

A PARTNERSHIP FOR PROGRESS

Years of U.S./

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Part II *This article continues the IBEW Journal's commemoration of the Members Confront Economic Depression and the Tragedies of War*

1914

WW I begins in Europe, airplanes first used as war weapons; Great Britain declares war on Germany; Canada also enters war, employers use war as opportunity to expand working hours to 13 or 14 per day. Reid-Murphy faction reunited with IBEW. Ontario adopts workmen's compensation law on which today's plans are based.

1916

Manitoba is first province to provide income to widows and divorced or deserted women with children.

1917

Organized labour protests beginning of conscription in Canada.

1918

WW I ends Nov. 11; B.C. Federation of Labour Vice President Albert Goodwin shot to death as a draft dodger; Canadian government imposes an Order-in-Council prohibiting strikes in war industries and railways (it's rescinded one month later).

Many historians portray the Roaring Twenties as a business boom time, but by 1928 local unions were sending reports of slow work situations to the IBEW's *Journal of Electrical Workers and Operators*. So, when the stock market crashed in October 1929, it devastated many IBEW members already looking for work. From a high of 121,792 members in 1919, membership plummeted to 60,421 at the end of 1930, dropping 11,000 more in the next three years. By June 1930 the *Journal* was filled with local union letters describing desolate work situations. For example, Frank J. Selke, press secretary of Local 353, Toronto, bluntly stated, "Work is dead, absolutely the worst we have had for many years; and it doesn't look any too promising for the coming [months]."

Despite the gloomy economy, the late 1920s was a time of great promise. Science hovered on the verge of revolutionary breakthroughs. Although not available to the general public, television's possibilities piqued the curiosities of even the most cynical. Radio; talking movies; solo, nonstop flights across the Atlantic; and theories of general relativity led people to believe science held the answers to almost any problem—and these scientific marvels gave people hope during a seemingly hopeless time.

For the millions of men and women without work, the winter of 1930 was especially harsh. Unemployment, with its accompanying suffering and hunger, was a worldwide phenomenon. The American Federation of Labor's Monthly Survey of Business revealed approximately 20 percent of affiliates' members were out of work. Banks foreclosed on farm mort-

gages, houses were seized and families evicted. The Brotherhood, too, went through some real changes in the early 1930s as membership dropped to a 20-year low.

War Brings Devastation, But Also Opportunity

By the middle of 1940, World War II embroiled most of the world in its most-bitter conflict. The war meant different things to the membership. For over 35,000 members it meant joining the armed forces. For many it meant a tremendous jump in factory work, building the planes, tanks, trucks, ships and guns of war. For others it meant restrictions by dozens of local and national boards and offices, and rationing of basic foods and materials. Nevertheless, it was a time of explosive industrial growth.

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Canada IBEW Unionism



1919

Ontario Department of Labour Act passes, first minister of labour is Walter Rollo; One Big Union founded in western Canada, based on industrial rather than craft lines; Winnipeg (Manitoba) General Strike called (Canada's first) an estimated 30,000 go out.

1921

Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees expelled from Trades and Labour Congress in dispute over industrial dual unionism.

1925

Labour representatives in Canada's House of Commons join forces with Agnes McPhail (Canada's first woman MP) and other Progressives to form the "Ginger Group," a voice for working people, farmers, the handicapped and underprivileged.

1929

U.S. stock market crashes, plunges Canada and U.S. into the Great Depression.

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LABOUR STRIFE RESULTS IN TRADE UNION ACT

The Toronto Printers' Strike is considered one of the most significant events in the history of the Canadian labour movement. Leading the group of employers was George Brown, publisher of *The Globe*, who inherited his antiunion reactionism from his father. Although he once suggested labour problems could be worked out by "consultation, conference, mutual concession and arbitration," he wouldn't sit down and discuss differences with union representatives.


Matters came to a head in March 1872, when the Toronto Typographical Society demanded the 54-hour week and \$10 weekly wages with 25-cents-per-hour overtime pay. The employers refused; the union printers walked out. Scab printers were promptly hired, while detectives spied upon strikers.

The Toronto Trades Assembly organized a rally on April 15, which attracted a crowd of about 10,000. Marching in the parade to Queen's Park, location of the Ontario legislative building, were members of various unions then organized in Toronto: bricklayers, iron moulders, bakers, blacksmiths and coachmakers, among others. No action was taken against the crowd that day; but on April 16, 24 trade unionists were arrested and charged with belonging to an illegal combination.

