CHAPTER 4

MILITANCY IN THE CANADIAN CIVIL SERVICE: 1918-1920

Anthony Thomson

I Introduction

Since the Second World War much of the interest which has accompanied the increase in public sector employment in Canada has been concerned with the increased public employee unrest and the extension to this sector of collective bargaining rights. Not only have C.U.P.E. and the P.S.A.C. expanded to the point where among unions in Canada they rank first and third in membership respectively, but public employees -- in particular postal and hospital workers as well as teachers -- have manifested a level of militancy which was seemingly without precedent a mere dozen years ago. It could be assumed that there has occurred in Canada a gradual evolution, based on objective occupational changes, in which 'white-collar' public employees have gradually come to perceive themselves as essentially no different from employees of private authorities and have, as a consequence, adopted bargaining practices modelled on those of the private sector. The evolution of the conscious identification of federal employees with the working class in Canada, however, has not progressed in a linear direction.

As indicated in the last chapter, public employee militancy as a whole, measured by strike activity, has two historical peaks, the first coming in the period following the First World War and the second beginning in the mid-1960s. Although between 1911 and 1930 the pattern of public employee militancy seems to correspond closely with that of the entire workers' movement, the parallel breaks down since there was little resurgence of militancy during the 1930s or after the Second World War. Between these two periods (1911-1917 and 1925-1939), public employee strikes involved almost exclusively civic labourers. In the upsurge of militancy between 1918 and 1920 civic employees were involved in the majority of strike actions as well. This period, however, also witnessed the peak of a new militancy within the federal civil service, manifested by the growth of employee organizations, by the affiliation of some of these with the Trades and Labor congress, and by the postal strikes of 1918 and 1919. In this chapter we will discuss some aspects of this early history of militancy in the Canadian federal civil service. The rise of a new wave of public employee unrest has aroused interest in past actions which at least in the Canadian post office have a long if mostly forgotten history.

In contrast to the current concern with collective bargaining rights, most Royal
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Commissions and academic studies which investigated the civil service prior to the Second World War focussed their attention on the evil of political patronage. Government patronage, it was claimed, prevented the development of an efficient and well-motivated public service.\(^1\) The attempt to rationalize the government services which took place during World War One was in direct contradiction to patronage. The Civil Service Act of 1918 introduced the merit principle of appointment and promotion into the full civil service and in theory eliminated 'political' appointments of federal employees. (The response of civil servants to the efforts at rationalization is discussed in Chapter Five).

One effect of a fully developed system of patronage was to inhibit the development of employee organizations. Political appointments to the service created lines of individual dependency between powerful figures in the government and its personnel which tended to undercut horizontal solidarity among the employees. According to a recent study, however, the amount of political patronage had been seriously over-estimated.\(^2\) There was, in addition, a logical connection between the growth of the state apparatus and the \textit{de facto} curtailment of patronage. As government functions and government employment expanded, it became increasingly difficult for government officials to control appointments, particularly of employees lower in the hierarchy in large bureaucratic departments.

Organizations of federal employees had been developed prior to the adoption of the full merit principle. If to some extent patronage inhibited the development of a consciousness of common employee interests, other causal factors were significant as well. Even if patronage secured employment it did not necessarily help to improve working conditions or salaries. Objective circumstances similar to those existing in private employment would motivate collective response. It was quite logical for civil service organizations, once formed, to oppose patronage, and significant pressure came from below to reform the service and establish the merit principle. Despite other major differences, all civil service organizations opposed patronage and, after 1918, resisted any attempt by government members to remove the merit principle from specific departments or branches.

II Conditions in the Civil Service
In Canada the first efforts of federal employees to form an association were undertaken by the letter carriers, who united to create the Federated Association of Letter Carriers (F.A.L.C.) in September, 1891. Formed for the purpose of advancing the interests of its members in matters of salaries and working conditions, the F.A.L.C. affiliated with the T.L.C. in 1896 following a salary dispute with the Postmaster General.\(^3\) The early formation of the letter carriers’ union meant that by 1911 organizations were quite well established in post office branches across Canada. Between that date and 1917 the number of locals increased from 37 to 45, a figure which dropped to 35 in 1919 following the formation of an alternative organization.
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The designation of letter carriers as 'white-collar' workers was based solely on their status as salaried federal employees. The work actually performed by letter carriers had little similarity to most non-manual occupations. The delivery of mail took place outside in all weather and involved lengthy walks and the climbing of stairs with a heavy load which the union attempted to standardize at thirty-five pounds. The result was often poor health -- ulcers, hernias and heart trouble attributed to the heavy work -- which was performed by old and young alike. Leg and feet problems were particularly common. The fact that the mail was usually brought into a town over night meant that the work was unevenly distributed, with eighty percent of the mail often delivered in the morning between 7:30 and 12:30, with no break in between these hours.5

Besides the perennial questions of salary rates and the cost of living, other demands of the letter carriers included uniforms, boots, the standardization of the size of mail, maximum weight for mail sacks, sick pay, superannuation, as well as the establishment of Christmas Day and New Year's Day as holidays. This last demand proved difficult because the public expected the delivery of gifts, news and well wishes on those days. These objectives were sought through the representations of the T.L.C., and their apparent preoccupation with these matters at the Conventions may have prompted H.A. Logan's remark that the F.A.L.C. was a "snug craft-conscious body [which] has kept its demand prominently before the T. & L.C."6

A second organization of postal workers was formed in 1913 at a convention of postal clerks from a number of scattered lodges. Originating as a western Canadian movement, the Dominion Postal Clerks' Association (D.P.C.A.) was at first confined primarily to that region. At its 1916 convention Lawrence Pickup, a clerk in Winnipeg, was appointed organizing secretary -- a post he filled successfully. His organizing efforts were directed towards eastern Canada and, in the next year's convention, Pickup was able to report that branches of the Postal Clerks' Association had been formed in Fredericton, Halifax, St. John, Montreal, St. Catherines, Brockville, Hamilton, and Toronto.7

The fact that these workers were designated as 'clerks' seems to imply that the nature of the work was more clearly 'white-collar' than was the case for the letter carriers. This would be more true for those who worked at the wickets and dealt directly with the public than for those who sorted mail in the back. Nevertheless there was much manual work done by the postal 'clerks', and in some places -- notably Winnipeg -- one of the chief grievances of the men was the basement work which was done in poorly lit and badly ventilated cellar in which the sewer line had a propensity to back up. Postal clerks were also required to work shifts, which included night work. In some of the larger post offices, particularly Montreal and Toronto, large numbers of postal workers were employed. For example, in 1914 the Montreal post office had one thousand workers and was already a 'mail factory' of sorts.8
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A third organization formed in the Post Office was the Dominion Railway Mail Clerks' Federation, which was founded in 1916. Working on holidays and week ends, in poorly heated and equipped cars, the railway mail clerk was the best paid of the three groups. Some danger was involved in this work since the mail car was constructed of wood and was generally linked in a very hazardous position next to the locomotive.

The postal service, then, was organized along group lines, with three separate organizations. Frequent attempts were made to form a single organization, or a federation, of the three associations to present common grievances to the government, but these tended to be temporary and easily broken apart. The development of a single organization encompassing all three branches arose out of the common practice of a successful strike, and split the postal workers organizationally on an east/west basis. The argument, favouring either a single union or closer co-operation between the craft organizations, was chiefly that some conditions of employment, such as salaries or pensions, were common to all groups and that unanimity of programme was crucial to obtaining redress. During the First World War, and to some extent afterwards, the question of salary and bonus was one such common grievance.

World War One was accompanied in Canada, as well as elsewhere, by an enormous rate of inflation causing prices virtually to double in a few years. In periods of inflation the differential between wages and salaries tends to decrease in favour of the former, and the feeling was widespread among the salaried civil servants that "the position of those having to depend on fixed salaries was far different from those who, owing to the special demands for their services, were able to command an increased wage commensurate with the increase in prices."  

Between 1901 and 1921 in Canada average earnings grew significantly in Canada, although they tended to level off over the next two decades. For clerical workers, Graham Lowe shows that in 1901 total clerical earning (and male clerical earnings) were 20 percent higher than the average earnings in manufacturing; by 1921 male earnings were only 6 percent higher, while total clerical earnings were 3 percent higher. Over this period of prosperity, then, there may have been a narrowing of at least this one economic differential between manual and mental workers. Nevertheless between 1901 and 1921, clerical workers averaged 50 weeks of employment per year, compared with an average total of 46 weeks -- which indicated the mental workers may have had more security of employment during this period.

Since the rapid inflation was clearly linked to the war, it was believed that once the war was over prices would return to the 'normal' level pre-dating the conflict. Consequently the view persisted that, at the termination of hostilities, prices would again decline and that therefore there was little sense in granting raises which would have to be rolled back subsequently. In the place of salary increases, governments introduced
bonuses as an alternative. The bonus system had the effect of placing the responsibility on the employee organizations for bringing conditions in the civil service to the attention of the government. It became a major focus of agitation, not only to secure a bonus but also to ensure its distribution, and each provided an impetus for organization. Prior to the war in both Britain and Canada only in the post office had organising drives made much headway. When the war ended and the cost of living failed to decline to pre-war levels, the demand for salary increases persisted, and civil service associations expanded rapidly.

