

Trade Unions and Employment Stability at the Canadian Pacific Railway, 1903-29

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Introduction

The early twentieth century was a time of rapid change in the Canadian economy and in Canadian labour markets. The dominion's population increased by over 60% between 1901 and 1921, with the proportion of the population living in the western half of the country more than doubling. While Canada was still a mainly rural society with a large share of the labour force in primary production in the 1920s, considerable industrialization had occurred in the previous two decades. As a country of many miles and few people, railways have played an especially important part in Canada's economic (and political) history. Canada's railway networks mushroomed in the pre-war years, with massive investments being undertaken in laying track and purchasing equipment.

It was in the early 1900s that trade union activity began to be accepted by some Canadian employers as an unavoidable part of the employment relationship. The federal government established mechanisms that were designed to allow trade unions some formal role in bargaining over wages and working conditions and at the same time reduce industrial conflict. Not many workers joined trade unions prior to 1917. In 1911, the first year for which numbers were calculated by the federal Department of Labour, only 133,000 members were recorded. This was less than 20% of workers in occupations where trade union activity might have been expected at this time.¹ Around the end of the First World War, trade union membership experienced a temporary near trebling from its 1911 level.

In this era, some firms learned to tolerate, or even in certain ways to benefit from, the activities of trade unions. Some workers were prepared to join unions and risk their income, their employment, and occasionally their safety to go out on strike. This paper examines how workers, managers, and government interacted at one of Canada's largest firms during key

episodes of industrial conflict. How did the employment history of workers affect their willingness to go on strike? What lessons did the employers and employees take away from their clashes?

The railway industry was one of the most heavily unionized industries in North America in the pre-Second World War period. Most railways were prepared to bargain with at least a subset of their blue-collar employees by about 1910, and union recognition for many more groups of workers was gained around the end of the Great War. In Canada, the wages and working conditions of virtually all semi-skilled and skilled railway workers were covered by union contracts in the 1920s and 1930s. Unions had become an accepted part of the industrial relations environment.

Trade unions are usually seen as both an effect and a cause of increased job stability. To the extent that unions raise wages and improve working conditions, union members working for firms that sign contracts with their union are less likely to quit. At the same time, workers are more likely to be prepared to pay substantial dues, and perhaps go on strike, when they feel that their current job, and current workmates, are worth supporting. Workers who move frequently from one workplace to another are not likely to join unions, unless they have other strong ties such as rare job skills or a common ethnic background.

The Canadian Pacific Railway, Canada's first transcontinental railway, was one of the two largest employers in Canada in the early twentieth century. Although in several important respects the firm was an outlier, relative to companies in other industries, it was a large outlier, and its employment practices were observed across the country. From the early 1900s, most

skilled workers at the CPR joined unions, and the company was prepared to bargain with these unions, which was early even by the standards of the railway industry.

Company pension plans are sometimes seen as an attempt to discourage workers from joining unions. Firm welfare benefits were an alternative to union benefits, and firms withdrew pension entitlements from workers who went on strike. Railways were among the first large enterprises to pay retirement pensions, and the Canadian Pacific was, in 1903, one of the earlier North American railways to set up a pension plan covering all regular employees.

Comprehensive records of hirings, promotions, demotions, and layoffs had to be maintained to determine possible eventual eligibility for a pension. The company also wanted to avoid re-hiring former employees who had been dismissed, even if the worker applied for a new job thousands of miles away from his former workplace. The CPR was an unusual firm in that it began to generate comprehensive employee records at an early date. Remarkably, the company has kept the summary employment record cards for virtually all workers present or hired since 1903, even though only a tiny fraction of the workers ever qualified for a pension. I have constructed a sample of the records of about 9,000 employees of the CPR, mainly workers in the Mechanical Department (which was responsible for building and repairing equipment). These are longitudinal records noting each job, job location, wage rate, and reason for departure from time of first hiring until final departure. While the records do not show whether an employee belonged to a union, they do show if the worker went on strike.

There are striking changes in the characteristics of the workers in my sample over time. In the early 1900s, the CPR was mainly hiring men in their twenties, and the median worker left after 6 months. Over half the departures were quits. By the mid 1920's, the company was mainly

hiring (or re-hiring) men in their mid thirties, and in the 1930s, men who were being re-hired (there were almost no new hires during the depression) on average were about age 40. Median duration of a job spell in the 1920s was still 6 months, but only about a quarter of departures were voluntary. Far fewer of the workers present in the 1920s were in their first spell of work with the company. Most of the change in aggregate quit behaviour occurred just after the First World War, around the time when major changes were taking place in the wage structure and working conditions as a result of increased worker bargaining power and government support for many worker demands. Looking at workers employed at a point in time shows that a core of stable employees was building up. Only 27% of those at work in April 1905 were in a job spell that would last at least 10 years; in April 1925, 58% were.

At least in part because of the government mandated wage increases, jobs at the CPR were likely more worth holding onto, or worth coming back to, in the 1920s than they had been in the 1900s. Thus the company was able to ration jobs by laying off temporarily surplus workers, and to hire mainly older workers of Canadian or British birth who were unlikely to want to quit. By the late 1920s the company had moved well beyond tolerating the international unions, with the *Machinists' Monthly Journal* describing the situation as one of "teamwork and cooperation."ⁱⁱ Unscrambling the reasons for changes in the characteristics of workers and their willingness to work for the CPR is complicated. The CPR had completed its period of rapid expansion of track and freight carried by 1914, so some signs of a maturing of the labour force would be expected to appear over the next several years. The shakeout of recent hires caused by the downturn of 1914, and then the drawing off of young men into the armed forces, speeded the formation of a stable core of older workers during the war. Other changes were also occurring at

the same time elsewhere in the Canadian railway industry. After a period of very rapid expansion from 1900-1915 (including the construction of 2 new transcontinental railways built as competitors to the CPR), the populated (and some of the barely populated) portions of Canada were well (or over) provided with railway lines by 1920. Most of the CPR's competitors went bankrupt during the First World War, and nearly all were amalgamated with existing government-run railways around the end of the war to form the Canadian National Railways. Thus a worker who left the CPR from about 1918 on was much less likely to be able to find another railway job than was the case up to that time.

In this paper I focus on the two big strikes at the CPR, one in 1908, and the other in 1919. The first strike involved shopcraft workers across the country, and was called by the international unions. The 1919 strike was an unauthorised set of strikes that were part of, or (in other western cities) in sympathy with, the Winnipeg General Strike. Despite great unrest, CPR workers in central and eastern Canada did not strike in 1919. My intent is to uncover the lessons managers and workers could have learned from their experience of industrial action, and to examine how the characteristics of workers at the time of the strikes likely affected willingness to go on strike.

Shopcraft Unions and North American Railways before the Great War

The early part of the twentieth century was a time of great labour unrest. The role of trade unions, the limits to managerial authority, and the scope for governments to become involved in worker-firm conflict were all both hotly debated and tested within the labour market. Firms often refused to negotiate with unions at all, or the range of issues over which bargaining could occur was very limited. Rival unions quarrelled bitterly over the aims of the labour

movement and their right to organize various classes of workers, and workers had good reason to wonder whether collective action, and what types of collective action, would help them.

Governments established mechanisms designed to reduce the number of, length of, and violence associated with strikes and lockouts.

The running trades brotherhoods (engineers, firemen, conductors, and trainmen) were among the earliest, and for many years about the most powerful, trade unions in North America. Once any railway was past its very earliest days, almost all engineers and conductors were recruited internally, and long-service employment was the norm. If running trades workers left one railway, there was good reason for them to look for a job on another railway, as their human capital was very largely industry-specific. Striking engineers and conductors could stop or severely disrupt train service, so it is no surprise that these occupational groups were able to organize early, and signed contracts with most North American railways by about the beginning of the twentieth century.ⁱⁱⁱ

Avoiding strikes by the brotherhoods was in the public, and not just in the employers' interest. Running trades workers were different from other railway workers. Their skills were almost entirely industry specific and were acquired over a long period. Engineers and conductors were the most highly paid railway workers. To ensure safe operation of trains these workers had to be highly disciplined. The running trades brotherhoods are an ideal example of the role of unions in maintaining an ethos of self-discipline and reliability.^{iv} It was in the interest of their peers to ensure that all brotherhood members maintained high standards of conduct. The running trades brotherhoods ("the big four") were able to charge high dues from their members and provided them with relatively generous welfare benefits.

My sample concentrates on workers who began their career in the Mechanical Department. Most of the skilled workers were tradesmen (such as machinists, blacksmiths, carpenters, or boilermakers) who built or repaired locomotives and rolling stock. Less skilled workers performed more routine operations in construction and maintenance. Teenage boys and young men who hoped to eventually become locomotive engineers started as wipers (they cleaned engines). Then they transferred over to the Operating Department to work as firemen. Small numbers transferred into or out of the Mechanical Department to or from almost all parts of the company. In this paper, I concentrate on the workers in the Mechanical Department, as they were involved in the strikes I will be considering. The two greatest locational concentrations of workers were Montreal (Quebec) and Winnipeg (Manitoba), the sites of the main railway workshops.

