

Which Side (of the Border) Are You On?: Nationalism, Ideology, and the Hegemonic Struggle
of the Seattle and Winnipeg General Strikes of 1919

by

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B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2011

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This thesis analyzes the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes of 1919, and represents them as two analogous ideological struggles for national hegemony in the post-First World War period. It argues that a comparative analysis of the pro- and anti-strike press during these two strikes reveals that the “form” of nationalism enveloped the “content” of each group’s ideological foundations, conceptions of class, and conceptions of justice, and that this “content” – when extracted from its national “form” – reveals a shared sense of progressive vision among the two groups of strikers, and a shared sense of conservative vision among their opponents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the wake of the First World War, a wave of labour agitation, unprecedented in the history of either country, swept across Canada and the United States. The war had opened an opportunity for workers to assert their power in a new way by providing “specific sparks to light the flame of working-class struggle” at the same time that “underlying structural changes in capitalist organization” provided “the necessary fuel for this fire.”¹ The fragile “pact” which had persuaded workers, employers, and the nation to put aside differences and fight the war had collapsed, in part because of the revelation that profiteers had successfully pursued their own self-interest during the war at the expense of their fellow countrymen.² Strikes sprang up throughout both countries as labour-management relations became increasingly polarized, and, as Antonio Gramsci perceived at the time, “cracks opened up everywhere in the hegemonic apparatus” in nations around the world.³

While the labour revolt was a nationwide phenomenon in both Canada and the United States, a general strike lasting several days in Seattle, and, several months later, a similar six-week general strike in Winnipeg, surpassed the intensity and duration of labour agitation in other regions of each country. Both strikes emerged out of the unbridled inflation and the high cost of living during and after the war. In Seattle, the city’s shipbuilding unions went on strike in an effort to secure wage increases, and – when these were denied by Charles Piez of the Emergency Fleet Corporation – they were joined by most of the city’s workers in a sympathetic general strike. The strike lasted for five days, but came to an end when international union leaders and public sentiment compelled the strikers to return to work. In Winnipeg, the strike was similarly

¹ Gregory S. Kealey, “1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 15.

² Chad Reimer, “War, Nationhood and Working-Class Entitlement: The Counter-Hegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg Strike,” *Prairie Forum* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 223.

³ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 80.

centred on demands for increased wages but was also rooted in gaining employer recognition of the city's Metal Trades Council, which was created to represent the collective interests of all metal trades unions in the city. The strike lasted for several weeks and remained essentially non-violent until June 21, when a mass gathering of strikers was challenged and fired upon by the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Following this, the strike was officially called off on June 26.

During these two strikes, an unprecedented level of polarization developed between the strikers and their opponents; indeed, both strikes were even believed to be attempts at revolution by those who opposed them. Thus, one can look to both strikes as the clearest examples of when a struggle for postwar hegemony was made manifest through the discourses of those involved in both events. Whereas other scholars have analyzed the specific grievances and the processes of union organization which preceded these strikes, this project will focus on how these strikes represented comparable ideological struggles for hegemony between the strikers and their opponents. For the purposes of this analysis, "hegemony" will be defined – in Gramsci's formulation – as control over the "moral and intellectual leadership" of a nation, as well as control over the "spontaneous consent" of its citizens.⁴ In effect, hegemony refers to control over a nation's cultural life. If a particular group is hegemonic, it is able to present its own worldview as the cultural norm and the status quo of a given society.

On the one hand, both groups of strikers represented progressive counterhegemonic forces attempting to carve a space for themselves in postwar society. As Winnipeg strike leader William Ivens perceived at the time, the strike held the same importance for the nation's workers as the war had held for the nation.⁵ On the other hand, opponents of the strikes represented the formation of historic blocs which attempted to assert their visions of "a return to normal" on

⁴ Hoare and Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12; 57.

⁵ Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre (Queen's University), 1968), 167.

postwar society. In a Gramscian formulation, a historic bloc “departs significantly from notions of class embedded in the Marxist tradition,” and goes beyond notions of ownership and non-ownership in formulating how a group becomes cohesive.⁶ In other words, opponents of the strikes represented a “ruling class” in that they formed a de facto alliance of “powerful groups in search of an enduring basis for legitimate authority.”⁷ Thus, the strikers and their opponents represented two competing groups which struggled for hegemony using ideological formulations rooted in radically different conceptions of society, government, class, and justice.

This crisis of hegemony was the result of intensifying conflict during and after the First World War. While Canada and the United States had been propelled towards a sense of national purpose, the postwar crisis turned “nationhood” into an empty signifier, and competing groups struggled to use the flexible language of nationalism to promote their political agendas. In Canada, the struggle for postwar hegemony became a struggle over the content of “Canadianism” and took place with reference to the country’s British heritage, while in the United States a corresponding discursive battle was waged over the content of “Americanism.”

Effectively, these two strikes became competitions over what the “common sense” definitions of “Canadianism” and “Americanism” would signify in the postwar period. All parties involved in these two general strikes were guided in their attempts to broaden the appeal of their message by appropriating “the existing values and predispositions” of their target public.⁸ In this way, each side was both a consumer of existing cultural meanings and at the same time a producer of new meanings. As Sidney Tarrow explains, each group had to attempt to

⁶ T.J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities,” *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 571.

⁷ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 254.

⁸ Sidney Tarrow, “Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meaning Through Action,” *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 189.

relate the grammar of their cultures to the semantics of their struggles.⁹ Tarrow posits that the “major symbolic dilemma” for social movements is to mediate between inherited symbols that are familiar, but which may lead to passivity, and new ones that can be electrifying, but which may be too unfamiliar to lead to action, or in other words, how to give “consensual symbols... oppositional meanings.”¹⁰ As Gramsci would posit, this process does not involve “bringing consciousness to the working class from without,” as Lenin believed, “but of building on what already lies within it.”¹¹ To be effective in controlling the hegemony of the postwar period, each group could not project its ideological framework to the public in its pure form, but instead had to use existing cultural material and frame it in such a way as to advance its own vision of “Canadianism” or “Americanism” in the hope that it would resonate strongly with the public.

These competing discourses manifested themselves primarily through newspapers, and what could be called a “media war” erupted for hegemony over public opinion. As Benedict Anderson would predict, print culture played a highly important role in the establishment and maintenance of the “imagined community” of the nation at this time.¹² This is also compatible with Gramsci’s acknowledgement of the importance of “the so called organs of public opinion” for ensuring that a given hegemonic formulation is perceived as being based on the consent of the majority.¹³ Consequently, by examining the media battles of these two strikes, one can determine how those both for and against the strikes attempted to articulate a construction of nationhood based on certain predisposed ideological suppositions. Thus, this thesis will argue that a comparative analysis of the pro- and anti-strike press reveals that the “form” of

⁹ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 109.

¹⁰ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 107; 114.

¹¹ Michael Burawoy, “Cultural Domination: Gramsci Meets Bourdieu,” <http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Bourdieu/4.Gramsci.pdf> (Accessed May 5, 2013).

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹³ Hoare and Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 80.

nationalism enveloped the “content” of each group’s ideological foundations, conceptions of class, and conceptions of justice, and that this “content” – when extracted from its national “form” – reveals a shared sense of progressive and counterhegemonic vision among the two groups of strikers, and a shared sense of conservative vision among their opponents.

While the editorial voice of these newspapers did not necessarily represent the aggregate mentalities of all individual strikers and their opponents, a close reading of these papers can reveal the underlying ideological frameworks which structured the discourses of each group in their attempts to control the definition of “Canadianism” and “Americanism” in the public sphere. In the media war during the Seattle strike, the strikers relied on the official organ of the Seattle Central Labor Council, the *Seattle Union Record*, to disseminate their views to fellow workers and the public. A special *Strike Bulletin* informed both the strikers and the public of developments in the strike situation. Although the distribution of the *Strike Bulletin* was “fitful,” did not reach all strikers, and did not “impress the middle class, because it was not familiar to them,”¹⁴ the paper still provides useful evidence for eliciting the ideological framework of the Seattle strikers.

Opposed to the *Seattle Union Record* in this media war were the Seattle dailies – namely, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the *Seattle Star*, and the *Seattle Times*. Although these papers did not initially oppose the economic grievances of the strikers, their opinion quickly changed as the strike developed and as the city was increasingly inconvenienced by the strike. The distribution of these papers was sporadic, and they often had to be handed out at the printing plants during the strike; nevertheless, they showcase the worldview of the opponents of the strike in Seattle.

In Winnipeg, strike leaders used a daily *Strike Bulletin* of the *Western Labor News* to address the public. The *Western Labor News* was the organ of the Trades and Labor Council in

¹⁴ Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 140.

Winnipeg, and was edited by ex-Methodist preacher William Ivens.¹⁵ The *Strike Bulletin* was published throughout the six week strike until it was censored and published as *The Western Star* and *The Enlightener* by Fred Dixon for three days before the strike was defeated.

Opposed to the *Western Labor News* were the Winnipeg dailies, including the *Manitoba Free Press*, the *Winnipeg Tribune*, and the *Winnipeg Telegram*. Since these papers were shut down for part of the strike, “it is not to be expected that they would show much understanding of the objectives of the striking workers,” and “their reaction ranged from frank and vigorous opposition to the hysteria of *The Telegram*.”¹⁶ Most notoriously of all, however, was the *Winnipeg Citizen*, which emerged as the leading anti-strike paper as soon as the strike began. The *Winnipeg Citizen* was the mouthpiece of the Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, which represented the key force in bringing the Winnipeg general strike to an end. It was edited by Travers Sweatman and Fletcher Sparling, who were themselves executive members of the Citizens’ Committee.¹⁷ The *Winnipeg Citizen* was considered a “terrorist paper” in by the editors of the *Western Labor News*, who asserted that it delivered “an orgy of misrepresentation” to the public, as its immediate assertion that the general strike was an attempt at revolution and its red-baiting set it wholly in opposition to the strikers.¹⁸

The Winnipeg General Strike has been well-documented in Canadian historiography. However, as Chad Reimer has argued, “none of this literature has focused specifically upon the cultural and discursive struggle that occurred during the strike.”¹⁹ The historical debate surrounding the event has largely revolved around whether the strike was the beginning of an

¹⁵ David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), 66.

¹⁶ J.E. Rea, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 12.

¹⁷ Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens’ Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 69.

¹⁸ *Western Labor News*, “Opposition Sheet Sees Red,” May 21, 1919, 3; *Western Labor News*, “Calgary Convention and the Strike,” June 15, 1919, 1.

¹⁹ Reimer, “War, Nationhood, and Working-Class Entitlement,” 222.

attempt to overthrow the Canadian government by force, or whether it was merely an attempt by workers to ensure their survival in the postwar period, through their demands for a living wage and the right to collective bargaining. Most historical accounts have sided with the latter interpretation, beginning with D.C. Masters' *The Winnipeg General Strike*, and continuing through Kenneth McNaught's and David J. Bercuson's, *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919*, and David Jay Bercuson's, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike*.²⁰ Masters' book highlights the scale of western Canadian labour radicalism – specifically the importance of the Calgary convention of 1919 held to discuss the founding of the One Big Union – and its impact on ideological sentiment in Winnipeg. McNaught's and Bercuson's monograph broadens the context of the Winnipeg strike by investigating the development of labour radicalism in Winnipeg several years before the general strike occurred. Bercuson's own book highlights how radical solutions such as the general strike came to be perceived as increasingly necessary among the average Winnipeg worker. In addition, Norman Penner's, *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of The Winnipeg General Strike*, provides an edited account of the strike from the perspective of the strikers themselves.²¹

The Seattle General Strike, on the other hand, has received significantly less scholarly attention than its Canadian counterpart. The landmark monograph concerning the Seattle general strike remains Robert Friedheim's aptly named *The Seattle General Strike*.²² Friedheim's book also focuses on whether or not the strike represented an abortive attempt at a revolution. His conclusion is that it was not, but was instead the product of a number of situational factors which

²⁰ D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Kenneth McNaught and David J. Bercuson, *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919* (Don Mills: Longman Canada Limited, 1974); Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*.

²¹ Norman Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of The Winnipeg General Strike*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimar & Company, 1975).

²² Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*.

had reached a tipping point following the First World War (none of which would have caused the strike individually but which in combination made it possible). The same conclusion was asserted by the Seattle strikers themselves in an account produced by the History Committee of the General Strike Committee in the aftermath of the event.²³

Of greatest importance to the present analysis are the monographs and articles concerning the ideological foundations of those involved in these two strikes. In this regard, Chad Reimer's, "War, Nationhood and Working-Class Entitlement: The Counterhegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike," is foundational for developing an understanding of the Winnipeg strikers' ideological claim.²⁴ Reimer's article was the first to argue that the Winnipeg general strike represented a "counterhegemonic" challenge, and uses Gramscian theory to interpret the rhetoric of the strikers in postwar Canadian society. In doing so, the article provides a number of foundational points of departure for this thesis. Additionally, Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell's, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike*, is an insightful historical investigation into the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand, and presents a detailed analysis of the ideological foundations of that group.²⁵

Victoria Johnson's book, *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take To Cook One Meal?: The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes*, provides a sociological breakdown of the discursive threads that made up the Seattle strikers' ideological content.²⁶ Johnson's book

²³ History Committee of the General Strike Committee, *The Seattle General Strike: An account of what happened in Seattle, and especially in the Seattle Labor Movement during the General Strike, February 6 to 11, 1919* (Seattle: Root and Branch, 1919).

²⁴ Reimer, "War, Nationhood, and Working-Class Entitlement."

²⁵ Kramer and Mitchell, *When the State Trembled*.

²⁶ Victoria Johnson, *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take To Cook One Meal?: The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

analyzes the influence of traditionally American intellectual sources in the thought of the Seattle labour movement, including the ideas of artisan republicanism and the “self-governing workshop” as first articulated by Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine and revived in the nineteenth century by the Knights of Labor. Thus, her book is indispensable in understanding the foundations of the Seattle strikers’ postwar vision.

In the present analysis, Chapter 2 will explicitly analyze how nationalistic language was used to preface the ideologies of each group during each of the strikes, and how the strikers and their opponents used their respective national traditions to legitimate their hegemonic formulations. Chapter 3 will outline the foundational themes of the ideological structure of each group. Chapter 4 will concentrate on a particular component of these ideological structures by analyzing in detail the conceptions of class held by the strikers and their opponents. Finally, Chapter 5 will analyze the conceptions of justice held in common between the strikers on both sides of the border and that shared by their opponents. Again, this thesis aims to reveal that the “form” of nationalism enveloped the “content” of each group’s ideological foundations, conceptions of class, and conceptions of justice, and that this “content” – when extracted from its national “form” – reveals a shared sense of progressive and counterhegemonic vision among the two groups of strikers, and a shared sense of conservative vision among their opponents.

Chapter 2: Nationalism as Form

In 1919, the language surrounding the concepts of “Americanism” and “Canadianism” was both “flexible and dominant.”¹ It represented an important element of the “common sense” of the postwar period, and, understood in this way, it became the “starting point of political practice, and renovated... its product.”² In other words, although a discourse centred on nationalism carried powerful rhetorical value and became an obvious choice for any group struggling to gain influence in the postwar period, such a discourse remained ambiguous as to what it truly signified. Thus, establishing a definitive and hegemonic understanding of nationalism became a key site of struggle for politically active groups at this time.

During the two general strikes, appeals to the American and British-Canadian traditions structured the hegemonic formulations of each group in Seattle and Winnipeg, respectively. This chapter looks at how these nationalistic appeals provided the “form” used to legitimize each group’s ideological “content,” and also why the contexts of Seattle and Winnipeg provided the ideological space for conflicting discourses of nationalism to emerge.

I. Americanism and the Intellectual Context of the Seattle Strikers

In Seattle, as in much of the United States in the postwar period, “an unprecedented national emphasis on pledging loyalty to American institutions, on defining what it meant to be an American, and on elaborating an American way of life” took hold, and “forced virtually every group seriously interested in political power... to couch their programs in the language of Americanism.”³ The strikers in Seattle were consciously aware that they were doing battle on this cultural level. One *Seattle Union Record* editorial, reflecting an attempt to show that the

¹ Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

² Richard Johnson, “Posthegemony? I Don’t Think So,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 3 (May 2007): 101.

³ Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, 8.

definition of what it meant to be an “American” was in a flexible state and could be used to advance progressive causes, explained: “The Stars and Stripes is our flag, but it waves over lots of things that we are ashamed of and want to see changed. Our allegiance is to the flag and not to every skunk and stinking cause that seeks cover by waving it.”⁴ The paper argued that “love of country means more than mere shouting for victory, cheering heroes and saluting the flag,” and “it means work for the good of the country, for the peace and prosperity of the people and for the maintenance of order.”⁵ The Seattle strikers applied the form of this progressive interpretation of Americanism to their rhetoric throughout the strike, and understanding this is essential to understanding the intellectual context of the workers in that city.

Some concrete examples of this progressive interpretation of Americanism stand out as particularly significant. For example, from a survey of the *Seattle Union Record*, it is apparent that many strikers believed their country should be a leader on the world stage. An editorial entitled “The War is Won -- Don’t Lose the Peace” suggested that the United States needed to play a stronger humanitarian role through the League of Nations in order to make up for its “late entry” into the war. It argued: “Our chance to show how seriously we were at war comes now. To build a righteous League of Nations, to back that League through its early struggles is as hard a job as to hold Verdun or win the battle of the Marne,” and that “the big fight for democracy and permanent peace is not won yet.” The editorial further explained:

It isn’t like Americans not to be in at the beginning of things. The war is over, [and] something bigger than the war is happening, something more American.... [The war] had to be done, but there is a bigger job on now, a bigger chance for America to show what America can do. It is harder to build than to blast. America has built one League of Nations already, the United States of America, and it is best fitted to help draw the plans and start the building of a United States of the World.... America did not have to spend as much for blasting, and many, many fewer of her men were killed in the work of blasting. It isn’t our custom to do less than the other fellow. The things we are proud of in

⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 31, 1919, 8.

⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “Stability,” January 21, 1919, 6.

American history are the times when we have given a little more, been a little more generous than the next fellow. We are proud that we got out of Cuba as no other country in the world would have done. We are proud that we returned the Boxer Indemnity, and were the only one of the five great powers to do so.⁶

With this, the *Seattle Union Record* established its confidence in a progressive sense of American purpose that would have resonated with many of the Seattle strikers. Interpreted in this light, the general strike could be represented as part of an international movement of strikes and worker agitation among countries and peoples advancing towards a new era (with America leading the way). Consequently, the Seattle strikers could perceive and represent themselves as being at the forefront of this movement by participating in the general strike.

Despite the existence of widespread anti-Asian sentiment amongst workers throughout the Pacific Northwest, the *Seattle Union Record* argued that America should also be a beacon of tolerance for immigrants, arguing: “We have yet to discover the enormous human values that are available to our national life through our foreign population groups.” The paper contended that as a nation “we must hold fast to what has been true of America in the past – namely, ‘tolerance in respect to all those matters such as race, language, religion, which woven together make up the curious complex that we call a man’s nationality.’” In this respect, the *Seattle Union Record* believed “America [was] far beyond Europe.”⁷ American exceptionalism, as the strikers’ understood it, envisaged a tolerant and progressive future for the country.

While the strikers saw America as an international trendsetter, Seattle labour also perceived itself as holding a unique position within the United States in terms of its ideological outlook, and a strong regional political culture certainly influenced the very idea of a general strike. The Seattle Central Labor Council (SCLC) perceived its own position within the American labour movement as distinct; for example, the *Seattle Union Record* reported: “Seattle

⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, “The War is Won – Don’t Lose the Peace,” February 13, 1919, 8.

⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, “Americanization,” January 24, 1919, 8.

is on the map – of labor. . . . The northwest is the stronghold of the class-conscious labor movement, and the place where big constructive ideas come from.”⁸ Unsurprisingly, this sense of distinction provided the atmosphere necessary for engendering the strikers’ progressive formulation of Americanism.

The SCLC was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was composed of generally conservative-leaning unions of skilled craftsmen. Affiliation with the AFL afforded a certain degree of legitimacy to the strikers’ nationalistic rhetoric. Recognizing the close relationship which had been established between the state and the AFL during the war, the *Seattle Union Record* argued that the SCLC’s relationship with the AFL was a guarantee that Seattle workers were solid Americans. The principles of the AFL were alleged to be firmly rooted in American political ideals, and its constitution was considered to have been “constructed entirely upon the same principles as that of our great government, the United States.”⁹ Thus, the strikers were able to use their membership in the AFL, an ostensibly “American” institution, to bolster the legitimacy of their rhetoric.

In reality, however, the SCLC was not as aligned with the principles of the AFL as it insinuated. Ironically, the national AFL played an instrumental role in bringing the general strike to an end by threatening to revoke the charters of all unions involved in the walkout if it continued. In general, the culture of Seattle organized labour exhibited an “unusually strong ethos of rank-and-file control within the unions,” which pushed them farther away from the centralized authority of the AFL.¹⁰ This greatly influenced the decision to begin the general strike. As Victoria Johnson argues, “the ethos of rank-and-file control had such moral authority

⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Seattle Is On The Map,” January 29, 1919, 4.

⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Says Labor Is Against Bolshevism,” February 15, 1919, 3.

¹⁰ Victoria Johnson, *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take To Cook One Meal?: The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 45.

in Seattle that SCLC officials respected the general strike vote even though most thought it was a bad idea.”¹¹ Generally speaking, the SCLC “differed quite sharply from the general line of policy of the AFL as established by Samuel Gompers,” and, “the parent body looked upon the Seattle AFL as a radical organization.”¹² Nevertheless, the *Seattle Union Record* sought to maintain a cursory connection with the AFL in the hopes that it could convincingly represent its agenda as fully “American.”

Seattle also diverged from the mainstream AFL in its promotion of industrial unionism. Industrial unionism was perceived to be the means through which to remedy the negative aspects of craft union organization; however, in the postwar period, the “American-ness” of this change was being debated. Amongst the leadership of the SCLC, it was understood that uniting all labourers in a given industry into a cohesive bargaining unit would provide a counter-force against the power of employers’ associations. This developing sense of industrial solidarity was essential to the development of the general strike, and – paradoxically – it also helped Seattle labour to legitimate itself as fully “American.” Joseph McCartin explains that, because the demand for industrial democracy (the ultimate goal of industrial unionism) was one which transcended class rhetoric to appeal to “American” values, this was “a crucial asset in a political culture that persistently denied the reality of class.”¹³ To bypass the limitations imposed by American political culture on an appeal coming from an explicitly class- or labour-centric position, terms such as “industrial democracy” became resonant in a way that did not contradict a sense of Americanism. While the term “industrial democracy” could imply something completely radical, it could remain acceptable within the context of American political culture

¹¹ Johnson, “*How Many Machine Guns*,” 107.

¹² Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 25.

¹³ Joseph McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7.

because its meaning was ultimately ambiguous. Any arguments which promoted “industrial democracy” as a goal of the Seattle labour movement allowed the average worker to believe that the change they were pushing for was merely an advance towards another phase in the evolution of American labour relations (thus creating a framework which allowed the Seattle strikers to accept this as a truly American idea).

Most critical to the Seattle strikers’ sense of Americanism was the assertion that labour represented the primary force responsible for bringing about positive reforms in the United States, and that it was the key social group responsible for safeguarding American freedoms and defining what it meant to be an “American.” The *Seattle Union Record* argued:

It is not now and never has been necessary for the labor movement to PROVE its Americanism. It is the labor movement that has made Americanism what it is. It is to the labor movement that America owes, first, its manhood suffrage, and, second, what approach to free and equal suffrage of man and woman there is. It is to the labor movement that America owes its free school system. It is to the labor movement that America owes whatever progress it has made toward abolishing child labor and making working conditions better for both men and women. It is the labor movement that made it possible for America to take the place in world affairs it is now holding by electing Woodrow Wilson president and by backing him up after his election, not only by subscribing to and beyond the limit for Liberty Bonds, War Savings Stamps, and all Red Cross and other social service association drives, but by building the ships and making the munitions and furnishing the men for the army and navy that aided in winning the war.¹⁴

This effectively summarizes the progressive sense of Americanism that became the “form” of the Seattle strikers’ ideological claim. Virtually everything positive about American society, according to the *Seattle Union Record*, had been secured through the efforts of labour. Thus, the strikers’ progressive representation of nationalism portrayed workers as the embodiment of the American tradition, and the general strike was depicted as an effort to secure the continuation of this tradition.

II. Americanism and the Intellectual Context of the Anti-Strike Press in Seattle

¹⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, “Aye, No Camouflage,” February 14, 1919, 1.

Similar importance was placed on asserting a sense of “Americanism” among the anti-strike press in Seattle. As Gramsci points out, one of the central problems for societal elites (and for representatives of the ruling class) in the postwar period was to determine how to reconstruct their hegemonic apparatus which had disintegrated as a result of the war and had placed the legitimacy of their worldview in doubt.¹⁵ As the presence of the progressive formulation of Americanism articulated by the Seattle strikers suggests, the “spontaneous consent” of the masses was unstable at this time. Employers and business interests in Seattle found themselves submerged in a political climate which saw labour disruption occurring across the country and around the world. In order to reassert hegemonic control, those opposed to the strikes had to compete with the workers’ vision of Americanism in a convincing way, and assert their own vision as “the best societal conception for all people and the most useful and legitimate guiding ideology for the society as a whole.”¹⁶

In the process, Jeremy Brecher argues, the immense patriotic sentiment generated in the United States by the war “was deliberately and skillfully manipulated into an hysterical fear and hatred of the growing power of labor,” and “employers mobilized this sentiment in their efforts to roll back the powers gained by trade unionism during the war.”¹⁷ McCartin explains that this was no easy task: “Workers had so successfully equated unionism with “an American feeling” during the war that managers had to do more than simply lock out unions and crush them after the war. They could not restore their legitimacy at the point of a bayonet.”¹⁸ Thus, this struggle

¹⁵ Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 228.

¹⁶ Aldon D. Morris, “Political Consciousness and Collective Action,” *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 363.

¹⁷ Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972), 104.

¹⁸ McCartin, *Labor’s Great War*, 215.

over true “Americanism” had to take place across a cultural battlefield, such as that which emerged during the Seattle strike.

In contrast to the *Seattle Union Record*, which highlighted the important role that the United States should play in bringing about progressive change, the “American exceptionalism” found in the anti-strike press focused on how the United States was *already* the greatest country on earth and why fundamental postwar social reforms were unnecessary. All that was required was a reconstructive “return to normal.” The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* asked: “Will you look over the records of the world and point out any country on earth that has dealt more fairly with labor than the United States,” or, “will you show me a country on earth where genuine wealth is more evenly distributed than here in the United States?”¹⁹ Some saw the postwar period as an opportunity for the United States to assert its own interests on the international stage.²⁰ The *Seattle Times* insisted that America had “long [been] a leader in the fight for human rights,” and “long an exponent of the highest aspirations of the race.”²¹ In a letter to the editor in the *Seattle Times*, which discussed “true Americans [who] are more than tired of anti-Americanism or pro-anything sentiment,” one Seattle citizen suggested that “it is against American spirit to be second to anything.”²² American history had also demonstrated to the *Seattle Times* that the United States had “been the guide and teacher of men everywhere who love freedom and who believe in the right of the people to decide their own destinies and the destiny of their country.”²³

From this foundation emerged a relentlessly xenophobic and ethnocentric discourse through which the anti-strike press attempted to portray the general strike (and the strikers’ demands) as the work of foreign elements in American society. Most notably, the *Seattle Star*

¹⁹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “To Labor Of Seattle,” February 6, 1919, 12.

