

Canadian Trade-Unionism Speaks Out

Roger Chartier

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Article abstract

What is Canadian trade-unionism up to ? What are its immediate goals ? How do its long-term policies stand ? Part of these momentous questions are answered in this survey of the speeches delivered, the motions carried and the reports prepared on the occasion of the annual conventions of the three major labor bodies in Canada.

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What is Canadian trade-unionism up to? What are its immediate goals? How do its long-term policies stand? Part of these momentous questions are answered in this survey of the speeches delivered, the motions carried and the reports prepared on the occasion of the annual conventions of the three major labor bodies in Canada.

For all three national centres of Organized Labor, the annual convention provides an opportunity for evaluating the work done during the previous year as well as for setting a course of action for the coming year.

The TLC (*Trades and Labor Congress of Canada*) had its 66th annual convention in Halifax, September 10 to 15; 406 delegates represented some 471,000 members distributed in 3,000 locals.

The CCL (*Canadian Congress of Labor*) gathered 636 delegates in Vancouver, September 17 to 22; they spoke on behalf of around 350,000 members forming some 1231 locals, at the 11th convention of the Congress.

The CCCL (*Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labor*) held its annual meeting in Quebec City, September 15 to 20; 400 delegates, a membership of 90,000 distributed in some 450 local syndicates.

* * *

In this survey, we shall make use not only of the resolutions moved by the Locals or Federations and carried by the various congresses*, but also of the speeches delivered by the respective presidents and of the Reports presented at the conventions by the Executive Councils, Federations of Labor and Provincial Executives.

* Those resolutions, democratic as they may be, are not always flawless: they are too many — an average of 160 this year—; they take too much time and distract from the main questions; they sometimes deviate from Union objectives; they encumber reports and memorandums.

CHARTIER, ROGER, Master of Social Sciences (Industrial Relations), in charge of Education in industrial relations in the "Centre de Culture Populaire" (Extension Department) of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Laval University.

STRUCTURAL REFORMS OF ENTERPRISE

The CCCL can no longer be regarded as conservative if not reactionary in spirit. Its president, Mr. Gérard Picard, says bluntly: *"To talk about reforms in the enterprise comes to asking ourselves whether there is good ground to leave behind Capitalism and wage-earning."* He draws a distinction between Capitalism, on one hand, and Democracy, Free Enterprise and Private Property, on the other, stressing the desirability and necessity of finding a "via media" between Capitalism and Collectivism, instead of accepting somehow short-sightedly the alternative Capitalism-Socialism.

"Too many people, says Picard, imagine that to wish to abandon capitalism is necessarily to wish to enter upon the road to socialism or communism. This conclusion is far too simple and extremely unjust."

Mr. Picard does not accept the argument that, while Capital and Labor are both factors in production, the former should dominate the latter, dictate all orders and feel "even" when it has paid some form of wage or salary. When he calls for the reform of industry and recommends basic structural changes in the capitalistic system, as Rev. G. G. Higgins of the National Catholic Welfare Conference sees it, he is thinking among other things of some form of co-management — arrived at not by legislation as in Germany, but by voluntary agreement between employers and workers. *"He (Picard) doesn't say that economic co-determination or co-management is a natural right (implying that co-management on social and technical matters are natural rights); but he does insist that it is a highly desirable goal towards which we may legitimately strive by the use of every available voluntary method of labor-management co-operation."*

POLITICAL ACTION

TLC and CCCL do not want to have anything to do with party politics; they reject direct affiliation with any political party. But they show, most normally so, a keen interest in non-partisan politics. The CCL and the CCCL have built their own Political Action Committees. Knowing the impact of Labor Legislation on the workers, they are ready to exert pressure and develop regular lobbying practices.

The CCL is more explicit in this field. In 1943, it labelled the CCF as "the political arm of labour in Canada". Let us listen to Mr. A. Mosher, president of the CCL:

"If what they (the workers) obtain from employers in the economic field . . . is nullified by the unwillingness of their governments to provide adequate protection of their interests, they have no alternative but to elect their own representatives to Parliament and Legislatures, and thus obtain direct representation of their interests."

