did members of the OBU and the CPC.

The CPC and OBU attempted to put pressure on the Canadian labour movement to take action, perhaps a Panglossian notion with the international unions’ close ties to the American government. The AFL had been uninterested in solidarity work, and the TLC shared this laconic mainstream, trade union indifference. The CPC sent wires to the two largest Canadian umbrella union organizations (notably not the OBU), the TLC, and the All Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL), in an attempt to organize a one hour general strike for Sacco and Vanzetti. The response from the ACCL was tepid. From the TLC, the CPC received only silence. Despite “the official passivity” of the broad labour movement, the CPC urged “all workers to participate in the mass

114. *Toronto Star*, 19 August, 1927.

115. Moritz, *The World’s Most Dangerous Woman*, 93.

116. EGP, EG to AB, 19 August 1927.

117. EGP, EG to V, 13 August 1927.

118. EGP, EG to V, 13 August 1927.

119. *Toronto Star*, 19 August 1927.

demonstrations over the weekend of 20–21 August for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti.”¹²⁰ Berkman was incensed with labour officials, chastising them as “too cowardly, too capitalistic in spirit to do anything.” He continued that “the idiots don’t understand that it is they, labor, who is being crucified in Sacco and Vanzetti.”¹²¹ Berkman’s tirade, for all its validity, understated the extent to which the forces committed to the Sacco and Vanzetti protests – communists, the OBU, and the IWW – largely lacked the capacity to mobilize mass strikes in this period. The *Bulletin* may have called for its members to participate in protests, advocating a general strike, but there is no evidence that any locals actually walked off the job.¹²²

In Canada, one group of union locals was sufficiently militant to buck its constraining district leadership and to engage in direct action. In Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, miners held a “large mass meeting ... behind the post office” on 12 August. Three speakers gave a history lesson on the two anarchists, “showing that the cards h[ad] been stacked against the two workers from the very beginning.”¹²³ A “splendid spirit of working class solidarity and sympathy was in evidence,” and the miners moved to send a telegram to President Coolidge informing him that “5000 miners had ‘downed tools’ as a protest against the murders of Sacco and Vanzetti.”¹²⁴ The leadership of the local unions resolutely refused to support the sympathy strike or even attend the meeting. The capitalist press dutifully noted that United Mine Workers of America “president J.W. McLeod took the course of sound common sense when he refused to call a day’s strike among the miners of District 26.”¹²⁵ On the evening of 21 August, militant solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti had surfaced among Canadian workers in the form of an illegal, wildcat strike in the coal fields. The next day, the miners threw up pickets at five mines – 1B, 2, 4, 11 and 24 – in the district.¹²⁶

A report to the Department of Labour noted that 3,845 “Male” workers struck on 22 August, although the number was deflated by the employer.¹²⁷ Union leadership was resolute in its attempt to quash and delegitimize the action. McLeod “expressed sympathy” with the plight of the anarchists and

120. *The Worker*, 27 August 1927.

121. EGP, AB to EG, 20 August 1927.

122. The obsessively technocratic ‘Strikes and Lockouts’ papers record no strikes by the OBU during this period, and nothing was reported in *The Bulletin*.

123. *OBU Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 25 August 1927.

124. *OBU Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 25 August 1927.

125. *Sydney Record*, 24 August 1927.

126. *OBU Bulletin*, 25 August 1927.

127. In my examination of thousands of strike reports from 1917 through 1945, unions almost universally over-estimate numbers by 10–30 per cent, and the employer engages in the same numerical obfuscation in the reverse, and often more.

evidently “believed they were entitled to a new trial.”¹²⁸ Nevertheless, he was convinced that “the tactics of calling a strike at the pits” were, at best, something “for the individual to decide.”¹²⁹ Shop-floor membership had other ideas altogether, and militant pickets kept the five mines idle, exerting whatever pressure they could in support of the anarchists. The strike in the collieries was part of a larger wave of workplace action against the abstentionism of union leaderships and part of a longer trajectory of militant action.¹³⁰

The leader of the TLC, Tom Moore, was unmoved and unimpressed by the proletarian self-activity in Glace Bay. Moore argued that “more harm than good” came from “mob demonstrations, one-day strikes and such extreme actions.” Moreover, Moore bizarrely placed the blame for the executions on the protestors. He claimed that “if these men go to the electric chair, it will be because of outbursts in other nations.” Indeed, although personally and professionally “opposed to capital punishment” in Canada, he argued that “no man is helped by demonstrations aiming at the intimidation of government by force.”¹³¹ In Edmonton, during the days leading up to the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, Moore noted that “the urge for demonstrations has all come from the Communistic party,” an argument meant to undermine the protests, but not entirely incorrect.¹³² The leader of a decidedly international body was decidedly uninterested in international solidarity.