The employers scoured legal annals until

they came up with a law which jeopardized the very structure of organized labour, the 1800 Combination Act of Great Britain. Although succeeding British statutes had revised the act and recognized the legal status of unions, Canadian law still included its original provisions. However, the use of this law backfired against the employers. The unionists, released on bail, roused the public with a call to "repeal...any law that might exist to warrant such an unjustifiable interference with the rights of the people."

Finally, Sir John A. Macdonald, prime minister of Canada, saw the situation as his opportunity to garner the support of the workers. He introduced legislation to revise Canadian law to reflect that of Great Britain and to legalize trade unions. Passage of the Trade Union Act infuriated employers, who responded by blacklisting known union members and requiring all others to sign a "yellow-dog contract," a pledge they would not join a union.

Despite employer reaction the printers gained the 54-hour week and better wages. Also, the Trade Union Act of 1872 declared that unions were not in restraint of trade, implicitly recognizing the right to strike. The outcome awakened unionists to how political activism might help them achieve their goals and inspired individual unions to consolidate their efforts by trying to form a federation of unions. 

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1931

Three miners killed during Bienfait (Saskatchewan) coal miners' strike. Statute of Westminster passed, a British law granting former colonies (including Canada) full legal freedom unless they wish to remain under British law.

1933

Founding convention of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (Canada) held with farm and labour representatives; about 30% of Canada's labour force unemployed.

1935

"On to Ottawa Trek," conducted by about 4,000 relief-camp workers demanding work and 50-cents-an-hour wages, results in rioting, leaders jailed.

1937

Strikes increase in the late 1930s in Canada, following a marked slowdown in strike activity earlier in the Depression.

1939

Canada enters WWII; Trades and Labour Congress of Canada expels CIO unions.

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Canada declared war in September 1939, and Canadian electrical workers were among the first to experience the demands of wartime production efforts. Canada's shipbuilding industry, which had languished since the end of World War I, revived almost overnight. The new aircraft manufacturing industry expanded with the war.

Production, however, was hampered by structural economic deficiencies. Shipbuilding, aircraft manufacturing and other defense-related industries required skilled mechanics. But Canada's skilled work force had been decimated by the inexorable march of automation and specialization in factories and years of economic stagnation. "Men with the proper degree of skill were disappearing," said First District Vice President Ernest Ingles, and "no new blood was being infused into industry." Technical schools employed instructors who had no

practical experience, so they turned out "youngsters with [only] a smattering of knowledge in the various [trades]."

Trade unions, the only bastion of skill left in industrial society at that time, rose to the challenge. Unions, according to Ingles, "scurried around and looked up their old members," who had been dumped on industry's scrap heap. Only with organized labour's participation was Canada able to meet its wartime production demands, and to build training schools, military camps and all types of factories in record time.

During the war women's labour-force participation increased by unprecedented numbers. As more and more men were shipped overseas, women took their places in the factories. And the IBEW, like many other North American unions, was far stronger at the end of the war years than it had been at the beginning. From Pearl Harbor to VJ Day, the IBEW membership almost



Women on the line. During the war women entered the work force in great numbers.

Local 1472, St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, telephone operators working a switchboard for the New Brunswick Telephone Company.



doubled (from 198,591 to 361,921); and, according to International President Ed J. Brown, IBEW members “performed 95 percent of all the electrical work used and installed in the prosecution of the war effort.”

Organizing campaigns continued to go well immediately following the war. But antiunion attacks, quietly begun during the war, strengthened as the IBEW met at its 22nd International Convention in San Francisco in 1946—its first Convention in five years.

Technology and the IBEW March On

The pace of technological change propelling Canada and the United States since the 1920s showed no signs of abating in the 1940s. FM radio expanded the sound quality and range of program possibilities on the airwaves. Talked about for years, televisions moved into working people’s homes after the war. The International Business Machine Company in New York was building room-sized “calculators,” capable of storing and reading large quantities of data. The possibility of using atomic energy to produce electricity was being worked out, and jet engines were poised to revolutionize air travel. Even sending men to the moon seemed within reach.

President Daniel Tracy spoke in a positive tone to the 23rd International Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1948. The union was strong and getting stronger, with membership up more than 80,000 since the war. The majority of delegates were satisfied with the course of the Brotherhood.

Many of the delegates at Atlantic City had just returned from war-time tours of duty. But new clouds of conflict swirled on the horizon. Within two years, many IBEW members were back in the military. By the summer of 1950, U.S. and Canadian troops, in support of the United Nations, went to the aid of the South Korean government after an attack by communist North Korean forces. North America was at war again. ■

Watch for the next part of our Canadian IBEW and Canadian labour history in the November issue of the IBEW Journal.



Local 213, Vancouver, British Columbia, members get ready to march.