And again:

"It is possible that industry, under the present capitalistic system, will not be able to grant the demands of organized Labour to a much greater extent in the future, and that, if the workers are to obtain further improvements along these lines, it will be necessary to bring about the nationalization of industry, and its operation on a basis of service rather than profit. Such a step takes us from the economic into the political field, and it is therefore essential that the organized workers should turn their attention more and more toward political action."

COMMUNISM AND PEACE

The fundamental opposition of Canadian Organized Labor to Communism has been oftentimes expressed. Here, Mr. A. R. Mosher (CCL) admits that there is still a good deal of work to be done, blaming certain employers who make agreements with Communist-dominated unions trying to maintain at all costs their existence and, for this very reason, offering better "deals". The CCL intends to go with \$50,000 for the establishment of a \$750,000 — South-East Asia Organization and Leadership Training Fund set by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to fight Communism.

Mr. Percy Bengough (TLC) says: *"We believe in disarmament — one item of the TLC platform of principles — and are opposed to war, but we cannot overlook the gigantic war machine that has been built and is still being built in the land of Stalin."*

CCCL's ideology eliminates the need for any statement along these matters. The TLC suspends a union; the CCL expulses another one.

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ORGANIZED LABOR CENTRES

February 20, 1951, an unprecedented form of co-operation had been initiated between the TLC, CCL and CCCL, plus the Dominion Joint Legislative Committee of the Railway Transportation Brotherhoods, by sending to the Federal Government a joint Memorandum advocating adequate price controls to curb inflation. This first move toward official co-operation was followed by

the setting of a Joint Consultative Committee intended to seek and express common thinking of Organized Labor on matters of general interest.

To CCL's and CCCL's surprise and sorrow, the TLC has just put an end to it all. CCL's dream for "one unified central labour body" expressed in a resolution this year, had vanished. TLC's reasons:

- *"There has been no noticeable improvements in the relations presently existing between the rank and file of these groups" (TLC — CCCL);*
- *"The other labor bodies have gained considerably by association with us, but we, on the otherhand, have gained little";*
- *"Congress (TLC) should be left free to express its (entire) actual policy without consideration of the thinking of any other outside group";*
- *"Little can be gained through joint presentation of briefs where another organization is affiliated with a particular political party" (CCL with CCF).*

UNIONIZATION

TLC's Claude Jodoin has just urged Quebec's Federation of Labor to get to real work with its organizational drive. CCL's Pat Conroy, who handed his resignation as Secretary-Treasurer, followed by a number of other leaders, had a strong belief that CCL's future in Quebec was good, despite quite a few painful failures; his own failure to convince all his colleagues may partly explain his gesture. Some observers are inclined to think CCCL's Organization Service has been urged to *"prepare a general plan of action to organize workers outside the Province of Quebec, as CCCL is still a nation-wide body."*

PRICE CONTROLS AND COST OF LIVING

In their February joint brief to the Federal Government, the Organized Labor Centres wanted four things: a) Adequate rent control; b) Freezing of prices; c) A public Board to pass on all applications for price and rent increases; d) Labor representation on that Board.

CCL and TLC now urge that subsidies be granted to essential commodities, and that prices roll back to the beginning of January 1951 level (as a basis). CCCL endorses all those claims, but for the subsidies, which Mr. Picard considers inadequate to curb inflation, as they throw to the Government new obligations with no corresponding power of payment. CCCL wants Labor to be represented when the system for calculating the cost-of-living index is

modified. It also criticizes high medical fees and sky-rocketing prices of drugs.

SOCIAL SECURITY

a) Unemployment Insurance

All three labor bodies are in agreement to ask that the waiting period — during which the unemployed are not entitled to any indemnity — of 9 days be eliminated, or at least substantially shortened. Indemnities should be increased; CCCL suggests that they vary according to the cost-of-living index. Employees engaged in hospitals and “charitable” institutions should be covered by the Law; CCL would also include those engaged in domestic service and agriculture; TLC goes farther, and urges that *all employees* be protected, regardless of income or employment.