²⁰ *Seattle Times*, “America’s New Role in World Affairs,” February 5, 1919, 6.

²¹ *Seattle Times*, “Only Americans Wanted in America,” February 13, 1919, 6.

²² *Seattle Times*, “Voice of the People – True Americanism,” January 6, 1919, 6.

²³ *Seattle Times*, “The History Children Should Learn,” January 25, 1919, 6.

rhetorically asked strikers under which flag they professed to stand by bringing the city to a halt, implying that their allegiance was not with the United States.²⁴ Even the mayor of Seattle, Ole Hanson, would argue that because immigrants could “not become Americanized as readily or as rapidly” as people born in the country, the “immigration problem” was “part and parcel of [the] bolshevik [sic] menace.”²⁵ Editorials frequently argued that immigration be severely curbed in the postwar period in order to exclude any anti-American elements. For example, in an editorial entitled “Immigrants America Does Not Want,” the *Seattle Times* insisted: “it is wise and just to make sure that the world struggle does not introduce into the republic elements which are unassimilable or which are out of sympathy with American principles of government.”²⁶

Elsewhere, the paper suggested:

The United States does not desire an influx of labor from Central Europe or from pauperized Russia. It probably would not even put the bars up altogether against newcomers from these countries, but it would wish to be sure that every one admitted was of the kind and character that could be counted upon to form a desirable addition to the nation’s body of citizens.²⁷

In other words, it was argued that immigration should be curbed because certain foreign elements and ideas were considered to be “unassimilable” in the vision of Americanism espoused by the anti-strike press.

The anti-strike press argued that many immigrants simply could not relate to certain elements in the history of the United States which had shaped the country’s national character. For example, the *Seattle Star* described the “frontier [as] the great Americanizer.” Bringing democracy and freedom to new lands was the historical mission of the United States, and thus true “Americanism [was] the child of the frontier. It was born of the conquest of a continent. It

²⁴ *Seattle Star*, “Under Which Flag?,” February 5, 1919, 1.

²⁵ Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920), 247.

²⁶ *Seattle Times*, “Immigrants America Does Not Want,” January 7, 1919, 6.

²⁷ *Seattle Times*, “Checking an Inrush of Aliens,” February 3, 1919, 6.

develops only in a crusade against common difficulties;” consequently, the *Seattle Star* argued that the country needed “a frontier and a crusade today,” but that now the frontier which was needed was “social and political” instead of “geographic.”²⁸ Unfortunately, this sentiment would eventually develop into a something like a crusade against immigrants and organized labour in the context of the First Red Scare.

In the midst of the strike, however, outright disdain for organized labour was rarely explicitly articulated in the anti-strike press. Instead, it was often camouflaged in an outward support for an “organized labor purged of foreign revolutionists, an organized labor organized and controlled by American citizens, by men who believe in democracy, by men to whom all dictatorship or any dictatorship is abhorrent.”²⁹ Thus, only conservative craft unionism was represented as being truly American. During the strike, an extreme view against labour was articulated by Edwin Selvin of the *Business Chronicle of the Pacific Northwest*, who argued that “if Labor Unions permit themselves to be made tools for getting under way a Bolshevik revolution to overthrow the Government of the United States, then the Labor Unions should not be allowed among American institutions.”³⁰ Similarly, the *Seattle Star* considered the general strike “an acid test of American citizenship,” the outcome of which would determine “whether this is a country worth living in and a country worth dying for.”³¹ Thus, a common sentiment found throughout the anti-strike press was an assumption that a state of affairs in which “the radicals will have no standing” among organized labour was conceived of as “a return to a condition that is normal.”³² This focus on a “return to normal” is clearly evocative of the attempt

²⁸ *Seattle Star*, “A New Frontier,” February 4, 1919, 6.

²⁹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Issue,” February 6, 1919, 1.

³⁰ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Real Cause of the Strike,” February 1, 1919, 7.

³¹ *Seattle Star*, “Stop Before It’s Too Late,” February 4, 1919, 1; *Seattle Star*, “Under Which Flag?,” February 5, 1919, 1.

³² *Seattle Times*, “Radicals Want to Control All American Labor,” February 5, 1919, 1.

to assert a hegemonic formulation in which those members of organized labour who opposed “radicalism” and the general strike could be portrayed as the truly “American” element.

In this regard, one of the more revealing articles in the post-strike editions of the *Seattle Times* argued that the defeat of the general strike was “worth more to [Seattle] in a material sense than any advertising she ever has had, or in the future will ever be able to buy” in terms of promoting the city as a safe haven for business investment.³³ In other words, by crushing the strikers, the opponents of the strike had helped to ensure that, in Seattle at least, the postwar world would be guided by a more conservative formulation of Americanism.

III. Cultural Luminaries in Seattle

Numerous historical and contemporary cultural figures were cited in both the pro- and anti-strike press, which served to contribute symbolic capital to the hegemonic formulations of both groups. In the *Seattle Union Record*, the Founding Fathers played an important role, largely for the value of their unquestionable manifestation of “American-ness,” with the anniversary of George Washington’s birth on February 22nd (in the aftermath of the strike) prompting a reflection on the nature of genuine patriotism.³⁴ The *Seattle Union Record* reminded its readers that President Washington had advised Americans “to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism” in his farewell address.³⁵ This was undoubtedly aimed at any concerns that strikers may have had that the general strike constituted an un-American undertaking, and suggested that the strike’s opponents were veiling their arguments under such a “pretended patriotism.”

As the sitting president at the time of the strike, it is unsurprising that the words of Woodrow Wilson were commonly appropriated. The *Seattle Union Record* admitted that Wilson was often not progressive enough for its liking. It suggested that Wilson “could analyze a vital

³³ *Seattle Times*, “Large Place in Sun Given to Seattle,” February 12, 1919, 1.

³⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, “True Patriotism,” February 22, 1919, 6.

³⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “A Word from Washington,” February 22, 1919, 6.

problem in such form as to lead men everywhere to think he understands it, but his remedy is always insufficient.” For example, the paper argued that “to remove war, caused by special privilege rule, he proposes a league of nations; whereas what is needed above all is to kill special privilege.”³⁶ Nevertheless, the editorial staff of the *Seattle Union Record* found hope in excerpts from Wilson’s “New Freedom” speech, where the president argued:

We are in a temper to reconstruct economic society. I doubt if any age was ever more unanimously desirous of radical and extended changes. We are upon the eve of a great reconstruction.... It is time that property, as compared with humanity, should take second place, not first place. What I am interested in is having the government more concerned about human rights than property rights.³⁷

Wilson’s progressive language exuded an almost millenarian tone which easily meshed with the strikers’ own vision of American society. Perceived by many Americans as a leader of the progressive movement, much of Wilson’s rhetoric was used to bolster and legitimate the strikers’ counterhegemonic conception of Americanism.

However, Abraham Lincoln was arguably the *Seattle Union Record’s* archetypical example of a model American. Portrayed by the paper as an unflinching friend of the labour movement, it suggested that – had the late President’s words been followed more closely – the United States would have remained a bastion of equality of opportunity. Lincoln was quoted, saying:

I don’t believe in a law to prevent men from getting rich – it would do more harm than good. So while we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else. When one starts poor, as most do in the race of life, free society is such that he knows he can better his condition,-- he knows that he is in no fixed condition of labor for his whole life. I want every man to have his chance, when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next work for himself afterward, and finally, to hire men to work for him.³⁸

³⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, “Eliminating War,” February 10, 1919, 4.

³⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, “Still True,” January 29, 1919, 5.

³⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Lincoln’s Words on Labor,” February 12, 1919, 8.

Lincoln's vision of an even economic playing field was a concept that the strikers could sympathize with, as the perception of rampant income inequality in the postwar period was a prominent concern amongst Seattle workers. The Great Emancipator himself, however, was admired because:

Lincoln was a great-souled man. His sympathies were with labor, but he saw labor through the eyes of sixty years ago, and not with any prophet-vision.... In the America of his day, the laborer was still the man who could hope to rise by thrift in a few years to a position of small employer. America was still the land of the small farmer, (the group from which Lincoln sprang) and the small shop. Keeping this fact in mind, the words of Lincoln on labor... appear even more remarkable.³⁹

Because true equality of opportunity was perceived to have existed in the United States in Lincoln's day, he could be forgiven for not voicing the need for systemic reforms in society. Nevertheless, because of his foresight and his apparent sympathy to labour, his words carried significant moral weight for the pro-strike press.

Other selections of Lincoln's work were directly applicable to the Seattle general strike, such as when he was quoted in the *Seattle Union Record* as saying: "I thank God that we have a system of labor where there can be a strike. Whatever the pressure, there is a point at which the workingman may stop." Even more rhetorically valuable was his suggestion that, "the strongest bond of human sympathy, outside the family, should be one uniting all working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds."⁴⁰ These selections legitimated the sense of solidarity that the *Seattle Union Record* aimed to instill during the strike. Taken in aggregate, the implication of these quotes from past and contemporary presidents seemed to be that, though the strike was essentially without historical precedent in the United States, the strikers' demands and even the general strike tactic itself did not fundamentally conflict with American principles as espoused by some of the country's most notable figures.

³⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, "Editorial Section," February 10, 1919, 4.

⁴⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, "Editorial Section," February 10, 1919, 4.

Opponents of the strike also used notable American figures to substantiate their arguments in the press. Theodore Roosevelt, as a recently deceased cultural luminary, was alleged to have emanated “resolute, robust, lofty, four-square Americanism.”⁴¹ More conspicuously, Lincoln was frequently cited as a defender of true Americanism, though naturally for different reasons than those articulated by the strikers. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* felt that Lincoln’s “spirit [was] brooding over [their] troublesome times,”⁴² and quoted him (in defence of private property and hard work), saying: “Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built.”⁴³ As a figure of high moral esteem, he was considered to be the “culmination of [the frontier’s] spirit of equal struggle for individual development,” and “directed his hatred against whatever restricted man’s freedom to develop or hampered the voice and impulse of the individual in society.”⁴⁴ In the aftermath of the strike, the *Seattle Times* argued that “Lincoln’s principles [had] emerged from [the] contest triumphant!”⁴⁵ The use of Lincoln on both sides during the Seattle strike is indicative of the selective presentation of his words by both the strikers and the anti-strike press. For example, in complete opposition to the interpretation of Lincoln by the strike press, the *Seattle Star* argued that the strike had been “a contest... waged between the principles in government which Lincoln maintained and principles in government that would have been as abhorrent to him,” and its demise was represented as a triumph of the principles of the Great Emancipator.⁴⁶

IV. The British Tradition and the Intellectual Context of the Winnipeg Strikers

⁴¹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Bolshevism and Labor,” February 10, 1919, 6.

⁴² *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Lincoln,” February 12, 1919, 6.

⁴³ *Seattle Star*, “Voice of Bolshevism Stilled,” February 12, 1919, 1.

⁴⁴ *Seattle Star*, “Lincoln, the Pioneer,” February 12, 1919, 6.

⁴⁵ *Seattle Times*, “Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday,” February 12, 1919, 6.

⁴⁶ *Seattle Star*, “Lincoln, the Pioneer,” February 12, 1919, 6.

During the Winnipeg general strike, a progressive and counterhegemonic articulation of “Canadianism” was developed in the context of Canada’s British political and cultural heritage.⁴⁷ While there was a considerable degree of ideological diversity amongst the strike leaders who formulated and disseminated their ideas about the general strike,⁴⁸ and although the cultural material included in the *Western Labor News* was often eclectic and wide-ranging, the claim that the strikers had inherited the mantle of the British tradition was a consistent theme throughout the strike.

For example, the *Western Labor News* often commented on the impact which the British connection had on the Canadian labour movement in general. The success of the Labour Party and the introduction of progressive labour reforms in Britain were followed with interest by those in Winnipeg, undoubtedly influencing the ambitions of the strikers in that city. Furthermore, the open discussion of progressive concepts – such as socialism – was rationalized as having first been acceptable within the British tradition. For example, the *Western Labor News* reported:

Socialism has a strange and menacing sound to many who have read nothing more enlightening than the daily papers. Yet Socialism has been for a century in Europe not only a well-known theory but has found expression in powerful political parties. In England, a “Utopian” Socialism was advocated by Robert Owen and other well-known reformers, [a] “Christian” Socialism by men like Charles Kingsley, [and] an “evolutionary” socialism by the influential group of writers and publicists known as the Fabian Society.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Craig Heron, “National Contours: Solidarity and Fragmentation,” *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 277.

⁴⁸ During the post-strike criminal trials against the strike leaders, “the defence argued that no conspiracy existed or could exist between men of such diverse beliefs,” Harry Gutkin and Mildren Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West*, (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997), 163.

⁴⁹ *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

By appropriating this connection to the mother country (and to Europe more broadly), the strikers could claim that socialism was quite compatible with the British tradition.⁵⁰ The British connection was also used by *Western Labor News* to repudiate suggestions that the Russian Revolution was in some way connected with the Winnipeg strike. “The overwhelming majority of labor people say they are British, not Russians, and are quite content to do things in the British way,” the paper asserted, reminding its readership that “the British way is much more radical than most Canadian employers realize!”⁵¹ Consequently, if an idea was acceptable amongst British labour groups, it was necessarily considered legitimate for Canadian workers.

In reality, Winnipeg was a bastion of labour radicalism unto itself, and by the postwar period, the city had distinguished itself within the Canadian labour movement. This can be attested to from the proceedings of the Walker Theatre meeting of December 22, 1918, and the proceedings of Western Labor Conference of March 1919. At the Walker Theatre meeting, a number of Winnipeg labour leaders gave incendiary speeches voicing their disgust with the Canadian government’s heavy-handed domestic policies during the war. The speeches condemned government by Order-in-Council, the continued imprisonment of political prisoners, and the sending of military forces to defeat the new regime in Russia.⁵² This meeting was significant in the development of the general strike idea, as the rhetoric which was used, and its reception by those in attendance, demonstrated the increasing level of radicalism among Winnipeg workers. The meeting also reflected the substantial common ground that had emerged

⁵⁰ The explicit influence of socialist thought in Winnipeg was a noticeable contrast with Seattle. While there were a number of Socialists in Seattle in the immediate postwar period, their influence on the formation of the general strike idea was nowhere near as great as the role which members of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) had in the Winnipeg strike. Many of the Winnipeg strike leaders were members of the SPC, including the strike’s most prominent figure, R.B. Russell. This point will be expanded upon in Chapter 2.

⁵¹ *Western Labor News*, “Open Letter from J.S. Woodsworth,” June 12, 1919, 4.

⁵² Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queens University, 1968), 169.

among various currents of the labour movement.⁵³ Similarly, the Western Labor Conference held in Calgary, Alberta in March, 1919, also showcased the increasingly radical sentiments that had appeared in several Canadian labour organizations. During the Western Labor Conference, several Winnipeg strike leaders explicitly advocated the general strike as a practical means through which to achieve progressive reforms, as well as the importance of advancing the idea of industrial unionism to increase worker solidarity (as in Seattle). This sentiment provided the context from which the Winnipeg strikers' counterhegemonic challenge could emerge.

Nevertheless, defences of the general strike tactic explicitly referenced the use of the general strike by British workers in order to make them appear legitimately "Canadian." The strike editions of the *Western Labor News* argued that "it cannot be forgotten that the sympathetic strike is the effective weapon of the British workers. [At] present they can see no other way."⁵⁴ Another passage suggested that "in England, industrial development is much further advanced than in Canada. In many cases these men [in Winnipeg] are merely fighting for principles that have been conceded in England years ago."⁵⁵ Similarly, another editorial argued: "Let us compare our present demands with the program of the British Labor party. That is not called revolutionary, yet it goes far, far beyond the demands of labor in this strike."⁵⁶ Britain was perceived as leading the way for Canada in terms of labour relations, and the strikers' progressive ideas were portrayed as being concepts that the British had long since accepted and deemed legitimate.

As the strike progressed, the British connection became even more important to the *Western Labor News*. The paper re-published British newspaper commentary on the Winnipeg

⁵³ Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, "The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm," *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, Craig Heron, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 179.

⁵⁴ *Western Labor News*, "A Birdseye View of the Strike," June 13, 1919, 3.

⁵⁵ *Western Labor News*, "Open Letter from J.S. Woodsworth," June 12, 1919, 4.

⁵⁶ *Western Labor News*, "Labor and the New Social Order," June 6, 1919, 3.

strike, insisting that the British themselves did not consider the general strike to be something foreign. The *Daily News* was quoted, stating “that the charges in respect of bolshevism and alien influences are overstated.” The *Manchester Guardian* believed “that the origin of the [labour revolt] is not obscure, as Canada lies within the orbit of the general influences of America, and reveals symptoms exactly similar to those [in the United States].”⁵⁷ These excerpts suggest the strikers felt that they could defend their nationalism by countering the hysterical criticisms of the anti-strike press with the seemingly sober-minded perspective of British commentators.

As will be examined in Chapter Four, the Winnipeg strikers also turned the moral authority of the British common law system on its head by asserting their own interpretation of what constituted British justice. Throughout the entirety of the Winnipeg strike, the British connection gave the *Western Labor News* a powerful sense of legitimacy, and helped to reassure fellow strikers and the public that the general strike was not something alien to Canadian political culture.

V. The British Tradition and the Intellectual Context of the Anti-Strike Interests in Winnipeg

Opponents of the strike in Winnipeg shared a similar ideological foundation with their counterparts in Seattle, although this was naturally mediated through Canadian political culture and a rhetorical connection to Britain. As Craig Heron explains, employers in Winnipeg “sensed that a large mass of the population had come out of the war with a cynical, if not openly hostile, view of corporate dominance over Canadian social and economic life.” The aim of these employers’ was “not only to secure the subordination of the working class but also to restore the legitimacy of their hegemony more generally.”⁵⁸ As Mitchell and Naylor posit, the hegemonic

⁵⁷ *Western Labor News*, “British Comment on Canadian Strike,” June 4, 1919, 4.

⁵⁸ Craig Heron, “National Contours: Solidarity and Fragmentation,” 287.

formulation of the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand revolved around "Anglo-conformity, capitalist relations of production, and cultural assimilation based on two assumptions: the superiority of British institutions and customs, and the undesirability of "alien" notions of citizenship."⁵⁹ In general, this was the vision of the postwar world which guided the anti-strike press in Winnipeg.

Critical to this formulation was the attempt by the anti-strike press to portray itself as manifesting the voice of the "true" British tradition. In this regard, the Citizens' Committee established a statement of principles against the strike which they called a "Magna Charta."⁶⁰ They also interpreted the shuttering of the Winnipeg daily papers during the strike as a "challenge to one of the bulwarks of our British Constitution... the freedom of the Press," and construed the postal workers joining the strike as a disruption of "His Majesty's mails."⁶¹ The general strike was represented as an interference with the rights of the British citizens of Winnipeg, as the strikers had allegedly demonstrated their disdain for the sanctity of the British Constitution, which – according to the anti-strike press – had to be held in the highest regard for "its flexibility, its capacity for adaptation to changing conditions, its amenity to reform."⁶² These notions were reinforced by the other Winnipeg dailies, including the *Winnipeg Telegram*, which explicitly attempted to link the concept of the British tradition with an argument against the strike, arguing:

The Bill of Rights and Habeas Corpus... these great democratic advancements, are due and are to be credited to the same type of men who are today, in Winnipeg, upholding the same rights of citizenship, the same equality of opportunity, that are challenged by the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists.... Ignorance and prejudice alone can account for the

⁵⁹ Mitchell and Naylor, "The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm," 211.

⁶⁰ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Citizens' Magna Charta," May 23, 1919, 3.

⁶¹ Citizens' Committee of One Thousand, *The Activities and Organization of The Citizens' Committee of One Thousand in connection with the Winnipeg Strike, May-June, 1919* (Winnipeg: Citizens' Committee of One Thousand, [1920]), 7; 10.

⁶² *Winnipeg Telegram*, "Unattainable Perfection," June 6, 1919, 7.

anathemas that are hurled at the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand. That Committee is the legitimate successor of the barons of Runnymede, the framers of the Bill of Rights, the originators of Habeas Corpus, the true progenitors of British democracy.⁶³

By contrast, the strikers:

Interfered with personal liberty; they interfered with freedom of speech; they interfered with constituted authority; they interfered with the freedom of the press. They interfered with the British constitution, the very fundament of which is the liberty of the subject – personal liberty – and freedom of speech.”⁶⁴

The point was clear: the Citizens' Committee and all opponents of the strike represented the inheritors of the true British tradition, and the general strike represented a means of achieving change that broke with that tradition.

Another means of discrediting the strike was to discredit its leaders, and the most effective way of doing this was to equate their radicalism with foreignness. As 1919 saw the beginnings of the First Red Scare, the public fear of radical immigrants accelerated to the point of irrationality in both Canada and the United States. Consequently, the anti-strike press portrayed the core element behind the strike as a radical immigrant minority which had duped the rank and file of organized labor into taking an excessive action that it otherwise would not have pursued. The narrative of the Citizens' Committee portrayed the strike as part of a larger conspiracy organized and led by a few “Soviet Socialist” leaders.⁶⁵ “Loyal” labour was equated with Britain and British-ness. The *Winnipeg Citizen* classified all opponents of the strike as being the true “British-Canadians,” and called the general strike tactic “absolutely contrary to British fair-play.”⁶⁶ Ironically, many of the strike leaders were actually British-born. Nonetheless, the *Winnipeg Citizen* alleged that these men had managed to “keep the pro-British element in the

⁶³ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Runnymede, June 15, 1215 – Winnipeg, June 15, 1919,” June 14, 1919, 11.

⁶⁴ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Personal Liberty and Freedom of Speech,” June 20, 1919, 1.

⁶⁵ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Citizens Will ‘Stay With It,’” June 17, 1919, 3.

⁶⁶ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Citizens Will ‘Stay With It,’” June 17, 1919, 1; *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Getting Back to the Real Issue,” June 3, 1919, 1.

strikers' ranks from gaining knowledge of the real purpose underlying the present revolution,"⁶⁷ while at the same time having a "sheer inability to comprehend the psychology of the true Canadian citizen."⁶⁸ The *Winnipeg Tribune* called for the expulsion of these men from their unions, arguing:

If sound Labor feels a consciousness of justice [its] duty is to cleanse itself and free itself from contamination with men who do not believe in anything, and who, by their words and their acts, would enthrone his Satanic Majesty in the place of the Man who laid down for world guidance the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.⁶⁹

There is no available evidence to either prove or disprove the involvement of "his Satanic Majesty" in the Winnipeg strike, yet the hyperbole of this rhetoric is indicative of the extent to which foreignness was inscribed upon the phenomenon of the general strike and its leaders.

Beyond the strike leaders themselves, however, the anti-strike press argued that Canada as a whole was in danger of being overrun by foreign elements. The *Winnipeg Citizen* explained:

The Canadian West is a polyglot people.... Out of a population of about a million and a quarter, nearly four hundred thousand are of German and Austrian ancestry alone. It is not an Anglo-Saxon community. It is a field peculiarly susceptible to the vagaries and theories of the nations of Europe which have been most backward in establishing political and industrial democracy.⁷⁰

In order to prevent this silent invasion, the paper argued that "the old policy of the open door belongs to a period of Canadian history that is over and done with. Immigration must now be discriminating." The "open door" had to "give place to the policy of the melting pot. The peoples who come to us in the future must go through the crucible and emerge from it as Canadians."⁷¹

For opponents of the strike, the only true Canadians were those who consented to their hegemonic formulation of "Canadianism."

⁶⁷ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "Enter the Outside Agitator," June 6, 1919, 3.

⁶⁸ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Citizens Will 'Stay With It,'" June 17, 1919, 1.

⁶⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, "Shun Evil Companions," June 16, 1919, 4.

⁷⁰ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Millennium in Winnipeg," June 17, 1919, 3.

⁷¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, "The Policy of the Melting Pot," May 1, 1919, 13.

VI. Cultural Luminaries in Winnipeg

As in Seattle, numerous historical and contemporary cultural figures were cited in both the pro- and anti-strike press in Winnipeg, contributing symbolic capital to the hegemonic formulations of both groups. Interestingly, while each side attempted to demonstrate to the public how their cause was truly British (and thus truly Canadian), most of the quotations incorporated by both groups were of American origin.

The *Western Labor News* included quotations from a variety of former American presidents, who apparently had moral weight which could provide the strikers' actions and demands with legitimacy. For example: "Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, [and] could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is superior to capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."⁷² This quote from Lincoln reinforced the strikers' labour theory of value in a resonant way. Even the words of William Howard Taft, a notoriously pro-business president, were appropriated in support of labour:

Time was, when everybody who employed labor was opposed to the labor union, when it was regarded as a menace. That time, I am glad to say, has largely passed away, and the man today who opposes an organization of labor should be relegated to the last century. It has done marvels for labor and will doubtless do more.⁷³

Wilson's article entitled "The Old Order Changeth" was quoted to support the strikers' argument that the circumstances of the postwar world called for new approaches: "We stand in the presence of revolution – not a bloody revolution – but a silent revolution, whereby America will insist upon recovering in practice those ideals which she has always professed, upon securing a government devoted to the general interest and not to special interests."⁷⁴ In another article entitled "The Coming Peace" Wilson argued:

⁷² *Western Labor News*, May 21, 1919, 4.

⁷³ *Western Labor News*, "Labor Versus Capital," June 9, 1919, 3.

⁷⁴ *Western Labor News*, "The Old Order Changeth," June 19, 1919, 2.

The world can be at peace only if its life is stable; and there can be no stability where [there] is not tranquility of spirit and a sense of justice, of freedom and of right. It is not of material interest merely that we are thinking. It is rather of fundamental human rights, chief of all the right of life itself.... We are speaking of no selfish material rights, but of rights which our hearts support, whose foundation is that righteous passion for justice upon which all law, all structures alike of family, of state, and of mankind, must rest.⁷⁵

Like the strikers themselves, Wilson hailed the coming of peacetime as a new opportunity to advance progressive reforms. One can easily understand why he was appropriated by the *Western Labor News*, arguing here for the establishment of a new sense of justice and human rights.

The American Transcendentalists seem to have been another source for the *Western Labor News*. The critique of government found in Transcendentalism was the most common theme appropriated from these thinkers. Emerson was included, stating: “They have rights who dare maintain them,” and that “Fear, Craft and Avarice Cannot rear a State.”⁷⁶ These ideas reinforced the theme that workers had to ensure their rights by realizing them themselves, and that government repression ultimately engenders an unhealthy society. Thoreau was also cited: “Under a government which imprisons anyone unjustly the true place for a great man is also in prison.”⁷⁷ When the strike leaders found themselves arrested and imprisoned near the end of the strike, Thoreau’s thoughts on civil disobedience allowed them to legitimate their actions as morally right even if in defiance of the law.