Part of the knowledge of railway shop workers was railway specific. However, men with the same craft qualifications were also employed in other industries. Shop craftsmen could and did enter or leave railway service easily. Before 1920 it was also common for them to move from one railway to another. Railway shop workers thus had less of an incentive to band together to improve their pay and working conditions, as they were not tied to the railway industry in the same way that locomotive engineers were, and they also had a weaker ability to impose terms on their employers because they were more readily replaceable.

Relative to men in the running trades, shopcraft employees were dispensable in the eyes of their employers. Relative to a broader spectrum of workers in other industries, however, these craft employees were more likely to want to join trade unions, and to be able to compel their employers to negotiate collectively.^v Railroad managers had more reason to enter into

collective agreements with their shop workers than did many other employers of skilled craftsmen. Shopmen could be replaced, but employers needed at least a core of stable workers. Workers had an incentive to increase the degree to which the railways depended on their skills. Thus it should come as no surprise that most of the early locals of the international metal trades unions in Canada (machinists, boilermakers, moulders, blacksmiths, tinsmiths) were found in railway centres, with all or almost all members railwaymen.^{vi} Joining a union was one thing, securing a collective agreement quite another. While the first Canadian IAM local was formed in 1890 in Stratford, Ontario, a Grand Trunk Railway town, the GTR remained open shop (with a brief break sometime in the very early 1900s) until 1918.^{vii} The CPR, however, signed its first contract (with workers employed on western lines) in 1899, and never returned to open shop status.

The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (also known as the Lemieux Act) was introduced in 1907, with the aim of reducing labour strife. “Public utilities” which were generally large employers and often monopoly providers of an essential public service (like railways), were covered by the act.^{viii} The IDIA required that before a strike or lockout began, the parties to the conflict had to submit their grievances to a board composed of a representative of the employers, a representative of the workers, and an independent member. The board would try to settle the matter, and write a report making recommendations for solving the problem. Either or both parties could reject the report (and the board could produce majority and minority reports.) Both unions and employers frequently claimed that the provisions of the IDIA benefited their opponents.

Thus one of Canada's major railways was fairly willing to live with unions, while the other was not. The federal government tried to introduce a structure that would give unions some voice, but reduce the probability of strikes. To see whether the CPR's acceptance of shop workers' unions fitted in with broader trends on North American railroads, I have used a list of railways the IAM had contracts with in 1909 and tried to relate the existence of a contract to various quantifiable characteristics of each railway in 1909/10. For many of the railways, a Moody's stock rating exists for 1909, and official returns indicate miles of line operated and the railway operating ratio. In 1909, the CPR had more miles of track than any other railway.^{ix} I have used returns for all railroads with more than 500 or more than 1000 miles of track. About 2/3 of railways with more than 1000 miles of line had contracts with the IAM.

Table 1 shows estimates of probit models relating contract status in 1909 to observable characteristics. Length of line stands out as being very important, whether the CPR is included or excluded from the sample. Railways with some track in the west (for Canada, west of the Ontario / Manitoba border, for the US, roughly west of the Mississippi) were also perhaps a little more likely to be unionised. Operating ratios (operating expenses relative to operating revenues) are often used as a measure of the profitability of railroads. Railroads were defined as "safe investments" if Moody's described their stocks and bonds as "safe" or "conservative."^x Neither of these variables seems to play any role in explaining the presence of a contract. It is possible that these rough measures do not appropriately reflect profitability. The brief remarks that contemporaries made on the subject suggested that some financially weak companies were unable to resist a union organizing drive, while there were rents to extract from more profitable companies. The net effect of profitability on having a contract is thus not clear. While there

were a lot of railroads in the US, most were controlled by a small group of magnates. Railways in the Harriman system were said to be relatively willing to live with unions. I have not tried including an ownership variable, as the structure of ownership and control in the US was complicated and shifted often.

Given that CPR mileage was so much greater than that of any other railway, I tried estimating the model for all railways other than the CPR. The same results emerge. Thus it was probably not a matter of chance, or of conditions purely specific to the CPR, that shopcraft unions were recognised there. Skilled workers in the west were harder to replace than skilled workers in the east. A contract on a big railway meant more to the fledgling unions than a contract on a small railway, so it made more sense for the unions to concentrate organizational efforts on the bigger lines.

Table 1: Explaining IAM Contracts with North American Railroads, 1909

	Sample used to estimate model			
	all rr's >500 miles (N=83)	rr's >1000 miles, with Moody's rating (N=58)	rr's >1000 miles, with operating ratio (N=58)	rr's >500 miles, except for CPR (N=82)
constant	-0.668 (0.250)	0.674 (0.278)	-0.742 (1.499)	-0.667 (0.251)
miles operated (,000)	0.244 (0.0882)		0.224 (0.096)	0.244 (.090)
west	0.595 (0.308)			0.595 (0.308)
safe investment		-0.451 (0.353)		
operating ratio			0.0069 (.0209)	

Pseudo R ²	0.157	0.022	0.092	0.148
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The 1908 Strike

The CPR shopmen were among the first workers to make use of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, and the strike that followed the unsuccessful attempt at conciliation was one of the largest in Canada in the pre-war period (over 350,000 strike days -- up to 8,000 workers were on strike for 2 months). While they lost the strike, they maintained union recognition.

1908 was a year of high unemployment in North America, and the CPR saw a sharp fall in earnings. 1906 and 1907 had been very good years for the CPR, with traffic increasing substantially.^{xi} The boom in western Canada meant that benefits flowed to railway workers. On western lines, CPR shopmen enjoyed higher wages and better working conditions than employees on competing roads in Canada and the US. The setback to earnings resulted in substantial layoffs, mainly in eastern Canada (see Graphs 1 and 2).^{xii} The company saw the opportunity to trim expenditures by increasing the range of work that could be performed by helpers and specialists, by introducing lower paid classes of boilermakers, and changing roundhouse working hours for some men so as to reduce overtime.^{xiii} Some of the proposed changes directly threatened the unions. The company proposed to no longer recognize grievance committees and to increase the ratio of apprentices to mechanics. On 1 April, 1908, the CPR posted notices in the shops on western lines announcing that the changes would take effect on 1 May.

The first response of the unions was to accept the breaking of the existing schedules on condition that there would be no further layoffs. Layoffs continued and the company demanded agreement for an across-the-board pay cut before it would discuss the other issues. With the

recognition that changes in the schedule for workers on western lines would affect men in eastern Canada as well, the initial willingness to tolerate the company's arbitrary decision was soon reversed.^{xiv} The unions saw the CPR move as part of a much broader anti-union campaign by North American railways. "The purpose of the management was to force a strike there and then and break up the shop organizations while the condition of the labor market was favorable to the company."^{xv} An immediate strike would have been illegal, as well as ill-advised. The unions complied with the law and promptly invoked the Lemieux Act. A conciliation board was established, with hearings held until early July.^{xvi}

The board was unable to reach a unanimous decision. The majority -- both appointees of the Minister of Labour, as the company's appointee withdrew when the committee chairman agreed to extend the scope of the inquiry beyond the initial topics of investigation -- proposed a compromise solution. On some key points, they sided with the unions: statements that "the men have abundantly proved that they are entitled to committee representation" and "except in so far as the present schedules are altered by the rulings as above, they shall continue in force"^{xvii} are hardly consistent with union busting. The majority also opposed allowing machinists' helpers to use tools.^{xviii} Otherwise, the majority report largely favoured the company's position. The minority report, by James Somerville, the Second Vice-President of the IAM, was, not surprisingly, much more sympathetic to the workers' case.

The CPR declared itself willing to accept the majority report. Thus far, the IDIA seems to have worked the way the Department of Labour hoped it would. The board added issues closely related to the initial matters under dispute, thus not unduly dragging out the conciliation process. The majority report recommended a compromise solution that would have allowed the

CPR to cut its expenditures, while reaffirming the rights of workers to engage in collective bargaining.

The workers voted 97% against accepting the majority report. A period of high unemployment is rarely a good time to launch a strike, and the union leaders, at least, were well aware that times were bad. However, they felt their chances of waging a successful strike were greater in the late summer of 1908 than they would be in the spring of 1909.^{xix} The harvest period was always the peak for CPR traffic. If train operation could be disrupted then, the company might be forced to concede on some points.

Graph 1
Workers and Strikers 1906-1910, Eastern Canada

Notes for Graphs 1 and 2: "At Work" is the number of workers in the balanced sample employed in any Mechanical Department occupation, present on first day of each month. The balanced sample includes only workers from a specific set of alphabetic ranges of surnames. "% strikers" is the proportion of workers employed on the first day of each month who went on strike in 1908. September 1 and October 1 1908 are indicated by the very low proportions of strikers at work on those days.

Graph 2
Workers and Strikers 1906-1910, Western Canada

Tactically, rejecting the majority report lost the unions some political capital. The CPR subsequently claimed that it had compromised, while the workers would not. Pro-CPR editorialists interpreted the IDIA to mean that if a union applied for a conciliation board, it was morally bound to accept the majority report.

On 5 August 1908, the strike began. As graphs 1 and 2 show, western workers were much more likely to join the strike. Regional differences in the proportions going on strike must be considered in light of the regional occupational composition of the workforce, not just differences in the perceived costs and benefits of striking. Car department employees, a large fraction of whom were located in the Angus shops in Montreal, were much less likely to strike than other employees. In 1908, most of the men building or repairing cars were woodworkers. The key money issues in the strike affected metal trades, not wood, workers. In addition, job losses had been much greater in Quebec and Ontario than in western Canada, so that employees had more reason to fear that they would not get their jobs back than did their peers in the west.