Despite the cries of “responsible” unionists, across Canada the CPC kept up its united front approach to solidarity campaigns. Oscar Ryan, recently freed from jail following the altercation at the US consulate, penned a poem to rouse the proletariat into further action. His closing refrain: “one resolute step / Fist held high / One sweeping charge / Torches high / One clear thunderous wrenching cry: / They shall not die! / THEY SHALL NOT DIE” was a clarion call to direct action.¹³³ Adhering to notions of “boring from within,” Tim Buck was in Edmonton for the national labour meeting and led a solidarity rally. Due to the “boosterish” nature of Western Canadian papers, strikes and militancy were deliberately played down.¹³⁴ The *Edmonton Bulletin* mentioned his talk, but failed to cover it. Likewise in Winnipeg, the paper whined about “another meeting” being called by the “communists” for 20 August. Like the earlier

128. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 22 August 1927.

129. *Glace Bay Gazette*, 22 August 1927.

130. John Manley, “Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922–1935,” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (Fall 1992): 96.

131. *The Globe*, 22 August 1927.

132. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 20 August 1927.

133. *The Worker*, 27 August 1927.

134. Alan Artibise, “Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871–1913,” in Artibise, ed., *Town and City* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981), 215–217; James Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies* (Toronto: Fifth House, 1995), 115.

meetings of 6 August, "meeting of between 2000 and 2500 people" warranted merely a few lines of reportage and was relegated to the second page.¹³⁵

Spector repeated his views on the repressive nature of "class justice." In striking opposition to Moore, he saw the Sacco and Vanzetti case as a sounding board to appeal to direct action. Spector noted that "only the workers c[ould] save Sacco and Vanzetti," and indeed, only "militant demonstrations [had] saved them" until late August. The two men were targeted and "rail-roaded to their deaths" not by accident, not by a "miscarriage of justice," but because of the normative operation of "the justice of capitalism." Simply put, "American Imperialism was out to get these revolutionary workers."¹³⁶ Despite the heady rhetoric from the CPC, their domestic ideas were more limited. With proletarian riots, unrest, and strikes in support of Sacco and Vanzetti commonplace the world over, the CLDL advocated restraint in the Dominion. F.W. Gerrish issued a Montreal statement to the public, wherein he "hoped that the outraged consciousness of the world will yet prevent the tragedy threatened in Boston." That being said, "if this tragedy should not be prevented, the city central committee urgently appeals that all friends of SV should act with the same dignity and restraint as they have always shown in public meetings and otherwise. Any disorder is against the express wishes of the Committee."¹³⁷

Goldman was at home the evening before Sacco and Vanzetti were to be put to death. As Freda Diamond, who was at her house that night stated, Goldman's "phone rang all evening long. There were calls from all over the world, but especially from Boston, pleading with her to do something. But there was nothing she could do, and she knew it."¹³⁸ Despite global efforts, in the early morning of 23 August, "capitalism murdered Sacco and Vanzetti." The "heroes of the class struggle were executed by a vindictive government," and the movement shifted from solidarity to remembrance and agitation.¹³⁹ Following the state murder of Sacco and Vanzetti, the miners' wildcat was called off. In September, the leadership of the United Mine Workers used the wildcat as an excuse to expel militant members.¹⁴⁰ Solidarity exacted a price. The CPC immediately made plans for memorial meetings and further demonstrations. Spector used the occasion to denounce Tom Moore. The communist leader railed against Moore's crusade to "stem the tide of the working class protest against the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti." Spector further argued that "thousands of Canadian workers must have been aghast" at the TLC leader's

135. *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 August 1927.

136. *The Worker*, 27 August 1927.

137. *Star* (Montreal), 22 August 1927. For more on the Sacco and Vanzetti movement in Montreal see Mathieu Houle-Courcelles, *L'anarchisme au Québec*, 150–151.

138. Freda Diamond, quoted in Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 53.

139. *The Worker*, 3 September 1927; *Bulletin*, 25 August 1927.