The *Western Labor News* also cited key figures in the American socialist movement. Eugene Debs was the subject of a lengthy article which highlighted his peaceful tactics and his abhorrence of violence. This fit with the paper’s instructions that strikers not disturb the peace for fear that the strike would be harshly suppressed. The article was filled with glowing

⁷⁵ *Western Labor News*, “The Coming Peace,” May 20, 1919, 2.

⁷⁶ *Western Labor News*, May 31, 1919, 2.

⁷⁷ *Western Labor News*, June 23, 1919, 4.

admiration for Debs, and maintained that “few more beautiful souls have lived.”⁷⁸ Socialist writer Robert Hunter was quoted, discussing “the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority... with the patience and the meekness of a people with the vision that they are soon to inherit the earth.”⁷⁹ The strike was the means through which to inherit the earth, or at least the means through which to inherit the right to a living wage and collective bargaining.

One token British figure celebrated by the *Western Labor News* was William Shakespeare. Quotations from his plays were often used to bolster the strikers’ critique of the political system, and, as a prominent figure in British culture, the use of Shakespeare was a powerful means for evincing the legitimacy of the strikers’ nationalistic rhetoric. For example: “Plate sin with gold and the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks. Clothe it in rags – a pigmy’s stare doth pierce it.”⁸⁰ These words from *King Lear* reinforced the strikers’ belief that capital had corrupted true justice in postwar society. “Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing the attempt” from *Measure for Measure* endorsed the solidarity of those strikers who may have doubted the wisdom of the general strike. “Fat paunches have lean pates,”⁸¹ from *Loves Labors Lost* was clearly an insult aimed at the Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, and all other members of the postwar Canadian plutocracy.

The extensive focus on American figures begs the question of how the Winnipeg strikers perceived Canada’s relationship with the United States, and what legitimacy (or symbolic baggage) came with the use of these sources. In this regard, an editorial in the *Western Labor News* argued “that radical movements in Canada cannot precede radical movements in the

⁷⁸ *Western Labor News*, “Eugene Debs on Violence,” May 20, 1919, 2.

⁷⁹ *Western Labor News*, “Labor Irresistible,” June 19, 1919, 2.

⁸⁰ *Western Labor News*, May 29, 1919, 2.

⁸¹ *Western Labor News*, June 3, 1919, 4.

United States,”⁸² suggesting that at least some of the strike leaders believed that radical movements in Canada usually took their lead from similar movements in the United States. This was certainly the case with the mainstream Canadian Trades and Labor Congress which took its lead from the AFL; however, the suggestion that more radical labour ideas were also considered to be derived from American sources is significant.

Clearly, the *Western Labor News* was influenced to a far greater extent by American ideas than the *Seattle Union Record* was influenced by Canadian ideas. This is not surprising, and it may simply reflect American cultural hegemony over the Canadian labour movement in general. For example, Craig Heron explains that the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada “had difficulty carving out room to manoeuvre in response to specifically Canadian conditions, since the U.S. labour leaders viewed Canada as merely another state.”⁸³ It is to be expected that the ideas and debates circulating among American labour leaders would be followed by their counterparts in Canada.

However, one particular quote in the *Western Labor News* seems to suggest that the American influence on the Canadian labour movement had its limits. At one point, J.S. Woodsworth wrote:

The majority of the organized workers are probably old-country people.... The “Citizens’ Committee” have made a shameful use of the flag in arrogating to themselves the right to be called “patriotic”. As a matter of fact these old country people [the strikers] in their independence of thinking are more British in spirit than are the more or less “Americanized” Canadians.⁸⁴

Despite the use of quotations from mostly American sources in the *Western Labor News*, Woodsworth’s quote seems to suggest that the connection to Britain was perceived as more

⁸² *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

⁸³ Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, “The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada,” *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, Craig Heron, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 33.

⁸⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Open Letter from J.S. Woodsworth,” June 12, 1919, 2;4.

legitimate in the eyes of the strikers than was the American connection (with the Citizens' Committee being subtly denigrated for being too "Americanized"). This was perhaps due to a perception on the part of the strikers that Britain and the rest of Europe existed in a more "developed" state of labour relations that the strikers in Winnipeg could have hoped to attain, or perhaps this was simply another rhetorical attempt to usurp the Citizens' Committee's claim that it represented the British tradition and the strikers did not. In any case, the *Western Labor News* was clearly informed by both British *and* American ideas, but it is safe to argue that a rhetorical connection to the British tradition was more important to the paper's sense of self-identity during the strike.

Interestingly, the anti-strike press in Winnipeg also fawned over American figures throughout the strike. For example, Lincoln was cited as a defender of the sort of postwar world it envisioned. Relating his ideas to a universal sense of justice that was applicable to the Canadian context, the *Winnipeg Tribune* explained:

Lincoln gave to the world the foundation principle in government – government of the people, by the people, for the people. Rudely, and sometimes almost aimlessly, as we have endeavored, in our national life, to reach the high standard, it is in the hearts of Canadian people to enthrone JUSTICE, which is another less definite way, perhaps, of stating the goal and the truth which Lincoln had in mind.⁸⁵

It is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that Lincoln had enough cultural capital to be relevant in the Canadian context, and that the sense of justice emanating from the battle over slavery could be related to the definition of Canadianism espoused by the Winnipeg anti-strike press.

Few Canadian or British figures were celebrated by the anti-strike press in Winnipeg, and instead, the heavily American influence on these papers was abundantly evident. Opponents of the strike frequently cited various newspapers from Chicago and New York, which often detailed

⁸⁵ *Winnipeg Tribune*, "That Genuine Feeling," June 7, 1919, 4.

the suppression of strikes in those cities. For example, the *Winnipeg Citizen* highlighted the spread of the Citizens' Committee idea in the United States, and pointed out the benefits of such an organization.⁸⁶ Comparisons highlighting the similarities between Canada and the United States in terms of labour relations were common. The *Winnipeg Tribune* proposed: "Living side by side, it is generally accepted that the laws and conditions which govern labor are very much common between Canada and the United States."⁸⁷ The *Winnipeg Citizen* argued that "the future of our two countries is bound up together," and issued a hope that "the two nations, so vital to each other, [would] work together for the advancement of a common North American civilization."⁸⁸ The heavy rhetorical focus on the United States in both the pro- and anti-strike press is interesting for two groups who attempted above all else to appear as the embodiment of the British tradition.

VII. The Cultural Capital of Returned Soldiers

Briefly, it is critical to acknowledge the cultural capital derived from returned soldiers in the nationalistic rhetoric of virtually all the newspapers which commented on these two general strikes. Having literally put their lives on the line for their respective countries during the war, returned American and Canadian soldiers were effectively beyond reproach with regards to their patriotism. Concerning the Winnipeg strike, but also applicable to the situation in Seattle, Reimer argues that "by identifying the soldiers as workers, the sacrifice of the soldiers became the sacrifice of workers, and thus the soldiers' right to demand recompense became the workers' right as well."⁸⁹ Thus, the cultural capital held by returned soldiers carried with it all of the connotations which developed out of the Allies' victory against German autocracy. Each side

⁸⁶ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "Why Not Organize Ourselves?," June 4, 1919, 1.

⁸⁷ *Winnipeg Tribune*, "Labor in the U.S.," May 12, 1919, 4.

⁸⁸ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Millennium in Winnipeg," June 17, 1919, 3.

⁸⁹ Reimer, "War, Nationhood, and Working-Class Entitlement," 225.

attempted to represent the interests of these soldiers as being in line only with their own, while attempting to glean the legitimacy which this group possessed.

The *Seattle Union Record* felt that “economic interest of the average returning soldier and sailor is bound up in the interests of the workers,” and that “unless that identity of interest [was] understood and fully appreciated the returning soldiers and sailors may be used by exploiters to break down [working] conditions.”⁹⁰ The paper insisted that “the legislature has no sincere interest in the welfare of the soldier,” and that “its only interest in the soldier is to make use of his unfortunate condition to break down wage and living standards and to force the organized workingmen of the state back into the condition of industrial peonage.”⁹¹

Unemployment was a critical problem for returned soldiers, and each group insisted that it could solve this problem in the most effective way. In addition, the strikers feared that, if they did not convince the soldiers to join the strike, they could be used as scabs and strike-breakers against it.

The *Western Labor News* believed that “the soldiers [were] prepared to back the workers in insisting that all men are given fair play.”⁹² Soldiers were persuaded to join the crusade against the wartime profiteering which had put their lives in danger on the battlefield. The paper argued that when the soldier:

Sees that the men who are opposing this strike are the... same men who fixed his pay at \$1.10 a day, who supplied Ross rifles, leaden bayonets, paper boots, spavined horses, and salted foods to him as he fought, who supplied shells at profiteer prices and then increased the cost of living and so profited on his wife and children, [then] his soul rebels against them.⁹³

However, a tension emerged during the Winnipeg strike when returned soldiers began marching in parades and showcasing banners featuring anti-alien rhetoric. Naturally, the strikers wanted to

⁹⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Brains Versus Clubs,” January 18, 1919, 8.

⁹¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Legislature Uses Flag to Cover Crimes,” February 10, 1919, 1.

⁹² *Western Labor News*, “Five Men to Come Out,” June 21, 1919, 1.

⁹³ *Western Labor News*, “The Spirit That Wins,” June 10, 1919, 2.

downplay ethnic divisions to maintain solidarity during the strike; however, as a group, the returned soldiers were not keen on having their jobs stolen by those whom they perceived as having been their wartime opponents. Thus, to counter the soldiers' demand to "Deport All Undesirable Aliens," the *Western Labor News* argued that "ALL undesirables" should be deported, as "this will get some of [the] men on the stock exchange."⁹⁴ This was an effective way to spin the soldiers' demands towards those of the strikers. Letters from individual soldiers published in the *Western Labor News* served a similar function, and when one soldier noticed that opponents of the strike had taken to wearing British flag pins on their lapels, he was concerned that they were "abusing the flag under which we fought for freedom and justice... to screen their low down dirty work of trying to bring organized labor into subservience as slaves."⁹⁵ Commentary of this sort was highly expedient for the nationalistic claims of the Winnipeg strikers.

On the other hand, the anti-strike press in both cities feared that returned soldiers would potentially join the strike if they were used to end it, and comparisons were made with what had occurred during the initial stages of the Russian Revolution. Most of the press agreed that employment needed to be immediately secured for this group. The *Seattle Times* insisted that "there [was] no more important duty confronting employers in this city and elsewhere throughout the country than the placing in civil life of those who served America overseas or who were in training for service abroad when the war ended."⁹⁶ Similarly, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued that Congress was doing its best to relieve the situation of unemployed returned soldiers by "passing helpful legislation," and, to show the support of the soldiers for the

⁹⁴ *Western Labor News*, "Wonderful Parade—Blazing Banners," June 6, 1919, 3.

⁹⁵ *Western Labor News*, "Returned Soldier Deprecates Abuse of Flag by Citizen's Committee," May 30, 1919, 4.

⁹⁶ *Seattle Times*, "Give a Job to a Soldier or Sailor," January 8, 1919, 6.

strike's opponents, the paper even gave one of its returned soldiers' service flags to be hung from the United States Department of Labor office in Seattle.⁹⁷

Similarly, the *Winnipeg Tribune* claimed that "Winnipeg owes an apology to the soldiers, for not having cleaned up this mess at home before they came back."⁹⁸ In a nod to this group, the *Winnipeg Citizen* acknowledged that the strike had its "advantages," as the men who during the war did not "offer their lives as a sacrifice in the cause of democracy abroad, today are showing that they are of the same stuff of which their... brothers were made, who donned the khaki and fought the Hun."⁹⁹ With this, the Citizens' Committee clearly attempted to appropriate the legacy of the wartime victory for the anti-strike cause. In presenting returned soldiers as the embodiment of true nationalism, the *Winnipeg Citizen* was mobilizing the cultural capital of veterans to reinforce opposition to the strike.

VIII. Conclusions

Tarrow argues that social movements need to use cultural themes in their rhetoric that are dynamic enough to be manipulated and imbued with a new, progressive meaning. These themes also need to be familiar enough to resonate with people within a given political culture.¹⁰⁰ In the postwar period, rhetoric centred on nationalism was perhaps the most effective means through which this could be accomplished. With appeals for self-determination appearing around Europe and elsewhere during this time, it seems that nationalism was simply in the air as an effective mobilization tool.

⁹⁷ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "Helping Service Men," February 6, 1919, 6; *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "U.S. Labor Office to Fly P.-I. Service Flag," February 2, 1919, 15.

⁹⁸ *Winnipeg Tribune*, "Returned Soliders First!" June 10, 1919, 2.

⁹⁹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Strike Has Its Advantages," June 20, 1919, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106-107.

Although appeals to nationalism naturally put some limits on the kinds of values and ideals to which appeals could be made, it is evident that the strikers in Seattle and Winnipeg found the rhetoric of nationalism sufficiently flexible to use it as the form for enveloping the ideological content of their counterhegemonic formulations. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued about “invented traditions,” the strikers attempted to produce a new national symbolic tradition which would be more applicable to their demands in the postwar world, and in doing so they attempted “to establish continuity with a suitable historic past” to legitimize these demands by appealing to the American and British traditions.¹⁰¹ In doing so, the strikers highlighted the most progressive aspects of these traditions while sidestepping their more conservative aspects.

Unfortunately for the strikers, opponents of the strikes were also able to mobilize a rhetoric centred on the hypernationalism of the postwar period. In both the United States and Canada, while labour attempted to identify itself as the core of the nation, anti-strike arguments equated the radicalism inherent in the general strikes with foreign ideas. As this fear of radicalism became more prominent, foreigners came to be perceived as the rotten core at the heart of both labour and the nation. Thus, for opponents of the strikes, the idea of the nation became a means through which to exclude unwanted immigrants and labour agitators from political life. The “return to normal” in the postwar period meant the hegemony of ruling classes who promoted a highly exclusionary and conservative interpretation of nationhood.

¹⁰¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

Chapter 3: Foundational Ideological Themes as “Content”

What was the ideological content of the strikers’ progressive interpretation of Americanism and Canadianism? What were the implicit ideological beliefs and assumptions behind the claims of the anti-strike press? This chapter will analyze the ideological content and prominent source materials which informed the hegemonic formulations of each group. For the purposes of the present analysis, ideology is defined – in Stuart Hall’s formulation – as the “mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”¹ Despite a rhetorical emphasis on distinct forms of nationalism in Seattle and in Winnipeg, both groups of strikers and both groups of their opponents shared much in common at their ideological foundations.

I. The Self-Governing Workshop and Labourism

While some regional variation existed between the ideological foundations of the Seattle and Winnipeg strikers, the similarity of the postwar working-class experience was such that a highly comparable critique of society developed in both cities. Nolan Reilly argues that the ideological structure of Canadian workers was largely homogenous across the country in the postwar period, and “was shaped in a structural sense by the ascendancy of monopoly capitalism, with its attendant national labour market and concentration of corporate power and wealth, and in the realm of consciousness by wartime events and socialist ideas.”² Since the same points can be argued about Seattle (with slightly less weight given to “socialist ideas”), it is unsurprising that the ideological structures in Seattle and Winnipeg were very similar.

¹ Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees,” *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 25-26.

² Nolan Reilly, “Introduction to Papers from the Winnipeg General Strike Symposium, March 1983,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 7.

Seattle was the bastion of a progressive labour ideology known as “Duncanism,” which was “a movement – named for James A. Duncan, Central Labor Council secretary – which stood for strong local control of unions by the council, close cooperation among kindred trades, and simultaneous expiration of agreements within a single industry.”³ For these views, Philip Foner suggests that Seattle essentially stood for everything Samuel Gompers rejected, and thus Duncanism fostered a unique sense of solidarity and cohesion among the individual locals in Seattle.⁴

Seattle was also a haven for members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose ideas of direct action and syndicalism certainly influenced many in the Seattle labour movement. The idea of the general strike itself stemmed in part from IWW ideology. Although the SCLC generally discouraged many of the group’s more extreme ideas in accordance with mainstream AFL policy, IWW members were still considered by the SCLC’s leaders to be part of the collective struggle for Seattle labour reform; thus, any abuse of an IWW member was considered an insult to the whole of the Seattle labour community.⁵ The toleration of a diversity of views within the Seattle labour movement – including IWW views – is a phenomenon detailed by Robert Friedheim. He argues:

With the multiplicity of ideas in the air, it would be too much to expect that Seattle labor would have been of one mind on philosophical and tactical questions. The remarkable degree of unity was brought about by a conscious effort to respect differences of opinion and position while still maintaining the ability to work together. In fact, if any characteristic of Seattle labor of the time stands out, it was this ability to “agree to disagree” without loss of cooperation.⁶

³ David Jay Bercuson, “The One Big Union in Washington,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (July 1978): 129.

⁴ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol.8: Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 63.

⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “Who Is The Anarchist?,” February 18, 1919, 8.

⁶ Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 37.

Friedheim argues that in Seattle a worker tended to fall into one of three ideological categories: “conservative,” “radical,” and “progressive.”⁷ Even conservative labour unionists in Seattle were arguably more radical than mainstream AFL conservatives, though their primary concern was always to improve day-to-day working conditions while working within the existing system of craft unionism. On the other hand, the radicals demanded far-reaching and immediate changes in the structure of society as a whole. IWW members could be found in this group, though some radicals did not have any organizational affiliation. The presence of these radicals pushed the conceivable limits of reform that the average Seattle worker could tolerate. Consequently, the progressives, whose outlook represented “a radicalism of the practical,” attempted to balance the demands of the conservatives and the radicals in an effort to keep Seattle labour unified.⁸

One example of this “radicalism of the practical” can be found in what Victoria Johnson identifies as the ideas of artisan republicanism and the self-governing workshop, which she argues were foundational influences for the strikers in Seattle. Johnson argues that the presence of these proto-socialist discourses in Seattle obscures the fact that it was really this movement for “a self-governing workshop” that motivated Seattle labour to participate in a general strike.⁹ She explains that the discourse of the self-governing workshop differed from socialism in that it remained based on private property ownership while still promoting the idea that the public good must take precedence over private interests, and that those who labour have a right to the wealth they produce.¹⁰

Johnson argues that the narratives that “labor creates wealth” or the desire to “abolish the wage system,” which were deeply embedded within artisan republican tradition, have often been

⁷ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 37.

⁸ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 47.

⁹ Victoria Johnson, *How Many Machine Guns Does It Take To Cook One Meal?: The Seattle and San Francisco General Strikes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁰ Johnson, *How Many Machine Guns*, XI; 7.

mistakenly interpreted through a class-conscious lens and attributed to Marxism or other “foreign ideologies.”¹¹ Rather, the idea of the self-governing workshop had its roots in established American intellectual traditions, originating in the writings of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, and was revived by the Knights of Labor in the nineteenth century. Consequently, the use of a discourse centred on the idea of the “self-governing workshop” could resonate with workers immersed in the American context, and could rhetorically legitimate the strike as being wholly “American” to the strikers themselves.

On the other side of the border, the concept of “labourism” was the loosely-defined ideology of the majority of the workers involved in the Canadian labour revolt of 1919. Many of the key themes implicit in the concept of the self-governing workshop could also be found within the context of this ambiguous philosophical orientation. Labourism, as Craig Heron explains, was “not an intellectualized doctrine, but more like an inclination and a set of political impulses which proceeded from some common ground.” This common ground included a belief in egalitarianism, gradualism, and what can be labelled producerism. The roots of this ideology were part of the “natural rights tradition,” and loosely derived from the nineteenth-century tradition of Radicalism. As Heron argues:

Labourism... owed its greatest ideological debts to nineteenth-century Radicalism, of both the British liberal and American republican varieties. This form of working-class politics in Britain and her settler dominions had followed a course from Tom Paine and the English Jacobins, through the early nineteenth-century struggles for parliamentary reform and the tumultuous Chartist agitations, and, by the 1860s, into the Radical wing of that dynamic Victorian reform coalition, the Gladstone Liberal Party.¹²

Labourism was the descendent of a long lineage of radical ideas, and this link with British intellectual discourses would have helped to further legitimize the strikes as part of a familiar tradition. However, labourism took on an ambiguous but meaningful aspect of its own, and –

¹¹ Johnson, *How Many Machine Guns*, 27.

¹² Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 50-51.

most significantly – it provided workers with an ideology that stood outside the bounds of the “common sense” liberalism of the era. As Ian McKay might argue, it served to “defamiliarize the ruling ideology” of the postwar period.¹³

In Winnipeg, as mentioned previously, socialists took on a leading role in the postwar labour revolt, and Heron explains that the merging of socialism with Western labourism in this period helped to give the labour movement “a sharper edge and a clearer vision.” Although the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) had formerly been opposed to gradualist labour reform, it was around the time of the strike that the Party acknowledged the emerging class consciousness of Canadian workers, and:

For the first time on a national scale, working-class liberalism... linked up with elements of Marxist and ethical socialism in a dynamic alliance, which, under the old label of labourism, provided the ideological dimension of the unprecedented post-war upsurge of the Canadian working class. The presence of the radicals within the house of labour by the end of the war helped to sharpen the focus of the movement’s analysis and to give the rhetoric a more visionary quality.¹⁴

Gerald Friesen argues that the SPC “did not regard the general strike as the ultimate weapon in the class struggle,” but instead sought “to build an inclusive united working class movement, the One Big Union, simply as the next stage in the class struggle.”¹⁵ The shared sense of dissatisfaction amongst many workers in this period, along with the more coherent ideological focus added by the SPC, was a critical foundation of the counterhegemonic challenge that the Winnipeg general strike represented.

Interestingly, Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson seem to have been a shared influence between the labourism of the Winnipeg strikers and the “self-governing workshop” of the Seattle

¹³ Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (December 2000): 637.

¹⁴ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1996), 50; Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working-Class,” 67.

¹⁵ Gerald Friesen, ““Yours in Revolt”: The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 1 (1976): 146.

strikers. The *Western Labor News* explicitly quoted Tom Paine in one of the *Strike Editions*, saying: “Tyranny like hell is not easily conquered. But the greater the struggle the more glorious the victory.”¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson was also cited, arguing for popular rights:

All eyes are opened or opening to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God.¹⁷

Thus, it is important to note that the *Western Labor News* relied on a highly similar ideological critique of society as the *Seattle Union Record*. Concerning the general strikes, what labourism and the idea of the self-governing workshop shared was a sufficient level of ambiguity that allowed most workers in Winnipeg and Seattle to accept the programmes of each strike. This ambiguity allowed the appeal of the strikes to be broad and resonant.

Beyond this ambiguity, however, was the self-governing workshop and labourism’s shared sense of a producerist ethic. It was this ideological theme which made these ideas into powerful counterhegemonic challenges. For example, the *Seattle Union Record* argued that even if the shipyard owners of Seattle took their business away from the city as a result of the strike, the fact would remain that no employer could take away a person’s ability to work. “If these gentlemen [the shipyard owners] decide to withdraw, so much the better,” argued the *Seattle Union Record*. “There are the shipyards, there are the ships to be built, and there is [our] own labor power with which to build them. To you, the workers, belong industry.”¹⁸ Commentary on a strike in New York also asked: “Is there not a lesson, too, in this strike of the ECONOMIC POWER of the workers if they make up their collective mind to use it? The answer seems to be

¹⁶ *Western Labor News*, June 10, 1919, 2.

¹⁷ *Western Labor News*, June 18, 1919, 4.

¹⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Answer Threat By Solidarity,” February 5, 1919, 4.

an unanswerable argument in favor of the organization of the USEFUL workers.”¹⁹ The notion that those who work have a right to the wealth they produce resonated strongly with Seattle strikers.

The producerist critique of private property was evident in several quotations in the *Seattle Union Record*, and not in a way which demanded its immediate abolition. Leo Tolstoy was quoted as saying: “Fifty years ago the government upheld private property in human beings; yet a time came when it was admitted that human beings cannot be private property, and the government ceased to hold them to be property. So it will be with property in land.”²⁰ In other words, just as slavery had been abolished in the United States, so would private property eventually be perceived as unjust and done away with gradually. German philosopher J.G. Fichte was often quoted in the *Seattle Union Record*, who explained that “the right of property in objects of luxury can have no foundation until each citizen has his share in the necessities of life,”²¹ and that “it is not enough to guarantee to every one property lawfully acquired: it is necessary that everyone should obtain the property to which he is entitled, in exchange for his lawful work.” Furthermore, “whoso has not the means of living, is not bound to recognize or respect the property of others.”²² Here was a powerful argument for a more equitable distribution of basic goods, and a restatement of the strikers’ producerist ethic in a manner that was relatable within the context of American political culture. On the redistribution of property from a producerist perspective, a quote from American lawyer and socialist Laurence Gronlund, stated:

Instead of taking property away from everybody, (Socialism) will enable everybody to acquire property.... It will afford the very mightiest stimulus for individuality to unfold

¹⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Economic Power,” January 10, 1919, 8.

²⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 24, 1919, 8.

²¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 24, 1919, 8.

²² *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” February 15, 1919, 8.

itself. Property will belong to its possessor by the strongest of all titles, to be enjoyed as he thinks proper, but not to be used as an instrument of fleecing his fellow citizens.²³

Though invoking a definition of socialism that could potentially be radical, the appeal to individuality and property in this quote could easily resonate with an American audience. Thus, a discourse based on the producerist component of the self-governing workshop idea fit within the context of the United States, and created the ideological space for workers to participate in a particularly radical action without creating any cognitive dissonance over their patriotism.

The labourism of the Winnipeg strikers also included a similar conviction in producerism.²⁴ For example, American freethinker Robert G. Ingersoll was quoted, saying: “Whoever produces anything by weary labor, does not need a revelation from heaven to teach him that he has a right to the thing produced.”²⁵ In the midst of the strike, the *Western Labor News* also argued that Winnipeg workers:

Have come to realize that as producers they have a right to more than the pittance they now receive, often not sufficient to support a family in decency. They have come to realize that they have a right to a voice in the management of the business in which their labor is essentially the most important factor.²⁶

The strikers believed that only those who work to produce new wealth have any legitimate stake in what is produced. The most important critique of this kind – which could be found throughout the Canadian labour revolt – was the conviction that “the capitalist system could not be reformed, it must be transformed. Production for profit must cease [and] production for use must begin.”²⁷ The profit motive was denigrated for its negative influence on the moral fabric of society, and, as one editorial argued:

²³ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 25, 1919, 8.

²⁴ This is not to be confused with a “producer ideology,” in which the interests of workers and employers are perceived to be one and the same. Producerism highlights the importance of those who actually produce things in society, and turns the labour theory of value into a social philosophy.

²⁵ *Western Labor News*, June 19, 1919, 2.

²⁶ *Western Labor News*, “Needed – Representative Government,” June 12, 1919, 2.

²⁷ Gregory S. Kealey, “1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 12.

The incentive of profit has filled our cities with slums, and our burying groups with babies' graves. The incentive of profits has turned the whole world into a shambles. The profit incentive made a few bleed the people of the world white while others crimsoned the fields of Flanders with their life blood.