Skilled workers were most likely to be union members, and in eastern Canada they were the most likely workers to join the strike (about 60% went out). Almost no unskilled workers joined the strike in the east, which is not surprising as almost none would have been members of a union, and they would have been little affected by the main matters at issue. In the west,

however, over a third of the unskilled workers struck, along with 80% of the semi-skilled and skilled workers.

If the first rule of when not to call a strike is “when unemployment is high”, the second must be “when the union has no strike fund.” While newspaper reports suggest that strike pay was anticipated, the only union able to provide regular strike benefits was the IAM.^{xx} The other unions paid little or nothing.^{xxi} By striking in August, however, the workers had chosen the time of year when ample temporary work was available for harvesters on the prairies.

CPR shop workers in 1908 were generally young men. Mean and median ages of both strikers and non-strikers were in the early thirties, with fewer than a quarter of the workers aged over forty. About a quarter were under twenty five. The median worker had three years job experience at the CPR when the strike began. Most workers had built up some sort of a continuing relationship with the CPR -- not very long by the standards of the 1920s, but they were not raw recruits. Age distributions were similar in eastern and western Canada.

The age distribution of the workforce adds some credibility to the criticisms levelled by a Toronto member of the IAM in November 1908. This elderly member bemoaned the use of strike votes. He argued that “the vote taken on a strike is wrong entirely on principle, for the younger and less experienced men want it for holidays and to see what it is like and they are generally in the majority. Some of them predict a settlement in a week or two and they go out with a hurrah on strike.”^{xxii} Even if the younger men were not the frivolous youths this grey-beard imagined, many would have been without either dependents or past experience of strikes. However, there was little difference by age in the propensity to participate in the strike once it was called.

The capacity of the unions to interfere with the company's operations depended heavily on their ability to keep new workers from being hired. The CPR had four types of strikebreakers available: current employees who did not walk out, former employees who had been laid off or quit, strikers who threw in the towel and asked to be rehired, and new hires. As already noted, skilled workers went on strike in large numbers, even in eastern Canada. Within days, especially in Montreal, job applicants appeared, but initially the company did little hiring.^{xxiii} On 15 August the company announced that on the 18th it would begin to fill the vacancies caused by the strike. In small railway towns where workers often lived in company housing, this meant that strikers, now considered former employees, would be evicted.^{xxiv} Strikers rehired after 18 August would be treated as new workers. This meant that men over forty would forfeit eligibility for a pension, and all would lose accumulated seniority.^{xxv} In mid-August there were frequent reports in the press that substantial numbers of strikers were returning to their jobs, and just as frequent denials by union leaders that this was happening.^{xxvi} On this point, the CPR sample bears out the claim of the union spokesmen; only a handful of strikers went back to work before the strike was called off.

From mid-August, numbers of men hired rose substantially. The company advertised for "first-class Machinists, Boilermakers, Blacksmiths, Car Inspectors and Car Men. Only competent and reliable men need apply ..." ^{xxvii} Many of the men hired in Montreal and other central Canadian cities were sent to western Canada.^{xxviii} Graph 1 suggests that by the beginning of October, employment had returned to the immediate pre-strike level in eastern, but not western Canada.

The unions claimed it would be difficult or impossible for the CPR to replace striking workmen. “The C.P.R. has the finest staff on the continent all through, and it would take them ten years to build it up again if it should unfortunately be disbanded through this trouble.”^{xxxix}

Initial reports in the Montreal press offer some support for the union position:

“...while there have been yesterday and to-day some five hundred applications not more than a hundred have been taken on. About forty or fifty of these are old hands, who, after mature thought, decided that they hadn’t so much reason for a strike after all, and so returned to work. Those seeking work have been very largely Russians and Italians, fit only for rough labor and therefore useless to the railway at this juncture....The chief demand has been for blacksmiths and painters, and they are evidently not to be had in any great numbers.”^{xxx}

Throughout, and indeed long after, the strike, the unions claimed that the strikebreakers were substandard workers. Much was made of the employment of Japanese car cleaners and labourers on the prairies. A good many of the Japanese quit “when the conditions were explained to them by the strikers.”^{xxxi} It was later asserted that “the gin shops and rum caverns of England and Scotland played ... an important part in the strike”^{xxxii} Rumours of equipment in bad condition, broken down locomotives, and concern by running trades employees about the safety of train operation were frequently reported, as were denials by the CPR that trains were late or that the company was in any way inconvenienced.^{xxxiii} The company stated that workers brought over from Britain were “far superior to the ordinary class of mechanics available in this country or the United States”^{xxxiv}

Table 2 CPR work experience of employees, 30 September 1908

At work 4 Aug.	39%
Not at work 4 Aug., but previous CPR work	17%

experience	
First hired 5-31 August	21%
First hired 1-30 September	23%

(N=525. Calculated for full sample of CPR workers in strike affected occupations/departments)

Slightly over half of the men in the CPR sample employed on 30 September had worked for the CPR before the strike broke out (Table 2). About a third of these men were not employed at the CPR on the eve of the strike. Probably only a small fraction of the new hires were living in Canada in August 1908. It is impossible to determine from newspaper reports, or from the CPR sample, the proportion of strikebreakers who came to Canada to take a job during the strike. Newspaper reports suggest that few skilled men applied for work before 18 August. After that, the press is full of reports of men coming from the US or Britain to replace strikers.

The unions believed that the Alien Labour Act would prevent the CPR from recruiting in either the US or the UK. This was the second piece of legislation that was supposed to regulate the conduct of strikes. The CPR interpreted the Alien Labour Act to mean that it could not recruit in the US. Information about the strike was widely disseminated in the US. According to CPR officials, US employment agencies offered to supply as many workers as were needed. The CPR offices in New York city were

“besieged with railway men and mechanics of all descriptions Most of these had been out of work since the present big depression started, and they were very keen to get employment, union or no union. The officials ... gave the applicants little encouragement, telling them that under the terms of the Alien Labor Law they could not help them to go to Canada, or offer them employment there.”^{xxxv}

While the company could not hire these men while they were in the US, or pay their passage to Canada, men who travelled to Canadian border towns could then be offered a job. Substantial

numbers of men, including Canadians who had migrated to the US, probably followed this course of action.

The British were not aliens. Therefore, the Alien Labour Act did not apply to recruiting in Britain, where business was also slack. Another reason for recruiting in Britain was that most union members belonged to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Relations between the IAM and the ASE were often strained.^{xxxvi} The CPR placed ads in the British papers asking for skilled men and mechanics' helpers. At the CPR offices in Trafalgar Square the crowd of job applicants were mistaken for an unemployed demonstration. At the Glasgow offices

“there was such a rush of applicants that railings ... were smashed and ... the police had to be called in to clear the street. ... There are thousands of men everywhere in the Old Country who are competent metal workers, and who have been idle for months, and can see no prospect of a job ahead of them. They would jump at a chance of a steady job in Canada, union or no union, since they are now practically starving.”^{xxxvii}

The CPR was in a particularly favourable position to undertake recruiting in Britain as it had offices in major cities and operated a line of steamships that could be used to bring strike-breakers to Canada. A few of the new hires quit as soon as they started work, claiming that they did not know there was a strike on.^{xxxviii} It seems more plausible that they knew at least something about the strike, but changed their minds after arrival.

The CPR had to hire about 1.3 new men to fill each job held by a new worker on 30 September. As newspaper reports suggest, almost all new workers were hired to fill semi-skilled or skilled positions. Almost two-thirds of these hires were anglophones, over 20% were Europeans, and only 12% francophones.^{xxxix}

Few of these men would have a career at the CPR. The median total time worked was only 1.5 months, with three-quarters working for at most 5 months. 38% had left by the end of

the strike, 61% were gone by the end of October 1908, and almost 90% by the end of 1910. Of the men who left by the end of October 1908, roughly 80% were listed as quitting; about 10% were dismissed.^{x1} European new hires were least likely to stay until the end of October. Only about 25% of the Europeans lasted that long, compared to 70% of the francophones. While at the beginning of September, 1908, about half of the workers in the CPR Mechanical department in western Canada, and over a quarter of the workers in eastern Canada, had been first hired since the strike began, the proportions dropped to 13% and 19% in November, and 10% and 15% in December. By the summer of 1910, only about 4% of workers had been first hired as strike-breakers.

By the end of September, with strikebreakers arriving by the boatload, the harvest over, and precious little strike pay forthcoming, the strikers' position was dismal. In an attempt to bring the strike to an end, the Manitoba government got involved in negotiations, mostly over the reinstatement of strikebreakers, and in early October, the strike was called off, with the unions accepting the Majority Report of the IDIA. The problem for workers on the eastern lines was that it was much easier to rehire workers in the west than in the east. More of the western workers went out on strike initially, and fewer of them had been replaced. As Graphs 1 and 2 show, most of the post-strike employment growth in the CPR was in the west, and so new positions came up there faster than in the east. Thus western strikers could go back to the CPR if they wanted to, and they generally did. With the possible exception of loss of pension entitlement (and not many of the strikers were over 40 in 1908), the cost of the strike to them was limited to 2 months wages. In Montreal, some workers, and more clearly the press, blamed

the western union leaders for encouraging the eastern men to go out on strike, largely in support of the claims of the western workers, and then abandoning the eastern workers.^{xli}

What lessons could workers have taken away from this strike? It seems to me that they should have noticed the role of market forces: demand for skilled workers was clearly higher in the west and therefore wages and working conditions were better there both before and after the strike. The legal framework was unlikely to assist workers in winning future strikes. The Alien Labour Act would be irrelevant for a strike lasting more than a few weeks. American strikebreakers could come to Canada independently, and the railway could recruit and pay the transportation costs for British strikebreakers. Most immigrant strikebreakers would reach central Canada before western Canada, again favouring the position of western workers. The IDIA offered workers some protection. Thus using the IDIA to get the most favourable majority report possible, but not going on strike thereafter, would probably seem to the best option.