Bonuses had been granted in Britain at the request of the lower paid postal employees. Amounting to five percent and seven and one half percent, such bonuses were ganted in 1915 and 1916. A third appeal in 1917 culminated in the setting up of a board of conciliation which reported that the rise in the cost of living warranted a further temporary bonus of from eight to fifteen percent.13

As the war reached its climax, the civil servants in Canada had not had a raise in pay for nearly a decade, the last raise coming in 1908.14 The D.P.C.A. had petitioned the government for salary increases in 1916 and 1917, and in the Spring of 1918, the Civil Service Federation, a central body representing an organization of independent civil service associations, arranged to collect data and promised to press the salary matter with all their powers. This amounted to making representations to Ministers and Members of Parliament, and the presentation of 'facts and figures' with which to argue the 'justice of their plea'.15 One precedent cited was the proposal of the House of Representatives in the United States to grant salary increases of from 10 to 20 percent to postal workers.16 Once granted a bonus, the federal employees had to exert further efforts to have the money distributed. It was a delay in the payment of a negotiated bonus in 1918 that was the direct precipitating cause of the first major strike in the Canadian Post Office Department. This tends to substantiate Jamieson's argument that "the tendency for rates of pay in the public sector to lag behind those for comparable jobs in the private sector during periods of inflationary expansion" imbued public employees with "a new and growing incentive to unionize and occasionally strike for their demands, even if illegally."17

Unlike Canada, between 1911 and 1939 the United States did not experience postal unrest. According to David Ziskind, prior to the Second World War there was only one strike in the U.S. post office, occurring in Butte, Montana, in 1908. The post office was relatively exempt from strike activity in this period, according to Ziskind, because of "the nature of its service and the character of its personnel. There has always been associated with the mails the idea of speed and regularity at any cost. From the days of the pony rider who braved the attacks of Indians and the stage coach mailman who fought with wild west bandits, the delivery of mail has been a special trust of the government for which all necessary sacrifices must be made. The public has developed this tradition, and officials have imposed regulations upon the service to perpetuate the idea."18
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Stripped of its romantic connotations, this is the 'service ethic' which, it was postulated, had a profoundly conservative effect on government employees. In general the response of the U.S. government to public employee unionism has been far more hostile than that in Canada, particularly in essential services such as the post office. This may help account for the difference in the response of U.S. and Canadian postal workers before 1925.

Labour unrest in the post office sufficient to lead to the possible consideration of an illegal withdrawal of services may have pre-dated the 1918 strike. In 1911 a press report originating from Regina declared that the clerks and letter carriers were on strike, despite being unorganized, as a result of oppressive conditions, including over-work, low pay, and the virtual elimination of opportunities for advancement. In November the Department of Labour wrote to its correspondent for details and was informed by W. B. McNeill that a strike had not taken place "although recently a request was made by the staff for more help, [and] this request was complied with." Unrest, then, involved local grievances and not only Dominion-wide issues such as salaries.

The 1918 postal strike was not caused solely by the salary and bonus question, but occurred against a background of other grievances which the government was accused of not considering seriously. The Civilian, official organ of the Civil Service Federation (C.S.F.), argued that the action of the clerks who went on strike was not due simply to sympathy with the letter carriers. On the contrary it involved "underlying causes and emotions which [had] their origin in the administration of the Post Office Department." Superannuation and the merit principle were fit topics to discuss with the Postmaster General, but grievances over working conditions were viewed by the Department as secondary in nature and referred to the Deputy, receiving little or no attention as a result. That these carefully enumerated and documented grievances were carelessly handled by the government caused an "incipient state of unrest" which "needed but the touch of a chronologic and sympathetic passion to induce a spirit of actual resistance to a system of long continued inerita, indifference and oppression." The payment of the war bonus was only the apparent cause of the strike -- according The Civilian the chronic cause was the persistent neglect of and indifference to civil service grievances and representations.

The 1918 strike is particularly notable for the support given by the public by business organizations and labour. Although is represented a victory for the strikers, it set the contours for future government tactics which were more successful in curtailing strike activity.

III The 1918 Postal Strike

Postal workers had been attempting to secure higher salaries since at least 1917, but were informed that because of the war money was not available. In the Spring 1918
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session of Parliament, however, the government set aside a sum of money to be distributed to the civil service as a bonus. By July nothing had been done to administer the allotting of the money.22

In the first two weeks of July meetings of postal workers were held in Winnipeg and Ottawa and resolutions were passed demanding redress and threatening "direct action".23 On the 13th the Toronto letter carriers met and resolved to go on strike on Monday, July 22, unless their demand for either a salary increase or a conciliation board composed of equal staff and government representatives was satisfied.24 This decision was reaffirmed almost unanimously on the 19th by five hundred postal workers. Only a clear agreement on behalf of the government to comply with their demands would have averted a strike.25

On the 21st of July, Deputy Postmaster Coulter announced that the government had decided to distribute bonuses of between $100 and $150 to the postal workers.26 On the following day Acting Prime Minister C. J. Doherty stated that this bonus would be paid to married men, widows and widowers, and the Civil Service Commission was charged with the responsibility of inquiring into the outside services.27 Postmaster General Blondin promised the F.A.L.C. that within two weeks the question of salaries would be settled.28

The government not only attempted to appease the letter carriers, but also resorted to threats and coercive pressure. At the same time that the bonus offer was made, the Civil Service Commission informed the Post Office Department that in securing workers to replace strikers the Postmasters could dispense with the provisions of the Civil Service Act. The department was empowered to hire all who would be necessary to fill vacancies and maintain the service.29

The government declared itself unable to legally grant its employees a Board of Conciliation since the Lemieux Act did not apply to federal civil servants. The Ottawa and Hamilton branches consequently accepted the compromise offer, which disposed of their most pressing grievance, and decided against strike action. In Winnipeg, the President of the Letter Carriers Association, W. C. Osborne, declared the bonus to be "indefinite and impractical." Since the bonus only applied to permanent employees, and only to a maximum of $1300 per annum, Osborne concluded that only twenty percent of the Winnipeg postal workers would benefit to the full amount. Since most of the temporaries, he declared, were returned soldiers, "the least we can do is to stand out for a little less injustice than is being perpetrated on them by the proposed scheme."30

A remark by a Member of Parliament, implying that the thought of postal workers walking out on strike was a "mere joke", inflamed feelings.31 On Monday, July 22, letter carriers walked out in Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Vancouver and New Westminster.32 In Toronto the postal clerks decided to remain at work but refused to perform the work assigned normally to letter carriers, and passed a resolution of favour of the strikers.33 The executive of the D.P.C.A. strongly advised its members to continue working, although L.
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Pickup, a prominent member of the executive from Winnipeg, stated on July 19 that it was highly probable that the clerks would walk out in support.\textsuperscript{34} On the 22nd the Winnipeg clerks announced that they would join the strike unless the government granted a conciliation board to consider wages, working conditions, and the question of reorganization.\textsuperscript{35} Osborne wanted the Board to be composed of representatives of the Department, representatives of the employees, and to have a chairman to represent the public.\textsuperscript{36}

On the second day of the strike, which \textit{The Civilian} called "the second most important event in the history of the civil service"\textsuperscript{37} had spread to at least fourteen centres, although it did not spread east of Ontario. In Halifax the postal workers, seeing little prospect for salary increases, resigned their positions and took employment elsewhere in the city.\textsuperscript{38} In the west the strike spread not only to other centres but to other branches, as postal clerks joined letter carriers in shutting the post office down altogether.

The government reiterated its position on the hiring of replacements. In Peterborough, the Postmaster and the local Member of Parliament assisted in postal distribution, and invited "girls" wishing to do their patriotic duty to leave their names at the post office.\textsuperscript{39} The government also made another compromise offer -- in the place of a Board, they proposed that a sub-committee of the Cabinet be formed to investigate the grievances. This averted a strike in Montreal, but in Toronto, the leading centre in the eastern strike, the workers resolved initially to remain on strike until their demand for a Board was met. Alex McMordie, long time secretary of the F.A.L.C., wired all branches and predicted that by Wednesday (July 24) forty-six branches across Canada would be on strike.