Unity Equals Strength

Uniting the Labour Movement in Canada

Unity of purpose among differing labour organizations isn’t usually uppermost in the minds of the rank-and-file members. Their priorities lie with the bread-and-butter issues—wages and working conditions. However, under certain circumstances it becomes obvious the only way to achieve some goals is through united effort. So, unions in Canada—as did their U.S. counterparts—attempted to combine their individual organizations into local councils and, ultimately, a national group to address the concerns of the working class.

The Toronto Coopers’ Union seized the initiative in 1871 by calling a meeting of representatives of the city’s unions. Although no authoritative action was taken, the delegates encouraged their unions to establish a central organization.

Union representatives later set up the Toronto Trades Assembly and drafted its constitution. This group quickly asserted itself in the community through speeches on behalf of working people, oversight of working conditions and occasional mediation of employee/employer disputes. An important item on the assembly’s agenda was the need for favourable legislation; such as extending the franchise, secret-ballot elections and a fair Mechanics’ Lien Act to safeguard tradespeople who were owed wages.

Ottawa, St. Catharines and Hamilton formed their trades councils around 1873. Unions soon realized how beneficial an umbrella national trade-union organization could be. The Toronto and Ottawa groups discussed the possibili-

ties, then invited potential affiliates to a conference. The first Canadian national labour organization was created at this conference: the Canadian Labour Union. A constitution was adopted; and the union representatives declared one of their intentions to be: “[agitating] such questions as may be for the benefit of the working classes... to obtain the enactment of such measures by the dominion and local legislatures as will be beneficial to us, and the repeal of all oppressive laws which now exist.” The new group expanded organizing, assisted unions involved in strikes or lockouts, and increased political action. The CLU vigorously opposed the use of convict labour and employment of children under 10.

By the second convention of the CLU, unemployment had decreased membership. This trend continued; and the organization’s meeting in 1877 marked its demise. Although it didn’t survive long, “it defined the aims of labour in language [which] still requires but little modification;... its position was consistently sound from a trade-union standpoint,” said R.H. Coats, Canadian historian and early editor of *The Labour Gazette*.

The Toronto Trades and Labour Council resumed efforts to establish a lasting organization and issued a convention call for the Christmas holiday period in 1883. Delegates discussed many of the resolutions addressed by previous conventions: extension of the franchise, pauper and assisted passage

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Cooperating for Kids

The AFL-CIO Union Label and Service Trades Department presented its 1999 Labor- Management Award to American Electric Power's Conesville, Ohio, Power Plant, in recognition of its labor-management partnership with IBEW Local 1466, Columbus, for a school outreach program. The award was given in May at the annual Union Industries Show held in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The AEP and Local 1466 team collaborated on a program to help Conesville Elementary School enhance its science and technology curriculum. The power plant team helped the school obtain \$130,000 in federal, state and local grants to develop a state-of-the art Science Exploration Center and Mobile Computer Lab; assisted with the design of the center; purchased new textbooks to replace

outdated ones; conducted student field trips; and tutored students at AEP's electrical, chemical and computer labs.

The Local 1466/AEP effort has resulted in a new, dynamic science curriculum for the school's 460 students, whose science proficiency test scores have since improved, and the project will be featured as a model program on Ohio's School to Work website. ■



International Secretary-Treasurer Edwin D. Hill (right) and Fourth District International Representative Nicholas Greco (second from right) congratulate the Local 1466/American Electric Power labor-management team on winning the AFL-CIO Union Label and Service Trades Department's 1999 Labor-Management Award. Pictured from left are: AEP Executive Vice President Bill Lhota; AEP Control Technician Dave Shepler; Local 1466 Business Manager Richard Taylor; and AEP Conesville Plant Manager Dan Lambert.

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from Europe, factory and sanitary legislation, and employer liability when employees are injured by unprotected machinery. They agreed that working people needed to have representatives from their ranks in the legislature.

Further progress toward a national organization was achieved in 1886 when more than 100 delegates attended a meeting to create a new central body called the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress. This organization focused on legislative action, deeming organizing a subordinate priority. Its "Platform of Principles" contained 15 goals reflecting the temper of the times as seen through the eyes of the working class: free education; the eight-hour day; a locally based, living minimum wage; public ownership of utility-type franchises (railways, waterworks, lighting, etc.); abolition of the appointed Senate; tax reform; use of the union label; no child labour under age 14; compulsory arbitration of disputes; and more.

The name of the CTLC changed several times, eventually becoming the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. In 1956 the TLCC merged with the Canadian Congress of Labour to form the Canadian Labour Congress. ■