What lessons could the CPR have learned from the strike? The company could win, but at some considerable cost, especially in the west. The strikebreakers hired were not much good – the railway could keep going, but the available substitute workers, even in a time of high unemployment, were not stable employees.^{xlii} Threatening the loss of pension entitlement was not an effective deterrent. The CPR did stick to its guns on this issue, and never gave a pension to former strikers who were over 40 when they were rehired. It is doubtful that in 1908 workers believed this would be so. In 1909, the company probably took advantage of its recent victory to introduce a form of piece-work payment at the Angus shops in Montreal. The payment-by-results system was not as extensive as that used at the Grand Trunk shops in Montreal, or by many US railways. Given the standard objection of unions to piece-work, the relative weakness

of the unions in the post-strike period was probably important in explaining the timing of this innovation. The company never introduced piece-work in western Canada.

As the next several years were prosperous, and railway business was booming, it is probably no surprise that the CPR and the shopcraft unions had no serious cause for conflict. In the US, the IAM lost several big strikes, which greatly depleted its funds, and this may have further encouraged peace in Canada.^{xliii} The sharp economic downturn of 1914/15 led to severe job cuts in the Mechanical Department, mainly of workers with little seniority. The CPR did not, however, challenge the unions. By this time, it had a substantial core of stable employees, although plenty of short-term workers as well.^{xliv} My sense is that the CPR management did not want to rock the boat. The outbreak of war may have entered the mix somehow. Industrial peace was preserved (if not jobs for a substantial chunk of union members).

Industrial Unrest and Centralised Wage Setting, 1917-22

Unrest over inflation, demands for better working conditions, and the resulting conflicts between employers and workers are standard parts of any account of industrial relations in the 1917-1920 period, and the Canadian railways are no exception. Railway wage negotiations were in some respects highly unusual. Around the end of the war centralized, continent-wide, pay scales were adopted for many groups of railway workers. National pay agreements on the railways are one sign of the decreased labour market flexibility believed to be a characteristic of the 1920s and 1930s in most western countries.^{xlv} The elimination of marked regional wage differentials probably exacerbated discontent over inflation in the areas with the highest pay rates and living costs up to 1918. The willingness of many western, but few eastern, Canadian railway workers to leave the international unions for the One Big Union (and then to participate

in the Winnipeg General Strike) is likely related to the introduction of uniform wage rates, since western workers gained much less from the centralization of wage setting.

Both the US and Canadian federal governments were slow to allow railway rate increases for most of the war, so that firms could not readily pass increased wage costs on to consumers.^{xlvi} Not surprisingly, railway companies granted few and small wage increases.^{xlvii} Whenever there is inflation, most workers feel that they are losing from price increases; during the First World War railway workers could see the wages of other industrial employees rising when theirs were not. Some of the industries that expanded most rapidly during the war, particularly munitions and shipbuilding, employed large numbers of skilled metal trades workers. Thus railway shopmen saw their wages falling behind those of men with similar backgrounds, skills, and occupations. Attaining wage parity with shipyard workers was a key aim for union negotiators.

In the later years of the war quit rates from North American railway shops were high, with many men moving to better paid jobs in munitions and shipbuilding.^{xlviii} Immigration from Europe was virtually zero, and railway workers were drawn into military service. However, railway managers could plausibly foresee that higher wages granted on account of supposedly temporary inflation and labour shortages would likely turn into permanent increases. The railways, unlike the shipyards, would maintain a high volume of business and therefore employment after the wartime emergency ceased, so that the long-term consequences of wage hikes were greater. Average earnings of Canadian railwaymen rose sharply (by over 20%) in 1917 relative to 1916, mainly because employees were working full-time and overtime, and there was a drift towards the employment of more skilled workers -- or at least workers classified as such.^{xliv}

In the later war years, the CPR was one of the few North American railways that did not experience a massive change in the way it was operated. Most other Canadian railways were at or near the point of bankruptcy, and were being (or were about to be) nationalized (the Canadian Northern in 1917-18, the Grand Trunk and Grand Trunk Pacific in 1920).¹ In the United States, almost all railways were taken over by the federal government at the end of 1917 because they were unable to provide the necessary services under wartime conditions. Faced with unprecedented difficulties, and as a result shortly thereafter with rapidly evolving ownership and management structures, railways would perhaps have been too overwhelmed with other problems to make decisions about raising wage rates even if moderate freight rate increases had been authorised earlier.

In March 1918 Canadian shopcraft employees demanded nationwide uniform wages of 75 cents per hour for skilled men, 62.5 for specialists, and 56.25 for helpers, for an 8 hour day.^{li} The same rates were demanded in the US. Negotiating for the same wage for all workers by skill level across all railways was made somewhat easier by another decision taken at the same meeting. The railroad workers' system federations (for the CPR, GTR, Canadian Northern Railway, and Canadian Government Railways) decided to affiliate with the Railway Employees' Department of the A.F. of L. The shopworkers formed Division 4 of the R.E.D.^{lii} This was seen by many unionists as a great advance, and break with the past. The hope was that negotiating through R.E.D. would make it possible to present a stronger and more united front. The headquarters of the division were in Winnipeg.^{liii}

I can find no evidence of the decision by the Canadian railroads to enter negotiations with Division 4. The federal government clearly favoured this development.^{liv} The Canadian

Railway War Board, which had been organized in late 1917 to increase cooperation between railways on matters such as rationalization of train schedules, began discussions about shop wages and working conditions in the spring of 1918.^{lv} By that time, several outstanding disputes with other classes of railway employees had been the subject of conciliation board hearings under the IDIA. Boards were recommending that wage claims not be dealt with until a decision about US railroad wages was taken, and so the shopmen's negotiations were also delayed. The original McAdoo Award of May, 1918 (the US award was named for William McAdoo, the director of the US Railroad Administration) did little to quiet union demands for raises in either the US or Canada, and in July further conferences took place, this time with federal government representatives also participating. The unions were threatening to call a national shopmen's strike, as was also the case in the U.S. It is hard to tell how genuine this threat was. Most of the Canadian leaders of the shopcraft unions during the war had also been union leaders in 1908. A substantial fraction of the workers employed in 1918 had participated in the 1908 strike, and several big railway strikes in the US had also been lost in the last few pre-war years, which probably promoted an element of caution.^{lvi}

By mid-July a solution was reached. The Canadian railways agreed to increase shopmen's wages, initially according to the McAdoo Award and then by amendments to it (which were being negotiated in Washington).^{lvii} In return, the railways were allowed to raise freight rates sharply.^{lviii} The eventual award was 68¢ for shopmen and 45¢ for helpers. There were far fewer classes of tradesmen and helpers recognised than had been the case in the past, so that most workers were assigned to one of a small set of hourly wage levels. At about the same

time, other union contracts signed in Canada (with shipbuilders and munitions factories) were usually paying blacksmiths 70¢, and helpers 50¢.^{lix}

That the Canadian government and the Canadian railways were willing to be bound by decisions taken in Washington was a classic Canadian solution. Tying the Canadian wage increases to US wage increases reduced the danger of serious labour trouble. If the international unions agreed to the conditions offered in the US, the same unions were almost certain to accept the same conditions in Canada. By 1918, it was clear to everyone that substantial wage adjustments were essential, but in this labour-scarce situation it was not obvious how much firms had to concede to keep workers on the job. The US Railroad Administration in Washington might concede too much, but the standard set in Washington would be used by workers to judge any Canadian offer. Lower offers would very likely have been rejected immediately. Agreeing to apply a US award in Canada in return for a simultaneous increase in freight rates limited the independence of Canadian railway managers, but it also ensured that what was probably the lowest feasible award (parity with the US) was achieved.

Setting wages while keeping an eye on conditions prevailing in the northern US had always made sense for Canadian railways. Both the CPR and the Grand Trunk owned lines in the US. Train crews often crossed the border. Paying different rates depending on where workers were on their run would have been extremely difficult. For shop workers, common wage rates were not essential, but at least on the CPR most of these workers were unionized and paying uniform rates for all workers of a given grade in a region, on both sides of the international boundary, had long been standard. The Canadian roads had strong incentives to pay their workers about the same wages as employees on competing American lines. A good deal of

traffic could be routed over either Canadian or American railways; similar pay rates helped to keep costs in line.^{lx}

The 1919 wage negotiations were again protracted. In June, Canadian railroad shopmen once more threatened a nationwide strike.^{lxi} US shopmen were also restive, with perhaps a quarter to one half of workers on strike in the spring or early summer.^{lxii} Eventual wage hikes were modest -- only 4¢ for most workers.^{lxiii} The Railroad Administration, backed by President Wilson, believed that the cost of living would soon drop. Workers gained many more concessions about working conditions than wage rates in this round of bargaining. While the McAdoo Award set the eight-hour day as the standard, it did not require the payment of overtime for workers normally employed for nine or ten hours. The national agreement of 1919 established the eight-hour day as the norm, and required the payment of overtime for hours worked beyond that. Other work rules that increased earnings were specified, such as minimum numbers of hours to be paid if workers were called back to work and payment for time travelling to wrecks or to a temporary assignment. The role of seniority in allocating better jobs was strengthened: "the oldest employee in point of service shall, if sufficient ability is shown by trial, be given preference..."^{lxiv} Work classifications tightly defined the responsibilities of each craft.