Within the producerist ethic of the *Western Labor News*, the incentive of profit had to be replaced by "the incentive of service," and it was necessary that co-operation replace competition.²⁸ Thus, at the foundation of the Winnipeg strikers' thought, and in common with the *Seattle Union Record*, was the hope for a social system where the productive elements of society would receive a more equitable share of their own production.

However, there was a downside to the ambiguity inherent in the use of rhetoric centred on the self-governing workshop and labourism. Tarrow argues that "movements pay some costs for adapting frames that draw on societal mentalities and consensual political cultures," as some groups desire more far-reaching changes that exist beyond the acceptable limits of a given political culture.²⁹ To use Seattle as an example, although the general strike was a significantly radical step, progressive-minded workers could be denigrated by the IWW and the Socialists for not being radical enough. As the purpose of the general strike became increasingly ambiguous, it struggled to represent any concrete demands. Friedheim suggests that "in the absence of stated goals and motivated leadership, the Seattle general strike was all things to all men."³⁰ Nowhere was this ambiguity more explicit than in the famous strike editorial, "No One Knows Where," written by Anna Louise Strong, which stated: "We are undertaking the most tremendous move ever made by LABOR in this country, a move which will lead – NO ONE KNOWS WHERE!"³¹ This phrase essentially signified anything its reader wanted to read into it. The strikers used it as

²⁸ *Western Labor News*, "The Incentive of Profit," June 18, 1919, 2.

²⁹ Sidney Tarrow, "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meaning Through Action," in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 189.

³⁰ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 181.

³¹ Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike*, 110-111.

a catch-all to boost participation and enthusiasm in the strike among all ideological leanings, but when anti-strike interests saw the inklings of a socialist overthrow in it, the strikers were forced to argue that it did not imply anything revolutionary. Framing the general strike in such an ambiguous way carried the risk that a resonant counterhegemonic challenge could be counter-attacked because of its ill-defined aims and ambiguous language.

II. Marxism

Around the time of the strike, there were very few explicit references to the works of Karl Marx in the *Seattle Union Record*. Direct references to socialism or Marxism were likely not published in the paper because they would fail to resonate with a majority of workers in the context of American political culture. As Harvey O'Connor suggests, the Marxism of the vast majority of Seattle workers was "emotional" rather than intellectual.³² Direct references to Marxist texts – representing a "foreign" or "un-American" ideology – could arguably have alienated the average striker.

The closest mention of something akin to Marxism was in a response to a controversial editorial at the time entitled, "Revolution or Evolution," by Jack Dunstan, who was obviously sympathetic to the cause of organized labour, but seemed to want to convince the public that labour radicals were not representative of the whole. The editorial argued that "the evolutionary program is at work persistently and step by step toward the democratization of industry and the emancipation of labor," and that "the real revolution that we want to see will come more quickly if some of its advocates learn to adapt their tactics and their propaganda to the conditions that exist in this country."³³ It continued:

It has been truly said that no revolution can be forced on a country from without, and if we are wise we will clothe our social and economic message in terms that the American

³² Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 110.

³³ *Seattle Union Record*, "Revolution or Evolution," January 7, 1919, 8.

people understand and to which they will respond. For this reason we are likely to make greater progress with our movement if we emphasize such terms as “industrial democracy.” Of course we cannot have an industrial democracy, in the true sense of the word, without an actual economic revolution, but that change will probably come by means of an evolutionary process. It is up to us to show the American people that industrial democracy is simply a logical and consistent application of that democratic principle of which we have heard so much in these recent days.³⁴

This editorial received a critical reception from some of the *Seattle Union Record*'s readership.

One letter to the editor contended that Dunstan's editorial was theoretically unsound, and used Marxist arguments to debunk it. It argued:

Capitalistic production has developed two classes in society, the working class and the capitalist class. Their economic interests are as diverse as the two poles. What is right in one class is wrong in the other. To a capitalist, capitalism is ethically and morally right, and will remain so as long as capitalism and capitalists exist, whether it be in Russia or America.... If society is to be revolutionized by the evolutionary process, as Mr. Dunstan hopes, the capitalist must be convinced by argument that right is wrong. The capitalist has so far been able to convince the worker that right (working class) is wrong.³⁵

The debate around Dunstan's editorial is testament to the fact that, while truly revolutionary ideas were circulating in Seattle in 1919, the position of the *Seattle Union Record* was one of pragmatism and of moderation between radical and conservative ideas.

On the other hand, the influence of Marxist ideas was overtly evident in the *Western Labor News*. One editorial argued that “history has justified Marx and confounded his critics. The cataclysm he predicted has occurred throughout a large part of the world, from the operation of the very forces which were asserted to be waning.”³⁶ The inevitable downfall of capitalism as predicted by Marx was often alluded to, such as when the paper insisted that “capitalism will collapse in Europe and later in America and it will matter little what the workers do or don't do.”³⁷ In another instance, the paper argued that “no man can stop [the general strike], no man

³⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, “Revolution or Evolution,” January 7, 1919, 8.

³⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “Letters to the Editor,” January 16, 1919, 6.

³⁶ *Western Labor News*, “Capitalism Creates Crisis, War and Revolution,” June 27, 1919, 2.

³⁷ *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

can start it. It is the normal development of an abnormal system. It will pass just as inevitably as it has evolved.”³⁸ In a Marxist vein, the *Western Labor News* also believed that the international working-class had become increasingly educated concerning the problems of the day and more attuned to the nature of their alienation. It considered the general strike as “a university course in politics and economics,”³⁹ and professed:

High prices during the war made the people think. They studied the economic question thoroughly. They now understand the meaning of wages and real wages. They know what “the market” means. They understand the expression, “the cost of production.” They understand the mysteries behind the banking system.... They know the full meaning of profiteering; and they know who are the profiteers.⁴⁰

The *Western Labor News* believed that this growing sense of class awareness provided the means to achieve new heights of labour action, and, throughout the strike, it attributed the maintenance of the strikers’ solidarity to this increased intelligence and class consciousness. All of this demonstrates the direct and indirect influence of Marxist ideas on the *Western Labor News*.

III. The Strikers’ Critique of the Political System

Central to the ideological content of the strike press in Seattle and Winnipeg was a critique of the political systems of both the United States and Canada. Workers were critical of their existing political systems mainly because they were perceived as having been corrupted by financial interests. “Congress has become, not an assembly of “the wisest men to make the public laws,” but a gathering of attorneys, each pledged to some local or corporate interest,” argued the *Seattle Union Record*.⁴¹ Conservative political philosopher Edmund Burke was selectively cited in the paper and appropriated in a progressive way: “When popular discontents have been very prevalent -- there has been generally something found amiss in the constitution,

³⁸ *Western Labor News*, “War and Strikes,” June 7, 1919, 2.

³⁹ *The Enlightener*, “What next? Lessons for all,” June 26, 1919, 2.

⁴⁰ *Western Labor News*, “Brains vs. Brute Force,” May 27, 1919, 4.

⁴¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” February 17, 1919, 6.

or in the conduct of the government.”⁴² What better way to contest a conservative philosophy than to use its own foundational sources against it in a critique of the political system?

The *Western Labor News* also assumed that the Canadian political process had been corrupted by high finance. For this reason, the paper was generally antagonistic when it referred to the actions of the federal government. The paper, published as *The Enlightener*, referred to it as “the House of a Thousand Scandals at Ottawa,” and in another instance argued: “We are governed by a ring of thieves through the medium of professional liars.”⁴³ “Politicians do not represent the people,” it claimed. “They are for the most part the veritable puppets and servants of the big interests. The few who get elected as free men soon find themselves cribbed, cabined and confined by a system that makes protest next to useless.”⁴⁴ Canadian intellectual Andrew Macphail was quoted in the paper, suggesting: “We in Canada pretend that we are living under British institutions. In reality we are not.” Instead, he argued: “We are living under the government of an interested class, who find a party in power and keep it there until it becomes too corrupt to be kept any longer, when it seizes upon the other party and corrupts it.”⁴⁵ Even Plato’s *Republic* was invoked to critique the existing political system, where Plato explains:

Neither drugs nor charms nor burnings will touch a deep-lying political sore any more than a deep bodily one; but only right and utter change of constitution; and they do but lose their labor who think that by any tricks of law they can get the better of those mischiefs of commerce, and see not that they [hew] at a hydra.⁴⁶

The inclusion of this justification for a complete turnaround of government from the thoughts of a foundational Western philosopher is significant. It is debatable whether or not the editorial staff of the *Western Labor News* gleaned it from its original source, as this quote was prominently

⁴² *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 7, 1919, 8.

⁴³ *The Enlightener*, “What next? Lessons for all,” June 26, 1919, 2; *Western Labor News*, “Can Canada Avoid Revolution?,” June 12, 1919, 2.

⁴⁴ *Western Labor News*, “The Rubicon,” May 31, 1919, 3.

⁴⁵ *Western Labor News*, “Why Ottawa Is Impotent,” June 2, 1919, 4.

⁴⁶ *Western Labor News*, June 19, 1919, 3.

featured in a book of the time called *The Cry for Justice: An Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*, edited by Upton Sinclair. Nonetheless, including Plato in the intellectual repertoire of the paper is certainly indicative of the range sources which informed the Winnipeg strikers' critique of the political system.

Beyond the eclectic quotes already mentioned, a major influence on the political critique of the *Western Labor News* was the Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations from the United States. This commission had investigated labour conditions throughout the United States before and during the war, and exposed many of the injustices and shortcomings of the political and capitalist systems in that country. Joseph McCartin argues that the Report of the Commission on Industrial Relations was fairly ground-breaking in the way it “made workers’ rights a central focus of national reform efforts, [and for] placing the issues of authority and consent in the modern workplace on the national political agenda.”⁴⁷ It is no surprise that the *Western Labor News* was able to use it for quotable material to support its position during the strike. Interestingly, as the Winnipeg strike was beginning, a Canadian equivalent to this initiative known as the Mathers Commission was beginning to investigate labour unrest around Canada. Thus, it is significant but unsurprising that the *Western Labor News* employed the American report in its *Strike Editions*.

Small excerpts from this commission could be found scattered throughout the *Western Labor News* during the strike. One of the more significant portions of the final report which informed the strikers' critique of the political system argued:

It is axiomatic that a Government which can be maintained only by the suppression of criticism should not be maintained. Furthermore, it is the lesson of history that attempts to suppress ideas, results only in their more rapid propagation.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 13.

⁴⁸ *Western Labor News*, “The Fruit of Suppression,” June 18, 1919, 3.

This was clearly pointed at opponents of the strike, effectively arguing that the demands made by the strikers were nothing in comparison to what could be demanded if attempts were made to suppress the strike. There is also the suggestion here that the legitimacy of the Canadian government would be shattered if it attempted to suppress the strike without conceding these demands. Other excerpts related more specifically to the strikers' demand for collective bargaining, arguing:

We hold that the efforts to stay the organization of labor or to restrict the right of employees to organize should not be tolerated, but that the opposite policy should prevail and the organization of the trade unions and the employers organizations should be promoted, not, however for the sole purpose of fighting each other, but for the commendable purpose of collective bargaining and the establishment of industrial good will. Organizations of employers that have no object in view except to prevent labor having a voice in fixing the conditions of industry under which it is employed, have no excuse for existence, as they ARE A BAR TO SOCIAL TRANQUILITY and a detriment to the economic progress of our country.⁴⁹

Through excerpts such as these, the *Western Labor News* insisted that the demands of the strike were backed by the law and were aimed at the well-being of society. In aggregate, the excerpts from the Commission on Industrial Relations provided the *Western Labor News* with formidable ideological support for their critique of the postwar political system, and thus their counterhegemonic formulation as a whole. While the report was intended to address labour conditions in the United States, it is telling that the Winnipeg strikers perceived their own conditions to be similar enough that they could simply apply the report's findings to the Canadian context.

Fundamentally, whatever their critique was based on, both strike papers determined that the primary purpose of legislation had become the protection and legitimization of economic exploitation. The *Seattle Union Record* observed that: "Mixing banks in politics is evidently very

⁴⁹ *Western Labor News*, "The One Time Remedy," May 30, 1919, 2.

profitable to bankers, if we may judge by their practice. They have secured many nice business advantages over producers, and, further yet, secure immunity from prosecution for usury and other law violations.”⁵⁰ The *Western Labor News* expressed similar sentiments, citing French poet and novelist Anatole France, stating: “The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridge, to beg in the streets and to steal bread.”⁵¹ In the eyes of the strike papers, the agendas of lawmakers in the United States and Canada had become increasingly unbalanced and tilted towards protecting the status quo of economic corruption.

Nevertheless, the strike press did see some merit in the democratic political systems of the United States and Canada, and the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News* professed a general confidence in the basic structures of their respective national governments. In Seattle, it was suggested that if the true founding principles of the United States were applied to the Seattle dispute, a resolution would be found in favour of the strikers’ demands. President Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom” speech was cited in this regard, which explained:

Men who cry out most loudly against what they term radicalism are the men who find that their private game in politics is being destroyed.... America was created to break every kind of monopoly, and to set men free, upon a footing of equality, upon a footing of opportunity.... I don’t care how benevolent the master is going to be, I will not live under a master. That is not what America was created for. America was created in order that every man should have the same chance as every other man.⁵²

This implies a general faith in the structure of the law on the part of the *Seattle Union Record*, along with the belief that the country’s original principles – here, the equality of opportunity – had been corrupted. The strikers portrayed themselves as the *true* Americans, or even the *true conservative* Americans, because they sought to restore the country to its founding principles.

⁵⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Banking and Politics,” January 3, 1919, 8.

⁵¹ *Western Labor News*, June 19, 1919, 2.

⁵² *Seattle Union Record*, “Still True,” January 29, 1919, 5.

In much the same way, the *Western Labor News* argued that “those who violate every tradition of British liberty [i.e. profiteers and unscrupulous employers] have forfeited the right to administer the affairs of Canada.”⁵³ By selectively interpreting history to defend a given interpretation of what the founding principles of the United States and Canada were, both groups of strikers could argue that the existing governments of their respective countries were straying from long-established political avenues. The political system itself was viewed as salvageable, although serious reconstruction was required.

Thus, a key issue for both groups of strikers was increasing labour representation within democratic society. One *Seattle Union Record* editorial argued that the American political system could and would work fairly if workers only voted for what was truly in their best interests.⁵⁴ Similarly, the *Western Labor News* lamented that in Canada, labour was almost completely unrepresented in the provincial and Dominion governments; thus, the strikers perceived that “governments of today are not disinterested judges. They are the instruments of a class. They represent one section in the community.”⁵⁵ As long as this state of affairs continued, “then so long will the workers have to bow under the yoke of a constitution calculated to keep them in abject submission to capitalist rule.”⁵⁶ With this revealing statement, the *Western Labor News* issued a powerful critique which avowed the inseparability of the economic and political spheres.

Admittedly, the idea that fair representation would be achieved within the Canadian and American democratic systems out of the goodwill of the ruling classes was highly unlikely in the eyes of the strike press. It was understood that extra-political action needed to be taken in the

⁵³ *Western Labor News*, “British Born, No Rights in Canada,” June 20, 1919, 4.

⁵⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, “Died For Right to Vote,” January 27, 1919, 1.

⁵⁵ *Western Labor News*, “Needed – Representative Government,” June 12, 1919, 2.

⁵⁶ *Western Labor News*, “The Lesson of the Strike,” June 21, 1919, 2.

economic realm to ensure the recognition of labour's demands; hence, the general strikes. As Gerard Hauser argues, the workers' movement sacrifices the terms of its own self-consciousness when it participates in the bourgeois public sphere.⁵⁷ If they chose to act within the parameters of the political system as it existed, many strikers recognized that the result would be division and cooptation of their solidarity; thus, by resorting to economic action through the general strike, the workers of Seattle and Winnipeg attempted to influence the political system through the most direct and powerful means they had at their disposal.

Ultimately, the strikers shared a similar sense of what the proper role of government should be in postwar society, and this would shape both the strikers' demands and how the strikers chose to interact with governmental authority. In a general sense, the strikers believed that government needed to play a larger role in postwar reconstruction to steer the United States and Canada on a stable economic course. The *Seattle Union Record* highlighted the need for the government to restore equality of opportunity in the postwar period, and, to this end, approvingly reprinted a quote from Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson which argued that "the government does not owe any man a living, but it does owe him an opportunity to earn a living."⁵⁸ The paper also quoted progressive political activist and muckraker Henry Demarest Lloyd to defend its position, saying: "Industry, like government, exists only by the cooperation of all, and, like government, it must guarantee equal protection to all."⁵⁹ These modest proposals suggest that the paper believed in some manner of government intervention in industry and the economy, especially in times of economic crisis.

⁵⁷ Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 47.

⁵⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, "Opportunity," January 16, 1919, 8.

⁵⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, "Mountain Philosopher," January 21, 1919, 6.

Some quotes from the *Seattle Union Record* presented even more far-reaching possibilities for government intervention. American socialist Max Eastman, whose work argued that industrial democracy was entirely applicable within the context of American political culture, was quoted:

An industrial government ought to be perfectly intelligible to the American people. Two years ago the business men of this country went down to Washington and simply swept aside the political government in order to conduct a successful war. (We had a government by boards, on industries, on food, on labor, on fuel). In Russia the working people did the same thing in order to conduct a successful peace.⁶⁰

Eastman acknowledged that the American state – with financial interests at the helm – had taken a leading role in industry during the war to boost production and ensure industrial peace. Thus, he suggested that it was not un-American to now allow a greater proportion of representation for the workers of the United States in peacetime.

Many similar sentiments could be found in the *Western Labor News*. Strikers in Winnipeg certainly believed that the government was acting thoughtlessly by not mediating the strike or intervening in the economy. One editorial argued: “In the face of a most serious crisis, the governments, Dominion, provincial and civic sit inactive – impotent.”⁶¹ Another suggested “it shows how little the government understands the unrest of this hour. They tinker with tariffs when [the] real need of the nation is a bold financial policy that would, by conscripting wealth, remove the load of debt from the nation and so reduce taxation.” Beyond increasing the taxes of the wealthy through the “conscription of wealth,” a bold “policy of the nationalization of the basic industries of the nation” was also proposed.⁶² In all, government was viewed by the *Western Labor News* as the instrument through which to ensure “the protection of the weak

⁶⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Max Eastman – Poet and Revolutionist,” February 18, 1919, 8.

⁶¹ *Western Labor News*, “Needed – Representative Government,” June 12, 1919, 2.

⁶² *Western Labor News*, “Tremors of the Earthquake,” June 9, 1919, 3.

against the strong... as a great-hearted watchful friend” which “should help labor to its full and due recompense and reward.”⁶³

Some comparisons were naturally made to the government of Britain. “Why could not our government boldly face the question as the British government has done?” argued one editorial:

Let the State take the responsibility of finding a suitable job for every man at a living wage.... Behind the whole question of collective bargaining and the sympathetic strike lies the question of the democratic control of industry. The British Government is attempting to solve this most important problem by creating new machinery in the form of industrial councils. These are not the solutions proposed by the workers, but apparently they have been successful in forming a sort of *modus Vivendi*. That, after all, is the British way.⁶⁴

In the strikers’ eyes, the British way naturally entailed the pragmatic implementation of new solutions to new problems. In sum, this sentiment related the nationalistic form discussed in the previous chapter to the strikers’ critique of the political system.

IV. The General Strike and the Role of Government in the Anti-strike Press

How did the anti-strike press perceive the strikers’ claims about government, and how did they view the role of government themselves? Above all, the anti-strike press seems to have generally believed that the general strikes represented – at the very least – an attempt to divide the allegiance of American citizens against the nation (at worst, this attempt was considered to be violent and revolutionary). The *Seattle Star* considered the general strike a “showdown” and, as mentioned above, a “test of Americanism.” It believed that “part of [the] community [was] defying our government,” and was “contemplating changing that government, and not by *American methods*.” The *Seattle Star* was concerned that labour, a “small part of our city,” talked

⁶³ *Western Labor News*, “What Constitutes a State?,” June 23, 1919, 4.

⁶⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Is There A Way Out,” June 23, 1919, 4.

plainly of “taking over things,” and of “resuming under [their] management.”⁶⁵ Such ideas, according to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, violated a key principle of society: “a fundamental principle of all government is that there cannot be a sovereignty within a sovereignty.” The highest allegiance of an American citizen had to be to one’s country “and in every issue in which his country is involved he is compelled by the logic of facts and the result of experience to side with his country.” Ultimately, it believed that “divided allegiance in the United States is a revolt against democracy, no matter what form or direction this allegiance takes.”⁶⁶

The anti-strike press in Winnipeg also expressed concern over the issue of divided allegiance posed by the general strike. The *Winnipeg Citizen* argued that “Winnipeg, as a matter of plain fact, [was] governed by the Central Strike Committee of the Trades and Labor Council,” having effectively usurped municipal power through the strike.⁶⁷ This was perceived as completely contrary to the Canadian democratic process. The *Winnipeg Tribune* agreed, believing that “Manitoba and Dominion authority, and Empire authority, yes, even International authority, will not tolerate lawless Russian rule on the decent soil of Canada.”⁶⁸ The strike was clearly the work of those who had essentially resigned themselves and said “to hell with the government.”⁶⁹

Significantly, the anti-strike press did not believe that the democratic systems of the United States and Canada were as corrupt or defunct as the strikers asserted. In the midst of the strike, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reminded its readers that the primary elections for city council were coming up, and asked: “Can any one question the importance of these elections in

⁶⁵ *Seattle Star*, “Under Which Flag?,” February 5, 1919, 1.

⁶⁶ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Divided Allegiance,” February 12, 1919, 6.

⁶⁷ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Strike Situation in Winnipeg,” May 19, 1919, 1.

⁶⁸ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Just One Ending,” June 7, 1919, 4.

⁶⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “The Difference,” June 6, 1919, 4.

the light of what has been going on of late?”⁷⁰ In other words, the worth of the democratic system would be proven when the citizens of Seattle elected those who would treat the upstart workers of Seattle with severity.

In a similar way, the *Winnipeg Tribune* argued that the democratic process remained the best hope for quelling discontent in society. It asserted: “When a doubtful question goes up to the people – the voters – the Canadian practice is to decide by the ruling of the constitutional majority.” The paper admitted that “the majority may sometimes be wrong, but the highest human ingenuity in government, where the ballot is free, has never discovered any better way of setting a community difficulty than at the ballot-box.”⁷¹ The *Manitoba Free Press* agreed, and at one point printed the words of a returned soldier, who argued that “the cause of all this unrest is not any defect in our political institutions, but deficiencies in ourselves as individuals or as members of the various groups within the state.”⁷² Elsewhere the paper insisted that “the antidote to revolutionary tendencies in the body politic will be found in the full application of the principles of representation and responsibility,”⁷³ affirming that the integrity of the existing political system remained solid.

For this reason, the anti-strike press in both Seattle and Winnipeg agreed that the government had a proper role to play in defending itself against the threat to authority posed by the strikers. Doing so could even include the use of force, if necessary. Mayor Ole Hanson released a statement to the public stating:

The seat of government is still at the city hall. The mayor and the chief of police, together with their legally chosen assistants, are the peace officers of this city, and will continue to

⁷⁰ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Loyalty in the Council,” February 10, 1919, 6.

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Demands of Justice,” June 3, 1919, 4.

⁷² *Manitoba Free Press*, “Returned Soldier Discusses Causes and Character of Strike,” June 7, 1919, 11.

⁷³ *Manitoba Free Press*, “Unrepresentative Democracy,” May 13, 1919, 13.

police the city of Seattle. Our function is to preserve order and protect life and property. This will be done.⁷⁴

The mayor also notified the strikers that he would “take advantage of the assistance and protection offered this city by the national government and operate all the essential enterprises.”⁷⁵ In this regard, the mayor referred to the several hundred soldiers from the nearby Camp Lewis who had been mobilized into Seattle to prevent any violent uprising. Throughout the strike, the possibility of violence saw the state ready to move against Seattle workers with armed force.

The Citizens’ Committee also believed that the integrity of the federal government was at stake, and thus violent force was perceived as a legitimate option for the purposes of crushing the Winnipeg strike. The Committee argued that any action which implicitly attacked the Constitution “must be an occasion for the performance by this Government of its full and unquestioned duty to protect its laws and its own dignity.”⁷⁶ Certainly, this rationale for state violence became questionable after violence actually erupted on Bloody Saturday against unarmed demonstrators near the end of the strike.

Ironically, despite these claims that the state alone possessed the legitimate use of violence, opponents of the strike in both Seattle and Winnipeg generally approved of the para-police groups who employed force to defeat the strike. In both cities, armed special police, or “specials,” were deputized to protect scab workers and defend property. One could argue that this essentially represented extra-legal violence which helped to sustain the rule of law.⁷⁷ In Seattle, a group known as the Minute Men also mobilized strongly against the strike. This was

⁷⁴ *Seattle Star*, “Mayor Hanson’s Statement,” February 4, 1919, 2.

⁷⁵ *Seattle Star*, “Troops in Seattle,” February 7, 1919, 1.

⁷⁶ Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, *The Activities and Organization of The Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand in connection with the Winnipeg Strike, May-June, 1919* (Winnipeg: Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, [1920]), 37.

⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 179.

essentially a vigilante anti-socialist group who employed spies and agent provocateurs to harass Seattle labour organizations. During the strike, this group “organized the framework of a complete citizens’ police system” in case a “reign of terror” emerged from the strike situation and “the contemplated revolution was started and got beyond the control of the police.”⁷⁸ Regarding Winnipeg (but also applicable to Seattle as well), Tom Mitchell and James Naylor argue that these special police were similar to “the nascent fascist organizations that were being spawned by the inability of European states to stem the working-class challenge at the end of the war.”⁷⁹ The comparison is apt, as the hegemony these individuals were protecting was heavily based on xenophobia and a strong sense of nationalism.

However, all but the most vitriolic commentators against the strike were willing to concede that the government had a new role to play in the postwar period, and that this new role included the rehabilitation of the economic system. Nevertheless, the perceived new role of government was naturally directed towards maintaining the legitimacy of capitalist relations of production in postwar society. For example, in Seattle, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* commented with approval that Congress was “deliberating reconstruction legislation,” and lamented that it was “not yet ready to authorize federal enterprises that will relieve the labor market.”⁸⁰ The *Seattle Times* questioned the delay between the end of the war and any sign of government action to remedy the unemployment problem in the United States. It boldly suggested that:

Were the national legislature at this session to undertake a billion dollars’ worth of construction work – reclamation projects, road-building, construction enterprises of various kinds and other measures that have been considered for many years in Congress – there would be no unemployment problem in the country.⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Seattle Times*, “Minute Men Help Police Guard City,” February 13, 1919, 3.

⁷⁹ Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, “The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm,” in *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 208.

⁸⁰ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Unemployed,” February 6, 1919, 6.

⁸¹ *Seattle Times*, “Why Doesn’t Congress Do Something?,” January 15, 1919, 6.