On the 24th a deputation consisting of representatives of the striking workers, the Toronto Trades and Labor Council, the City of Toronto, the Board of Trade, and the Retail Merchant's Association, travelled to Ottawa to negotiate with the government. In the conference the government communicated their decision to allow temporary employees to participate in the bonus, but maintained the impossibility of setting up a Board. McMordie telegraphed to Toronto and advised that, since this was the best that could be attained, the men should accept it.\textsuperscript{40} According to the press accounts, murmurings "of discontent were audible while the telegram was being read . . . . It was evident that many of the men were not satisfied with the terms of the settlement." The mood changed, however, when the men learned that McMordie had recommended acceptance.\textsuperscript{41} The workers resolved to return to work although they reserved the right to strike if the findings of the sub-committee were unsatisfactory. In Ontario, where ten centres had experienced a strike, all but one branch returned to work on the 25th, the exception being Port Arthur. On average the postal workers were on strike for two days.\textsuperscript{42} The Western postal workers took a decidedly different view of the proposed settlement,
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and felt that the east had capitulated leaving them in the lurch.\textsuperscript{43} On the 24th they escalated their demands, passing a resolution calling for a Board of Arbitration before returning to work and demanding, in addition, to be paid for the duration of the strike "as the work would have to be done by us in our return to duty." They also demanded the distribution of the $150 by the end of July.\textsuperscript{44} While some of the western leaders counselled the postal workers that the settlement was the best obtainable and a prominent F.A.L.C. official advised the men to return,\textsuperscript{45} most of the workers continued to strike. In some places the initial decision to return to work was over-ruled shortly afterwards, when it became clear that the sentiment in the west was overwhelmingly in favour of staying out.

The government responded by resorting to both of its earlier tactics. On the one hand they threatened that those who persisted would be dismissed immediately from the service and, on the other hand, they sent Crothers, the Minister of Labor, and Arthur Meighen, the Minister of the Interior, to Winnipeg to negotiate directly with the strikers. Winnipeg emerged as the focal point of the western strike and delegates from Western points converged on the city.\textsuperscript{46} The split between east and west, which had emerged in practice, was aggravated when the Toronto local telegraphed to Winnipeg on Friday the 27th urging the employees to return to work.\textsuperscript{47}

As the strike continued to paralyze business in many Western cities, and disrupt national mail service which went through Winnipeg, the postal workers received assistance from two quarters. According to some press commentary, while the government would not lower its official dignity by dealing with its employees, it had to respond to the protests emanating from the business world. The Winnipeg Board of Trade decided to exert their influence and requested that a Board of Arbitration be granted. Along with the civic authorities, they attempted to convince the strikers to return to work for at least ten days while they negotiated on their behalf.\textsuperscript{48}

Pressure on the government to accept the workers' demands was exerted from a second source. The railway mail clerks in the west threatened to join the strike on the 28th,\textsuperscript{49} thereby extending the walkout to all major classifications in the post office. The government's threat to proceed with the dismissal of the strikers -- a decision communicated to, and presumably cleared by, Prime Minister Borden in Britain --\textsuperscript{50} precipitated motions of solidarity in some Dominion labour bodies. Harry Veitch, the Vice President of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council, announced to Crothers that the employment by the government of permanent strike breakers would result in a general strike in Canada.\textsuperscript{51}

The Vancouver Trades and Labor Council took a similar position, pledging a general strike vote should the government not grant a Board. In Regina and Saskatoon the same position was taken\textsuperscript{52} the movement in Saskatoon being led by the railway brotherhoods and metal trades workers. The International Steam and Operating Engineers condemned the
government on the grounds that many of the strikers were returned soldiers, a fact which led the Great War Veterans' Association to also extend support. The President of the T.L.C., J. C. Waters, speaking in Victoria, refused to support the strikers, however, on the grounds that unions sought to settle disputes by exhausting direct negotiations, and only after this avenue was proven to be completely barren was the case referred to an independent Board. The postal workers, he claimed, had demanded an Arbitration Board without entering fully into direct negotiations.

Despite official Congress disapproval, the striking postal workers were able to expand their support. The Civilian reported that assistance was material as well as moral: "Strike committees throughout the west were liberally supplied with funds. In Winnipeg, in addition to private contributions, tickets were sold for a football match (two leading teams gave their services) and within a week over four thousand were disposed of at twenty- five cents each. In other centres parades were held, and as the strike continued, messages from strike committees received at the central headquarters became more enthusiastic."

Crothers, who had travelled to negotiate directly with the workers, arrived in Winnipeg on the 29th, and was reported to be in almost constant contact with the men. Speaking to the postal workers, Crothers reiterated the government’s refusal to grant an Arbitration Board but offered a new compromise, recommending that the Civil Service Commission proceed immediately with its inquiry into reorganization, and that it commence in Winnipeg by hearing the grievances of the strikers.

Representatives of the Board of Trade and the Manufacturers’ Association met with Mayor Davidson and the decision was made to negotiate with the strikers. They promised to "do everything in their power to make sure that the undertakings given by Mr. Crothers on behalf of the government are carried out in every particular." Doherty gave assurances from Ottawa that the government would ratify the promises and that the Commission would begin with no delay with Dr. Roche, of the C.S.C. leaving for Winnipeg, immediately upon agreement.

With the intervention of the business community of behalf of the government’s offer, the western postal workers were persuaded to return to work. In their back to work resolution, the employees explained that by staying out in defiance of the eastern workers and of the F.A.L.C. executive, the western workers had achieved their aim by bringing forcefully to the attention of the Government "the shocking treatment meted out to them by the . . . unbusinesslike methods of the department." The settlement included promises on the part of the government to pay the wages and salaries for the duration of the strike, and that no discrimination or intimidation would be practised against any of the employees. In addition to these promises, in Calgary the postmaster agreed that each employee would be restored to the position vacated, that no striker would be held responsible for losses
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resulting from the strike, and finally that all those hired during the course of the strike
would be dismissed. 64

The employees in Winnipeg accepted the offer by a vote of 314 to 47. The employees
returned to work on the 31st at 7:30 p.m. and worked until midnight. The workers
reportedly returned to work with enthusiasm, having successfully conducted a strike for
ten days in the midst of general community sympathy and encouragement. In Saskatoon,
where a sympathetic strike had been led by railway workers, a procession of local unions
proceeded through the streets and ended in a victory rally. 65 As Bercuson pointed out, the
community support was crucial to the success of the strike; in 1918 militancy paid off. 66

The postal workers had the support of most of the public. Mayor Church in Toronto
declared that the government and not the strikers was to blame for the strike and that it
would teach the Government not to trifle with its employees. 67 This view was reflected as
well in several press accounts of the cause of the strike: failure to agree to the conciliation
Board was "evidence that [the government felt] their side of the case too weak to stand
investigation," 68 the bonus was pronounced to be ridiculously small in comparison to what
was requested; 69 living rates had increased 150 percent, yet letter carriers were paid less
than labourers for more responsible work; 70 and the Port Arthur Chronicle concluded that
while it was true that "the public will be inconvenienced during the time the government
compels the employees to stay out", it was better to suffer this "than to have the men we
employ in our postal branch to carry the brand of the slave." 71

The public response to the postal strike, according to the Peterboro Review, was
similar to the response to strikes of street railwaymen, when patrons refused to ride in cars
that were operated by strike breakers, and walked without complaining. 72

While individuals were adversely affected by the strike -- in particular those who
awaited government cheques (efforts were made by the strikers to distribute these), and
those awaiting news from the front -- the primary effect of the work stoppage was to
paralyse business. Without the sophisticated network of communication developed
subsequently in Canada, the postal system was the crucial link between businesses. On the
whole the business representatives took the view that the government was at fault, and
their efforts at persuasion were directed primarily at the Department.

The theory of the 'neutral state', propagated by Mackenzie King and others, asserted
that the government represented the public and intervened between the factions of capital
and labour in the interests of the public and the nation as a whole. In the 1918 postal strike,
however, the protagonists were the government and its employees. In this situation the
role of the defender of the public interest was in fact played by capital. Capital itself used
the 'interests of the public' to dampen militancy and prevent strikes. In 1918 its primary
concern was to end the strike and restore the service, and the only question was how to
accomplish this. In this respect, both the government and business stood to learn much
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about dealing with public employee strikes.