140. *OBV Bulletin* (Winnipeg), 1 September 1927.

suggestion that protesting on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti's freedom would lead to their execution.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, Moore's statement gave the "capitalist press" the erroneous impression that these skewed positions constituted "the viewpoint of Canadian labour as a whole." Not only was this broadly untrue but "a stab in the back" and a "most treacherous attack" on those proletarians inclined toward solidarity.¹⁴²

The OBU was clear in its stance; by having the forthright masthead of "Murder Committed!" the *Bulletin* clearly conveyed that before Sacco was electrocuted, "he exclaimed 'Long live anarchy!'" The *Bulletin* articulated that the two men "refused all spiritual consolation by the prison chaplain ... preferring to die as they had lived outside of the pale of Christianity."¹⁴³ In a manner laden with obfuscation, the communist press noted that the two anarchists "died as all true revolutionaries die, with quiet manner and a faithful message to their class;" yet lived on as "unborn poets." For the CPC, their deaths reflected the need, now more pressing than ever, to see the "abolition of this system of society where legal lynchings are carried out with diabolical callousness."¹⁴⁴ For Goldman, this "cruel burning of witches" was deeply personal:

It convinced me that all my efforts over the period of a lifetime were in vain, that no headway was made not only with my work but with the work of hundreds of thousands of others who tried desperately to bring some light to the people of the United States. What hope can one still retain if such a crying thing could happen as the butchery of the two wonderful people on the 23rd of August?¹⁴⁵

There were three different memorial meetings held in Toronto for the anarchists. The CPC held two gatherings simultaneously for different language groups at the Labour and Alhambra halls. Spector, being fluent in Yiddish spoke at both, while different CPC members shared the platform with an ecumenical group, including Arthur Hawkes, a Toronto Liberal.¹⁴⁶ Spector spoke of the need to strengthen the Canadian Labour Defence League and the nature of "class justice." At both events, the "lynchings" evidenced the ever pressing need to "renew the struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist state." The other memorial had Goldman and Rev. Salem Bland speaking in English, and Alex Cohen of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers providing his remarks in Yiddish.¹⁴⁷ The RCMP covered Goldman's event. Over 1,200 people attended. Agent 30 noted that it was "predominantly Jewish with

141. *The Worker*, 3 September 1927.

142. *The Worker*, 3 September 1927.

143. *Bulletin*, 25 August 1927.

144. *The Worker*, 3 September 1927.

145. EGP, EG to Evelyn Scott, 3 September 1927.

146. *The Worker*, 10 September 1927.

147. Moritz, *The World's Most Dangerous Woman*, 93–94.

a sprinkling of English speaking people.”¹⁴⁸ “Jewish youth” played a funeral march, and large pictures of Sacco and Vanzetti, draped in black, graced the stage. Goldman laid a rose before each before starting proceedings. To a great ovation, Rev. Bland “condemned the present system,” which he declared was “a hunt for the almighty dollar at the expense of one’s fellow man.”¹⁴⁹ Goldman followed. Agent 30 noted that she was “erratic” at times, and her mental state was shattered indeed. In a heart-wrenching letter to Berkman, she acknowledged that she “had to drag [herself] out of bed to attend it, but nothing short of unconsciousness would have induced” her to stay away.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, she denounced “class injustice” and the “United States generally, but made no mention of Canada.” The agent took particular note of the fact that “obviously for propaganda purposes, [she emphasised] that Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists.” Following a “very nice definition of anarchism, she urged the audience to continue the work which S-V had started with the end in view of establishing a new order in which mankind will be free. Following her speech, the meeting adjourned.”

With the exception of the IWW and the OBU, the Canadian labour press ignored the executions, although some reacted to the killings in predictably reactionary ways. Showing its hand early, *The Labor Leader* (“Canada’s National Labor Weekly”) printed articles under a headline that stated “Canadian labor men should not tolerate the IWW and the One Big Union, nor Bolshevism.”¹⁵¹ The *Leader* reprinted a caustic article, which argued that it was “a bold publicist” who would “accuse all the men of the Supreme Court, Gov. Fuller and others of deliberately sending Sacco and Vanzetti to their death for any other reason than that they participated in a murder in their state.”¹⁵² Theirs was an ahistorical argument, forgetting the cases of the Molly Maguires, Haymarket Martyrs, the plight of Thomas Mooney, and Warren Billings, the attempted eradication of the IWW, the imprisoning of Eugene Debs, the deportation of thousands of radicals, the conviction of Charlotte Whitney, the criminal syndicalist laws, and many other similar developments. In the first circular published since the deaths, the *Canadian Labor World* gave its masthead to an article on how “Labor Purge[d] Itself of the Red Element,” using the elimination of communists from certain French unions as a pretext for the headline. The *World* was perhaps less tasteless in its attack on the left, but it was certainly in the same vein. Indeed, of all the major Canadian mainstream labour

148. EGP, *Report re: Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Meeting, Toronto*, Agent No. 30, 2 September 1927.