Consequently, while steadfastly denying that any variant of socialism could be applied to the American context, the anti-strike press was often willing to acknowledge that the state was the only entity capable of solving problems of national significance. Even the *Seattle Star* insisted that wages “must remain high and be raised higher, and hours still further shortened” through the influence of the federal government. Interestingly, the paper claimed that “there [was] no socialism in this,” but instead this was “EMERGENCY-ISM.”⁸² In this regard, the anti-strike press seems to have anticipated the welfare capitalism of the interwar period.

Similarly, on the other side of the border, the *Winnipeg Tribune* understood that it was the duty of “our statesmen now on the job” to return “that money already illegally taken from the people by profiteers.”⁸³ It argued that “the functions of a local government are limited in uprooting evils in the economic life of the nation,” and identified that “the injustices from which all the people are suffering,” was “pressing home upon the Ottawa government the need for radical action in matters in which it alone has the power to take immediate action.”⁸⁴ The *Manitoba Free Press* made the comparison between the British and Canadian situations. Fearing that Great Britain was itself close to revolution due to its own labour troubles, the paper acknowledged that “the final catastrophe was averted by the united efforts of the government and the regular trade union leaders,” and thus one possible solution to Canada’s labour troubles was to follow this course, and establish “a safety valve for troubles of this kind [through] the presence in parliament of a strong body of labor representatives who are able to exert their influence directly upon the government of the day.”⁸⁵ All of this is consistent with the conclusion drawn by Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, who argue that because capitalist interests took on

⁸² *Seattle Star*, “Unemployment? Why?,” January 29, 1919, 6.

⁸³ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Act At Once,” June 19, 1919, 4.

⁸⁴ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “The Premier’s Statement,” June 27, 1919, 4.

⁸⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, “The Real Remedy,” June 3, 1919, 9.

an increasingly large number of administrative roles during the war, “traditional liberal conceptions about the separation of capital and the state were eclipsed by a growing fascination with some kind of corporatist state.” In the eyes of these ruling interests and their collaborators, “state institutions would more directly sustain the capitalist economy, and the principles of efficiency and managerial expertise – the hallmarks of what is often called pre-war “progressivism” – would prevail over narrow party spirit.”⁸⁶ Although this would entrench capitalism firmly into the structure of the state, there was some room in this conception of corporatism for labour to have a voice.

In sum, although there was no substance to the claim that the strikers carried a divided allegiance (in the sense that they were Bolshevik agents attempting to spark revolutions in the United States and Canada), opponents of the strikes and their representatives among the anti-strike press perceived (in good or bad faith) a revolutionary threat that had to be met with the full power of government. Nevertheless, all but the most vitriolic commentators admitted that the government had an expanded role in the postwar period (if for no other reason than to keep labour agitation at a minimum).

V. Progress, History, and the Course of Civilization

The ideological formulation of the strikers in Seattle and Winnipeg also diverged from that of their opponents in terms of how each perceived progress and the course of civilization. In the pages of the *Seattle Union Record* and *Western Labor News*, there existed the almost millenarian belief that a new day had arrived for society in which equality would be established and the world would essentially be remade anew. This mindset placed the general strikes into a category beyond mere industrial disputes, supporting the contention that these events represented

⁸⁶ Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, “The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada,” in *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 15.

real counterhegemonic challenges to the postwar social order. For example, the *Seattle Union Record* pronounced:

We are facing a new era.... The world has been made safe for democracy; our task now is to make democracy safe for all of God's little images.... We cannot go on as we have. We cannot continue to blight the lives of 1,000 workmen to make one millionaire.... The world cannot be made up half of Cains and half of Abels. We are brothers, children of the same benign God, and as soon as we thoroughly recognize that fact the sooner will the world be the good place to live in it was intended to be."⁸⁷

Here, this millenarian belief revealed its religious influence. However, claims elsewhere perceived this transition period in more secular terms, perceiving the new era as emerging from the rubble of class warfare with the end result of a more equitable society. The prediction of American philosopher John Dewey was included in one editorial, which claimed that "the rule of all upper classes, including the so-called "respectable society" [was] nearing its close."⁸⁸

From essentially the same ideological position, the *Western Labor News* argued that workers "have reached a new day. A day when Labor sees itself as a solid whole lined up against a much smaller but just as solid opposition. It is the worker versus the profiteer. Justice versus avarice. Right versus wrong. Life versus death."⁸⁹ The average industrial dispute is not commonly portrayed as a matter of life and death. Elsewhere, the *Western Labor News* also asserted that in the postwar period humanity had "all the stuff to build a heaven" on earth, and the strike was simply part of a "transition period" that required "heroic measures" to usher in a new era.⁹⁰ This was not purely hyperbolic polemic (although there was plenty of that). Many believed that a new era had arrived, and that the postwar world would see the reorganization of society on a more egalitarian basis.

⁸⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, "The New Order," February 15, 1919, 8.

⁸⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, "Rule of "Respectable Society" At End," February 10, 1919, 4.

⁸⁹ *Western Labor News*, "The Sympathetic Strike," June 3, 1919, 4.

⁹⁰ *Western Labor News*, "The Hour of Man," May 19, 1919, 3; *Western Labor News*, "The Incentive of Profit," June 18, 1919, 2.

It is obvious that foreign events – specifically, the Russian Revolution – had an influence on the development of the strikers’ belief that society could be suddenly and wholly remade. As Anderson points out, “the Bolshevik revolutionary model... opened the possibility of, so to speak, cutting history off at the pass.”⁹¹ How did both strike papers comment on the event? For fear of giving a basis to claims that the strike was a Bolshevik attempt to carry out another revolution in the United States, the *Seattle Union Record* was cautious in giving direct support for the Russian Revolution. The paper noticeably toned down its rhetoric concerning Russia during the lead up to the strike. Detailed knowledge of the atrocities and the authoritarian nature of the new Russian regime were not readily available, and so it was generally perceived as a great triumph for the international working-class. The paper even suggested that the United States, along with the rest of the West, could learn from the new Russian regime, arguing:

The plutocrats of all countries are united in howling against what they call the terrorism of the workers’ experiment in Russia. The working people there may make some mistakes along this line, but remembering what plutocratic greed brought on the world in the last four years, we would think it good taste at least for the plutocrats to say nothing. If we were they, we would be ashamed of the comparison even if we took their lies about Russia at face value.⁹²

The paper also rationalized the Russian regime’s violence, and explained that “whatever force may have been used by the Lenin regime as a military measure, is one thing,” but “it should be clearly kept in mind that the Bolsheviki are no more “Terrorists” than, say, the Republican or Democratic parties in America.”⁹³ As Robert Murray notes, this enthusiasm and sympathy is understandable, as “having very little success of their own to point to and completely

⁹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 156-157.

⁹² *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 16, 1919, 8.

⁹³ *Seattle Union Record*, “Not Terrorists,” January 25, 1919, 8.

discouraged by their wartime persecution, American radicals were suddenly confronted with the most successful Socialist revolution the world had yet seen.”⁹⁴

However, the *Seattle Union Record* ultimately denied that their strike was in any way directly connected to or influenced by the Russian Revolution. While it boosted working-class morale and class-consciousness in Seattle, the milieu of American political culture made it necessary for the *Seattle Union Record* to differentiate itself from this influence. In the aftermath of the strike, the publicity committee of the strikers insisted:

Let it be understood that while Seattle labor staged the first general strike in America, it positively did not secure the methods of same from Russia, nor from any of its Bolshevik subjects. The inspiration of applying the general strike was taken from the general lock-out system as applied in many instances by big business.⁹⁵

This stance was taken to reassure the public that organized labor’s loyalty and methods were sound and one hundred percent American.

The Russian Revolution also had the same indirect influence on the Winnipeg strike. In the words of the *Western Labor News*:

Working-class thinking in Canada as elsewhere has been profoundly influenced by recent events in Russia. Students of history know that the French revolution has left an indelible mark upon the political ideals and institutions and even the literature of the whole world. So it is perhaps not going too far to say that the Russian Revolution has captured the imagination of the working-class the world over.⁹⁶

Interestingly, Eric Hobsbawm agrees that, in the twentieth century, “the radicalism of the Russian Revolution took over from that of the French Revolution as the main ideology of global emancipation.”⁹⁷ The success of the Bolshevik Revolution provided psychological reinforcement that indicated to many Winnipeg labour leaders that the time was right for the workers of the

⁹⁴ Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 36-37.

⁹⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “Says Labor Is Against Bolshevism,” February 15, 1919, 3.

⁹⁶ *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

⁹⁷ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 136.

world to unite and cast off their chains. The *Western Labor News* demonstrated a keen awareness of the worldwide labour unrest that was endemic in the postwar period, explaining:

Labor in every part of the world is in incipient revolt against the present inequality.... This unrest found voice, not in Russia and central Europe alone; but in France, Italy, Britain, Australia, the U.S.A., etc. It [is] a world phenomenon for the simple reason that the profiteering has been universal.⁹⁸

At the centre of this trend were, of course, the events in Russia; nevertheless, as in Seattle, the *Western Labor News* ultimately went to great pains to demonstrate that the general strike was not a Russian method, explaining: “Canada is not Russia and... social developments will proceed here along quite different lines.... The rank and file of organized labor in Western Canada is predominantly British. They look for leadership to Great Britain rather than to Russia.”⁹⁹ “Labor, the world over,” the paper argued, “regards it as the business of Labor in every country to work out its own salvation in its own way.”¹⁰⁰

In sum, the Seattle and Winnipeg strikers were aware of the Russian Revolution, and it provided significant psychological reinforcement for their own collective action during the general strike. However, because of the strength of the criticism emanating from both strikes’ opponents, the strikers were forced to differentiate their own actions from this influence.

Indeed, those opposed to the strikes naturally perceived the strikers’ pronouncement of a new day arriving as a threat to the stability of the body politic. Although many admitted that living conditions had deteriorated in the postwar period, the argument was made that the people of Canada and the United States needed to have faith in the established laws of their respective countries for the situation to be remedied. Otherwise (matching the hyperbolic language of the

⁹⁸ *Western Labor News*, “Citizens and Revolution,” May 29, 1919, 2.

⁹⁹ *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Western Labor News*, “Calgary Convention and the Strike,” June 15, 1919, 1;4.

strikers), the anti-strike press proclaimed that at stake in each of the two general strikes was the very foundation of civilization itself.

As the general strike was a foreign phenomenon in Western society in 1919, it is not surprising that people of all political leanings believed it was the beginning of a truly revolutionary moment in both countries. Russia was represented as having already left the trajectory of Western civilization with the success of the Bolshevik revolution, and many believed the same phenomenon was occurring in Canada and the United States. For example, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued that continuing on the existing path of civilization was the only way to achieve true progress. In one article written as an open letter to Seattle labor, the city's religious establishment proposed:

Your [labour's] problem dwarfs into insignificance compared with the preservation in the next year of civilization itself, and you should settle it at once and settle down to the biggest job humanity ever undertook [post-war reconstruction]. . . . For without [this] democracy itself will be destroyed in the last home it has on earth.¹⁰¹

For the anti-strike press there was a prevalent belief that “the balance of human civilization,” was an actual edifice that could be disrupted.¹⁰² The general strike represented “organized forces of revolt, insurrection and rebellion” attempting to disturb this balance and the consequences of such a fall were believed to be dire.¹⁰³ The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued:

If “sympathetic strikes” should become a regular institution it means that American cities will go out of business, and that a nation-wide “back to the farm” movement will begin. If Americans who live in cities cannot rely upon paid agents to supply their needs without fail, then they must arrange to supply their daily needs themselves.¹⁰⁴

In other words, if workers used the general strike every time their demands were not met, supply chains would collapse and urban centres would be unable to sustain themselves.

¹⁰¹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Pastors Review Strike Problems From Pulpits Before Large Audience,” February 3, 1919, 5.

¹⁰² *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “To Labor Of Seattle,” February 6, 1919, 12.

¹⁰³ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Issue,” February 6, 1919, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Self-Service,” February 9, 1919, 6.

In Winnipeg, the editors of the *Winnipeg Citizen* professed a similar apocalyptic view, suggesting that society would be ripped apart by continuous general strikes. The paper argued:

It is time for organized communities to realize that the social fabric is being attacked by disintegrating forces, and that, unless they defend themselves, the present order of civilized life will pass away in a flux of destruction and chaotic experimentation. After this has run its course, society will have to reconstruct itself painfully and return to the principles of responsibility and intelligent subordination, by which alone civilized life can survive or man progress.¹⁰⁵

Even the *Manitoba Free Press* thought that the strikers had “dragged the first principles of the system up to the light of day, and [were] working with live and explosive elements.”¹⁰⁶ The general strike represented a return to a kind of Hobbesian state of nature, where the social contract did not yet exist.

When the strikes were defeated, however, they were automatically perceived as having been merely temporary interruptions in the normal course of progress rather than any kind negotiation towards a new social contract. The strikes had been something that needed to be “dealt with,” rather than an indication that postwar labour relations needed fundamental reshaping. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* explained:

Seattle has not existed by the permission of any man, labor leader or revolutionist. Business has been hampered; the wheels of industry have been idle, the life of the community has been thrown out of its accustomed gear. But for how long? Seattle went ahead and Seattle will continue to go ahead. Strike committees may delay or may complicate matters, but they are only hindrances. They cannot close the city; they cannot throttle it and they cannot frighten it.¹⁰⁷

The strike was seen as a “hindrance” to the life of the city and the most worrying concern of the whole affair was that “business had been hampered.” Indeed, in this excerpt the “life of the community” is essentially equated with business and “the wheels of industry.” Another editorial suggested that the strike had been a “good thing” because it “cleared the atmosphere” and

¹⁰⁵ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “No Strikes in Public Service,” June 6, 1919, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, “The Industrial Unrest Commission,” May 14, 1919, 11.

¹⁰⁷ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Coming Out of It,” February 9, 1919, 1.

“proved the weakness of the radicals;” in other words, the strike provided organized labour with the opportunity to purge itself of the un-American elements, and allowed “conservative labor to take over control of its own affairs.”¹⁰⁸ In this interpretation, the temporary impediment of the general strike came to an end, and civilization and true progress continued on its natural course.

The same sentiments could be found in Winnipeg near the conclusion of the strike. The anti-strike press presented moments of crisis, such as the general strike, as mere aberrations in the otherwise stable social order. When the strike was waning, the *Winnipeg Citizen* reported that it was “dying a natural and quiet death.”¹⁰⁹ In a revealing choice of words, the *Winnipeg Telegram* argued in similar vein that Bolshevism in Russia had to “be left to burn itself out.”¹¹⁰ Like Bolshevism, the general strike was simply an idea that would die out, and the *Winnipeg Tribune* also argued that though “ideas die slowly... nevertheless they in the fullness of time die, unless they embody some law of the eternal that humanity may strive for, never to entirely grasp.” The strike was dismissed as an ill-informed action, where “the ideas of Marx [had] been passionately taken up by many who... never had the patience to try them by the test of intellect and try to answer the question, “What next?””¹¹¹

It was made clear in the anti-strike press that the development of civilization depended upon slow and gradual reforms. Any quick and easy solutions to society’s problems would always prove to be fatal to the improvement of civilization. Progress, in this view, was achieved slowly and deliberately over time. The *Seattle Times* believed that “generation after generation, America’s citizens... fought their way onward and upward against stupidity, inefficiency and error, constantly striving to improve their condition” and, through “suffering and sacrifice,” the

¹⁰⁸ *Seattle Times*, “Labor Radicals Must Go!,” February 10, 1919, 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “There Is Greater Work To Do,” June 20, 1919, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “The Grasping Hand of the I.W.W.,” May 31, 1919, 15.

¹¹¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Ideas and Ideals,” June 25, 1919, 4.

country had achieved “that which the nation now enjoys of law, order and progress.”¹¹² In one metaphor, progress was depicted as a ship sailing forward. “It seems to me the great industrial activities of this country, before the war, were like a great ship, steaming along under fair headway, in fairly smooth water,” read one letter published in the *Seattle Star*. “There is every necessity for us to get up full speed ahead again [but] the general strike is allowing the ship to drift into anarchy.”¹¹³

Similarly, the general strike in Winnipeg was interpreted as an attempt to force something on the course of history for which it was not ready. “If a society comes in which pleasurable, co-operative work produces plenty for all,” argued the *Winnipeg Tribune*, “it will be built upon those democratic and industrial institutions that evolved through long centuries of struggle.” There were no evolutionary shortcuts to the good society: “The Utopia reached by short cuts... is like the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow – found only in childish imaginations.”¹¹⁴ Since the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden, argued the *Winnipeg Telegram*, mankind had been willing to “follow the gleam” of “panaceas” offering enduring happiness; now, the paper warned that “the five-headed Cerberus of Winnipeg, gifted with a quintripled [sic] power of tongue, seems to have been able to hypnotize many men, not themselves fanatics, into belief in the latest cure-all.”¹¹⁵ Within this ideological worldview, the general strike was simply the latest manifestation of the “destructive force” ever present in civilization.¹¹⁶ In the *Winnipeg Citizen*, comparisons were even drawn between the strike and the fall of the Roman Empire, reflecting on the past and claiming:

¹¹² *Seattle Times*, “The History Children Should Learn,” January 25, 1919, 6.

¹¹³ *Seattle Star*, “The Strike! Readers of the Star Discuss the Walkout,” February 3, 1919, 6.

¹¹⁴ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Utopias at the Rainbow’s Foot,” June 21, 1919, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Fakirs and Dupes,” June 2, 1919, 7.

¹¹⁶ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “A Menace to Capital and Labor,” June 13, 1919, 2.

He is a foolish man who thinks he is too wise to learn from the past. Of the future there can be no certainty but the past is known to us and that there is a philosophy of history, there is, amongst men of thought and culture, no shadow of doubt. One of the most powerful influences upon the human race was the Roman Empire [which] declined and fell. It has left amongst other things certain lessons which are entirely apropos to conditions in Canada today.¹¹⁷

Elsewhere, the paper insisted that society “must move forward one step at a time,” and “according to the ideal and principles of Anglo-Saxon civilization and of common righteousness.”¹¹⁸ Mayor Charles Gray was also cited in the *Manitoba Free Press*, explaining to the citizens of Winnipeg:

History has taught us that men only learn wisdom under the pressure of calamity – calmness, patience and British fair play are the salient attributes that must and will guide us safely through the trying hour in our city’s life.... Law and order must be the fundamental basis of our social structure.¹¹⁹

The *Winnipeg Telegram* cited the importance of “the ancients,” whose spirit could be encapsulated with “the old Latin tag – Festina Lente – make haste slowly,” and despaired that “the modern mind seems, from disuse perhaps, to have lost in some degree its capacity for sustained, serious, logical thought, and the result is much hasty, ill-considered action, which leads to no real progress.”¹²⁰ In aggregate, these references to progress and history carried the implication that the strikers had disregarded some kind of ancient wisdom by attempting to take a historical “shortcut” through the strike.

No example of how quick and easy change would turn disastrous was more stark in the anti-strike press than the Russian Revolution. As McCartin points out, in light of the Russian Revolution and the resultant paranoia towards leftist ideas, the nuance between “state regulation and state socialism” and “collective bargaining and collectivism” was not appreciated by many

¹¹⁷ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “A Lesson from the Past,” June 14, 1919, 2.

¹¹⁸ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Millennium in Winnipeg,” June 17, 1919, 3.

¹¹⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, “Mayor Gray Appeals to Citizens of Winnipeg to Avoid Violence,” May 15, 1919, in *The Winnipeg General Strike* by J.E. Rea (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 27.

¹²⁰ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Festina Lente,” June 7, 1919, 11.

politicians or business leaders.¹²¹ Postwar Russia was perceived as being the perfect illustration of the consequences inherent in breaking with tradition.

As mentioned previously, the beginning of the Red Scare saw the conflation of labour radicalism with the Bolshevism of the Russian Revolution and any of a variety of other “foreign” doctrines. These foreign doctrines represented a threat to the political traditions of both countries. For example, the *Seattle Star* argued that the “false Bolshevik leaders haven’t a chance on earth to win anything for you in this country, *because this country is America – not Russia.*”¹²² Despite the fact that the United States had been forged through a revolution, the revolution of the general strike was still perceived as a foreign idea. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* distinguished between “American” revolution and “alien” revolution in one editorial, claiming:

Not long ago I heard labor leaders most favorably compare the murderous Bolshevik upheaval with our war of revolution. They also declared the cause of American labor was today bound up in the success of the bloody-handed Bolsheviks. This they said to an approving audience, largely alien in birth, and having little understanding of American history and institutions. I wondered how men of repute could be so criminally false to historical facts and so densely ignorant of the centuries [of] difference between the political conditions and character of this country and Russia.¹²³

Whereas the American Revolution was perceived as a legitimate revolt against tyranny, the Russian Revolution was perceived as being based on illegitimate principles against civilization.

Similarly, in Winnipeg, the “Bolshevism” of which the general strike was a part was considered contrary to true “Canadianism,” as explained by the *Winnipeg Telegram*. It argued: “There is nothing that Bolshevism, or any other imported theory, has to offer that cannot be better served by the processes of democracy and the spirit of Canadianism.”¹²⁴ Again, as the

¹²¹ McCartin, *Labor’s Great War*, 186.

¹²² *Seattle Star*, “Stop Before It’s Too Late,” February 4, 1919, 1.

¹²³ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Bolshevism and Labor,” February 10, 1919, 6.

¹²⁴ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Canadians Deal With Conditions, Not Theories,” June 2, 1919, 6.

previous chapter demonstrated, what was deemed “American” or “Canadian” was merely the form used to envelop a group’s ideological content. Despite the fact that it had little directly to do with the two general strikes, that Bolshevism (as the representative ideology of leftist thinking at the time) was deemed un-American and un-Canadian in the popular mind during these strikes was a rout for the strikers’ progressive and counterhegemonic challenges.

VII. Conclusions

The opposing themes outlined above clearly indicate that two conflicting ideologies emerged during the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes. The strikers’ counterhegemonic formulation revealed an ideology founded in a sense of producerism grounded in the hope for a more equitable postwar world. In Seattle, this was rooted in what was known as “Duncanism,” and in a long-standing American tradition of artisan republicanism, and specifically in its concept of the self-governing workshop. In Winnipeg, on the other hand, this was grounded in the labourism of the nation-wide labour revolt, as well as the infusion of socialism from the SPC. Both identified the corruption of the political system by high finance as one of the key problems facing postwar society. Both determined that labour had to rely on itself as a social force in order to achieve positive gains in society. From an amalgamation of eclectic sources, both agreed that the postwar state had a larger role to play in regulating the economy, especially in assisting labour interests. Importantly, this change was demanded immediately, as the strikers were informed by a sense of progress that left room for society to change suddenly and in wide-ranging ways (of which the Russian Revolution was a favourable example).

On the other hand, the strikers’ opponents saw themselves as defending the status quo; thus, no “sources” needed to be put forward to defend their position other than that of “common sense.” The anti-strike press saw the strike as an indication that some segment of society had a

divided allegiance against the state; thus, it argued that the state should have the legitimate right to use force to defend itself against this threat. In this worldview, this would be done for the greater good of society as a whole. Opponents of the strike seem to have believed that society was fundamentally stable, although the strike was represented as a threat to civilization in order to mobilize people against it. This worldview saw progress as a gradual and balanced movement, and the Russian Revolution was perceived as an extreme example of what would happen if societal change was forced too quickly. Most conceded, however, that the state also had a role to play in the reconstruction of economic life in the postwar period, although it was never clearly stated what this role should be.

Chapter 4: Conceptions of Class

The Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes can most accurately be understood as class-based social movements. The citizens of Seattle and Winnipeg confronted each other primarily in terms of their differing interpretations of class identification; thus, this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the perceptions of class structure as perceived by each of the groups involved in the two strikes.

As with the basic ideological presuppositions outlined in the previous chapter, a similar conception of class was shared by each group with its counterpart across the border. Arguably, this demonstrates the continuity of conceptions of class among similar groups across national boundaries during the postwar era of social crisis. Broadly, the strikers conceived of society as divided into two classes: producers and parasites. Their opponents generally denied the existence of social class altogether, but – in Winnipeg, at least – often paradoxically invoked the importance of a “middle class” as the foundation of social life.

It is vital to identify how these competing conceptions of social class informed the discursive struggle during these two strikes. Whether the strikers or their opponents were more “correct” in accurately describing the reality of the situation is ultimately moot, as Pierre Bourdieu argues that conceptions of class – and whether they are perceived to exist or not – are ultimately based on political choices, and the sense of belonging to a class is ultimately a socially constructed identification.¹ However, this does not make a group’s conception of class any less significant when placed in the context of a political struggle, and the general strikes represented a contest over which understanding of class would become the hegemonic “common sense” of the postwar period.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “What Makes a Social Class?: On The Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32 (1987): 2.

I. The Strikers' Conception of Class

The conception of class at the root of both the Seattle and Winnipeg strikers' identities was heavily influenced by the producerist sentiments that informed both groups. Fundamental within this conception was the conviction that society was composed of only two classes – a productive working class and a parasitic master class. For example, Bercuson points out that in the years leading up to the Winnipeg strike, workers “began to believe in the idea that there were only two classes of consequence in society, those who produced and those who lived off producers,” and as a logical result of this philosophy, workers began to be able “to think in terms of general strikes or the creation of a single union of all wage earners.”² Certainly, the producerist conception of class – presenting a struggle between the “masses” versus “elites” – was closely related to the political philosophy of populism, and much of the strikers' rhetoric often exuded a populist tone. This style of address and this inclusive conception of class arguably created the discursive space necessary to generate the solidarity for two strikes in the first place.

In the rhetoric of both the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News*, both the strikers and the “general public” were often conflated into this productive working class. Heron argues that “from this perspective, [even] an entrepreneurial industrialist was a co-producer, facing the same enemy in the economic “parasites” who lived off the honest toil of the “producing classes.”³ It was imperative to both papers that the average citizen should identify their own interests with that of the striker. In other words, the general strike was portrayed as being for the good of all members of the producing class. For example, arguing that what benefits labour ultimately benefits the entire community, the *Seattle Union Record* reported:

² David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 193.

³ Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 59.

Regarding the present metal trades strike in this city, where does the interest of the average person lie? In the hands of the shipyard owners or in the fate of the worker in this strike? If the strike is won, it will mean a distribution of \$200,000 to \$300,000 a week among the [small] business men of Seattle. If we lose, can or will the shipyard owners distribute that much money among the small business men of Seattle?⁴

In other words, an increase in wages for the Seattle strikers would guarantee larger profits for the city's small business owners, while a victory for the shipyard employers would result in no economic benefit for this group. Thus, the *Seattle Union Record* argued that the average citizen of Seattle had more in common with the strikers than with the employers opposed to the strike.

Similarly, the *Western Labor News* argued that society was a cohesive unit that worked best when its constituent parts worked together harmoniously. It suggested that "the general strike has done more to convince the general public that society today is a unit than anything else that has ever happened," and that "it compels us to realize that the lives of the workers as a whole and our lives are wrapped up together."⁵ While small business owners existed "in the industrial world but not of the industrial world," they had a duty "to see that those injustices which are the cause of strikes [were] removed,"⁶ and to realize that their fate was tied in with the fate of the strikers themselves. The interests of the general public were perceived to be in line with those of the strikers, and it was the responsibility of all to "get down to a study of the economic problems of the hour and... see the imperative need for a complete change of our social system."⁷ By doing so, the *Western Labor News* was confident that the public would perceive society in the way it was represented by the strikers.