Not all press and business response was favourable to the workers. Those who supported the strike did so in the name of the justice of the cause, while at the same time deploiring the inconvenience suffered by the public and the tie-up of business. Since the post office was an essential public service, the argument against the strike was that the innocent public, which stood neutrally between the two parties, was the one suffering most. The government utilized this ‘service ethic’ in its pronouncements. Blondin, for example declared that "it was the duty of the strikers, in consideration of the inconvenience of the public, to return to work".73

The Montreal Gazette also took the view that the public must be prepared to suffer the inconvenience of the strike not to assist the workers, but rather because the strikers must be compelled to capitulate. In their view the strike was of the gravest import since it was essentially an attempt on the part of one group to coerce the government into paying higher wages than authorized by Parliament. "If letter carriers can declare a strike, and absent themselves from duty until their demands are complied with" editorialized the Gazette, "so may any other class of officials, with the consequence that government by compulsion supersedes government by Parliament."74 The Hamilton Herald agreed and deprecated the failure of ‘appropriate machinery’. A disinterested authority must adjudicate disputes in the public service, but the decision should be binding, and those who persisted in striking should be dismissed.75

The second major ideological attack on the postal workers rested on the special circumstances of the exceptional times. The workers were labelled as being 'unpatriotic' and as having interfered "with businessmen who are engaged, directly or indirectly, in carrying on the business of the war."76 These charges were levelled at the workers in an effort to intimidate them and undermine their desire to carry on with the strike.77 Labor Minister T. W. Crothers stated that he had received advice to declare unions illegal, and told the Winnipeg strikers that every "lockout and strike in Canada is a blow in favour of the Germans and against the allies . . . . Labour and capital are interdependent of one another and the sooner they come together the better."78

The workers responded to these attacks by declaring the strike to be one aspect of a larger worldwide fight for justice. In response to a direct charge by Cabinet Minister Frank Carvell that the strikers were unpatriotic, the postal workers denied the allegation and claimed that many of those on strike were returned soldiers. They added that when the "government allows some men to pile up millions in profits out of the war and permits a condition to arise in which the workingmen have to fight for a living wage, the same workingmen may reserve the right to strike."79

The Montreal Gazette drew the appropriate conclusions from the lenient settlement of the strike, conclusions which the government was to heed very carefully in the future:
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“This is an altogether new and extraordinary method of discouraging strikes. The government not only meets the demands of the striker considerably more than halfway, but actually finances the strike with public money. On this attractive basis the men return triumphantly to the service which they have so signally demonstrated their power to control. Will the next strike please step forward?”

The editorial concluded that the lesson will surely not be lost on the Toronto workers, nor on the rest of the employees in the public service.

While the government maintained that public employees were distinct from those in the private sector, and consequently did not have the constitutional right to strike, the civil servants reserved the ultimate right to strike for legitimate demands. According to The Civilian, the strike was the final weapon to force concessions, the means to redress somewhat the balance of power which tilted overwhelmingly in the direction of the employers. It was a justifiable means not only to better social and economic conditions, but to safeguard the employees from oppression. On the other hand, if a strike was "simply another word for insurrection, bloody revolution, the overthrow of democratic government, or even the opening wedge for such, it should certainly be nipped in the bud." Yet, even while the government was arguing that the public interest demanded that service strikes be illegal, the argument was raised in The Nation, published in Washington, that if one were to take a wider, rather than a narrower, view of the 'public interest', then strikes by public employees would be made legal since they serve as a "safety valve in the economic system". In fact this has become government policy; but in 1918 it was quite an advanced idea and not until illegal strikes again threatened to radicalize large sectors of civil servants did the government adopt the policy of more or less full bargaining rights for its employees.

The issue of the sovereignty of Parliament and the rights of civil servants to strike had a long history of debate in Canada. What is important in the present context, however, is the correctness or incorrectness of the arguments, but rather the extent to which these ideas penetrated the consciousness of the workers and, by becoming part of their world view, acted to discourage militant action and identification with other workers, and encouraged 'normal' dispute resolution mechanisms. The call for a conciliation board not only expressed the belief of the workers that such an instrument was both legitimate and neutral, but that it was the appropriate way to bargain. The success attained by British civil servants in their salary claims gave the idea of a Board a great deal of currency. Since, in 1918 the Canadian government was even refusing its employees the right to have a Board, it was reasonable for them to demand one.

The question of whether suppression or leniency yields the most satisfactory social control has not been definitively answered, and cannot be answered in the abstract. The unrest in the civil service at the end of the First World War arose out of the difficulty in
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influencing official decisions. The policy of allowing some employee representations, which the government eventually adopted, was coupled with repression of specific means to attain this influence. That is the government was willing to give concessions on the demands for greater co-operation, nevertheless attempting at the same time to retain as much of the prerogative as possible, and continuing to define certain actions as illegitimate and, therefore, necessary to suppress. From the point of view of the government, the mistake in 1918 was to treat the strikers leniently and thereby to give much legitimacy to the strike weapon -- a tendency it would have to correct in the future.

It must be remembered that the concessions that were given and the hard lines that were drawn equally reflected the development of the workers’ movement. The government found that, in order to compromise with the postal workers, it was necessary to offer more concessions to the western than the eastern workers. The government had the legislative weapons with which to dismiss the strikers and enforce the rule of law, but the support from all sectors of the community helped to stay its hand. It became clear that what was possible in the way of dealing with the strike depended on the ideology and consciousness of those directly or indirectly involved. The potential for radicalization inherent in situations of social confrontation could be undermined not only by force, but by the promotion of ideology which would isolate groups of workers from each other and from the mass of workers comprising the 'public'. It became a crucial issue, therefore, what the class identification of civil servants would ultimately prove to be. The solution to the ideological confrontation was sought within the ambiguous class position of civil servants. So in the strike issue the sovereignty of the government was made synonymous with democracy, and in the class issue, the ideology of public service reinforced the differential between civil servants and private manual workers.

The government began its offensive almost immediately upon the settlement of the strike. The C.S.C. enquiry proceeded in Winnipeg, but did not have power to determine salary rates, although it could make recommendations. The sub-committee of cabinet, on the other hand, did make a decision on wages and, once announced, it was disapproved by all branches of the postal service. Not only were the increases smaller than expected, but the western workers were discriminated against by receiving a smaller increase, which narrowed their previously higher salary rates relative to the East. This was justified by the government by arguing that the western workers had received a higher salary because of the 'isolation' factor and the higher cost of living, but that the latter had diminished and it was therefore logical to diminish somewhat the differential.83

Calling the salary increases "miserable" and "mean and insignificant", the postal workers again threatened to strike. In Toronto numerous motions were introduced demanding action, although in the end, "wiser councils prevailed".84 Alex McMordie advised the workers not to take any action until it was determined whether all other
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branches would agree and were unified. The upshot was that the discontent was quelled temporarily, and decisions were postponed until the annual convention of the F.A.L.C. which was to be held September 4, in Hamilton. The de facto split in membership which took place during the strike became institutionalized at this convention, and while the eastern organizations became concerned with rebuilding their strength, the western workers became occupied in founding a new organization. For the next few years the strike idea was real and living, and with the new classification and reorganization of the post office, postal workers not only had more grievances, but shared these grievances with increasing numbers of other civil servants.

IV The Amalgamated Postal Workers/Amalgamated Civil Servants of Canada

The western postal workers had raised the question of a single organization for all postal workers at past conventions and, when the debate was raised at the Hamilton convention, as usual, the vote was split on an east-west basis, the eastern workers voting for a federation of separate organizations rather than amalgamation. According to a 'Westerner' in a letter to the Postal Journal,

"the result left the western men with the choice of either deserting the clerks who supported the strike, and remaining F.A.L.C., or deserting the F.A.L.C., and staying with their supporters and forming an amalgamation of postal workers, aiming at a Dominion-wide organization. The western men chose the latter course; in fact the feeling was so strong that some branches of the amalgamation were formed while the Hamilton convention was in progress, and others before the delegates got home to report."

The amalgamated organization, formed by the western letter carriers, postal clerks and railway mail clerks, was first named the Western Postal Association, and was subsequently re-named the Amalgamated Postal Workers. All post office employees under the rating of first class clerk were initially defined as within the jurisdiction of the A.P.W., thereby attesting to the original class position of the movement, although it later broadened its scope somewhat to allow these more senior members in. Arising as a western protest movement, the A.P.W. at its formation comprised sixteen branches from Sault Ste. Marie to Victoria, and intended from the outset to operate along trade union lines. Some 'dual' branches were organized: in Moosejaw and Edmonton, which remained F.A.L.C. locals, and in Winnipeg and Vancouver which remained branches of the D.P.C.A..

Consistent with its decision to operate as a trade union, the branches of the A.P.W. made application to local Trades and Labor Councils, being accepted first in Winnipeg and Vancouver, and also made enquiries to the T.L.C.. The Eastern organizations maintained that separate organizations should continue to exist on a craft basis, with some form of federation for common action. The F.A.L.C. re-organized its western membership and refused to take part in any conferences with the A.P.W..

In its response, the T.L.C. proposed that the A.P.W. might be considered for
affiliation if it relinquished its claim to organize workers for whom the jurisdiction within the Congress had already been granted to the F.A.L.C.. This seemed to open up the possibility that the A.P.W. could be granted jurisdiction for a union composed solely of postal clerks and railway mail clerks, a prospect which the D.P.C.A. viewed as a distinct threat. In 1919 the question of affiliation with the T.L.C. was taken up by the Postal Clerks, and enquiries addressed to the congress. At its 1919 convention a referendum on affiliation was passed by a vote of 38 to 13, and the Secretary announced that letters had been received from twenty-two branches of postal clerks, all but three of which supported affiliation.

On May 11, 1920, the T.L.C. issued a charter to the Dominion Postal Clerks' association, the merger being consummated symbolically when postal clerks for the first time walked in the annual labour day parade. Since the jurisdiction over postal clerks was granted to the D.P.C.A., the T.L.C. broke off its negotiations with the Amalgamated. At its annual convention of 1921 the A.P.W. adopted a new constitution, claimed jurisdiction over all federal government employees, and changed its name to the Amalgamated Civil Servants of Canada. The new union thereby became a rival of the Civil Service Federation, although its membership remained composed in most cases of postal workers.