Of course, the cost of living did not peak in 1919, so that in the first half of 1920 there was further agitation for wage adjustment, and on the part of the railways, demands for increases in freight rates. In Canada, the federal government again made it clear to the railways that a national rail strike was to be avoided.^{lxv} In the US, there were many wildcat strikes in the spring of 1920. According to the craft unions, most workers were exceptionally restrained, and the behaviour of the leaders exemplary throughout this unsettled and frustrating period.

“Patriotism of the highest order, and consideration for a helpless public prompted the chief executives to refrain from using that weapon which many felt must be used if relief was to be obtained -- the strike. And be it said to the everlasting credit of the men that with few exceptions, they placed absolute confidence in their leaders, and bowed to their judgment at all times.”^{lxvi}

The Chicago Award, as the decision of the United States Railroad Labor Board was known, was issued in July 1920, and gave most shop workers a raise of 13¢ an hour. Once again, the parallel Canadian agreement was signed about a month later.^{lxvii} Substantial, extremely unpopular, freight rate increases were approved in Canada to allow the railways to pass on extra labour costs to customers.^{lxviii}

In a letter to all members of Division 4 of RED one of the labour negotiators stated: “It must be agreed that the rates established are by a considerable margin better than the average paid by Canadian industries...”^{lxix} Thus after roughly three years of unrest and negotiations, railroad shopmen in the US and Canada, or at least their union leaders, had achieved a very substantial proportion of their aims. The eight-hour day was firmly established, the vast majority of employees belonged to trade unions, and a set of work rules regulated most aspects of employment.

The cost of living did finally begin to fall at about the time that the Chicago Award and its Canadian counterpart were signed. Experience with the work rules imposed by the agreements of 1919, coupled with the wage increases of 1920, the decline in price levels in late 1920 and 1921, and reductions in wages in other industries all increased employer discontent. In 1921 the chorus of employer complaints about excessive wages and restrictive working conditions strengthened dramatically across North America. In Canada, both the Minister of Railways and the Chairman of the Board of Railway Commissioners favoured negotiating a new

agreement.^{lxx} In the US, criticisms of the effects of federal control on labour productivity and costs had begun earlier. At the beginning of 1919 there were claims that while the wage increases dramatically reduced quit rates, productivity fell and absenteeism became a serious problem. The McAdoo Award effectively eliminated piece rates in late 1918, because piece rates were not adjusted when hourly rates rose. As a result “ ... in the shops where piece work has been eliminated the output per man has decreased 30 per cent and the labor cost of doing the work has increased 50 per cent.” Lower productivity was also an effect of a drop in quality of foremen. The McAdoo Award initially gave only very modest raises to supervisors, so that for several months it was quite common for foremen to be paid less than the men they were supervising. Many of the better foremen quit and disciplinary problems increased because the workmen “feel the foremen are their inferiors, and obey instructions grudgingly.”^{lxxi}

Given the bargaining patterns established over the previous several years, the timing and extent of wage cuts and alterations to working conditions in Canada would be heavily influenced by decisions taken in the US. The return of US railways to private control in March 1920, a new government board to adjudicate railroad labour disputes (the Railroad Labor Board), and a change in the political complexion of the federal government, all affected how negotiations proceeded, and the relative strength of the parties. Many American railroads, especially those which had been non-union in 1917, moved aggressively to undo as much of the McAdoo Award as possible. The US federal government established the Railroad Labor Board in 1920 to settle disputes about working conditions, grievances, rules, and wages. Three members were drawn from railroad management, three from labour, and three from the public. The Republican presidential victory in 1920 spelled an end to a sympathy for labour in the White House.^{lxxii}

Some US railroads, such as the Pennsylvania, were determined to return to the open shop. More commonly, railroads wanted to eliminate standard rates of pay and working conditions, reintroduce piece rates, and lower wage rates.^{lxxiii} The open shop railroad in Canada had always been the Grand Trunk. Only in 1918 did it begin serious negotiations with the shopcraft unions. By 1921, the GTR was being folded into the Canadian National system (the successor to the Canadian Government Railways). The other constituent elements of the CNR had been unionised, and a drive to eliminate unions on a government controlled railway was highly unlikely. While the McAdoo Award and subsequent agreements very significantly altered wages and working conditions in Canada, the scale of the changes was more modest than for many American railroads. The Canadian railways wanted to lower wage rates, limit overtime payments, and remove some featherbedding rules; they did not want to smash the unions.

In the summer of 1921, as we might by now expect, the shopcraft unions and the Canadian Railway Association (successor to the Canadian Railway War Board) agreed to cut wages by the same amount that they had recently been cut in the US.^{lxxiv} The shopcraft unions in both countries acceded to wage reductions in 1921 more readily than did the running trades brotherhoods, especially in the US, where a national rail strike was narrowly averted.^{lxxv}

Many questions about working conditions, employment rules, and overtime were brought to the US Labor Board in 1921. Towards the end of the year several decisions were handed down limiting the conditions under which overtime would be paid, permitting piecework if the employees agreed to it, and modifying work rules so that “it will not be necessary for half a dozen men, all concerned in seeing that they do nothing that might come under the work of a man in another craft, to work on a job which any one of them could complete.”^{lxxvi} Within a few

months the Railway Association of Canada announced that Canadian railways wanted to bring working conditions into line with the American revisions. In late May 1922, agreement was reached, with rewritten rules similar to those in force in the United States.^{lxxvii}

The big break between the US and Canada came in the summer of 1922; the US shopmen began a long and disastrous strike, while Canadian railroaders stayed on the job. The US railroads applied for further wage cuts in early 1922. In June, the Labor Board ordered wage reductions effective 1 July. Several roads had taken other measures which provoked workers' fury, particularly the contracting out of repair work to non-union firms. A national shopmen's strike began on 1 July.^{lxxviii} In Canada, the railways proposed to implement the same wage cuts. When negotiations broke down, the Railway Association proposed to apply the cuts, starting 16 July, but treat the cuts as temporary, so that if further negotiations resulted in an agreement more generous than the initial cut, the railways would treat the difference as back pay. The shopmen, using the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, asked for a board of arbitration. They argued that the railways were violating the IDIA by imposing wage cuts before a board heard the case. The railways responded to the effect that they could not wait for a board to make its decision, and that if the board upheld the wage cut, it would be very hard to recover the excess wages. Canadian shopmen took a strike vote in mid-July; 97% of votes were in favour of striking. With a strike threatened, the federal government intervened. Prime Minister King asked the railway presidents to restore the pre-16 July wage rates until the board made its decision; the railway presidents agreed.^{lxxix}

The situation in the US continued to play an important role in shaping decisions taken in Canada. The US railway strike was crumbling by late August. The majority report of the IDIA

board recommended that the railways' proposed cut be implemented effective 15 August, but be treated as a tentative cut only.^{lxxx} Negotiations over making the wage cuts permanent began in late September. The American President of the RED had advised against launching a Canadian strike in early September, and the federal government leaned on both the railways and the unions to continue discussions. The Minister of Labour promised that should negotiations break down, it would not be necessary to convene another IDIA board before a strike call could be issued.^{lxxxi}

As ever, a strike during the autumn would be much more effective than a strike during the winter. The negotiations went nowhere, and another strike ballot was taken in late October. It appears that this vote failed (the results were not made public). Reluctance to strike was no surprise. By October, the US strike was largely lost. Unemployment rates were high, and with the onset of winter could be expected to climb. Railway employment prospects were bleak, particularly as the CPR closed down its passenger car shops in October for several weeks.^{lxxxii} In early December, the unions accepted the railways' proposals to make the wage cuts permanent.^{lxxxiii}

The big difference between the US and Canada in 1922 is that by avoiding a strike in Canada, the principle of national agreements was maintained. The IDIA slowed down the process of negotiation and confrontation. By the time the Canadian workers were in a position to strike, their American brothers were in serious difficulty and would have been able to offer virtually no support. The shopcraft unions lost a large fraction of their members in the US as a result of the 1922 strike, and many railroads introduced company unions.^{lxxxiv} Canadian railway workers above the grade of labourer, by contrast, remained fully organized.

Regional Wage Differentials and the Winnipeg General Strike

Around the end of the First World War all kinds of strains were placed on the population, and radical political solutions gained both publicity and considerable acceptance in virtually every western country. The above account suggests that the war and immediate post-war period was remarkably peaceful in the North American railroad industry. Despite repeated threats, and last-minute negotiations, there were no strikes authorised by the international unions until the ill-fated 1922 US strike. Reality, however, was not so peaceful. Many workers, including some at the CPR, went on strike against the advice of the international unions. I think that a major lesson CPR management probably learned from the upheavals of the later war and immediate post-war years was that they could continue to do business with the international unions. The scales had shifted substantially in favour of the unions, which posed problems for management, but the internationals kept the men on the job. Other labour organizations were more unpredictable and troublesome.

