

**FAST FOOD ALIENATION: SERVICE WORK AND
UNIONISM IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1968-1998**

by

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ABSTRACT

Since World War II, service work has become the major employment sector in North America. One of the most recognizable forms it takes is in the fast food industry, a multi-billion dollar business with outlets all over the globe. Little has been written about the history of this work, central to the functioning of the global economy and a key part of the move from an industrial economy to a consumer one. This move has changed work drastically and rolled back the limited bargain of postwar Fordism.

This thesis historicizes fast food work by examining BC's White Spot chain, which unlike almost any other has been unionized for over three decades. Drawing on union records and oral interviews, it analyzes fast food unionism, evaluates organizing in the sector, and draws out workplace dynamics and processes; arguing that labour practices in this sector have been crucial in making work more exploitative.

Keywords: fast food; labour history; Fordism; service work; unions

Subject Terms: Fast Food Restaurants – Canada; Labour Unions – Restaurant Employees – Canada – 20th Century

To Sarah, for everything

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Chapter 1

Introduction: "Jobs Of The Future"



—Globe & Mail, James Lewcun
Yukon Bud Fisher of Whitehorse pours for Harvey Smith of Saskatoon to amusement of Nat Bailey, Vancouver (left), and A. J. White, St. John's, during Canadian Restaurant Association show at Exhibition Park, Toronto.

Look at the past serving the future. The men sitting at the table in the photograph served by one embodiment of their industry's history. Confident and relaxed in expensive suits, they can enjoy the service of the bearded prospector as an amusing throwback to the old days of Canadian restaurants. The days when food was strictly a necessary proposition, something sold to camp workers in mining towns, factory workers in the big cities, or in Chinese restaurants dotting the small towns from coast to coast. The days of running

hardscrabble, subsistence businesses are over. They can laugh because they have seen the future of their trade, the future of the Canadian economy, and the future looks very different.¹

Harvey Smith, the youthful, crew-cut man in the centre, is the president of the Canadian Restaurant Association. Bonanza '65, the trade show he put together, drew over 20,000 delegates to Exhibition Park in Toronto to meet, greet, and be wowed by 500 displays erected by 275 firms. Even better, it's getting front page coverage in the *Globe and Mail's* business section, a must read for Canada's elite, above the fold next to articles on the big players in pulp, airlines, and auto manufacturing. His comments to the *Globe* reporter are fitting for a man, and an industry, in a confident, expansive mood.

Smith and the man to his right in the picture, Arthur Somerville, asserted that restaurants would be one of Canada's leading employment engines over the next two decades, and that the industry was already of such importance that its fundamentals needed to be taught at the university level. The biggest challenge facing this rosy future was the ability to attract the right workers. Smith said better people needed to be attracted with higher wages and better technology. Somerville said of the importance of workers, "in the past, many

¹ Roger Newman, "Restaurant Industry Forseen As Mainstay For Jobs Of Future," *Globe and Mail*, 23 March 1965. The headline also is the source for this chapter's title.

establishments have just muddled through, but you can no longer be in the restaurant business just because you make the best hamburgers in the world.”²

Smith and Somerville were right about many things. Since 1965, the service economy in Canada, like other Western nations, has grown exponentially. The 2001 census reports that almost four million Canadians, or almost twenty-five per cent of the working population, are employed in sales or service.³ The nation, like much of the wealthy West, has moved to what neo-liberals call a post-industrial economy. Yet the higher wages and better jobs the two restauranteurs deemed essential failed to arrive as quickly as growth and profits did. Indeed, the 1990s saw a neologism coined that reflected how the public saw service employment as typified by the work available at the world’s, and Canada’s, most successful restaurant: McJobs.⁴

Though the current state of much restaurant work is familiar to North Americans, there is still much left unknown. Journalists, sociologists, economists, cultural theorists, and of course, workers themselves have testified to the monotonous, low-paid, high stress, and dangerous work done in the restaurant industry. But despite the litany of studies, two of the most important questions about fast food work remain unanswered: How did it get this way? Has it

² Newman, *ibid.*

³ Statistics Canada, “Experienced Labour Force 15 Years and Over By Occupation (1991-2001 Censuses), online at <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/labor44.htm>.