Through the pages of its organ, The Postal Journal, the D.P.C.A. was quick to assure its readers that affiliation with labour was by no means a radical move and did not mean that civil servants were progressing toward anarchy and rebellion. On the contrary, the Trades and Labor congress itself was "clearly anti-bolshevist". Unions were formed for "a fair day's wage for an honest day's work, the best obtainable working conditions, and the betterment in health and success of both employer and employee." The adoption of the theme of employee-employer co-operation was predictable in the civil service where enterprises were not openly operated for private profit but supposedly for the benefit of the nation as a whole.

The acceptance of a conservative 'business' unionism by civil service organizations was related to both their 'middle class' position and the service ethic. They tended to perceive the relationship between capital and labour in similar 'national terms' -- that the only way for both to love in comfort and safety was to travel the path of the "brotherhood of Capital and Labor, united for the Commonwealth." It would have been highly unrealistic for civil servants as a whole to identify themselves with capital, but while one segment of the clerical workers began to argue in favour of affiliation with labour, the conservative response to this view was to maintain that in a certain respect civil servants were 'classless', or rather, were a class unto themselves. Ultimately this latter view was to win out, but not before a pro-union faction had arisen within the inside service at Ottawa to challenge the Civil Service Federation.

V The Question of Affiliating with Organized Labour
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Besides the early Dominion-wide organizations in the Post Office Department, the initial impetus for other civil servants to organize came in Ottawa where the greatest number of government employees was concentrated. In 1903 a committee of Ottawa civil servants, believing there was a need for a service-wide mouthpiece and a means of communication between the various classes and branches, established a journal known as The Civilian. Four years later, in 1907, an association of all classes of the 'inside service' as the civil service in the Capital was called was formed in Ottawa. A Royal Commission had been appointed to inquire into matters pertaining to the civil service and the C.S.A.O. was created to enable the civil servants an opportunity to discuss issues collectively and present a unified viewpoint to the commission.

During the next eighteen months the civil Service Association of Ottawa C.S.A.O. found that its development outside of the region of the capital was extremely slow but that, in the meantime, a number of scattered organizations had developed independently. It appeared that the only feasible means of joining all federal employees into one organization was on the 'federation' principle in which each association would retain its autonomy but unite to form common purposes. The C.S.A.O. subsequently limited itself to organizing classes of the inside service and put out a call for a convention of civil service associations to be held in April, 1909. At this convention the Civil Service Federation of Canada (C.S.F.) was formed, with the C.S.A.O. as its largest and most prominent member.

Although it claimed complete independence in editorial policy, The Civilian described itself in 1916 as "in full accord with the broad principles adopted by the Civil Service Federation and its constituent bodies", and in 1917 became the official organ of the C.S.F., a status it retained until July, 1920. It was within these three years that, with The Civilian as a focus, a concerted effort was made to affiliate civil servants with the T.L.C.

The question of affiliation had originated outside of Canada, and some civil servants in Britain, the United States and Australia had already joined the central trade unions bodies. In Britain the major debate surrounded the desirability of affiliation with the Labour Party, and the formation of the Independent Labour Party in Canada made this debate pertinent to Canadian civil servants. In the United States the A.F.L. granted a charter to the National Federation of Federal Employees (N.F.F.E.) which claimed jurisdiction over all employees of the U.S. government with the exception of those in the post office and those eligible for membership in other craft unions. The objects of the Federation were "to advance the social and economic welfare and education of the employees" and "to aid in the perfection of systems that will make for greater efficiency in the various Services." The methods to achieve these aims were limited to petitioning Congress, fostering public sentiment, co-operating with government officials, attempting to
secure legislation, and utilizing other means deemed legitimate, "provided that under no circumstances shall this federation engage in or support strikes against the United States Government." Frank Grierson, a prominent member of the C.S.F. executive, was in correspondence with the President of the N.F.F.E. and, in his letters, Grierson's pro-labour orientation was apparently quite evident.

No suggestion seems to have been entertained that the C.S.F. should merge with the N.F.F.E. At its 1902 (Berlin) conference, the T.L.C. took the position that where an international union exists, no national union would be recognized having an identical jurisdiction, and it is not clear why the C.S.F. was exempt from this provision since it may have been seen as a 'national' union in competition with an 'international'. While the National Federation, in fact, had two Canadian locals chartered in 1917, it failed to expand. It is unclear however, the extent to which it actively attempted to organize in Canada, and if it did, whether its lack of success was caused by anti-labour feelings or anti-American feelings on the part of the Canadian civil service. The ideology of 'public service' and the devotion to Parliament prevented civil servants from joining the union, which might have created a conflict of interest between their perception of their duty and possible demands by foreign leaders.

Along with the rapid growth in membership of the Civil Service Federation - between 1917 and 1919 it tripled in size -- the pro-union sentiment of The Civilian, of which Frank Grierson was the business manager, evolved from a more or less objective presentation of the pro-union arguments without taking a definite stand, to advocating that the C.S.F. affiliate with labour, and eventually to a concerted effort to bring this about first within, and later outside, the Federation.

Early in 1918 The Civilian expressed the view that civil servants should refrain from affiliation with labour until the new Civil Service Act had been given a fair trial. Nevertheless civil servants should become familiar with the labour movement so that they would be able to understand "the cause of the impending social upheaval in many countries which will be a preliminary skirmish to the Battle of all battles, in which the tyranny of the Monarch of all monarchs -- King Capital -- will be banished forever."

While one segment advocated affiliation with labour and claimed that civil servants were 'workers', the ideology of 'public service' promoted by the government helped shape the consciousness of many civil servants that they were in a position quite distinct from other working people. In a letter to The Civilian, A. C. Campbell, a prominent member of the Civil Service Association, argued in favour of civil servants organizing. He also favoured private employees having the right to strike, since it was simply the opposition of two private parties from which the public as a whole stood to gain. He placed civil servants, however, in a separate category:

“I consider myself a servant of all of the people of Canada, and am proud of that position. I
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will not ally myself with any section of the people in opposition to any other. Therefore I
will not join the farmers, the workers, the traders, the manufacturers or any other class, nor
will I be a member of any association that allies itself with any class. I do not see any way
by which a civil servant can serve two masters, the public and a section of the public, and
whole-hearted devotion to my august master, the public, is both my duty and my
pleasure”.
Campbell concluded that "our interest lies in glorifying our work by improving its quality
[rather] than in asserting our rights by force of numbers and the strike."109

The thrust of this argument was to place the civil servant in a single class position by
virtue of government employment, and to advocate the necessity for civil servants to unite
as one body. This would lead to "the development of a class consciousness which shall
make us loyal to one another and devoted to the interest of the public with whose
commission we are honoured."110 This view had a dual effect: while erecting a wall between
government employees and other workers, it expressed at the same time the unity of class
positions within the civil service.

In a letter written to Lawrence Pickup of the Postal Clerk’s Association, a “trade
unionist” argued that the greatest problem remains the "incessant and inevitable
antagonism between Capital and Labour as at present conditioned." This was defined
broadly to include civil servants by making the essential connection between private and
public workers not the question of ownership but rather the subjugation of employment to
a "capitalistic regime". In fact the two kinds of employment were becoming increasingly
similar not only with the adoption by the government departments of management
practices pioneered in the private sector, but in the separation of ownership and control in
the capitalist system. And if the private company was faced with the difficulty of making a
profit, the government department was charged with the necessity of working within a
more or less confined budget -- a budget that declined in periods of economic difficulty in
the pre-Keynesian period.

While the “trade unionist” argued that "the fact of government employment will
present some problems not arising out of private employ"112 he was speaking more of the
objective difficulties such as legal questions rather than the subjective question of
identification. The two are closely linked, however, since the justification used by the
government to make government employees a separate category was the indispensable
services they rendered to the public and this exceptionalism was reinforced by the ideology
of the public employee that 'service' was of utmost importance and duty was to the 'people'
as a whole, a duty that could best fulfilled by fully obeying the government.