Canadian labour and social historians often debate whether labour radicalism in the early twentieth century was mainly a western phenomenon, or whether it was a common feature across the country.^{lxxxv} Canada's most famous strike was the Winnipeg General Strike of May-June, 1919, which effectively shut down the country's third largest city for over a month. The General Strike was a sympathy strike in support of building and metal workers outside the railways. The only CPR shopcraft workers who went on strike in this period participated in the Winnipeg General Strike, or in strikes called in other western cities in support of it. For these railway workers, a good deal of the tension that came out in the form of participation in the Winnipeg General Strike was created, or at least exacerbated, by the ending of regional wage differentials. Up until about 1918, CPR workers in western Canada could feel that they definitely gained from

participating in the international unions. In 1919, they felt that their needs were being ignored, and many were prepared to ignore their craft unions' calls for restraint. It was much less likely that a CPR employee in Montreal would have felt the same way.

Up to 1918 railway wage rates were higher in the west than the east. In the US, the west started at Chicago, in Canada in northern Ontario. The CPR system was effectively divided at Fort William, with separate collective agreements covering workers in each half of the country. By the fall of 1918, the McAdoo Award and its supplements had established virtually identical wages and working conditions for railway shop workers throughout both countries. The elimination of regional pay differentials provoked remarkably little discussion at the time and less consideration since.^{lxxxvi} If one is looking for substantial institutional differences between post-war and pre-war Canadian labour markets, the elimination of these differentials in the railway industry is a good place to start. It is likely that in the 1920s regional wage gaps would have been smaller than in the 1910s. After the war, growth on the prairies was rapid rather than explosive. What would probably otherwise have been a gradual erosion of differentials was, on the railways, a sudden disappearance.

When the unions asked for uniform nationwide minima in 1918, they wanted inflation adjustments based on prevailing western wage rates. Why the US Railroad Administration adopted uniform national wage rates is unknown. Administrative simplicity allowing for speedy implementation was probably important. After the fact, the USRA claimed that a national agreement led to greater stability of the workforce as there was less reason for dissatisfaction with local conditions.

“Everyone will admit that the ideal shop organization is a force of what has by the boomer been termed ‘home guards,’ who select railroad work shop as their

permanent occupation and who wish to establish themselves permanently at the point where they are employed Under such conditions men become familiar with the work required of them, study the details of the particular equipment which they are required to handle ... and become a part of the permanent organization which is necessary for the successful operation of any property.”^{lxxxvii}

Despite their complaints that the government was slow to take decisions and arbitrary in some of those it made, the craft unions recognized that federal government control of the US railroads worked very much in their favour. Therefore union leaders encouraged the men to accept the deals hammered out in Washington (and copied almost exactly in Montreal) on the grounds that they were the best solution possible, and a great step forward for a large proportion of the railway workforce, whatever part of the country they worked in.

Such arguments rang very true in the US, but they were less accurate for Canada, particularly for Western Canada. Students of the Winnipeg General Strike often consider reasons why workers were attracted to the general strike philosophy of the One Big Union. Workers, such as CPR shopmen, who were already members of an international union were unlikely to join the OBU unless they were disaffected from their international union. The introduction of nationwide minimum wage rates is almost certainly a key reason why railwaymen in western Canada were so disappointed by the McAdoo Award and angered by the willingness of the international unions to accept it.^{lxxxviii} In early 1917, the average CPR fitter or machinist on the Prairies was paid 50 cents per hour, while in Quebec the pay was only 40 cents. In early 1919, the average Quebecer, at 69 cents, was being paid a penny more per hour than the average man on the Prairies.^{lxxxix} Western union representatives were so angry with their eastern brothers' willingness to accept the uniform wage proposals in July 1918 that they “walked out of bargaining headquarters in disgust and boarded a Winnipeg-bound train.”^{xc}

Contemporaries did not put the complaint in the way I have just explained it -- unions were committed to ending regional wage differentials, but on the basis of levelling up, not levelling down -- so in both the US and Canada disgruntled union members generally said that the raises were not large enough, not that western workers should have been awarded more than eastern workers. Throughout 1919 railway shop workers in the US and Canada threatened to strike because of the slowness of wage negotiations and the small size of increase granted. The union journals counselled patience: in the US the longer term aim was to maintain Government control of the railroads. "Nothing could do more to hasten the return of the railroads to private owners than strikes..."^{xci}

Generally the discussions by union leaders of the high cost of living and the adverse impact of inflation on workers made no comment about differences in the cost of living between western and eastern North America. Perhaps union leaders did not fully understand why there was so much more unrest over the McAdoo Award in the west than in the east. The international unions described the splitting of union ranks as a reflection of the gullibility of western Canadian unionists.

"By following the prophets of the O.B.U., organized labor of the West today finds itself in the wilderness ... labor has made a mistake. Mistakes for labor are always costly ... But it can not be helped now. Regrets buy nothing. Progress is not by looking backwards. Experience is a hard school but thorough ... The ranks of labor will become more and more solidified as the orthodox unions continue to grow, continue to form federations and systematically and scientifically vamp the

great international trades union movement to meet new conditions and situations as they arise.”^{xcii}

At times the criticisms were sharper. It was not just that the workers had innocently, if foolishly, responded to utopian dreams; baser motives had also come to the fore. At the end of 1919, W.G. Powlesland, the General Vice President of the International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths responsible for Canadian affairs, reported on his recent trip through western Canada. From his perspective,

“The splitting up of the ranks has given a fine chance for the time being to the “cheap-dues-guy,” or the guy who doesn’t want to pay any dues at all, or join a union, as some of them have done with a 10c per month per capita tax, and leave it to the men of the International organizations to negotiate the agreements and foot the bills for the same.”^{xciii}

Such arguments ignore the interests of CPR shop workers in western Canada. The CPR had never put up much opposition to the formation of union locals, and had signed its first contract with the International Association of Machinists (covering western workers) in 1899.^{xciv} Arguments about the benefits to all railway workers of greater (indeed any) collective bargaining rights for men on other lines might not seem terribly important to a shopman in Winnipeg or Calgary. Nationalizing the CPR was not a serious option, and unlike the situation in the US, government control of other Canadian railways could be seen to be more than a temporary wartime measure. In Canada the argument that strikes should be avoided so as to make government control of railways appear successful was therefore irrelevant. A settlement giving virtually identical wages to all skilled workers meant a much smaller increase for workers

on western than eastern Canadian lines, and within western Canada the smallest raises went to CPR employees, who had been the best paid.

A lower increase in wages for workers on western lines could have been rationalized if the gap in living costs between central and western Canada had closed substantially during the war, and workers understood this. Emery and Levitt's recently constructed inter-urban, inter-temporal price indices suggest that living costs in Winnipeg and Montreal did converge during the war, but that there was a sudden return to pre-war price differentials in 1919 and 1920. The 3-4% price differentials of 1917-18 turned into 23-35% differentials in 1919 and 1920.^{xcv}

No doubt there were other reasons why Winnipeg's CPR shopmen were attracted by the rhetoric of the supporters of the general strike, but in late 1918 and early 1919, I think it would have been perfectly reasonable for these workers to have concluded that the restraint of the international unions was not helping them. If the craft unions could not deliver, then other options were worth support. Over 85% of the Mechanical Department employees in the CPR sample working in Manitoba joined the Winnipeg General Strike. About 60% of sample workers in Alberta participated in sympathy strikes supporting the General Strike. CPR Mechanical Department workers in Manitoba in the spring of 1919 cannot be described as young hot-heads. The median age was 41, with only 10% under age 26, and a quarter aged at least 47.

These CPR shopmen were willing to go on strike for over a month in order to support union recognition and wage demands of metal trades workers employed in contract shops in Winnipeg. While frustration over their own wage award was no doubt involved in explaining their willingness to strike, the Winnipeg General Strike did not directly have anything to do with the railways. Railway workers were not willing to accept the arguments of the international

unions that gains to railway workers elsewhere in North America were more important than gains to themselves. Perceptions of 'solidarity' were in a substantial state of flux.

In 1908, the shopmen's strike was mainly called in the interests of the western workers, and the western workers probably lost less as a result of the strike than the eastern workers. At least they were more likely to get their jobs back. The characteristics of the western workers and the eastern workers were broadly similar in 1908 – obviously there were more francophones in Quebec, and more workers of continental European origin in the west – but the age distribution, proportions of skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers, and length of service with the CPR were very close.^{xcvi} By the end of the war, however, the situation had changed considerably. The brisk labour market of the First World War years (and perhaps regional differences in willingness to volunteer for the Canadian Expeditionary Force) had done much more to draw workers away from the CPR in eastern Canada.^{xcvii} Far more Mechanical Department workers in eastern Canada were relatively recent hires. At the beginning of July, 1918, 14% of the workers in the east had first started with the company since the beginning of the year, and almost half had been hired from the spring of 1915 onwards. In the west, only 2% of workers had begun their CPR employment in 1918, 30% since the early spring of 1915.^{xcviii} I have found no evidence that western workers knew of the changes in the composition of the workforce in the east, but they could, with some justice, have thought of eastern workers as johnny-come-latelys. Not only did the eastern workers not need as big a pay increase because they were experiencing more moderate price increases in 1919, they were also often recent hires with limited railway experience.