In a significant display of this sense of class solidarity amongst the producers of society, the strike press also included farmers and small agrarian interests in their overarching conception

⁴ *Seattle Union Record*, "To The Public," January 30, 1919, 4.

⁵ *Western Labor News*, "The General Public and the Strike," June 14, 1919, 3.

⁶ *The Enlightener*, "What next? Lessons for all," June 26, 1919, 2.

⁷ *Western Labor News*, "The General Public and the Strike," June 14, 1919, 3.

of the producing class (at least rhetorically). For example, in the *Seattle Union Record*, the Nonpartisan League was a much-discussed topic around the time of the strike. This grassroots American movement, initiated by farmers in North Dakota, was closely followed by the Seattle labour movement, as it advocated state control of farm-related industries in an effort to wrestle them out of the hands of corporate interests in the east. In one commentary on the League's activities up to 1919, the *Seattle Union Record* asked:

Will orderly reform of economic conditions take place, as Nonpartisans desire? Will the league state of North Dakota establish a near-Utopia to give other commonwealths a similar ambition? The league members have complete control – the other states will patiently wait. One thing is certain, rumbling storms mean that the exploitation of farmers and laborers must cease in at least one state in the Union. Lincoln's ideal, a government of, by and for the people, will at last be tried out. Democracy must win. As the weary traveler, when lost at night, must guide his way by the North star, so weary workers for democracy in neighboring states hope to guide their way for the coming two years by the North star of the farmers' movement [in] North Dakota.⁸

Clearly, the agenda of the Nonpartisan League reflected many of the same sentiments as the producerism of the Seattle strikers. Farmer control of agriculture would logically be more desirable than corporate control, as worker control of industry would be more desirable than corporate control. Thus, farmers were incorporated into the conception of the producing class. Moreover, to the Seattle strikers, the Nonpartisan League represented a wholly American manifestation of what the strikers were hoping to accomplish, and used this issue to show that the producing class was working together (consciously or not) for change across the country.

Similarly, the *Western Labor News* sought to identify farmers' interests as akin to those of the strikers. This is supported by the inclusion of several quotations from the *Grain Growers' Guide*, a progressive journal published by agrarian interests in Winnipeg. Clearly, both the *Guide* and the *Western Labor News* shared similar ideological leanings. For example, the *Guide* explained:

⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, "The Nonpartisan League and Its Independent Press," January 14, 1919, 8.

In Canada there is as yet none of that terrible poverty, and only the beginning of ruling plutocracy. But at the present rate twenty-five years will see the wealth of Canada controlled by one hundred men, and the most of it by a score. It is coming with tremendous speed, and then only one thing will prevent hopeless misery for the poorer classes. That will be a revolution that will shake Canada to its very foundations.⁹

The idea that capitalism is unsustainable and that society was governed by a ruling plutocracy was easily incorporated into the pages of the *Western Labor News*. By citing the *Guide*, the paper arguably hoped to demonstrate that the strikers' demands in the general strike were actually held in common by all members of the producing classes.

The inclusion of these sentiments in both papers reflected the reality that Seattle and Winnipeg workers had become increasingly class-conscious. All true power was perceived as being in the hands of the productive classes, and this simply had to be collectively realized to effect change. Thus, the inherent value of work and labour power was a common theme in both the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News*. In the former, an anonymous contributor suggested: "On a foundation of good honest labor, you may build anything you please. On a foundation of doles and charities and free meals, you can build nothing that is worthy of your labor."¹⁰ This readily corresponded to the strikers' producerist sentiments, as it suggested that labour did not want handouts, but simply desired the ability to work in a more equitable society where their labour power could be fully actualized. English Socialist William Morris was quoted, saying: "To feel that we were doing work useful to others and pleasant to ourselves, and that such work and its due reward could not fail us! What serious harm could happen to us then? And the price to be paid for so making the world happy is revolution."¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau was cited in a similar manner, saying: "Force made the first slaves; their cowardice has perpetuated

⁹ *Western Labor News*, "A Forecast That is Realized," June 2, 1919, 4.

¹⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, "Mountain Philosopher," January 4, 1919, 8.

¹¹ *Seattle Union Record*, "Mountain Philosopher," February 17, 1919, 6.

slavery.”¹² The implication here was that Seattle labour simply had to assert itself as a collective in order to shake off the chains of economic servitude that were so prevalent in the “common sense” of the postwar period. It would take a counterhegemonic “revolution” for people to perceive that labour had to rely only upon itself in order to create a more equitable society.¹³

In the *Western Labor News*, the inherent power of the working-class was a foundational theme. One of the Calgary Convention’s resolutions, published in the *Western Labor News*, asserted “the ultimate supremacy of the Working Class in matters economic and political.”¹⁴ The paper argued that “every forward step [the working class has] made has been secured only when the ruling class has no longer deemed it safe to refuse it.”¹⁵ This had to change, however, as English historian Henry Thomas Buckle affirmed that “no great political improvement, no great reform, either legislative or executive, has ever been originated in any country by the rulers.”¹⁶ In a more populist tenor, American abolitionist Wendell Phillips was quoted, saying: “I rejoice at every effort the working-men make to organize.... I hail the labor movement. It is my only hope for democracy.”¹⁷ In aggregate, these quotes imply a foundational belief that improvements for the working-class could only be achieved by the working-class.

In contrast to the idea of a productive working class shared by the strikers in Seattle and Winnipeg, the parasitic element in society consisted primarily of a wealthy, elite ruling class. It was this class in the abstract – not necessarily those employers directly involved in either strike – which the strikers in both Seattle and Winnipeg perceived as their opponent. This class embodied all of the evils of the capitalist system, extracting wealth “from the sweat of workers” and

¹² *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 21, 1919, 6.

¹³ *Seattle Union Record*, “Striker Says Labor Relies Upon Itself,” February 5, 1919, 4.

¹⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Delegates Russell and Johns Report from the Calgary Conference,” March 21, 1919, in *The Winnipeg General Strike* by J.E. Rea (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 21.

¹⁵ *Western Labor News*, “We Must Go Forward,” May 24, 1919, 1.

¹⁶ *Western Labor News*, June 4, 1919, 4.

¹⁷ *Western Labor News*, June 9, 1919, 3.

“feeding on the surplus that the worker is robbed of.”¹⁸ As explained previously, both strike papers commonly expressed the fear that this class was using its power to manipulate economic and political conditions at will to corrode the proper functioning of government. The *Seattle Union Record* argued:

It is not the “government of the United States” to which many of our people are opposed, but to that “invisible government” which is practically controlling the United States through a multitude of so-called boards and leagues. It is this “corporation” government which has made the I.W.W. organizations possible, and, if not suppressed, will make the Bolsheviki powerful in the United States.... Friends, you have in your very midst a corporation viper far more dangerous than any possible I.W.W. or Bolsheviki.... You have a corporation controlled plague, which has penetrated the very vitals of our country and is already well organized, and has at its back, not the government, but those men who are proving to be traitors to the people of the United States.¹⁹

These traitors were the wartime profiteers, who were alleged to have gained their wealth by profiting from the slaughter of their fellow countrymen’s lives in the war. The perception of an explosion in profiteering during the war led both groups of strikers to vigilantly condemn these parasites within society.

In Winnipeg, Norman Penner points out that there was never “any misunderstanding on the part of Labor... as to the real source of the denial of a living wage to them;” indeed, they were “the men who control the finances of this city; bankers and brokers and the big interests [who were] the very same men who [were] directly responsible for the high cost of living.”²⁰ The *Western Labor News* argued that this master class was fundamentally unable to provide a solution to postwar problems:

The truth is that the business-professional group have been living in quite a different world from the working-class, speaking a different language, dominated by a different set

¹⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Answer Threat by Solidarity,” February 5, 1919, 4.

¹⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Corporations Want To Run Government,” February 5, 1919, 4.

²⁰ Norman Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers’ own history of The Winnipeg General Strike*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimar & Company, 1975), 33.

of ideals. Hence they are at an utter loss to comprehend the new world into which they have had a glimpse, and quite misunderstand the whole situation.²¹

In Winnipeg, as in Seattle, speculators and employers who had made exorbitant profits during the war, such as Joseph Flavelle, were painted with the label “profiteer” (also: “the money kings, railway magnates, iron-masters, tariff-barons, departmental store potentates, [and] the land grabbers”).²² This corruption was often perceived as a natural consequence of the capitalist system, and the degeneracy of wartime profiteers was perceived as part of a long line of corruption which had existed before the country had even been founded. For example, during the strike, Fred Dixon, one of the strike’s prominent leaders, spoke about a number of historical events “which showed that every step the workers had taken along the road to freedom had been opposed by the same class of men [as] the committee of one thousand, and that the tactics of those enemies of freedom had always been similar and in the long run futile.” In particular, Dixon compared the Citizens’ Committee of 1,000 to the Family Compact, who, in 1887, had “denounced those stalwart champions of constitutional government, Mackenzie and Papineau, as rebels and traitors.” Dixon argued that “the committee of one thousand was trying to constitute itself a new family compact.”²³

Thus, the Winnipeg general strike represented the call to “purge Canada of grafting politicians and greedy profiteers, and [to] make [the] country safe for democracy.”²⁴ By drawing on examples of class struggle and of the corruption perpetrated by the parasitic class throughout Canadian history, the strike leaders attempted to spotlight the attention of the public on the historic significance of the strikers’ cause.

II. Anti-strike Conceptions of Class

²¹ *Western Labor News*, “Back of the Calgary Convention,” June 21, 1919, 3.

²² *Western Labor News*, “The Testing Time,” June 6, 1919, 2.

²³ *Western Labor News*, “Soldiers’ Session Changes Hour,” June 19, 1919, 1.

²⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Deport the Profiteers,” June 19, 1919, 3.

In general, the anti-strike press asserted that classes did not exist. In the midst of the focus on postwar nationalism and, subsequently, citizenship, this idea seems to have been more or less assumed in American and Canadian society. Bourdieu argues that “the cultural realm masks the class stratification upon which it is founded,” and “absorption in the practices of the dominant – “legitimate” – culture hides the class-based cultural resources that make those practices possible.”²⁵ In other words, discourses centred on nationalism and citizenship provided opponents of the strike with convincing alternatives to class as the primary unit of experience.

For example, as Michael Kazin points out, Americans have historically viewed themselves as a “people” and not a class.²⁶ Instead, the concept of class was considered akin to a “virus” that spread among illiterate and ignorant masses.²⁷ Thus, the anti-strike press in Seattle attempted to use language that evoked issues of “the public interest” while brushing over issues of class conflict. One editorial in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued:

This is a free country. If a man wants to be “class conscious” he can be. If a man is too small to be an American, he is free to size up in any class he wishes. If a man wants to break the tide of resolute, robust, lofty, four-square Americanism, such as Roosevelt stood for, he is free to do it, and then to hide in any class eddy he can find. This country is free. If a man wants to talk “class war” he can. If he wants to preach tolerance in one breath and class hatred in the next, he can. We revel in freedom.... There are no “classes” here except such as are conjured up by demagogues; workers are our fellow citizens, the peers of every other man. The worker’s ballot may cancel the vote of a college professor or millionaire; since workers outnumber so-called capitalists a thousand to one, they can outvote them if they want to, a thousand to one.”²⁸

In other words, classes did not exist in reality, and anyone who was perceived to be “conjuring up” a belief in class systems was portrayed as un-American and as not having the public interest in mind.

²⁵ Michael Burawoy, “Cultural Domination: Gramsci Meets Bourdieu,” <http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Bourdieu/4.Gramsci.pdf> (Accessed May 5, 2013).

²⁶ Michael Kazin quoted in Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 74 (2008): 26.

²⁷ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Bolshevism Takes Near East Trend Which Has Menacing Possibilities,” February 5, 1919, 4.

²⁸ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Bolshevism and Labor,” February 10, 1919, 6.

The *Seattle Times* claimed that class consciousness “was conspicuous by its absence” during the strike.²⁹ To the “few converts of Bolshevism” in Seattle, the *Seattle Star* explained that “perhaps members of our organization would be placed in a capitalistic class... while none of us are wealthy, some of us own our own homes, are making livable salaries, a few professional men are among us; all of us are ambitious that our children receive good educations.”³⁰ This implies that – for the *Seattle Star* – wealth apparently did not determine one’s social class. Those opposed to the general strike were not all wealthy capitalists; moreover, “professionals” could be considered “capitalists” to dilute the negative connotation associated with the term. It was the strikers, on the other hand, who were alleged to have imposed their class structure on the United States, and – in the anti-strike narrative – attempted to create division in society.

The Winnipeg anti-strike press also denied the existence of classes in Canadian society. However, Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell argue that despite this denial, class identities are often “most keenly felt at the summit of the social structure,” and thus the Citizens’ Committee of 1000 arguably “felt class keenly,” and “deceptively argued that the Strike was the work of a few Machiavells and that the majority of Winnipeg’s “citizens” were a homogenous family.”³¹ Through an ad in the *Winnipeg Telegram*, the Citizens’ Committee explained that “we are all citizens of a great and free democratic Dominion and do not want class distinctions.” It argued that “employers and employees are getting together and the workers are participating in industrial affairs more and more every day.”³² This implied that the interests of workers and their bosses were one and the same, and that class conflict was a farcical idea that had no place in

²⁹ *Seattle Times*, “Labor Radicals Must Go!,” February 10, 1919, 6.

³⁰ *Seattle Star*, “To the Unheard Workers of Seattle,” February 1, 1919, 9.

³¹ Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens’ Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 35.

³² *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Canadian Labor Will Crush Bolshevism,” May 30, 1919, 6.

Canadian society. The *Manitoba Free Press* attributed the rise of class discourse in the *Western Labor News* to “the direct result of educational propaganda work in economics among the working classes,” and although the strikers had tried “to interpret the Winnipeg situation in terms of a “class war...” the Marxian lingo [did] not fit;” rather, the push to end the strike was “a true rally of citizens on a fundamental issue of citizenship; it [was] not inspired by any class feeling towards labor at all.”³³

The anti-strike press relied on arguments describing the strikes as not being in the interest of true citizenship to crush the strike. For example, the *Seattle Times* argued that all individuals “must first of all be a citizen. Any man who owes a higher allegiance to any organization than he does to the government should be sent to the federal prison or deported.”³⁴ Kramer and Mitchell argue that appeals to citizenship in the North American context of the postwar period were the most effective means of mobilizing public support, as a previous chapter has implied.³⁵ In both Seattle and Winnipeg, self-described “citizens’ committees” emerged as collections of interests opposed to the strikes. In Winnipeg, this committee played a much more central role in ending the strike, though in Seattle this group did maintain close contact with Mayor Hanson throughout the event, and their influence swayed Hanson into taking a more belligerent stance towards the strikers’ demands. Friedheim argues that “with its powerful backing of civic, cultural, fraternal, business, and humanitarian organizations, the Citizens’ Committee – and not Ole Hanson, as he bombastically claimed – sealed the fate of the general strike.”³⁶

The self-identification of these organizations as groups of “citizens” was a conscious rhetorical tactic. Kramer and Mitchell argue that, in Winnipeg at least, “the business interests...

³³ *Manitoba Free Press*, “The Industrial Unrest Commission,” May 14, 1919, 11; *Manitoba Free Press*, “A Rally of Citizenship,” May 29, 1919, 5.

³⁴ *Seattle Times*, “Seattle Strike Called Attempt at Revolution,” February 9, 1919, 5.

³⁵ Kramer and Mitchell, *When the State Trembled*, 170.

³⁶ Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 135.

sought a discourse and a mode of action that would allow them to enter the public sphere as champions dressed in the public interest, not just in the narrow interests of capital.”³⁷ Ostensibly, these committees arose to represent “all interests” of the community, and placed a heavy rhetorical emphasis on their status as “citizens;” however, in reality these groups were composed of the leading industrial and business interests in each city.³⁸ For this reason, these organizations arguably acted in bad faith when they claimed to represent any kind of a “citizen” interest, especially when they misled the public as to the true composition of their membership. For example, in Seattle the Committee claimed: “we know that we express the sentiments of the vast majority of the people of Seattle,”³⁹ and yet their representatives spoke for the “business interests and general community” who looked “upon the so-called general strike as rebellion against the government.”⁴⁰

Similarly, the *Winnipeg Citizen* reported that “the Citizens’ Committee is more directly representative of the people of Winnipeg than is any administrative body that we have in this City or this Province,” and added, “if it were merely an organization of any one class, representing any special interest, it would have been doomed to failure from its inception.”⁴¹ This claim was patently false, as the composition of the group was rooted in the Winnipeg business elite, and included members of the Manitoba Board of Trade and the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association. Nevertheless, the rhetorical power gained in calling these organizations “Citizens’ Committees” was inestimably effective.

One interesting point of comparison can be found in that, in Seattle, the public interest generally referred to an aggregate of the interests of individuals, whereas in Winnipeg, the public

³⁷ Kramer and Mitchell, *When the State Trembled*, 169-170.

³⁸ *Seattle Star*, “Official Statement,” February 8, 1919, 1.

³⁹ *Seattle Times*, “Must Keep Order, Declare Societies,” February 5, 1919, 3.

⁴⁰ *Seattle Times*, “Resume Business as Usual, Hanson Urges,” February 10, 1919, 3.

⁴¹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Getting Back to the Real Issue,” June 3, 1919, 1.

interest more commonly referred to the community as a collective whole. As Perlman points out, since the founding days of the United States, “the harmony between the self-interest of the individual pursuing his private economic aims and the general public interest proved a real and lasting harmony in the American colonies and states.”⁴² In other words, the political culture of the United States has historically held little ideological conflict between individual self-aggrandisement and conceptions of the common good. For example, in the aftermath of the strike, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* asked who was responsible for bringing the strike to an end, and it determined:

Many individuals, directly and indirectly, willingly and unwillingly, had a hand in it, but, as the mayor accurately and frankly says, it was “the American citizenship of Seattle” that did it.... Public opinion was confronted with an emergency, and met that emergency with a mass of thousands of individual opinions that for the time being coincided perfectly. In its disorganized state it might even be described as mob opinion, called upon to meet well-drilled and disciplined opinion.... The ending of the strike was just another illustration of the omnipotence of public opinion in a democracy.⁴³

The association between “the omnipotence of public opinion in a democracy” with opposition to the general strike is indicative of the attempt to associate the defeat of the strike with a larger victory for “American citizenship,” which played into the hegemony formulation of the anti-strike press. Furthermore, the association of the “public opinion” with the “mass of thousands of individual opinions that... coincided perfectly” is indicative of the fact that individuals were perceived to be the primary unit of society in American political culture. This was implied elsewhere in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, when it suggested:

The task is up to you as an *individual*, and if you stand squarely upon the firmer foundation of your unquestionable city, state and national foundation you will keep on building the superstructure of your community and national edifice until it will be as near perfect as human brains and hands can make it [emphasis added].⁴⁴

⁴² Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1949), 157-158.

⁴³ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Who Did It?,” February 16, 1919, 6.

⁴⁴ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “To Labor Of Seattle,” February 6, 1919, 12.

Selig Perlman argues that individualism is deeply rooted in American political culture, and it usually plays into the hands of anti-union capitalism more directly than into the hands of unionism; furthermore, Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore argue that during the twentieth century “individual liberty” frequently discounted “the claims of solidarity in favour of the non-union workers and, more to the point, the antiunion employer.”⁴⁵ Eventually, it was not much of a stretch for employers to begin to portray the “open shop” as an American principle.⁴⁶ Thus, the anti-strike press in Seattle argued that unions who “forced” their members to participate in the general strike were breaching individual liberty of the city’s workers.

In a similar way, the idea of community was foundational for the anti-strike press in Winnipeg, and the importance of national and municipal harmony was frequently invoked. As Seymour Martin Lipset has argued, Canada has historically differed from the United States in that it has been a more communitarian society and more accepting of a strong state.⁴⁷ In contrast to the focus on the individual in the Seattle press (and in contrast to the class-based arguments of the *Western Labor News*), the *Manitoba Free Press* argued that “the will of the community as a whole must govern in every democratic state [and] that will [could] be expressed only through the processes which we know as “politics.”⁴⁸ The strike was unjust in the eyes of the *Winnipeg Telegram* because “its principle is that because an injustice has been done to one section of the community, every other section of the community must suffer injustice.”⁴⁹ The *Winnipeg Citizen* cited Elbert H. Gary, an American lawyer and a key founder of U.S. Steel, who suggested:

Communities succeed or fall together. Competitors in trade, producer and consumer, employer and employe [sic], the private individual and the public – all secure the best

⁴⁵ Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, 208; Cowie and Salvatore, “The Long Exception,” 8.

⁴⁶ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol.8: Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 10.

⁴⁷ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

⁴⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, “Labor and Politics,” May 31, 1919, 9.

⁴⁹ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “The Sympathetic Strike’s Futility,” June 19, 1919, 7.

results if they work together. The success of one on legitimate lines means the benefit of all, and the failure of one means loss to all.”⁵⁰

The *Winnipeg Citizen* argued that the “community” of Winnipeg needed to align itself against the strike, and “it is a fight... for the recognition of the rights of the whole community by any and every section of the community.”⁵¹ It was foundational to the Winnipeg anti-strike press that society be perceived as a coherent whole rather than divided into classes or interests, and, consequently, it was vital to promote a sense of responsibility for one’s community.

In Winnipeg, the idea of the middle class was also critical to the self-understanding of the Citizens’ Committee. Interestingly, this degree of emphasis placed on a middle class was absent in the Seattle anti-strike press. This may have been due to the difficulties inherent in acknowledging the existence of class in the American context. By acknowledging a “middle class,” the anti-strike press would have implicitly acknowledged the existence of class as a unit of analysis. However, as Lipset argues, Americans have tended to be “less class-aware and less deferential to social superiors” than Canadians.⁵²

Nevertheless, despite the arguments of the anti-strike press which suggested that classes did not exist, there were constant appeals to the existence of a Winnipeg “middle class.” While a definition of this class was never rigorously adhered to in any particular paper, it was implicitly assumed that the readership would understand who was signified in this term. The *Winnipeg Telegram* defined this group as “the great bulk of the people, which is neither capital nor labor,” and “that indeterminate mass of unorganized strength commonly called the middle classes.”⁵³ The *Winnipeg Citizen* suggested that the middle class was made up of “people who are neither capitalists nor of organized labor.... the ham in the industrial sandwich – the Belgium of the

⁵⁰ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “For Community Success,” May 26, 1919, 3.

⁵¹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Shoals of Pernicious Leadership,” May 22, 1919, 1.

⁵² Lipset, *Continental Divide*, 7.

⁵³ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “The Logical Autocracy,” May 27, 1919, 8.

industrial world.”⁵⁴ In other words, it was the neutral middle part of society, which represented neither the interests of capital nor labour.

The *Winnipeg Citizen* argued that it was the direct mouthpiece of the middle class, which it claimed was united in its opposition to the strike. The Citizens’ Committee, alleged to be comprised of “all of the men who sprang voluntarily to arms for the purpose of being ready if it were necessary to call upon them to defend the Constitution [including] working men, doctors, lawyers, professional men of every description, [but open to] any citizen,”⁵⁵ defined itself as a voluntary self-defence organization formed by Winnipeg’s middle class to protect its interests. The strike had “brought about a cohesion and solidarity and organization,” not of the strikers, but “of the great middle class, which has become tired of being eternally cast in the role of “goat,” and asserted that “even a goat will get busy if deprived of its food and water supply. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and that law has been invoked.”⁵⁶ By making the issue of the strike into a threat against the neutral middle class, the anti-strike press reinforced the argument that the strike was bad for the whole of society.

Coupled with this sense of society as fundamentally homogenous, a key component of the conception of class held by the anti-strike press was the belief in the societal necessity of an elite class of business owners and managers. In this regard, successful capitalists were often portrayed as heroic and selfless figures; for example, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* suggested that “men of great capital” were the motive forces in the world, and used their wealth not for themselves, but for others; indeed, their wealth was often “at work in the world, extending production, giving jobs to thousands, functioning in a world of business and industry to which it

⁵⁴ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Citizens’ Committee of ‘One’ Thousand,” June 2, 1919, 2.

⁵⁵ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Citizens’ Committee of ‘One’ Thousand,” June 2, 1919, 2.

⁵⁶ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Shoals of Pernicious Leadership,” May 22, 1919, 1.

is the life blood.”⁵⁷ Similarly, in Winnipeg, the *Winnipeg Citizen* lamented that “many workers do not realize that the boss’s job is no soft snap. He has problems to solve that the average man, who has not been trained along these lines, could not possibly handle.”⁵⁸ The paper suggested that the role of this elite carried over from the workplace into society itself, as the paper’s definition of “democracy” argued:

All men are not equal, [and] they differ in physical strength, health and mental ability. Men also differ greatly in the God given senses and in genius. Every individual is entitled, within the limit of the laws of the land, to the free exercise of the faculty senses and genius which God has bestowed upon him. Every man is entitled to the fruits of his labor. Society, as it is constituted, has developed according to the laws of God, and in those countries where there has been the greatest development in democracy, there is the smallest amount of hunger and suffering.... All the people of the world cannot be rich, at least 99% of the inhabitants of the world must work hard to prevent hunger in the world. If you destroy the men of genius, who are directing the industries of the world, there will be famine and starvation in the world in less than one year.⁵⁹

This elite cadre, described here as the literal one percent naturally endowed with a gift for genius, was perceived to be vital to the well-being of democratic society. This was legitimated by the fact that it was based on a meritocratic system, with the possibility of social mobility open to all citizens.

The sense of confidence in the prospect of social mobility for the average citizen was another key component of the conception of class articulated by the anti-strike press. The idea of social mobility helped to defuse any suggestions that the ruling classes of society in the United States or Canada were established simply by birth and not by merit. For example, the belief that America was a nation of true equality of opportunity, and that those who worked hard would be guaranteed to rise above the circumstances of their birth was clear in a *Seattle Star* editorial, which argued: “All men are born with equal right to opportunity, which is not saying that all men

⁵⁷ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Bogie of Capital,” February 3, 1919, 6.

⁵⁸ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Speaking of Bolshevism,” June 12, 1919, 4.

⁵⁹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Which Do You Believe?,” June 11, 1919, 3.

are born equal, as doctors, philosophers and ethnologists will corroborate.”⁶⁰ Similarly, the *Winnipeg Telegram* insisted that “many of our richest employers were once workmen,” and that “the Canadian laborer does not hate millionaires. He may be a millionaire himself some day. Most men of success have labored with their hands and have begun small and raised themselves. The man promoted is the coming business man.”⁶¹ Whether or not this was expressed in good faith, the suggestion that upward social mobility existed for all who deserved it was a powerful argument against the conception of class in the counterhegemonic challenge articulated by the strikers.