149. EGP, *Report re: Sacco-Vanzetti Memorial Meeting, Toronto*, Agent No. 30, 2 September 1927.

150. EGP, EG to AB, 7 September 1927.

151. *The Labor Leader* (Toronto), 27 August 1927.

152. *The Labor Leader* (Toronto), 27 August 1927.

publications, it was only *The Citizen* (Halifax) that covered the execution with any sympathy. The *Citizen* argued that “there was every indication of prejudice from the judge and jury” and called for “granting a new trial.” The paper closed its article with a broad attack on capital punishment.¹⁵³

It is difficult to ascertain the specific *telos* that resulted from the solidarity movement in Canada. To be sure, the Sacco and Vanzetti protests indicated what a diverse left could accomplish with little funds, in spite of tilting against a capitalist milieu that exhibited no willingness to countenance any tolerance of dangerous foreigners, especially of the anarchistic kind. The state, the judiciary, the media, and even mainstream trade union officials constituted a formidable opposition to all of those who would speak out and act on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. What was accomplished in the mobilization to save the two anarchists, then, was significant.

Nonetheless, from another vantage point, the meaning of the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign is deeply ironic. The solidarity movement for two murdered anarchists strengthened the authoritarian-communist controlled CLDL and punctuated the weakness of the organized anarchist-communist and anarcho-syndicalist movement in Canada. For the OBU, and to a lesser extent the IWW, Sacco and Vanzetti agitation showed the relatively vitiated state of their power on the shop floor. For Goldman, and the small anarchist forces she could rally, the Sacco and Vanzetti case left a residue of depression and despondency. Quickly following the execution, she left for France to write *Living My Life*, in which she struggled to put a brave face on the Sacco and Vanzetti period of her life. But anarchism in Canada had difficulty recovering.

The primary beneficiary was Canadian Labour Defence League, which used its ecumenical program to reach thousands of workers. Florence Custance was the profoundly able functionary of the CLDL, taking over the CLDL following the incompetence of the previous leaders. She noted that although “the Anglo-Saxons are very hard to reach,” the Sacco and Vanzetti case galvanized “them” into action, and following the judicial murder of the anarchists, they were finally “able to form an English branch in Montreal.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, by the end of the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign, the CLDL had “fifty” branches across Canada, in six provinces, and would only grow from there.¹⁵⁵ The CLDL would become one of the most articulate and able organizations on the Canadian left throughout the remainder of its existence. It made up for its sluggishness on Sacco and Vanzetti with a strong and immediate campaign to save the ‘Scottsboro Boys,’ eight black youth from the American south who were in the process of being judicially lynched.¹⁵⁶ Before the Sacco and Vanzetti case, the

153. *The Citizen* (Halifax), 27 August 1927.

154. COMINTERN Files, K-315 (47): Constance to Central Bureau of MOPR, 22 September 1927.

155. COMINTERN Files, K-315 (47): Constance to Central Bureau of MOPR, 22 September 1927.

156. *The Labour Defender* (Toronto.) 1932–1937. The CLDL would devote the better part of

CLDL's concerns were "parochial," largely tasked with "providing aid" for those "victimized during trade union and industrial disputes – this charge expanded in 1927."¹⁵⁷ This expansion was built on their opportunistic solidarity with the anarchists. The solidarity movement had enough of an impact that the CLDL called its first national convention merely two months after the verdict, meeting in Toronto in October of 1927.¹⁵⁸ After 1927, the CLDL would become an important and powerful ally to the Canadian proletariat. Nevertheless, the growth of the CLDL must be understood within Brown's diktat that the "organization must be nonpartisan," and "under the control and guidance of the party." And within the context, present from the original order from Moscow, that it was "very easy, and therefore necessary to organize the wide masses on" solidarity issues, and therefore could draw people "by such means into the communist party." This lends credence and legitimacy of anarchist arguments that the communists used the anarchists' case mainly to grow their ranks.¹⁵⁹