In recent years, Canadian labour historians have often stressed how widespread across the country was strike activity in 1919, and the role of recent recruits to the union movement in participating in strikes.^{xcix} Yes, concern about inflation, wages, and working conditions was typical of workers across Canada (and the western world) at that time. But some workers had much more immediate economic reason to feel disaffected than did others. Craft workers at the CPR in Winnipeg and other western cities could plausibly feel that after years of support, their international craft unions had sold out their interests. Given that so many of these men had worked together for years, they may have felt that an agreement to go on strike would be honoured by nearly all workers. CPR employees in Montreal had far less reason to reject the existing unions, which had at last delivered substantial wage increases. There were many more recent hires in the CPR shops in Montreal, and the prospects of organizing and sustaining a mass walk-out likely seemed much less strong.

Conclusions

The fact that the railroad industry was reaching maturity in Canada around the time of the Great War implied some settling down of the labour force, and this had little or nothing to do with trade unions. Throughout this period, wages and working conditions for CPR craftsmen were probably at the upper end of what was possible for blue-collar workers in Canada. The agreements of 1918-20, despite some erosion soon thereafter, probably further pushed these workers up within the ranks of the working classes. The craft unions were able to extract rents from CPR before the war, and from the railway industry as a whole during and right after it. Except at times of maximum upheaval, most workers probably understood that this was the case. The seniority systems the unions advocated increased the job stability of the longer employed

workers. By the mid-1920s, employees who had joined the CPR in the years of expansion and upheaval, and survived the shake-outs of 1908, 1914, and 1921-22 formed a very solid core workforce who expected that their employment would continue until they retired.^c

After 1919, there were no more strikes by shopcraft workers on the CPR. The international unions gradually rebuilt their locals in western Canada, and at least officially the split of 1919 was forgotten by the unions.^{ci} The Canadian National Railways inherited the traditions of the Inter-Colonial and Canadian Northern Railways – there was no open-shop movement there. No federal government would have favoured losing the votes of large numbers of CNR employees, even if an open-shop CNR would have been cheaper to run.^{cii} With the main competition unionised, the costs to the CPR of trying to become open-shop would have been great. The federal government did not want disruptions to rail traffic, and pressure was regularly brought to bear on the railways to make enough concessions to keep the trains running. If the 1908 strike had taught CPR management that while they could win strikes, they did not want to have to rely on strikebreakers to staff their shops, the experience of 1918-19 reinforced the idea that the unions they wanted to deal with were craft unions. Craft unions bargained over issues related to the workplace.

My guess is that by the mid-1920s, the CPR management's acceptance of unions went well beyond such tentative notions. It is often said that early railways developed their work-rules based on what was done in the army. NCO's are loathe to involve the officers if they do not have to. While mentioning trade unions and armies in one sentence may seem incongruous, CPR managers appreciated that there were benefits from having union leaders around to help foremen deal with grievances and discipline problems. Lots of minor problems could be

resolved without having to formally raise the issue with management. In the 1960s, a study of the Angus shops in Montreal examined the extent of interactions between foremen and shop chairmen, and concluded that the union leaders played an active role in maintaining peace at the local level.^{ciii} I suspect that this kind of relationship was already being established in the 1910s, and it was much stronger by the 1920s.

Endnotes

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- i. Assuming that workers in mining and quarrying, manufacturing and mechanical, construction, and transportation and communication occupations were liable to join unions. *Historical Statistics of Canada* (1st edn.) C14-21, D412.
 - ii. *MMJ*, Aug. 1931, p. 454.
 - iii. Reed C. Richardson, *The Locomotive Engineer, 1863-1963* (Bureau of Industrial Relations, U. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1963).
 - iv. Did Phelps Brown ever publish his paper on Victorian attitudes to trade unions with White Nile - Blue Nile metaphor? (Paper given at Nuffield c. 1982)
 - v. See Mark Perlman, *The Machinists: A New Study in American Trade Unionism* (Harvard U.P., Cambridge, MA, 1961) Chs. 1-3 for information on the role of railway machinists in the International Association of Machinists.
 - vi. Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada 1812-1902*, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1982), p. 247-259.
 - vii. Forsey, p. 255.
 - viii. Paul Craven, *'An Impartial Umpire': Industrial Relations and the Canadian State 1900-1911* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1980), Ch. 9, pp. 271-317. Mines were classed as public utilities.
 - ix. I have broken American railroad systems down into their constituent operating units, as it was sometimes the case that only certain parts of an American railroad system had a contract with the IAM in 1909. The CPR appears as one system, with only its subsidiary the Minneapolis, St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie entered as a separate railroad. Thus the apparent greater length of the CPR is partly an artefact of the way railroads were defined.

x. Not all lines were rated. Any railway that went bankrupt up to 1914 in the US was also defined to be not - so - safe. The Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk and the Inter-Colonial were all defined as not - so - safe. As the ICR was a government controlled enterprise, one might argue that from the workers' perspective, higher wages and better working conditions could be gained, despite the company's weak financial returns. ICR machinists did have an IAM contract.

xi. W. Kaye Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (Macmillan, New York, 1977), p. 441.

xii. I also have information on some workers present at the time of the 1908 strike whose surnames fall slightly outside the balanced sample range. Table 2 uses information on all workers (such as all workers hired during the strike). Newspaper reports and union journals mention short working hours in most shops at this time. The CPR record cards do not document short-time working.

xiii. Some men would start at 7 am, others at 8 am.

xiv. *MMJ*, July 1908, p. 624, January 1909, p. 24.

xv. *MMJ*, December 1908, p. 1093.

xvi. *LG*, August 1908, pp. 151-160. (The *Labour Gazette* was published by the Department of Labour.)

xvii. *LG*, August 1908, pp. 156-7.

xviii. The board favoured the existing rules encouraging worksharing -- cuts in working hours rather than layoffs -- when business was slack. The CPR had proposed the elimination of this clause.

xix. Somerville in *MMJ*, December 1908, p. 1093.

xx. *MMJ*, January 1909, p. 44. The IAM paid benefits to 2,400 men. Machinists' helpers would have been given much less than machinists. *La Presse*, 8 August, 1908, p. 20 refers to a promise of strike pay of \$8 for married men, \$6 for single men. *Montreal Gazette*, 21 August, 1908 reports that Montreal boilermakers received strike pay of \$8 or \$6 on 20 August (their first benefits), and that machinists would receive \$7 or \$5 the following week. (Don't have page #). *Montreal Daily Star*, 21 August 1908, reported that steamfitters and brassworkers were also being paid. In some places, all money (both benefits and donations) was pooled and distributed to strikers. *MMJ*, December 1908, p. 1105. Strikers from the Angus shops collected the last installment of their July earnings on 14 August. *Montreal Daily Star*, 14 August, 1908. (Don't have page.)

xxi. *MMJ*, January 1909, p. 26; *Blacksmiths' Journal*, October 1909, p. 25; *Montreal Gazette*, 22

September 1908, p. 1 stated that some car workers in Toronto had yet to receive any strike pay.

xxii. *MMJ*, January 1909, pp. 72-3.

xxiii. *Montreal Gazette*, 7 August, 1908, 8 August, 1908.

xxiv. Evictions at Chapleau and Schreiber, Ont., *Montreal Daily Star*, 19 August, 1908, p. 6; Evictions at McAdam Junction, N.B., *Montreal Daily Star*, 30 September, 1908, p. 1.

xxv. *La Presse*, 17 August 1908.

xxvi. *Montreal Daily Star*, 18 August, 1908, p. 1, *Montreal Gazette*, 8 August, 1908.

xxvii. *Montreal Gazette*, 22 August, 1908, p. 3.

xxviii. *Montreal Gazette*, 22 August, 1908; 25 August, 1908; 26 August, 1908, p. 12; 29 August, 1908.

xxix. Bell Hardy in *Montreal Daily Star*, 13 August, 1908, p. 6.

xxx. *Montreal Daily Star*, 7 August, 1908, p. 1.

xxxi. *Montreal Daily Star*, 10 August, 1908, p. 1, referring to events in Winnipeg and Brandon. 7 August, 1908, p. 10 mentions Japanese workers in the round house at Calgary. 10 August, 1908, p. 10 states that at Winnipeg the "C.P.R. is finding difficulty in handling the Japanese as strike-breakers."

xxxii. Report from Local 274 (Montreal) in *BJ*, October 1909, p. 25. (*BJ* stands for *Blacksmiths' Journal*.)

xxxiii. *Montreal Daily Star*, 11 August, 1908, p. 1; 11 September, 1908, p. 1.

xxxiv. *Montreal Daily Star*, 11 September, 1908, p. 1.

xxxv. *Montreal Daily Star*, 20 and 21 August, 1908. (Quotation from 21 August)

xxxvi. *Montreal Daily Star*, 18 August, 1908, p. 1.

xxxvii. *Montreal Daily Star*, 8 September, 1908, p. 6; *Montreal Gazette*, 8 September, 1908, p. 1; 12 September, 1908, p. 7 (Comments by James Cuttie, of the Montreal Transportation Company about situation in Glasgow).

xxxviii. *Montreal Gazette*, 10 September, 1908, p. 10; *Montreal Daily Star*, 10 September, 1908, p. 6.