III. Conclusions

Michael Burawoy argues that “for Gramsci the cultural realm is a realm of class struggle.”⁶² Certainly, the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes showcased a struggle between two competing ideological formulations of class. During the strikes, in accordance with a Gramscian interpretation, the strikers presented a true alternative vision of class structure within the framework of nationalism (the cultural realm), and articulated a sense of class “for itself” through its own “organic intellectuals,” which was represented by the arguments of the labour press.⁶³ Both groups of strikers shared a similar belief in society as divided into producers and parasites. This conception portrayed the parasitic elements of society as being outside of the true definition of the nation. This conception of class, rooted in socioeconomic location, allowed the strikers to include a broad array of “producers” in their rhetoric. Within this worldview, the

⁶⁰ *Seattle Star*, “Whole Hog or None,” January 20, 1919, 6.

⁶¹ *Winnipeg Telegram*, “Canadian Labor Will Crush Bolshevism,” May 30, 1919, 6; *Winnipeg Telegram*, “The Grasping Hand of the I.W.W.,” May 31, 1919, 15.

⁶² Burawoy, “Cultural Domination.”

⁶³ James P. Hawley, “Antonio Gramsci’s Marxism: Class, State and Work,” *Social Problems*, 27, no. 5 (June 1980): 588.

public was implored to sympathize with the strike on the basis that the strikers' demands were ultimately in line with their own economic self-interest.

However, as Heron explains with regards to the Canadian labour revolt (and the point also applies in the American context), strikers were forced into making “contradictory appeals to [both] class solidarity and community service.”⁶⁴ Although the strikers needed to appeal to all citizens in order to advance the validity of their cause, it was also vitally important to maintain the significance of labour as a distinct group within the nation. The resulting rhetorical ambiguity between the strikers' own demands as a social group and their claims of advancing the welfare of the nation as a whole thus opened up the opportunity for the anti-strike press to label the strikers as self-interested and duplicitous.

The strikers' opponents, on the other hand, generally denied that classes existed at all. Instead, they argued that the public should align itself against the strike for the sake of community, national harmony, and – above all – good citizenship. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge point out that it is common practice for the ruling classes to portray their conception of the public sphere as a “synthesis of the totality of society,” or as a “community” interest; however, it is ultimately an illusion that it is representative of the whole of society.⁶⁵ Citizens' committees emerged during both strikes to reinforce this conception of society and (when class was tenuously acknowledged by this group), to defend the allegedly neutral middle class of society – the repository of social mobility – which had been placed under attack by the strikes. It was the strikers who had attempted “to divide us on class lines,” in the words of Seattle mayor Ole Hanson. “Sensible men” had to fight against the acceptance of “this false gospel” so as to “see to

⁶⁴ Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class,” 57.

⁶⁵ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 74-76.

it that [American] institutions and... ideals [did] not perish from the earth.”⁶⁶ Whether professed in good faith or not, this was the essence of the anti-strike press’ counter-argument to the claims of the strikers.

During the period of crisis in the hegemonic order during these general strikes, class struggle was propelled to the forefront; however, because the strikes were defeated, these class tensions became temporarily sublimated under their opponents’ overarching representation of nationalism. Class endured, both as a social reality and in the ideological realm, as the history of labour readily demonstrates; nevertheless, the stakes in combining the language of nationalism with the language of class struggle were immense.

⁶⁶ Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshevism* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920), 241.

Chapter 5: Conceptions of Justice

I. Natural Law v. Rule of Law

The discourse of the strike press in Seattle and Winnipeg was shaped by a common conception of justice. This conception of justice, loosely founded on a kind of natural law, was basic to their actions and their ideological resistance. Although the discourse through which this conception was presented was often different in the two cities, a shared conception of justice remained fundamental, despite rhetorical differences in its expression.

Those interests opposed to each of the strikes generally attempted to combat the strikers' appeals to natural law by highlighting the importance of the rule of law. The anti-strike press tended to situate the formalistic power of what can be termed "common law" institutions as the ultimate form of justice in the civilized world. Both the pro- and anti-strike press occasionally appealed to both natural law and a legalistic understanding of the rule of law when a given situation made such a tactic necessary or effective, rendering both of these conceptions of justice tentative and inchoate; however the natural law/rule of law binary roughly corresponds to a pro-strike/anti-strike binary.

The belief in natural law can be defined as the idea that an appropriate system of moral behavior can be determined from the examination of human nature. Human beings may build additional positivistic legal structures on top of this law, though the spirit of natural law is always perceived as being the source of true justice. During the two general strikes, this was often manifested as a kind of "common sense" notion of morality in the strike press, in which the simplest or most obvious solution to a moral dilemma was the correct one. For example, the *Seattle Union Record* quoted Michelet, who explained: "No consecrated absurdity would have

stood its ground in this world if the man had not silenced the objection of the child.”¹ This quote is an apt example of what natural justice encompasses, as it explains that a childlike view of morality can plainly see what constitutes right and wrong without being convoluted by inflexible legal language. Fundamentally, natural justice focuses on the morality of a situation rather than its technical legal implications.

For example, the editors of the *Western Labor News* believed that the “master class” often exploited the legal system for its own ends, and for this reason, “the notions of British justice mobilized by the paper went beyond the purely juridical or formalistic, to the substantive and social.”² For example, when the strike leaders were arrested in the cover of night on questionable grounds, the paper noted:

It is a fundamental principle of British law that a man is innocent until he is proven guilty. . . . There is a type of individual who believes in hanging men first and trying them afterwards. But that is not the British way. Those who prate of British law and British justice should have the decency to refrain from the methods of the Spanish Inquisition and remember that British law holds every man innocent until he is proven guilty.³

The *Western Labor News* also quoted the Magna Charta to defend themselves, stating: “No free man shall be taken, or imprisoned, or deprived (of his property), or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way attacked. . . . unless by lawful judgment of his peers, or by the law of the land.”⁴ In this way, the strikers could evoke the *spirit* of the British tradition rather than its more legalistic aspects.

Natural justice often involves appeals to religion, but this is not an essential aspect. For example, as Craig Heron argues in his work on the Canadian labour revolt, it is difficult to distinguish whether appeals to the “brotherhood of man” in the strikers’ rhetoric came from Jesus

¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 3, 1919, 8.

² Chad Reimer, “War, Nationhood and Working-Class Entitlement: The Counter-Hegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg Strike,” *Prairie Forum* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 229.

³ *Western Labor News*, “Robertson and Conspiracy,” June 19, 1919, 1.

⁴ *Western Labor News*, “The Rights of Free Men,” June 23, 1919, 4.

Christ or Tom Paine.⁵ The moral sentiments held by the strikers in Seattle and Winnipeg came from an eclectic and muddled array of sources. Nevertheless, there was a distinctly religious component in each of the strikers' conceptions of justice. For example, the *Seattle Union Record* compared the general strike to the story of the Exodus, explaining:

The kept press has much to say these days about "Bolshevik agitators" and strikes. But think of how the kept press must have spouted when Moses called that general strike in Egypt! This disreputable enemy of law and order not only stopped all essential industry, but took the workmen, who otherwise would have been content to go on making bricks without straw, away with him.⁶

Heavily tongue-in-cheek, here Moses was portrayed as a "disreputable enemy of law and order" when he is commonly known to have been a champion of justice and morality. This reveals a key piece of the strikers' conception of justice; namely, that in some circumstances, as in the Egypt of Moses' day, written laws are not sufficient in and of themselves to adjudicate society. There is a higher law which is in force at all times, and, if this higher law is violated by some particularly serious injustice in society, moral people have the natural right to revolt against that injustice – even if this involves breaking the established code of laws. As in Moses' "general strike," the strikers in Seattle placed their trust in this higher law when it was believed that a particularly gross injustice was taking place in postwar society.

Another editorial in the *Seattle Union Record*, entitled "Our False Morality," gave an account of Abraham Lincoln, who, while he was conversing with a delegation of ministers, was said to have told them "that he was not so anxious about having God on his side as he was about being sure that he was on God's side."⁷ The editorial also argued that if people "really believed in retribution for unjust acts, if we really believed that there was a moral basis to the world which the more devout call the Law of God, would we not be so anxious to be right that we would

⁵ Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 63.

⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, "Editorial Section," January 30, 1919, 8.

⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, "Our False Morality," January 11, 1919, 8.

weight all sides of a question?”⁸ No matter the opinion of the Seattle media, the law of God – in the strikers’ view – would ensure that the injustices of society would be remedied.

The *Western Labor News* in Winnipeg was edited by the ex-Methodist pastor William Ivens. For Ivens, “socialism” arguably signified “social cooperation,” based on “a spiritual ideal of harmony founded upon Christianity.”⁹ Thus, the paper often made passing references to natural justice concepts such as the law of God, and the paper also frequently included direct biblical quotations. One verse from Isaiah argued: “War unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievances which they have prescribed to turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey and that they may rob the fatherless.”¹⁰ Although there was not an inordinately large number of widows or fatherless among the strikers, the inclusion of this verse aimed this Old Testament prophesy at the “unrighteous decrees” being passed down in the postwar period. Another verse from Isaiah defended the Winnipeg striker’s producerist ideology, explaining: “And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and other eat; for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”¹¹ With this, the idea that production should be for use and not for profit was given a biblical foundation.

American poet Berton Braley was quoted by the *Western Labor News* indirectly relating the trials and tribulations experienced by the Winnipeg strikers to the trials of Jesus, saying: “They seized and tried him, that they might have their will, and so they crucified him, upon a lonely hill, the outcast agitator, driven by scourge and rod: they called him “fool” and “traitor.”

⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Our False Morality,” January 11, 1919, 8.

⁹ Nancy Christie, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁰ *Western Labor News*, June 23, 1919, 4.

¹¹ *Western Labor News*, June 23, 1919, 4.

We call him Son of God.”¹² This put into stark relief that no matter what the public perception of the strikers’ motives was, it was certain that time would prove them just in their actions.

Conversely, scab workers were portrayed as traitors worse than Judas Iscariot. One excerpt claimed that, “Esau was a traitor to himself. Judas Iscariot was a traitor to his God. Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country. A strikebreaker is a traitor to his country, his family and his class. A real man is never a strikebreaker. Be a man!”¹³

The *Western Labor News* also explained that Winnipeg labour stood “resolved to establish a righteous principle by moral suasion,”¹⁴ and in an article discussing the “spirit of the strike,” the paper argued: “At last God is coming out from the shadows to show that he has been keeping watch above his own.... Justice proclaims that democracy must extend even to the pay envelope.”¹⁵ This assertion not only makes it clear that religion was a central pillar of the conception of justice informing the *Western Labor News*, but also that the injustices of the postwar period were perceived by the strikers as to be so glaring as to warrant divine intervention.

Condensing the concept of natural justice into a simple axiom, appeals to the Golden Rule were also prevalent in both the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News*. In the former, one editorial showcased the diversity of sources from which the Golden Rule can be derived. Beginning with its biblical origins in Luke, the paper cited: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” The paper also quoted the works of Spinoza, where the philosopher implored: “Desire nothing for yourself which you do not desire for

¹² *Western Labor News*, May 27, 1919, 3.

¹³ *Western Labor News*, “The ‘Scab’ Defined,” May 26, 1919, 2.

¹⁴ *Western Labor News*, “The Committee of 35,000,” June 11, 1919, 2.

¹⁵ *Western Labor News*, “The Spirit of the Strike,” June 6, 1919, 3.

others.”¹⁶ Likewise, the *Western Labor News* published one of Dixon’s speeches to the Winnipeg public, where he argued for “equal sacrifices and equal rewards; the Golden Rule and Canada for the common people.”¹⁷ These references to the Golden Rule are telling in that this axiom can be applied both in secular and a religious sense. While the references cited here are primarily taken from a religious context, the secular and “common sense” nature of the Golden Rule highlights the straightforward sense of natural justice to which each of the strike papers appealed.

Biblical references were by no means as frequently made in the anti-strike press as a means of defending their conception of justice rooted in the rule of law. When cited, religious sentiments were often attempts to turn the striker’s own words against them. The *Winnipeg Citizen* pointed out the hypocrisy of the *Western Labor News* for claiming that “greater Love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend,” as the strikers had allegedly cut off the milk supply to the city’s babies. “In the light of such a tragedy,” the paper argued, “one almost hears the voice of the Great Master replying to the hypocrisy of the Labor News and those behind it,” saying: “Inasmuch as ye have done unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.”¹⁸ The *Manitoba Free Press* also made an *ad hominem* attack on William Ivens, “the pundit of the Strike Bulletin [who] may once have had a certain familiarity” with a certain volume, and implored him to “see Second Thessalonians, chapter three, verse ten.”¹⁹ Of course, this verse argues that those who do not work should not be allowed to eat, and implied the strikers were condemning themselves to this fate through their participation in the strike. Ironically, this verse would later provide the basis for a propaganda slogan in the Soviet Union.

¹⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 4, 1919, 8.

¹⁷ *Western Labor News*, “What Dixon Said,” June 2, 1919, 3.

¹⁸ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “‘Unto the Least of These,” June 19, 1919, 4.

¹⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, “If Any Would Not Work, Etc.,” May 29, 1919, 5.

Language evoking the Old Testament can be detected in an open letter to the strikers from Charles Piez, the federal representative of the Emergency Fleet Corporation whom the Seattle strikers saw as an antagonist. However, the message is worthy of note more for the use of a particular word than its spiritual bearing. Piez referred to the breaking of contracts inherent in the general strike by arguing that the strikers had “deliberately disregarded the *covenant* made with the United States government through the emergency fleet corporation [emphasis added].”²⁰ The rhetorical force behind the word “covenant” is indicative of how central the criticisms of strikers’ disregard for the sanctity of the written contract were in the conception of justice held by the counter-strike interests. For these interests, to break a contract was to “compromise a vital moral principle.”²¹ Piez appealed to the strikers’ “sense of fairness” to stick to their contracts – a sense of fairness which the shipyard workers of Seattle apparently demonstrated when they “gave such an excellent account of themselves during the war and impressed [Piez] so strongly as sane, loyal, conscientious Americans.”²²

The *Seattle Times* summarized this sentiment well when it argued that if the contracts of most workers in the city were broken by a sympathetic strike, “then no contract [would be] worth anything, and the whole business fabric of the nation [would] be destroyed.”²³ Thus, business interests had a strong argument in claiming that if a breach of contract was permitted only once, it could happen again and again whenever workers felt the slightest inkling of dissatisfaction with their employers. After the strike was over, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued that the

²⁰ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “No Compromise, Piez Repeats,” February 6, 1919, 1.

²¹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Strikers Advised Appeal For Wage Must Be Regular,” February 2, 1919, 1.

²² *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Ship Workers Strike! Facts That the Men Must Recognize,” February 3, 1919, 16.

²³ *Seattle Times*, “Uncle Sam Takes Firm Stand Against Any Wage Increase,” February 3, 1919, 1.

breaking of contracts, or “labor’s broken word,” would leave a stigma on the honest union men of Seattle, “in spite of their individual and collective honesty.”²⁴

However, *Seattle Union Record* retorted by explaining that if Charles Piez and the business interests of Seattle wanted strikers to honor their contracts and legal obligations then the shipyard employers would have to lead by example in honoring the highest contracts of them all -- the Constitution and the Bill of Rights -- by protecting the dignity and civil liberties of all American workers. In the words of the *Seattle Union Record*, “if America would offer justice to the nations [as through the League of Nations], she must first establish it within her own borders.”²⁵ In addition, the aftermath of the strike saw several advertisers cancel their contracts with the *Seattle Union Record*, and in response the paper declared: “Our readers will note the absence today of a number of our regular advertisers. They have cancelled their contracts – contracts being merely scraps of paper.”²⁶ Cheekily reinforcing the strikers’ conception of natural justice, the *Seattle Union Record* threw the “sanctity of contract” argument back at its opponents, demonstrating that the accusations against the strikers breaking their contracts were decidedly hypocritical.

The *Western Labor News* also received and responded to criticisms regarding the breaking of contracts inherent in the general strike, and similarly argued that written contracts can become invalid when a moral principle is at stake:

These contracts are no more broken than they are broken when an employee is sick, or has a vacation, or gets a release to visit a dying brother, or rests over a Sunday. The clear cut issue is that an emergency has occurred; a crisis has been reached; and all Labor must perforce cease work for a day, or a week, or a month, or, if need be, for three months, until that crisis has been passed and a resumption of work is possible. Broken contracts mean that employers or employees are not prepared to fulfill the terms of those contracts.

²⁴ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Coming Out of It,” February 9, 1919, 1.

²⁵ *Seattle Union Record*, “To Extend Justice, We Must First Establish It Among Ourselves, Says Cochran to Mooney Convention,” January 22, 1919, 8.

²⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” February 13, 1919, 8.

In this instance there is no such issue at stake. Labor makes no refusal to fulfill its contracts. But, like a battalion in war time, a gunner is willing, if need be, to take a shovel and dig for dear life if another battalion is endangered by the attack of the enemy. He does not violate his oath of allegiance by so doing. Rather, he proves his loyalty to the whole cause by such action. So it is with Labor at this time. Labor for once has risen above mere technicalities. It has entered the realm of principles, and says that technicalities can well wait until the principles have been vindicated.²⁷

With words and phrases such as “above mere technicalities” and “principles,” this passage clearly demonstrates an appeal to higher conceptions of law and justice to counter the stigma of broken contracts. In this view, contracts could become null and void when a worker’s dignity was threatened by an unsatisfactory standard of living.

Furthermore, an important refrain found in the *Western Labor News* was the idea that “every great cause has gone through prison;” indeed, “every advance that has been made, every vestige of human freedom that has been won, resulted from that sublime spirit in the human breast that is willing to suffer for righteousness sake.” Examples of this trend included:

Latimer and Ridley were burned at the stake, but they lit a fire in England that has never been put out. Milton wrote immortal poetry in jail. Bruno was burned for truth to his convictions. Galileo was persecuted for righteousness sake. The Gracchi brothers were stoned to death for trying to get land for the returned soldiers of the Roman Empire. Socrates the great and wise was compelled to drink the hemlock because his generation failed to understand him. And one, greatest of all, they crucified.²⁸

In this light, the strike was an acceptable form of civil disobedience because it was done in the name of a righteous principle. “As THEY increase the brute force pressure, argued the *Western Labor News*, “WE increase the intensity of our thinking. We stay by the negative method of the strike while they hope for a solution by the rifle. . . . Brains have ever outwitted brawn.”²⁹

The *Western Labor News* ultimately believed that the general strike was a weapon of *last resort*. Due to the fact that this tactic would inconvenience the city in an extreme way, the

²⁷ *Western Labor News*, “The Sympathetic Strike,” June 3, 1919, 4.

²⁸ *The Enlightener*, “Every Great Cause Goes Through Prison,” June 26, 1919, 3.

²⁹ *Western Labor News*, “Brains vs. Brute Force,” May 27, 1919, 4.

Western Labor News suggested that the only reason it had become acceptable was because it had been “forced” on the workers.³⁰ The *Western Labor News* reasoned that “the general sympathetic strike is a weapon to be used only as a last resort when the workers are driven to desperation. Even then it should be called only on a matter of principle.”³¹

However, the principle at stake for those aligned against the strikes was a different one; namely, the protection of life and of property. Of course, neither the strikers in Seattle nor Winnipeg threatened these institutions, much less with violence. Yet, the counter-strike press portrayed the general strike as a revolutionary threat to both. In Seattle, Mayor Ole Hanson “in calling attention to the need of American ideals and sane citizenship” argued that “true American citizens” would “assist... the city government in protecting life and property.”³² The strike was “a question of protecting a whole city, of safe-guarding the welfare of 400,000 people, of providing life necessities for thousands of babies, women, [and] men.”³³ In Winnipeg, the issue was presented in much the same way. The *Winnipeg Citizen* argued: “There is only ONE ISSUE before the public for decision at the present time: THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO LIVE THEIR OWN LIVES, TO CARRY ON THEIR NORMAL ACTIVITIES, TO HAVE POLICE AND FIRE PROTECTION AND ADEQUATE FOOD AND WATER.”³⁴ Any forceful threat to life and property would be considered a revolution by most observers, and this is precisely what the anti-strike press hoped to establish in the minds of Seattle and Winnipeg citizens.

Bolstering the argument that the general strikes were more revolutionary than they appeared was the assumption that striking as an employee of the government was inherently revolutionary. The *Seattle Star* asked, rhetorically: “At whom would a “general strike” be

³⁰ *Western Labor News*, “Calgary Convention and Strike,” June 15, 1919, 4.

³¹ *Western Labor News*, “Sympathetic Strike vs. Political Action,” June 11, 1919, 4.

³² *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “General Strike Banquet Subject,” February 5, 1919, 9.

³³ *Seattle Star*, “Seattle Shall Not Be Crucified,” January 31, 1919, 1.

³⁴ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Don’t Be Misled – The Only Issue Is Bolshevism,” May 30, 1919, 4.

directed, save at the government of the United States?”³⁵ One of Charles Piez’s statements to the public clearly articulated this, asking: “Do the men in the shipyards realize that the question of wages in the yards is not one between the shipyard workers and the yard owners but is between the shipyard workers and the Emergency Fleet Corporation, representing the government of the United States?”³⁶ In agreement, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* argued that “a sympathetic strike on the part of city employes [sic] cannot be defended on any grounds.”³⁷

The Seattle strikers responded by arguing that the general strike had originally had nothing to do with the federal government. On the contrary, Piez, as a representative of Emergency Fleet Corporation, was himself largely responsible for the bringing the federal government into the situation, and thus it was he who had escalated the dispute by interfering in labour-management relations.³⁸ However, there was still a kernel of truth in the argument that the general strike implied a defiance of state authority. While the hysterical rhetoric of the strike’s opponents may have significantly distorted the true intent behind the strikers’ demands, the accusations suggesting the strikers had “revolutionary” motives was an effective rhetorical tactic because it was partially based in fact.

The argument that public employees were not legally able to strike was found in equal measure in the Winnipeg anti-strike press. The *Winnipeg Tribune* claimed that true justice called for “permanent, unflinching, unswerving loyalty on the part of public employees to the public,” but, in Winnipeg, “the public [was] Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada and the Empire – far more important bodies than any combination of employers or any union or combination of

³⁵ *Seattle Times*, January 28, 1919, 2.

³⁶ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Ship Workers Strike! Facts That the Men Must Recognize,” February 3, 1919, 16.

³⁷ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Municipal Strikers,” February 14, 1919, 6.

³⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Responsibility Rests With Piez,” February 5, 1919, 1.

employees.”³⁹ Thus, in Winnipeg the anti-strike press’ focus on the significance of governmental employees striking was arguably even more pronounced due to the added emphasis this argument could make in conjunction with an appeal to Britain and the Empire. In other words, not only were Winnipeg strikers revolting against their *municipal* government, or even their *federal* government; instead, they were revolting against the mother country, which made the general strike tantamount to treason against the British Empire. In a similar way, when the police and various other public sector unions in Winnipeg opted to join the general strike, the *Winnipeg Tribune* argued that “employees of the State must fully conform to the laws laid down by the authority duly authorized by the constitution of the land,” and that not abiding by established laws practices was an attitude “akin to absolute anarchy.”⁴⁰ “Any body which is hired by the State, paid by the State, and under orders of the State – the People – which takes everything from the State save the State’s direction in its public duties,” argued the *Winnipeg Tribune*, “is acting unconstitutionally and against the rules of rational and national common-sense.”⁴¹ The Winnipeg strikers’ claim that they were defending a higher moral principle was moot, as the *Winnipeg Citizen* insisted that “when the sworn guardians of the public peace and safety undertake to enforce economic demands by deserting their posts,” then “in such cases the moral right to strike... does not apply and does not exist.”⁴²

By encroaching on the authority of the government, the strikers had in fact trampled on one of the key principles of the anti-strike press’ regard for the rule of law. Thus, the antistrike press recognized that there could be “no compromise” with any of the strikers’ demands if they insisted on securing them through the tactic of the general strike. The *Seattle Star* stuck by this

³⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Demands of Justice,” June 3, 1919, 4.

⁴⁰ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Dismissal Was Just,” June 10, 1919, 4.

⁴¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “What the State Demands,” June 9, 1919, 4.

⁴² *Winnipeg Citizen*, “No Strikes in Public Service,” June 6, 1919, 3.

no compromise theme after the strike, arguing: “On the issue of Americanism [during the strike] Seattle made no compromise. And on that issue Seattle will never and shall never make a compromise.”⁴³ The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* suggested that the general strike was the “greatest peril which this nation [had] ever faced,” and that Seattle was “at the vortex of the attack....” There could be no compromise with the strikers, as revolution would “wind its slimy lengths from ocean to ocean and bring with it suffering and disaster,” and thus, “the time [to] kill it is here and now.”⁴⁴

Similarly, to the Citizens’ Committee in Winnipeg, the general strike was tantamount to a “bargain or compromise... with Treason.”⁴⁵ The issues of the strike, as far as the *Winnipeg Citizen* was concerned, were “merely a pretext” for the revolutionary goals of the strikers, and that a living wage and collective bargaining “had as much to do with bringing about this “strike” as the murders at Serajevo [sic] had to do with bringing on the Great War – that is to say, nothing at all.”⁴⁶ For this reason, there could “be NO COMPROMISE,” and the agenda of the Citizens’ Committee would be to maintain, “at any cost... the authority, absolute and complete, of Canada’s constitution and Canada’s laws,” and “for the complete authority of the State.”⁴⁷ Thus, in both cities, a stance of “no compromise” with the strikers’ tactic of the general strike effectively foreclosed any common middle ground between the natural justice of the strikers and the importance of the rule of law in the eyes of the anti-strike press.

II. A Living Wage

⁴³ *Seattle Star*, “No Compromise,” February 10, 1919, 1.

⁴⁴ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “Seattle Is the Vortex of An Attack by Bolshevists,” February 9, 1919, 7.

⁴⁵ Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, *The Activities and Organization of The Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand in connection with the Winnipeg Strike, May-June, 1919* (Winnipeg: Citizens’ Committee of One Thousand, [1920]), 4.

⁴⁶ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Revolution, or Law and Order?,” May 22, 1919, 3.

⁴⁷ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “No Compromise On One Point,” June 14, 1919, 4.

The struggle to secure a living wage was the ostensible source of injustice that precipitated each strike. Examining this particular issue in the light of what has been outlined above can further elucidate the divergence between the strikers and their opponents with regard to conceptions of justice.

The sympathetic strike in Seattle resulted from a conflict arising over the readjustment of wages for those working in the city's shipyards, with workers demanding that wages be raised to a level that was perceived to be sustainable for comfortable living, or, for what the strikers called a "living wage." As expressed in the *Seattle Union Record*: "Our demands are for the minimum wages that we can live on in a semi-decent way," with strikers complaining that their current wages would "not even let us give our children meat and milk in the quantities that are needed for proper growth."⁴⁸

This demand reflected the acute perception of the workers of Seattle that the cost of living in the city was exorbitantly high. Inflation was perceived to be infringing upon the dignity of the city's workforce. Harvey O'Connor, a labour activist at the time of the strike, wrote that the primary cause of the social unrest which swept much of the United States during the postwar period was "the constantly soaring cost of living, up 50 percent in three years," and, making matters worse, in Seattle:

The high cost of living was an especially exasperating prod. The Pacific Northwest had always been a high-price region, far off the beaten track of America commerce; costs of transport whether by ship or rail were padded by the extra profits extracted. Even more than in other sections, the Pacific Northwest regarded itself as in a colonial position, exploited by the Eastern captains of industry.⁴⁹

In the weeks leading up to the strike, the *Seattle Union Record* featured numerous headlines and editorials concerned with high prices in the city and throughout the world. One heatedly

⁴⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, "Striker Says Labor Relies Upon Itself," February 5, 1919, 4.