Sacco and Vanzetti were clearly the victims of anti-foreign, anti-anarchist, racist attitudes which conflated 'foreignness,' 'anarchism,' and violence. With select and varying opposition, the proletarian or working-class nature of the men was emphasized much more than their position as racialized beings and anarchist militants. There was no "ethnic solidarity" extant in Canada in regards to shop-floor activity. This is perhaps most clearly articulated in the strike in Glace Bay, where the workers had a minor tradition of anarchism (at best) and were largely, but not uniformly, Scottish. Although the OBU had a significant base in Nova Scotia dating back to 1919, by 1927 it was "not a factor" in the province.¹⁶⁰ In Nova Scotia, a militant, organized shop floor – with a history of

the 1930s to advocating for the Boys, alongside other international and domestic causes. The League was banned in 1940 under the Defence of Canada Regulations.

157. William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 122.

158. *Labour Organization in Canada: 1927* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1928), 239. The program of the first CLDL conference is available in Anglicised Yiddish and limited English in COMINTERN Files, K-315 (47), and English minutes are available in limited quality.

159. Indeed, for Buck the only real utility of the solidarity movement seems to be that it brought more members into the Party. He noted that "The second form of our United Front activity has been in the development of our non-Party organisations ... [namely] the CLDL." "Through these organisations we have conducted numerous campaigns through the past year, the most important of which are the following: Campaign on behalf of Italian refugees, against the decision of the sc which made picketing illegal. On behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. For the release of class war prisoners in Canada. In the interests of the British Miners' strike. Against the Polish terror and against Marie of Roumania, who revived a very hostile reception in Canadian cities." For him, the campaign was one among many, and a way to gain membership. COMINTERN Files, [K-269] (1): *Report of Tim Buck to the COMINTERN*, 12 January 1927.

160. *Labour Organization in Canada: 1927* (Ottawa: Kings Printer, 1928), 13. The communists had received a call for an organiser to be sent to Glace Bay in 1926, but it is unclear as to whether one was sent or not. COMINTERN Files, K-274 (6): *Minutes of the Organization Committee of the CP OF C*, 20 April 1926.

solidarity and proletarian self-activity – was seemingly enough to precipitate action in favour of the two anarchists. From the Lakehead west – where the IWW and OBU were strongest historically in Canada (with the notable exception of Nova Scotia and the OBU), and where the IWW and OBU still maintained a significant place in working-class organization and struggle – there is no evidence of solidarity strikes with Sacco and Vanzetti.¹⁶¹ This was surely a blow to the organizations and a reflection of their growing weakness.

In the end, whatever the advances registered in the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign in Canada, and whatever positives resulted from this mobilization, it is difficult not to conclude that the forces opposing the victimization and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti did indeed lose. One lesson to learn from this history is that in such mobilizations, little faith can be placed in the courts and, ultimately, the state. True, these fundamental structures of power can be and must be called to order. But what emerges from a scrutiny of the Sacco and Vanzetti case is that the state acted then, and will act currently, in the way it sees fit – with little regard to legality. To predicate criticisms of the state and capital for transcending their role is merely blind liberal hypocrisy: the state will always act as if the law does not apply when under even the most minor threat. Indeed, the state and capital interests broadly aligned but not under state control, will utilize the most minor of events to trample “rights” and extend tremendous violence, exclusion or repression to whatever group seems pertinent. Maurice Spector came closest to the mark in an editorial written when all appeals seemed exhausted and the anarchists were about to be sent to the electric chair. “They are to die to throw terror into the hearts of the working class. This is the challenge of American capitalism to the workers. Remember, we can frame you any time we please. We can kill you any time we please. This is American justice. This is democracy.”¹⁶² For Sacco and Vanzetti, and for the global proletariat, capitalist “democracy” was thrown into sharp relief in 1927, and “class justice” was laid bare for all to see. The lessons of this solidarity movement are that no matter how powerful the cries, how militant the action, within capitalist social relations, sometimes the proletariat *will just lose*. As Goldman later wrote, “my feeble voice, like that of millions, cried in vain.”¹⁶³ The task is to take understanding of defeats and losses such as those experienced in the Sacco and Vanzetti mobilization of the 1920s and turn it into wider appreciations of what it is necessary to do to insure that future defeats and losses are minimized and, ultimately, banished from the experience of humanity.

161. Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 203–205.

162. *The Worker*, 13 August 1927.

163. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover, 1970), 991.