xxxix. Since 1908 record cards do not give nationalities, ethnicities are inferred from names. For a subset of workers who were rehired after 1910, nationality was added. These proportions are calculated for the full sample of workers hired between 5 August and 5 October into occupations /departments involved in the strike.

xl. For most of the other 10%, the reason for departure was unclear. Only one man is listed as having joined the strike.

xli. *Gazette*, 8 October, 1908, p. 12. Article titled "Angry with Union: Eastern Men Claim They were Deserted by Leaders, Who Looked Out for Westerners."

xlii. There are a few press reports of intimidation of strikebreakers. e.g. *Montreal Gazette*, 7 Oct, 1908, p. 3 "John Miller, a machinist, 30 years of age ... was beaten about the head in a most brutal manner and his left ear was almost kicked off. ... Miller arrived here recently from England ..." After the strike, the company posted notices in the shops stating "Any interference whatsoever by any employee of the company with another, or the use of objectionable language by one employee to another, whether while on or off duty, will be sufficient cause for dismissal." *Gazette*, 10 Oct., 1908, p. 15.

xliii. Perlman, *The Machinists*, pp. 31-2.

xliv. In the west, at the beginning of May, 1914, only a quarter of workers had started since August 1912, in the east since May 1913. The longest serving 25% of workers in the west had begun by late 1905, spring 1907 in the east.

xlv. Barry Eichengreen, 1992 "The origins and nature of the Great Slump revisited," *Economic History Review*, p. 217

xlvi. Ken Cruikshank, *Close ties : railways, government and the Board of Railway Commissioners, 1851-1933* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1991), pp. 127-155.

xlvii. There were some wage rate increases in 1916 on both US and Canadian railroads, on the eastern division of the Canadian Northern and the Canadian Pacific, for example. *The Boilermakers' Journal*, Sept. 1917, pp. 661-2 and 676-7.

xlviii. "Shop Labor Situation in 1918," *Railway Mechanical Engineer*, Vol. 93, No. 1, January 1919, p. 22. This article is about railroad shops in the US, but similar conditions prevailed in Canada. William G. McAdoo, *Crowded Years* (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1931), p. 456. "...there were employees of the roads in 1917 whose wages were actually as low as ten cents an hour; and approximately half of the total number of those employed received seventy-five dollars a month or less. On the other hand, unskilled laborers were getting as much as five dollars a day in war industries. Nobody in the land who wanted a job was out of work. Any railroad hand with a bit of gumption could leave the railroad any day and

be at work next morning somewhere else at larger pay.”

xlix. “The Railway Wages Situation,” *Canadian Railway and Marine World*, April 1921, p. 187 for average annual compensation of railway employees.

l. Cruikshank, pp. 213-14.

li. *BJ*, April 1918, p. 12.

lii. The RED had been formed in 1909. Canadian railway workers had not affiliated with it earlier because of the existence of the IDIA (*BJ*, March, 1914, pp 1-2). Under the IDIA, workers would not have been immediately able to respond to a strike called by the RED. (What else can “we cannot conform to all the laws of that department” mean?) On each Canadian railway the association of individual craft unions was known as the Federated Trades or the System Federation.

liii. David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg* revised edn. (Montreal, McGill-Queen’s, U.P., 1990) , p. 70.

liv. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, p. 70.

lv. Cruikshank, p. 135.

lvi. 13% of the Mechanical Department workers in the east, and 25% in the west, employed on 1 May, 1918 had struck in 1908.

lvii. *BJ*, September 1918, p. 17.

lviii. *LG*, August, 1918, pp. 615-16, *BJ*, August, 1918, p. 42, Cruikshank, pp. 144-45.

lix. *BJ*, August 1918, p. 42, October 1918, p. 19.

lx. But at times CPR wages did drift away from US rates. Just before the 1908 strike, for example, machinists in Winnipeg earned two cents an hour more than their peers working around St. Paul Minnesota (about a 5% premium). “Canadian Pacific Strike,” *Railroad Age Gazette*, Vol. 45, Aug. 21, 1908, p. 775.

lxi. *BJ*, July 1919, p. 21. The national strike order was cancelled in June 1919 at a meeting of RED in Atlantic City, NJ.

lxii. *Railway Mechanical Engineer*, Vol. 93, No. 8, August 1919, p. 457. Since the strikes were not authorised by the unions, estimates of the number of workers involved were very rough.

lxiii. *LG*, December 1919, p. 1489. The awards were backdated to the spring of the year.

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- lxiv. Rule 18, *Labour Gazette*, December 1919, p. 1491. (Pp. 1489-1505.)
- lxv. Cruikshank, p. 146.
- lxvi. *MMJ*, August 1920, p. 763.
- lxvii. The Canadian Railway War Board was by this time renamed the Canadian Railway Association.
- lxviii. Cruikshank, pp. 146-153.
- lxix. *BJ*, October 1920, p. 54. Letter from Charles Dickie, Secretary-Treasurer of Division No. 4.
- lxx. *CRMW*, April 1921, p. 187.
- lxxi. "Shop Labor Situation in 1918," *Railway Mechanical Engineer*, Vol. 93, No. 1, January 1919, pp. 22-24. Quotations from p. 24.
- lxxii. Harry D. Wolf, *The Railroad Labor Board* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1927).
- lxxiii. *CRMW*, April 1921, p. 187, May 1921, p. 263, July 1921, p. 373, September 1921, p. 473. *MMJ*, December 1921, (don't have page number. Editorial titled "Railroad Situation Unchanged") (probably about p. 940). Geoffrey Channon, *Railways in Britain and the United States, 1830-1940* (Ashgate, 2001), Ch. 11, pp. 238-244.
- lxxiv. *CRMW*, August 1921, p. 426.
- lxxv. The strike was to have begun in early November. *CRMW*, November 1921, pp. 578-80.
- lxxvi. *CRMW*, January 1922, p. 24-5.
- lxxvii. *LG*, July 1922, pp. 771-72, *CRMW*, June 1922, pp. 284-85.
- lxxviii. See Colin J. Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen's Strike* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 1997) for an account of the shopmen's strike.
- lxxix. *CRMW*, July 1922, pp. 361-2, August 1922, pp. 401-404, September 1922, pp. 453-455.
- lxxx. *LG*, September 1922, pp. 942 - 947.
- lxxx. *CMRW*, October 1922, pp. 519-522.
- lxxxii. *CRMW*, November 1922, pp. 563-64, December 1922, pp. 613-14; *MMJ*, November 1922, pp. 744-45.

lxxxiii. *LG*, April 1923, pp. 403-405.

lxxxiv. At the end of 1923, 70% of American railroads had company unions, and these were disproportionately the larger firms. Davis, pp. 237-8.

lxxxv. Bercuson, pp. 200-203 attacks the position that the west was unusual.

lxxxvi. Except by Bercuson and Friesen.

lxxxvii. Frank McManmy, "The National Agreement with the Shopmen," *Railway Mechanical Engineer*, Vol. 94, No. 4, April 1920, p. 234. (Pp. 233-35)

lxxxviii. Gerald Friesen "Bob Russell's political thought," in *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1996) pp. 131-134 (121-146). Bob Russell was a machinist at the CPR.

lxxxix. MacKinnon, "New Evidence on Canadian Wage Rates, 1900-30," *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 1996, p. 118.

xc. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, p. 71.

xc. *MMJ*, July 1919, p. 646.

xcii. *MMJ*, September 1919, p. 846.

xciii. *BJ*, January 1920, p.23.

xciv. *MMJ*, August 1931, p. 457.

xcv. J.C. Herbert Emery and Clint Levitt, "Cost of Living, Real Wages and Real Incomes in Thirteen Canadian Cities, 1900-1950," University of Calgary, mimeo, Feb. 2001. From 1921, the gap again closed substantially.

xcvi. 50% of the eastern workers present on the eve of the 1908 strike had started before January, 1906, 75% by May, 1907. For western workers, the cutoffs were October, 1905 and April, 1907.

xcvii. Bercuson points out that there were few munitions contracts awarded in Winnipeg. Obviously there were no shipyards! Thus railway tradesmen in western Canada probably had fewer alternative jobs available than was the case in the east.

xcviii. The return of most veterans in early 1919 complicates the comparisons of dates first hired, which is why I cite figures for July, 1918. The ethnic and skill mixes of the workforce were not diverging between east and west. CPR shop workers in 1918 were less likely to be

anglophones than had been the case in 1908, but this was true across the country. In line with the smaller number of recent hires in the west, the average western worker was somewhat older (a median of 39, rather than 36 years) in 1919.

xcix. Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), Ch. 9 "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt", pp. 289-326 and Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (University of Toronto, 1998).

c. In the spring of 1928, about a quarter of Mechanical department employees had been first hired before the spring of 1910. The median workers had started in mid 1916, and only a quarter had been hired since mid-1923.

ci. In the 1940s when the unions went to bat for workers denied retirement pensions because of their participation in the 1919 strike, the CPR repeatedly pointed out that at the time these unions had opposed the strike.

cii. In fact the CNR introduced policies of union-management co-operation. This co-operation was supposed to reduce costs. See Rountree, pp. 231-260.

ciii. Maxwell Flood, "The Local Union-Management Relationship – A Case Study," (McGill University M.A. Thesis, 1964).