⁴⁹ Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 125-126.

proclaimed that, “neither from the [Paris] peace conference nor from any other official source has come a suggestive remedy which will meet the serious situation presented by the high cost of living,”⁵⁰ and another expressed the fear that bread lines would soon be needed in Seattle if nothing was done to lower prices or raise wages.⁵¹ To what extent this fear was exaggerated is essentially irrelevant, as what is important is that the strikers *believed* that their low wages threatened their standard of living, and that the situation showed no sign of being alleviated without some kind of direct action being taken.

The strikers in Winnipeg demanded a similar “living wage” as part of the rationale for carrying out the general strike. The *Western Labor News* defined “living wage” as a wage that provided “more than a bare existence... [and] enough to supply all reasonable needs and to put by a little for a rainy day.”⁵² On the most basic level, this demand for a living wage stemmed from a conception of justice in which society was believed to be fundamentally unfair when many of its members were forced to struggle merely for survival. The workers of Winnipeg perceived that the cost of living was spiraling out of control, and it was assumed that wages needed to increase in order to keep up with the inflationary trend. This need for higher wages was a “struggle for existence.”⁵³ Again, whether the strikers were exaggerating the severity of their condition is largely irrelevant. As Bercuson points out, “what is of prime importance... is that almost all workers *believed* inflation was ruining their living standards and destroying their wage increases whether it really was or not.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Heron explains that “all recent attempts to determine working-class income in Canada in this period have pointed to serious

⁵⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Living Costs Rise All Over,” January 25, 1919, 5.

⁵¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “The Bread Line Coming!,” January 4, 1919, 8.

⁵² *Western Labor News*, “What is a Living Wage?,” May 29, 1919, 3.

⁵³ Norman Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers’ own history of The Winnipeg General Strike*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimar & Company, 1975), 37.

⁵⁴ David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 34.

erosion of real wages after 1917.”⁵⁵ Thus, it is unlikely that Winnipeg workers were exaggerating the strain on their purchasing power.

Both the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News* also based their demands for a living wage on the social and community good that would result from an increase in wages. The *Seattle Union Record* believed that “high wages and ample leisure remain the foundation of any social ideal and most of the private virtues.”⁵⁶ Living wages were also necessary for the maintenance of a solid foundation of civic responsibility and social stability. If one spent all of one’s time working merely to exist, argued the strike press, it would be difficult for one to place much importance on political participation or community involvement. The *Seattle Union Record* argued that “when labor is crushed to the plane of actual want and deprivation by inadequate, insufficient wages he becomes a liability to the community instead of the asset he or she should be,” and that “no person can or will participate in the upbuilding of a state or nation except as that person is placed beyond the pale of material want.”⁵⁷ Instead of feeling like a part of the postwar reconstruction, workers in Seattle acutely felt that inflation was degrading the sense of social cohesion in the country.

The *Western Labor News* also believed that a living wage for workers would have beneficial effects for society as a whole. Even if Winnipeg’s citizens did not feel a sense of sympathy with the strikers demands, the *Western Labor News* insisted that they should realize “that industrial and social evils menacing large groups of the population cannot continue without eventually bringing disaster to society as a whole.”⁵⁸ The paper argued that “justice proclaims that democracy must extend even to the pay envelope,” and that “only when this is accomplished

⁵⁵ Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 21.

⁵⁶ *Western Labor News*, “A Plea for a Living Wage,” June 23, 1919, 2.

⁵⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, “Better Wages, Better Citizens,” January 10, 1919, 8.

⁵⁸ *Western Labor News*, “The Public’s Duty,” May 29, 1919, 2.

can we hope for that social health and individual happiness which should prevail in a civilized community.”⁵⁹ With this, the *Western Labor News* made it eloquently clear that Canada required a new form of social organization – one in which the “British rights of freedom to work, to organize, and to secure a decent living” were ensured, and in which a more equitable living wage would ensure a healthy and flourishing postwar society for all.⁶⁰

Thus, the demand for a living wage provided the degree of moral certitude necessary amongst the strikers to take such extensive collective action against unjust employers and government officials. These sentiments are evocative of E.P. Thompson’s conception of the moral economy, and a brief discussion of this concept provides a useful framework for understanding this demand in a larger context. In his study of bread riots in early modern England, Thompson concluded that among the peasantry there was “a deeply-felt conviction that prices *ought*, in times of dearth, to be regulated, and that the profiteer put himself outside of society.”⁶¹ Whenever market factors failed to provide the bare necessities for material sustenance, it was socially necessary for the peasantry to revolt against what were perceived to be greedy and unscrupulous distributors. In Thompson’s analysis, peasants were often successful in “setting the price” of bread at a much lower level than market forces would allow for, and this was accomplished simply through the strength of their moral claim and the power of their collective action.

Thompson argues that “it is difficult to re-imagine the moral assumptions of another social configuration,” and thus it is not easy for us to conceive of a time, “within a smaller and more integrated community, when it appeared to be “unnatural” that any man should profit from

⁵⁹ *Western Labor News*, “The Spirit of the Strike,” June 6, 1919, 3.

⁶⁰ *Western Labor News*, “Needed – Representative Government,” June 12, 1919, 2.

⁶¹ E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 50, (1971): 112.

the necessities of others, and when it was assumed that, in times of dearth, prices of “necessities” should remain at a customary level, even though there might be less all around.”⁶² However, a similar logic was at work during both the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes. In combination with the heightened sense of national community in the postwar period, the counterhegemonic challenge of the general strikes drew upon the belief that the postwar market economy was not functioning in a way that met the needs of the majority of the people, and collective moral action was felt to be necessary to set things right.

For the strikers, the general strike was about creating a more equitable postwar society, and income inequality was a key part of the counterhegemonic critique in both strike papers. Citing figures that are familiar in contemporary times, the strike press demonstrated how glaring the postwar wealth gap was. One editorial in the *Seattle Union Record* stated that “there are now approximately 25,000 millionaires in the United States who own approximately one-fourth of the wealth of the country – that is one-fiftieth of one per cent of the people own twenty-five per cent of the wealth.” The paper argued that “if any further indictment of the capitalist system is necessary than the figures of its own statisticians, this world has become a hopeless place of abode.”⁶³ The *Western Labor News* cited similar figures, reporting:

It is freely stated that in America some 20 percent of the population own 65 percent of the wealth, and that the other 65 percent of the people own only 5 percent of the wealth of the nation. Whether these figures are accurate for Britain or not is not a matter of deep concern; they are approximately correct at any rate. And it is this unequal distribution of wealth that lies at the root of the whole industrial unrest.⁶⁴

Despite this focus on statistics, Bercuson explains that, in Winnipeg at least, “workers rarely saw the problem as one of cold statistics.” As has been explained in a previous chapter, workers “charged that they were the victims of “food pirates and price manipulators” and they demanded

⁶² Thompson, “Moral Economy,” 131-132.

⁶³ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 3, 1919, 8.

⁶⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Parliamentary Action vs. Strikes,” June 14, 1919, 3.

government action to improve the situation.”⁶⁵ Thus, that these figures were “approximately correct at any rate” indicates that the actual numbers essentially did not matter. The fact was that inequality had reached such an obscene level that the current system was perceived as simply being beyond the pale of an appropriate form of human organization.

The strikers’ critique of inequality was supported by a plethora of quotations and excerpts taken from famous thinkers, politicians, and labour sympathizers, which were scattered throughout the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Western Labor News*. The injustice of poverty was frequently invoked through quotes such as “the poor get genuine sympathy [only] from the poor.”⁶⁶ It was often implied that capitalist society was inherently and perpetually unequal, such as in the quote by economist Alfred Marshall which explained that “the poverty of the poor is the chief cause of the weakness and inefficiency which are the chief causes of their poverty.”⁶⁷ The Scottish Enlightenment thinker Henry Home, was quoted as follows: “Luxury may possibly contribute to give bread to the poor; but if there were no luxury there would be no poor.”⁶⁸ The societal effects of economic inequality were alluded to in a quote from Josiah Quincy, which stated that “as long as a punishment of a money fine is accepted from the rich and the alternative imprisonment is exacted from the poor, the equality of all men before the law is but a sounding phrase.”⁶⁹ In this view, capitalist society had the extra-economic side effect of rendering the judicial system inherently unequal. Adam Smith was also included, arguing that “no society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ David J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wisemen: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), 58-59.

⁶⁶ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” February 17, 1919, 6.

⁶⁷ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 28, 1919, 8.

⁶⁸ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” February 10, 1919, 4.

⁶⁹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 7, 1919, 8.

⁷⁰ *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” February 15, 1919, 8.

Unemployment and poverty were understood to be the unfortunate results of a society gone wrong. The *Seattle Union Record* included a quote from Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle which lamented that “a man willing to work and unable to find work is, perhaps, the saddest sight that fortune’s quality exhibits under the sun.”⁷¹ Carlyle was arguably the single most frequently cited individual around the time of the strike in the *Seattle Union Record*. This is unsurprising, as Carlyle’s work combined a Calvinist-infused sense of morality with a secular sense of social justice. Carlyle also highlighted the pointlessness of all the wealth created by capitalism if– in reality – it belonged only to very few people. “To whom then is this wealth... wealth?” asked Carlyle. “Who is it that it blesses, makes happier, wiser, beautifully, in any way better? As yet no one.”⁷²

The unsustainability of capitalist society was alluded to in a *Seattle Union Record* quotation from the evolutionary biologist Thomas Huxley, who argued that “any social condition in which the development of wealth involves the misery, the physical weakness and the degradation of the workers, is absolutely and infallibly doomed to collapse.”⁷³ Intriguingly, Huxley was also cited in the *Western Labor News*, commenting on a similar theme and suggesting that if civilization brought only wealth but no concomitant moral improvement in humanity, then he “would hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away.”⁷⁴

General criticism of inequality was also prominent in the *Western Labor News*. Quotations scattered throughout the paper affirmed the societal degradation that resulted from glaring disparities in wealth. American economist and progressive Raymond Robbins was

⁷¹ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 3, 1919, 8.

⁷² *Seattle Union Record*, “Editorial Section,” January 28, 1919, 8.

⁷³ *Seattle Union Record*, “Mountain Philosopher,” January 3, 1919, 8.

⁷⁴ *Western Labor News*, “Huxley The Scientist,” June 4, 1919, 3.

quoted, saying: “You cannot maintain the workers working for their daily bread, the people who feed and clothe and house the world, and at the same time maintain in idleness a group of automobile bums who clip the coupons of privilege and live upon the labor of the working world.”⁷⁵ George Bernard Shaw was quoted, saying: “Do not waste your time on Social Questions. What is the matter with the poor is POVERTY: what is the matter with the rich is USELESSNESS.”⁷⁶ Conservative political commentator Edmund Burke was appropriated to reinforce this theme, saying: “The whole business of the poor is to administer to the idleness, folly and luxury of the rich; in return that of the rich to find the best methods of confirming the slavery and increasing the burdens of the poor.”⁷⁷ This moral critique of inequality, taken from an eclectic array of sources, not only correlated to the strikers’ producerist ideology, but also bolstered their moral resolve to maintain the strikes by giving them theoretical support for their conception of justice.

But how did those groups opposed to the general strikes react to these demands for a living wage? In Seattle, the anti-strike press was generally unsympathetic concerning the cost of living and the demand for a living wage. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* was of the opinion that wages were necessarily dependent upon the state of the market, and that there was no necessary moral incentive for employers to raise wages if the market dictated that they were properly set; in fact, the paper suggested that Seattle wages were high enough at their present level. It stated:

There are many factors contributing to the continuance of the cost of labor at the existing high level.... Labor leaders have given warning to the country that no substantial lowering of wages will be suffered, but this would not... itself sustain high labor cost, unless the economic situation were favorable for it.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Western Labor News*, May 21, 1919, 4.

⁷⁶ *Western Labor News*, June 18, 1919, 4.

⁷⁷ *Western Labor News*, June 21, 1919, 2.

⁷⁸ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Business Future,” February 5, 1919, 6.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* believed that any agitation for higher wages, especially strikes, was inappropriate and counterproductive. The paper suggested that “agitations over wage readjustments and strikes for higher wages are likely to do the nation, and the strikers as well, more harm than good,” and if workers were not careful, “at a time when labor is doing very well if it can maintain the war level of wages, requests for higher pay are likely to result merely in the employer throwing up his hands and quitting.”⁷⁹ In other words, if Seattle workers were no longer willing to accept employment on the basis of competitively determined wages, business and industry in the United States would shrivel up and disappear.

The *Seattle Star* explained that “so long as men are selfish and try to grab one from another more than the one is entitled to there will be inequalities. The millennium is not to be reached without more and more Christianity.”⁸⁰ The same editorial also argued that “given absolutely free play, it is more than possible – in fact, probable – that the law of supply and demand is a natural law and therefore a just law,” but that “it so happens that this is not allowed to act freely, but is perverted by numerous combinations on one side and the other.”⁸¹ This is demonstrative of a belief that free market economics (here in combination with a paternalistic Christianity), constituted the natural order of the world. Inequality was viewed as a natural phenomenon that was to be endured until the market could be made truly free. Any agitation or striking on the part of workers was perceived to only delay progress and future prosperity, and was consequently viewed with hostility. Similarly, the *Winnipeg Citizen* attributed the high cost of living to a myriad of economic and political factors, but refused to concede that low wages and high prices were in any way related to the greed of corrupt businessmen or the unrestrained pursuit of profit. At one point, the *Winnipeg Citizen* even argued that “the high cost of

⁷⁹ *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “The Business Future,” February 5, 1919, 6.

⁸⁰ *Seattle Star*, “The Strike – Pro and Con – by Readers of The Star,” February 1, 1919, 6

⁸¹ *Seattle Star*, “The Strike – Pro and Con – by Readers of The Star,” February 1, 1919, 6

government... makes the high cost of living.”⁸² As Bercuson argues, Winnipeg employers were heavily imbued with a belief in the “ironclad laws of economics,” which perceived labour as a commodity and recognized supply and demand as the determinant of wages and working conditions.⁸³ J.E. Rea argues that the desire amongst employers to “restore the world of pre-1914” made them “not so much conscious exploiters as captives of the free enterprise mythology which they sought to sustain.”⁸⁴ This thinking was simply based on the ideological assumptions of the anti-strike press.

Thus, for the *Winnipeg Citizen*, the general strike would only aggravate existing problems and drive prices up further rather than convince employers to raise wages through a crisis of conscience. It explained that “the tremendous loss the strike has inflicted on producers out in the country communities through disorganized trade is revealed [and] the high cost of living will be greatly increased by the present strike.”⁸⁵ The *Winnipeg Tribune* agreed, and turned the rationale of the general strike on its head, reporting that it was the “labor troubles at the present time” which were at least “partially responsible for the high cost of living in Canada.”⁸⁶ The *Winnipeg Citizen* added that the only solution to the high cost of living was greater production, and argued that “greater production is the cure for the labor unrest.... Supply and demand will always rule the cost of produce and the cutting off of the supply and reduction of production will only add another notch to the already far-too-high prices.”⁸⁷ In other words, workers simply needed to go back to work – and work harder – to improve the postwar economic situation.

⁸² *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Socialized Industry A Failure,” June 16, 1919, 2.

⁸³ Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg*, 7.

⁸⁴ J.E. Rea, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973), 14.

⁸⁵ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “Strike Destroys Food – Cost of Living Increases,” June 12, 1919, 2-3.

⁸⁶ *Winnipeg Tribune*, “Show Strikes Send Cost of Living Higher,” June 13, 1919, 1.

⁸⁷ *Winnipeg Citizen*, “The Strike and the Cost of Living,” June 13, 1919, 4.

Clearly, those opposed to each of the strikes relied on highly similar conceptions of distributive justice, which revolved around a belief in the free market and the supremacy of the law of supply and demand. In this mindset, it was perceived as unjust for workers to interfere with production by striking. With the paternalism of the captains of industry in Seattle and Winnipeg added into this mix, these interests perceived the strikers as upstarts who simply needed to be told to go back to work and let the “natural order” of the market return to a normal state. Within this worldview, the natural order did not need to be egalitarian to be “just.”

III. Conclusions

Heron explains that “resistance to subordination within capitalist society stems from a mixture of resentment at the violation of accepted standards of natural justice and hope about alternative possibilities.”⁸⁸ The alternative possibilities which the strikers found some hope in have been outlined in the previous chapters. In this chapter, we have seen how the violation of accepted standards of natural justice was a key element in the development of the general strikes. This sense of (in)justice held by strikers on both sides of the border challenged the hegemonic conception of justice present in the postwar capitalist system. Although the strikers used capitalist concepts such as the “living wage” to articulate their demands (rather than demanding outright revolution), this was not a manifestation of “false consciousness.”⁸⁹ The strikers were by no means deluded about what capitalism as a social system entailed. In the face of an increasingly pervasive state apparatus perceived to be aligned with the capitalist economic system, both groups of strikers attempted to appeal to natural justice – a form of morality outside the legalistic mechanisms of the state.

⁸⁸ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1996), XVII.

⁸⁹ Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees,” *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 37.

On the other hand, those opposed to the strikes relied on the legitimacy of the rule of law to present the strikes as criminal or worse. The defeat of these two general strikes thus reinforced the legitimacy of the anti-strikers' formalistic interpretation of the rule of law in the postwar period, and helped to preserve the status quo. Nevertheless, the struggle to gain and maintain hegemony is a constant process, and elements of the strikers' conception of natural law certainly remained active and informed subsequent political struggles.

As one might expect, these conceptions of justice were wrapped in the flags of their respective countries. For example, the *Seattle Star* claimed, before the strike began: "It is because the United States is a nation founded on law and order, because it is a nation in which the people rule, that it is today the strongest nation on earth and an inspiration to every other state which aspires to be truly free."⁹⁰ In exactly the same way, the *Winnipeg Citizen* appealed to the highest common law principle in Western society – namely, the Magna Charta, and stated:

Seven hundred and four years ago tomorrow – on June 15, 1215, at Runnymede – the liberties and rights of British citizenship were secured, when the pistol was put to the head of King John and the Magna Charta was placed before him for signature. Many times in the last seven centuries have those rights and liberties been challenged – and never once successfully. Those rights have been bought too dearly and too dearly upheld, defended and retained, to be successfully challenged in this Twentieth Century in free Canada – in a Canada which is free only by the sacrifices of her sons through more than four long and bloody years of war.⁹¹

As Gramsci explains, "through "law" the State renders the ruling group "homogeneous", and tends to create a social conformism which is useful to the ruling group's line of development."⁹²

The "content" of the anti-strike conception of justice (along with the rest of the anti-strike ideology) was wrapped in the "form" of nationalism in order to turn the "ruling group's line of development" into the "common sense" of the postwar period.

⁹⁰ *Seattle Times*, "Sources of American Strength," January 16, 1919, 6.

⁹¹ *Winnipeg Citizen*, "The Truth – From the Inside," June 14, 1919, 3.

⁹² Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 195.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

Through an analysis of the media battles which took place during the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes, this thesis has established the framework of the hegemonic struggle which these two strikes represented. It has argued that a comparative analysis of the pro- and anti-strike press reveals that the “form” of nationalism enveloped the “content” of each group’s ideological foundations, conceptions of class, and conceptions of justice, and that this “content” – when extracted from its national “form” – reveals a shared sense of progressive vision among the two groups of strikers, and a shared sense of conservative vision among their opponents.

Ultimately, both strikes were defeated and the strikers’ demands were not met. In Seattle, the strike’s opponents seized on the opportunity to confirm the defeat as “the victory won by common sense in Seattle,” where “Americanism stood the test” and gave the city an opportunity to “[clear] the atmosphere” and suppress radical labour ideas.¹ In Winnipeg, despite a similar emphasis on the importance of Canadian citizenship in defeating the strike, force was ultimately necessary to bring the strike to an end, and “when the ideological consensus of a putatively universal rule of law and economic “fair play” broke down, and a central issue was at stake, the state engaged its coercive resources: arbitrary arrests, and the militia and police in the streets.”²

That these strikes were ended differently is testament to the fact that winning and maintaining hegemony is a process of balancing both coercion and consent. In Seattle, the strike ended without the use of force (although this was threatened through the mobilization of soldiers and special police), and a consensus interpretation of the strike as an attempted revolution was maintained largely through the medium of the press. In Winnipeg, on the other hand, maintaining

¹ *Seattle Times*, “Labor Radicals Must Go!,” February 10, 1919, 6; *Seattle Star*, “Now Comes the Test of the Square Deal,” February 11, 1919, 1.

² Chad Reimer, “War, Nationhood and Working-Class Entitlement: The Counter-Hegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg Strike,” *Prairie Forum* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 229.

this consensus opinion was not enough, and the strike was ultimately defeated through the use of coercive force on Bloody Saturday. Nevertheless, in the immediate aftermath of both strikes, the strikers were sufficiently discredited and their demands were sufficiently delegitimized through the press that it could be argued that consent was temporarily restored in the public sphere.

However, while conservative conceptions of society may have won out during these two strikes, Raymond Williams argues:

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. . . . It does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.³

Although these strikes were originally represented as attempted revolutions, later historiography has largely overturned this interpretation. Now, these two strikes are generally understood simply as powerful assertions of the strength of labour in the postwar period. Moreover, despite being defeated, the wealth of ideological material used by the strikers remained to plant the seeds for hegemonic struggles in the future. The nationalistic “form” may have shifted in line with a more conservative vision for a time, but the “content” of the strikers’ critique still remained useable for future progressive groups to take up and articulate in a new way.

Take, for example, the strikers’ acceptance of producerism. Here was a compelling critique of society that was effectively interwoven into the strikers’ hope for a more equitable postwar world, and not unfamiliar to proponents of the labour theory of value. Like the strikers, many other social movements have identified inequality and the corruption of the political system by high finance as two of the key problems facing society. Like the strikers, many still regard organized labour as having a unique responsibility for achieving positive gains in society. Like the strikers, many progressive social movements today perceive history as open for the

³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 112.

possibility of sudden and wide-ranging change. Even the strikers' conception of class as divided into producers and parasites finds resonance today. The "we are the 99%" rhetoric of the Occupy movement invokes this same sense of the bulk of society aligned against a few self-interested exploiters. All in all, much of the strikers' ideological content has been and can be applied to other hegemonic struggles in other times and places.

On the other hand, the strikers' opponents share some similarities with conservatives in contemporary times. Like the strike's opponents, many who are aligned against progressive causes perceive themselves as defending the status quo, the greater good, or the "common sense" of society. Like opponents of the strike, many conservatives today believe that society is fundamentally stable, although major events such as general strikes are still represented as "threats to civilization." This worldview sees progress as a gradual and balanced movement, and, even today, the Russian Revolution is still represented as an extreme example of what can happen if social change is forced too quickly. Like the opponents of the two strikes, many today also deny the existence of social classes (or perceive most of society as part of one big "middle class"), or at least assert that the possibility of upward social mobility allows one's social class to be determined by merit. All in all, defenders of "common sense" in different times and places are often represented in the public sphere by conservative arguments.

Another important point which this thesis has raised is that the nationalistic form which allowed the strikers to present their ideas to a broader base also limited the extent to which their ideological formulations could truly change postwar society. In other words, by appealing to nationalism – a fundamentally bourgeois value – the strikers arguably obstructed the dynamism of their own critique of society. Nationalism can obscure the reality of class conflict by blurring the distinction between the ruling classes and the proletariat through its labelling of both groups

as collective “citizens” of a given country. By implicitly affirming the importance of the nation, the strikers may have inadvertently foreclosed the possibility of far-reaching change from taking root by prefacing their ideology with a form based in class collaboration.

Today, progressives face the question of whether or not appeals to the nation are an effective mobilizing tool, or if, in an increasingly globalized world, emancipatory groups should appeal to broader concepts, such as universal rights and liberties. Peter Ives asks if the nation-state is still “capable of having an important impact on its citizens’ lives in the face of multinational corporations, global stock markets and international trends in production and consumption.”⁴ Marx famously called for the workers of the *world* to unite, and arguments centred on nationalism are often used to exclude certain groups from the political process, and often require those within a given nation to define their interests in contrast to those of other nations. Although the strikers in Seattle and Winnipeg were undoubtedly sympathetic to international working-class movements, their nationalistic rhetoric constrained them in some ways, and one wonders if nationalism is even more fraught with disadvantages in contemporary times.

The importance of the nation-state as a site of class struggle will continue to be the subject of much debate; however, it is certain that it will likely remain important as a system of socio-economic organization into the near future, despite the increasingly global scope of contemporary capitalism. Perhaps for structural reasons inherent in the capitalist system itself, the free circulation of commodities across the globe will even be met with growing divisions in the social sphere.⁵ However, recognizing the similarities between two popular movements which occurred in two countries in close geographic proximity, as this thesis has done, can still assist in

⁴ Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 15.

⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 168-169.

developing an understanding of how ideologies – progressive or otherwise – are refracted through national cultures in an effort to make them strongly resonate with a given citizenry. For example, such an understanding could allow one to reframe debates surrounding inequality within Canada and the United States in ways that are relatable to the average citizen while still using rhetoric that offers some possibility of advancing change. The languages of “Canadianism” and “Americanism” are still with us today, and remain “supple and malleable.” Thus, nationalism can be a means for radicals and progressives to engage with liberalism in an effort to resonate with a broader audience. Thus, it is vital to understand how historical actors constructed a progressive sense of “Canadianism” and “Americanism” and how they made this discourse into an “instrument of empowerment,” and it is equally necessary to understand how such discourse has been appropriated by reactionary elements seeking to reinforce the status quo.⁶

Stuart Hall argues that “it is perfectly possible for the idea of ‘the nation’ to be given a progressive meaning and connotation, embodying a national-popular collective will, as Gramsci argued.” Yet, he admits that in many countries (most notably in Britain), the idea of the nation “has been consistently articulated towards the right,” and issues of national identity are “intimately bound up with imperial supremacy, tinged with racist connotations, and underpinned by a four-century-long history of colonization, world market supremacy, imperial expansion and global destiny over native peoples.”⁷ These connotations are difficult to break, but progressives today must acknowledge this past at the same time that they pursue their vision for a more equitable society in the future. Nevertheless, the Seattle and Winnipeg general strikes of 1919 demonstrate that it is possible to imbue the idea of the nation with both progressive and

⁶ Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 336.

⁷ Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees,” *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 42.

conservative content. Despite its inherent limitations as a discourse of emancipation, nationalism remains an important site of ideological struggle in contemporary times, and social movements neglect this site at their peril.

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