While the pro-labour segment within the civil service did not attempt to attack the
institutions of the government, they de-legitimized the policies and members of the
government and argued for a traditional conception of the 'square deal'. Only those with
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social connections "or who may have a friend in the capitalistic class may get a hearing from officialdom. But the under-dog, the under-paid, the man without pull, has no court of appeal, and must suffer the penalty of his penury or lack of Norman blood."113 Such assertions, of course, contained two distinct elements: they expressed the actual view of some employees, and they expressed the rhetoric at attempting to get more out of the present system. The Civilian notes that the British civil servants were "driven to desperation to find some means to combat the tyranny of capital and power in parliamentary hands" and consequently became more closely identified with the Labour Party. While not counselling this action at the time, the affiliation of the C.S.F. with labour was presented as the best alternative.114 Over time, however, The Civilian came closer to advocating support for the Labour Party in Canada, and the D.P.C.A. was particularly interested in the party which was seen as a workers' party seeking social justice. The concept "workers' was interpreted widely to include professionals and artisans -- all who were dependent on their own exertions for a livelihood.115

The Postal Clerks' Association adopted the view that the Great War was fought for greater democracy and to spur on the evolution of human ideals, and promoted the wider interpretation of the meaning of 'worker':

"Is it not logical to assume . . . that the power to reconstruct society, economically, socially, and politically will be invested in democracy itself -- the majority of the people. The majority of the people are workers: artisans, professional men, and the 'knights' of the pen. Only by the unification of their efforts and the election of men of their own class to the halls of legislation will the interests of the people be protected and advanced. We are not aware that there is a fundamental difference between the average wage earner and the civil servant."

The article concluded by charging that only an act of moral cowardice would prevent civil servants from joining their fellow workers in the march to freedom.116

The Civilian adopted an identical view, arguing that the "man who sits at a desk is as much a labour man as the man in overalls", and intimating that the unity of all workers would result in the election of a labour prime minister.117 Individual civil servants took positions which argued this view -- a self-styled “progressive” argued that civil servants, like cigar makers, engine drivers and carpenters, were equally wage-earners, "daily toilers for bread".118

Civil Service Associations were condemned for lacking the strength to even enforce closed shop rules, and the success of the 1918 strike was attributed to the affiliation of the letter carriers to the T.L.C.. One commentary suggested that the militancy had its origin in the connection between the letter carriers and the A.F.L., led by "old Sam Gompers, cigarmaker, whose part in the smashing of Prussianism in both Europe and America is second to that of no other man." While civil servants might not have lived up to his "great
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leadership, . . . to be in even remote touch with Gompers is worth while.”119

The reforms of the government services were designed to establish it on a 'business basis' which was opposed to patronage, making public employment objectively more similar to private employment. According to the popular image, the connection with labour would improve the “hand” that the civil servants held when they “sit in’ the game with the Government and play at modern business”. The expectation was that affiliation would usher in an era of peaceful and just settlements. In an idealized conception of the future of personnel relations in the government service, it was predicted that it would one day be written in the school histories that when "organized labour said 'brothers' to the civil servants, little Canadian czars abdicated and reasonable men stepped in and settled the trouble.”120

In an effort to legitimate the campaign to affiliate the C.S.F. with labour, The Civilian informed its readers that, in Britain, the labour movement was broadening its membership by taking in doctors, engineers, teachers, lawyers and authors. Even the clergy was reported to be interested in the Labour Party. In fact, the labour movement "even includes the capitalist as long as he is a producer and human.”121

As The Civilian became increasingly identified both with affiliation with the T.L.C. as well as with the idea of a Labour Party in opposition to the current government, it came under some abuse in the daily press. The Montreal Star, for example, made reference to an edition of the journal claiming that it "consists of an arraignment of Canada's system of government which might have come from the pen of Lenine or Trotsky", and yet was sent freely through the mail. In its rejoinder, The Civilian explained that, on the contrary, the journal paid postage; no reference was made to the other criticisms.122

In the May, 1919 edition of The Civilian, an article entitled "Labour in the New Day" was partially reprinted from the London Observer at the behest of Alex McMordie. Taking the position that "the traditional ethics of property, profit and employment, are no longer tolerable to the moral sense, and . . . a new conception altogether is required of their place and function in the community", the article attacked the employing class for failing to develop any social philosophy of its own. Businessmen may have been free of restraint before the war, but these conditions had vanished, and the condemnation of these practices "has spread rapidly from the wage-earners to the ranks of the professions, and the general middle class attitude to these questions has been most remarkably transformed.”123

According to the presentation of the case in The Civilian, the new economic system would involve in practice the "mutual forbearance on the part of Capital and Labour", a mutual "good-will" which must, however, be based on increasing production. The decline in production was blamed on the "hopeless and embittering" condition in which workers find themselves. The solution, then, was to curtail capital in the interest of reviving the moral spirit and developing social justice, in a process which would ultimately lead to
assurance of a high living standard and the end of class warfare. Labour must in future share as an equal partner, for in "proportion as it is admitted to knowledge it will acquire responsibility, and as fast as its rewards become assured and substantial it will advance in zeal." The result would be unity of "national heart and effort". In one edition of The Civilian a cartoon composed of two panels showed in one an office worker who proclaims: "I found out that they [the factory workers] were fine fellows" In the second panel a factory worker comments: "The only trouble was we did not understand each other." The Civilian called for "a society with equal opportunity for all and special privilege to none", although it never concretized how this was to be brought about since the two were to some degree logically contradictory: equal opportunity meant equal chance to strive for scarce rewards and positions of privilege rather than abolishing privilege. The essential point, however, was the adoption of the petit bourgeois and "middle class" demand for equal opportunity, which became increasingly vocal as monopoly spread.

The orientation of the civil servants who supported affiliation to the T.L.C. was very pragmatic in nature, and the main argument in favour of the move was that it would strengthen their "hand" when dealing with their employer. The Civilian, however, expressed the view of only one segment of the service, and opposition to affiliation came from within the C.S.A.O. as well as from the government. The debate on the question came to a head during the 1919 and 1920 conventions of the Civil Service Federation.

VI The C.S.F. and the Debate on Affiliation, 1919-1920

Prior to the 1919 convention, the executive of the C.S.F. committed the Federation to a policy of affiliation with labour. In January of that year the F.A.L.C. was accepted as a member of the C.S.F., as was the mechanical staff of the Printing Bureau thereby increasing the "proletarian" content of the C.S.F. and presumably its pro-union sentiment. Until that time the Constitution had provided for the exclusion from membership of any Civil Service organizations which were affiliated with labour bodies. The admission of the unions occurred at a time when the Constitution was being revised, and the letter carriers and printing workers were represented at the 1919 convention.

During the annual meeting, held in March 1919, the question of affiliation with labour was prominently on the agenda. The Committee on Affiliation recommended that the Federation affiliate with the T.L.C., and while the executive adopted this position, to become official it had to be endorsed by the delegates. The Civil Service Association was one of the principal opponents of labour affiliation and took the position that the very nature of the Federation, composed as it was of independent associations, precluded the body as a whole from affiliation.

In the debate which followed the motion to affiliate, it became clear that if such a compulsory clause were adopted at least two of the member associations -- the C.S.A.O. and the Customs Officers' Association -- would withdraw from the Federation. J. C.
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O'Connor, the President of the Civil Service Association, played a prominent role in presenting a compromise resolution which provided for individual associations to affiliate, or not affiliate, with labour as they chose, and to refuse affiliation with the C.S.F. to any organization which had not complied with the constitution by having, for example, an explicit 'right to strike' clause. This latter provision may have been designed to prevent other groups of labourers who were government employees from joining the Federation; that is, it could be interpreted as a move to retain the primarily 'middle class' character of the C.S.F. as a hedge against affiliation. The third part of the resolution set up a standing committee to investigate the question of affiliation for the next convention. This was to cover similar territory to the Committee of Affiliation, but its terms were widened to include other bodies, such as provincial and municipal civil servants. This resolution as a whole passed by a substantial 274 to 32 margin. Despite the near unanimity, however, according to the Civil Service News, steps had to be taken to "exclude a well known Civil Servant from the executive of the Federation with the result that the Dominion Postal clerks withdrew from the Federation."132

On a second motion it was decided that local referenda would be taken on the question of affiliation with labour prior to the next convention. At the August, 1919 meeting a strong sentiment favoured affiliation and the majority voted to have the issue raised in the spring 1920 convention.133

As preparations advanced for this decisive meeting, some steps were taken by both sides in preparation. The Finance Department disenfranchised an Association which had been formed by the Departmental employees. The C.S.F. Executive protested against this discrimination, appealed for the right to organize, and alleged that the government had an unfavourable attitude to unionism. Frank Grierson, who had been elected president of the Federation, applied for and received a six months leave of absence with a view to leaving the service, and was appointed C.S.F. general organizer for Canada. To ensure that all branches complied with the 1919 decision, instructions were sent to all presidents in December 1919 to take all necessary steps to assure that the referenda were taken.136

The 1920 convention, however, witnessed the defeat of the movement to affiliate the C.S.F. with labour. The pro-union segment subsequently charged that the C.S.A.O. and Customs' Association had 'stacked' the meeting, with the bulk of the delegate votes coming from the former organization. The Civil Service Association was charged with abandoning the principle of proportional representation by the strength of their delegation, for which they had not paid the necessary per-capita tax to the Federation. The C.S.A.O., when pressed, argued that their failure to pay the tax, which must have hampered the activities of the Executive to some extent, was caused by the heavy debt incurred in their work on behalf of civil servants to secure bonus rights and superannuation. They had decided not to collect the tax since "it was deemed inexpedient to do so on account of the uncalled for
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attacks made about that time through the columns of The Civilian." The Executive allowed all representatives voting rights, perhaps because of their belief that they could carry the vote in any case. It seems clear that both the advocates and opponents of affiliation engaged in all manner of acts to achieve their aim.