CCCL proposes that indemnities be paid to all workers engaged in lawful strikes or lock-outs; and that part-time or sporadic jobs paying \$2.00 or less daily not deprive the unemployed workers of their right to indemnities.

b) Health Insurance

TLC and CCL urge the Federal Government to enact proper legislation for a contributory nation-wide health plan, subsidized by the Government, that will provide adequate medical, surgical, optical, dental and hospital treatment for the people of Canada.

c) Old Age Pensions

TLC and CCL ask that Old Age Pensions be granted to any male citizen 65 years or over, and to any female 60 or over. The amount put forward is \$65.00 monthly, possibly with a cost-of-living escalator clause (CCL). TLC suggests that the Means Test be abolished. CCCL asks for a monthly pension of \$60.00 for all.

WAGES AND SALARIES

Organized Labor makes it a point to demonstrate that increases in costs are always ahead of higher wages. TLC: *“Nowadays, increases are sought in wages because of increases in the cost of living which have taken place during the life of the (collective) agreement. Organized Labor has to justify its requests.”* TLC suggests that other factors be investigated upon, such as the

operation of cartels, the purchasing of industries at enhanced prices, watered stock and stock manipulation, poor management and excessive profits, *"which often have a far greater bearing on the price of commodities."*

CCCL suggests that the Minimum Wage in the Province of Quebec still be increased; that Ordinance No. 4 be replaced by 3 Ordinances (one for trade, the two others for industry and services). It also proposes that all legal claims for wages be dealt with quickly by judges especially appointed for this purpose.

The CCL recommends that all its affiliated unions undertake a national Campaign with a view "of increasing wages substantially" in order to "maintain their standards of living".

TAXES

Needless to say that taxes are not popular ! TLC and CCL call for Income Tax exemptions of \$3,000 for married people, \$1,500 for single people and \$400 for each child, as a strict minimum. Should not be taxed the amounts paid for transportation to and from work, for the purchasing of tools (in whole or in part). In short, almost all taxes (including the Sales Tax) are shown the way out.

EDUCATION

The need for education has always been felt and recognized by the workers, and their leaders show an increasing sense of duty towards this end. All three labor bodies have their educational services, the spreading of which has been advocated by a number of resolutions, at the yearly conventions.

TLC has been asked to grant scholarships for able members ready to go through an academic training in Law or Social Sciences.

Both TLC and CCL endorse the recommendations of the Massey Commission as far as federal aid to Universities is concerned. They approve of the work done by CBC and the National Film Board. With the CCCL, they ask CBC for free time to educate the working class.

HOUSING

TLC and CCL blame the federal government for dropping the housing program agreed upon by the federal-provincial-municipal governments, in view of the war. They state that the housing situation is "a scandal and a national disgrace" and request that the government "attack conscientiously" the problem.

CCCL asks the provincial government to re-examine the housing situation, and requires a report from the Housing Commission established in 1948.

PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

CCCL on the "*Labor Relations Act*": labels as "anti-democratic" the new article 41a protecting the decisions of the Commission against all appeal; asks the Commission not to grant certificates to so-called company unions; etc.

CCCL on the "*Quebec Trade Disputes Act*": asks that the arbitration proceedings be accelerated by setting shorter limits for each step: 3 days for designating both members; then, within 7 days, appointment of the president; then, 14 days to give his decision or recommendation, unless both parties agree upon a postponement. If, within 20 days following the conciliator's report or the request to the Minister of Labor made by either party, the Council of Arbitration has not been constituted, the parties should have the right to strike or lock out.

OTHER RESOLUTIONS

TLC and CCL ask that the right of Government employees to organize and bargain collectively on wages and working conditions be recognized.

TLC and CCL still request a National Labor Code.

* * *

Dozens of other resolutions have been carried, but this survey should be enough to show that Organized Labor is extremely conscious, and quite willing to be a factor of order in the rebuilding of a better Canada.