At the 1920 convention, following the defeat of the motion to affiliate, Grierson resigned as the president of the C.S.F. to be replaced by the President of the C.S.A.O., J. C. O'Connor. Other prominent Association members who also became members of the federation executive were T. R. L. MacInnes and J. H. Ryan.

With control of the Federation resting with the anti-labour group, a rupture occurred in the Civil Service Association between two groups, designated by The Civilian as 'progressives' and 'conservatives'. On July 20, 1920, the Trades and Labor Congress chartered Federal Union No. 66, the Associated Federal Employees of Ottawa (A.F.E.O.) which, at its inception, had 78 members. The Civilian, of which Grierson, who was closely identified with the new union, was sole proprietor and Business Manager, was still the official organ of the C.S.F.. Consequently the Federation corresponded with Grierson to negotiate taking over ownership, but it proved impossible to separate Grierson's private from business debts. Since he insisted that a condition of sale would be his retention for a period of a year as Business Manager, the C.S.F. was forced to abandon the journal. In August, 1920, the first edition of the Civil Service News appeared as the official organ of both the C.S.A.O. and the C.S.F., a status it retained until 1928 when the Federation began to publish its own journal, the Civil Service Review. According to the News, Grierson had threatened that if the C.S.F. did not agree to his terms over the sale of The Civilian, he would break up the Federation and start a new organization.

In the August edition of The Civilian, the creation of Federal Union No. 66 was proclaimed as a fait accompli. The result was the intensification of the agitation for a referendum of the entire inside service on affiliation. A vote, sponsored by the Civil Service Association, which advised the employees to vote against affiliation, was held on October 30, and resulted in a 3525-2517 margin in favour of affiliating with labour. The Civilian reprinted the results of the vote by department. Some of the largest majorities in favour of joining the T.L.C. came from Customs, Finance, Labour, Agriculture, the Naval Service, Printing Bureau Clerks, Public Works, Canals and Railways, Board of Pension Commissioners and the Post Office -- many of these civil servants being in greater contact with other workers. Some of the majorities against affiliation came from the Department of the Marine, the Militia, the Secretary of State and House of Commons Staff, some of which were in close 'official' contact in Ottawa. Tom Moore, of the T.L.C., advised the civil servants that if they wanted affiliation the procedure to follow was to join the new Federal Union.

According to Moore, the Associated Federal Employees (A.F.E.O.) was not the first
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group of clerical workers to affiliate with the T.L.C.. In addition, he cited the Insurance
Clerks of Montreal, the Provincial Civil Servants of B.C., and two or three branches of the
Civil Service of Alberta and Saskatchewan.148 In an editorial entitled "Enter the Clericals"
the Canadian Labor Press, official journal of the Ottawa Trades and Labor council, argued
that:
“the old idea of the clerical workers being in a different category from those actually
employed at the machine is dispelled. A full realization of same is best reached by the
close association which the trade union movement affords, bringing home to the entrants
that the same clay is the make-up of the different branches entering into our industrial life,
whether the pen or the pick be the most of our contribution of service.”149

According to Moore, the civil servants who refused to join the new union were attempting
to preserve their dignity at the expense of their bread and butter.150 In its weekly column in
the Canadian Labour Press, the A.F.E.O. claimed that civil servants had been blind to their
real position and had assumed a favoured superiority and security when in fact living and
working conditions had declined. The article asked rhetorically whether there were still
those in the service who considered themselves 'gentlemen' and held to the obsolete view
that they had "by force of circumstances . . . been compelled to 'accept a government
position' carrying with it a certain 'honorarium' but separated by a gulf both wide and deep
from 'earning a living' or accepting 'wages' and looking with disdain upon the humble
worker".151

It had been the policy of those, whose interest it was to keep the service divided, to
attack at the weakest point. The weak link in the consciousness of the civil servant was "a
half conscious snobbery". The opponents of unionization had "deliberately harped upon
the 'dignity', the 'respectability' of a government official's occupation, in order to induce
him to discard those opportunities for amelioration of living conditions which all other
organized sections of the workers of the country enjoy." The solution to sharing up the
'weak link' was to eliminate the attitude of superiority which no longer had a solid material
basis.152

In November, 1920, a mass meeting was held at which time Moore and Officials of
Federal Union No. 66 spoke according to Frank Jammes, the first president of the A.F.E.O.:
“There was a time when the civil servant considered himself a being apart from everything,
that he lived in a rarefied atmosphere of officialdom, he had plenty of money and it was
sacrilege to even suggest that he join an organization. These days, however, were passed,
the general public was beginning to regard the civil servant as a fellow worker, and
poorly-paid fellow worker at that. . . . [W]hen civil servants affiliated with labor, they
proclaimed their identity with an army of almost 300,000 workers within the Dominion.
They secured for themselves the moral support of these men, not as a class apart, as a white
collar crowd, but as brothers in arms . . . .” 153

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At first the C.S.A.O. carried on sharp polemics with what they called the new "onion" and engaged in some amount of red-baiting. The question of the ultimate success of the A.F.E.O., however, revolved principally around the success that the new organization would achieve in practice relative to the Civil Service Association. If civil servants were willing to abandon their claims to a superior status and join the trade union movement, they required some material benefits to make the 'sacrifice' worthwhile. Both Moore and the local leadership of Federal Union No. 66 in Ottawa concentrated on the bread and butter issues. Unionism was presented as the means of achieving the 'fair wage', the only way to "get into the game of Adequate Remuneration to offset Inflated Cost". Only through affiliation would civil servants be able to curtail the 'dictatorship' of those 'in high places'.

The question was whether the new union was able to deliver on its promises. It counted heavily on the moral support of the workers, but actually did not offer a real alternative to the C.S.A.O.. The aim of the A.F.E.O. was to promote "mutual sympathy, between the employees of the Canadian Government and their employers, resulting in greater contentment and loyalty among the former, and consequently achieving the maximum of efficiency in the public service." The means adopted by the organization differed only in quantity from those open to the C.S.A.O. with the exception of the clout which the T.L.C. was expected to have on the government. it is not clear whether the civil servants had an exaggerated sense of the power of the labour movement to accomplish its aims, a consciousness still prevalent in the middle class. The C.S.A.O. was quick to point out that the N.F.F.E. in the United States was connected to labour, but that the C.S.F. had achieved benefits "many times in excess of those achieved by the National Federation . . . "

The extent of labour support was first tested in the 1920 T.L.C. convention. Resolutions proposed by the A.F.E.O. were not accepted by the Resolutions Committee in their proposed form, the resolution on superannuation being dropped, and the one requesting a salary increase whittled down to 25 percent. The T.L.C. was opposed to private pension schemes because they could be lost to individuals through strike action. The T.L.C. platform requested superannuation by the state for all workers. The C.S.A.O. argued that the union had sold out the interests of the civil servants. Labour did not want to see high salaries in the civil service because it had "advanced itself until even the unskilled worker is better off than the once comparatively opulent civil servant. Labour likes the advantages of this new relationship and does not wish the Civil Service to be restored to its old relative position." At that point the Civil Service Association began to mount its own pressure and educational campaign for higher salaries, demanding publicly an increase of 80 percent.

Other than civil servants, the Canadian tax payers were considered to be part of one
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of two classes. Some, such as manufacturers, farmers and shop-keepers, followed independent pursuits, and had been able to raise prices sufficiently to compensate for inflation. The other class was composed of wage earners. They had received increased compensation in step with the cost of living. The civil servants suffered the most, and therefore taxes could be raised to meet the just demands of the C.S.A.O..162

The C.S.A.O. was able to argue that it could advance the interests of the civil servants best because it was not being dictated to by the T.L.C. or anyone else. The affiliation with labour was not a case of the merging of equals with identical interests; on the contrary the interests of the workers, who in fact paid civil service salaries through taxation, were opposed to those of public servants. In its own constitution, which expressed the extent of the trade union consciousness of the civil servants and their class position, the A.F.E.O. abdicated the right to strike. According to the Civil Service Association this was the ultimate source of a union’s strength and without it Federal Union No. 66 was a "blank cartridge" that could offer labour nothing and would therefore get nothing in return.163

The C.S.A.O. itself had a no-strike clause in its constitution, but was unprepared to admit that, in principle, civil servants should not have the right to strike. They recognized the fact that "there does not yet exist in the Service, the morale and unity of spirit essential to a successful strike."164 In reply the A.F.E.O. agreed with the position taken by the Association, claiming that no technical reason prevented adoption of the tactic of the strike, but that the refusal of their organization to strike was based on their sense of their important function in community life.165

Opposition to the new union did not solely emanate from the rival association, for the government itself was opposed to the affiliation of its civil servants with labour. Following meetings of the C.S.A.O. held in public buildings, the Federal union made applications to various departments to hold similar meetings.166 The Secretary of State, under instructions from the Cabinet, notified the Deputy Ministers that public meetings could not be used by organizations which were connected with trade unions.167 Upon being pressed by Tom Moore, who argued that the regulations were discriminatory, Prime Minister Meighen replied that the C.S.A.O. had never been granted official permission and reiterated the view that public buildings could not be held for meetings.168 Besides this difficulty, the A.F.E.O. made some charges that the supervisors in government departments were attempting to intimidate some of the workers from joining the union.169

Over the first few months of its existence, Federal Union No. 66 grew rapidly, reaching a membership of 1,366 by November 15, 1920.170 The C.S.A.O. in the meantime reported a decline in membership. By January, however, rumours of defections from the union were circulating, and became substantiated in February when The Civilian admitted that "a very few", described as "the weaker of the followers", had indeed left the
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organization.171 Early in the new year (1921) the A.F.E.O. adopted a more conciliatory tone, proposing on February 10 that all civil service organizations should attempt to find some common ground and unite around a common platform, and expressing the belief that "underneath all these differences, our various organizations are working earnestly and sincerely with the betterment of the service as their main and ultimate object."172
While in the abstract we can talk about unionism being either progressive or non-progressive, in the concrete historical case the designation must be based on a comparison with what is possible. Even without analysing the nature of the T.L.C. it would be possible to suggest that a movement to affiliate civil servants with labour was progressive at the time, and in fact had to be accomplished against 'middle class' prejudices. To some extent the programme of the self-styled 'progressives' in the civil service actually went beyond a narrow conception of class collaboration and included a view of working class political change. The defeat of the movement for affiliation must not be seen as an indication of the true consciousness of civil servants overall – consciousness itself is developmental and ebbs and flows in relation to objective events. The reform movement peaked at one point and the later defeat of the progressives was related to the objective situation and their own limitations. What civil servants regard as 'right' varies over time and is determined by the contours of the historical setting.

Notes for Chapter Four

2 Hodgetts, Biography of an Institution, pp. 10-16.
4 The following passage, taken from a special edition of The Civilian, eulogises the work if the post man "who carries the world on his back":
In their daily work . . . the letter carriers are messengers . . . who convey to the homes of our peace-loving people those tidings of joy and sorrow which in all ages have been the inheritance of man. No more welcome face comes to the door than 'Posty's' . . . . His is a life of devotion to duty, which in rain or shine he conscientiously endeavours to perform. Few people take thought of the tireless continuity of the service he renders . . . .
He trudges along through the snow and the sleet,
With a pack that is heavy to bear,
The slush of the roadway has hampered his feet,
And the whiteness has powdered his hair;
But he stands by the gate with a smile on his face,
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And his whistle is cheery and gay;
Oh, people who live in a far-away place,
Thank God for the postman to-day!

5 Civil Service Review, Vol. XII, No. 2 (June 1939), pp. 73-74.
6 Logan, Trade Unions in Canada, p. 294.
16 Ibid., Vol. X, No. 26 (12 April, 1918), p. 549.
19 Public Archives of Canada, Department of Labor, File of Strikes and Lockouts in Canada, Vol. 299.
20 The Civilian, Vol XI, No. 8 (2 August, 1918), p. 188.
22 Winnipeg Free Press, 23 July, 1918.
23 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 1 August 1918.
24 Calgary Herald, 19 July, 1918.
25 The Globe (Toronto), 20 July, 1918.
27 Ibid., 23 July, 1918.
28 The Globe (Toronto), 22 July, 1918.
30 Winnipeg Free Press, 23 July, 1918.
31 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 1 August, 1918.
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32 Public Archives of Canada, Post office Department, Registry Files, Vol. 60.
33 Toronto World, 23 July, 1918.
34 Winnipeg Free Press, 22 July, 1918; July 20, 1918.
36 Ibid., 23 July, 1918.
37 The Civilian, Vol. XI, No. 8 (2 August, 1918), p. 188.
38 Amherst News, 23 July, 1918.
40 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 1 August, 1918; Montreal Gazette, 25 July, 1918.
41 Ottawa Journal Press, 25 July, 1919. According to the account in this paper, after
the settlement was announced to the assembled postal workers, "Mayor Church tossed his
hat in the air, and Postmaster Lemon . . . requested the men to sing the National Anthem.
They did this readily and with gusto, and then they cheered some more."
42 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 1 August, 1918; Public Archives of Canada, Post Office
Registry Files, Vol. 60.
43 Ibid., 1 August 1, 1918.
44 Montreal Gazette, 24 July, 1918.
46 Hamilton Herald, 27 July, 1918; Winnipeg Free Press, 29 July 1918.
47 Calgary Herald, 29 July, 1918.
48 Times Journal (Fort William), 30 July, 1918; Peterboro Review, 25 July, 1918;
Calgary Herald, 29 July, 1918.
49 Calgary Herald, 29 July, 1918.
51 Calgary Herald, 29 July, 1918.
52 Ibid.
53 Victoria Colonist, 30 July, 1918.
54 The Canadian annual Review of Public Affairs, (1918) p. 436. Victoria was one of
the few cities in which the strikers capitulated. It was reported in Victoria that on the 30th
"Practically all the postal clerks are back at work and with the extra help that Postmaster
Bishop has secured to fill the place of the strikers more expeditious work in getting out the
mail was done." Victoria Colonist, 30 July 1918.
56 Montreal Gazette, 30 July, 1918.
57 Winnipeg Free Press, 31 July, 1918.
58 Ibid.; Montreal Gazette, 1 August, 1918.
59 The Civilian, Vol. XI, No. 9 (August 1918).
60 Winnipeg Free Press, 1 August, 1918.
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65 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 1 August, 1918; Winnipeg Free Press, Aug. 1, 1918.

66 Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg, p. 69.

67 The Globe (Toronto), 23 July, 1918.

68 Calgary Herald, 23 July, 1918.


70 Ibid., 24 July, 1918.

71 Port Arthur Chronicle, 24 July, 1918.

72 Peterboro Review, 24 July, 1918.

73 The Globe (Toronto), 23 July, 1918.

74 Montreal Gazette, 25 July, 1918.

75 Hamilton Herald, 24 July, 1918.

76 The Globe (Toronto), 22 July, 1918.

77 Winnipeg Free Press, 20 July, 1918; Toronto World, 29 July, 1918.

78 Ibid., 20 July, 1918.

79 Winnipeg Free Press, 20 July, 1918; Toronto World, 29 July, 1918.


82 Quoted in Ibid.

83 The Globe (Toronto), 20 August, 1918.

84 Mail and Empire (Toronto), 21 August, 1918.

85 Ibid.


88 Ibid.

89 Labor Organization in Canada, 1918, pp. 87-88; T.L.C., Proceedings, 1920, p. 89.

90 T.L.C., Proceedings, 1920, p. 89.

91 Ibid. 1919, p. 38.


97 Ibid.

98 Two Years of War as Viewed from Ottawa, A Special Edition of 'The Civilian'
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P.A.C., Memorial of the Civil Service Association of Ottawa, Meighen Paters, Vol. 229.


See, for example The Civilian, Vol. X, No. 22 (15 February, 1918); Vol. XI, No. 10 (September 1918).


It would be interesting to enquire whether the N.F.F.E., or other American unions of federal employees, became fully international in other areas, particularly in south and Central America where U.S. Unions have been active. Such information would be necessary before we could conclude one way or the other whether the fact that federal employees were organized almost exclusively by 'national' unions reflects the independence of the Canadian state.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., Vol. XII No. 1 (December 1918), p. 31.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 2 (January, 1919), p. 57.

Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 3 (February 1919), p. 104.

Ibid., Vol. XII No. 5 (May 1919), p. 218.

Ibid.

Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 8, (July 1919), pp. 312-313.
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126 Ibid., Vol. XII, No. 2 (January 1919), p. 58.
127 Ibid., p. 57.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 15 November, 1919.
135 The Civilian, Vol XII, No. 8 (July 1919); Canadian Labor Press, 6 December, 1919.
138 The Civilian, Vol. XII, No. 8 (July 1919).
139 Ibid., Vol XIII, No. 9 (August 1920).
142 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 31 July, 1920.
150 Ibid., 14 August, 1920.
152 Ibid., 4 December, 1920.
154 Civil Service News, Vol. 1, No. 2 (21 August, 1920), p.5. In that issue of the News it was written: "It is reported that leading members of a certain Trade Union have given up shaving and have taken to wearing red neckties. There is nothing like thoroughness."
156 Ibid.
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162 Ibid., Vol. 1, Vo. 18 (24 February, 1921), p. 3.
163 Ibid., p. 4.
164 Ibid.
171 Ibid., Vol. XIV, No. 3 (February 1921), p. 86.
172 Ibid., Vol. XIV, No. 4 (March 1921), p. 123.