⁴ The term McJobs was popularized by writer Douglas Coupland in *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991.

always been like this? To start to answer these questions, we will look to the empire created by the man on the left in the picture, the real pioneer, though he is not quoted in the article. His name is Nat Bailey.⁵

The name, unlikely to elicit recognition across most of the continent, is well remembered in British Columbia. It is still affixed to the marquee of Vancouver's eponymous baseball park, Nat Bailey Stadium. His picture still hangs in the White Spot restaurants he founded. An immigrant from the United States, Bailey moved to Vancouver as a boy, first finding work as a hawker of concessions at local sporting events where he amazed onlookers with his skill juggling and tossing nuts. He was soon running a team of hawkers, but his vision went beyond that. In 1928 he put his savings into opening the very first White Spot overlooking Granville Point on Marine Drive. While the area was sparsely populated, Bailey banked on the fact that his drive-in restaurant, the first in Canada, could benefit from the day-trippers taking their automobiles out for a Sunday drive.⁶

⁵ Notable recent work, both scholarly and popular, on fast food includes Barry Smart, (ed.), *Resisting McDonaldization*. London: Sage Publications, 1999, a series of articles examining the thesis that the organization of the fast food industry is increasingly becoming apparent as a determinant of social and political life; Joe Kincheloe, *The Sign Of The Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power*. Philadelphia: Temple Press, 2002, which investigates the hegemonic work done by McDonald's as a signifier; Tony Royle and Brian Towers (eds), *Labour Relations In The Global Fast Food Industry*. London: Routledge, 2002; and Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side Of The All-American Meal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Schlosser's book is an Upton Sinclair-style investigation of America's production and consumption of fast food. It was later made into a fictional film, by Richard Linklater,, and thus sits alongside Morgan Spurlock's widely seen 2004 documentary *Super Size Me*.

⁶ Constance Brissenden, *Triple O: The White Spot Story*. Vancouver, Opus Productions, 1993.

Bailey was right, and in the years to come he would open over a dozen White Spots around Vancouver, shrewdly locating them at the arteries of the growing city. During the Depression, his wife and business partner Eva Oulette ran the restaurants while he returned to oversee their stadium concession business. When meat supplies were scarce during the war, he kept the restaurants going by emphasizing fish dishes. As the city's population exploded in the postwar period, so did Bailey's empire. From 1941 to 1956, the population of Vancouver increased by a third, while the suburbs of Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey were also beginning to boom. Young families in new cars could travel the growing city and pass the famous White Spot murals on the way for a Sunday treat. By 1955 White Spot was serving 110,000 customers a week and in 1960 Bailey bought the rights to KFC franchises in BC as well, making him undoubtedly the pre-eminent player in the growing BC restaurant market.⁷

The story of White Spot, however, is much more than the tale of the vision and drive of a local entrepreneur. Bailey was successful because his business strategy dovetailed with the major developments of postwar North America: the growth of the suburbs, the explosion of disposable income for a segment of the working and middle classes, the permanent move of married

⁷ White Spot information comes from Brissenden, *ibid.*

women from the home to wage labour, the culture of the automobile, and the economic shift to a ethos of consumption. Without these developments, Bailey's White Spots, and the better-known McDonald's, Burger King, Tim Horton's, and others could not have attained their dominant position in the restaurant industry and North American economy.⁸

These changes have had a crippling effect on the North American workforce. Workers today work longer hours for less money, fewer benefits, and much less likelihood of a representative voice on the job. Meanwhile, income inequality has risen to levels reminiscent of the Gilded Age. While much has been written about these developments, work in the fast food industry, one of the key sectors of the emergent dominance of insecure service labour on this continent, has unfortunately largely escaped historical attention.

The 1950s to 1970s, the period in which Bailey, Kroc and others built and extended their empires, is often wistfully remembered as the apex of postwar Fordism. It is seen as a time when male manufacturing workers enjoyed the postwar settlement: good, stable jobs with high pay and benefits, which they had won through organizing and strikes in the 1930s and 1940s. It was the high-water mark of union membership and density.

⁸ These developments are explained by Robin Leidner in her article "Fast Food Work in the United States," Tony Royle and Brian Towers (eds), *Labour Relations In The Global Fast Food Industry*. London: Routledge, 2002, 8-29.

More recently, historians have begun to reevaluate this period. Postwar Fordism, while it provided tangible gains for some and served as an ideological lever for others, was limited in the benefits it presented to the worker, and largely excluded female, non-white workers. Issues of workplace control were taken off the table, which would be enormously damaging in the long run. When taken in a longer perspective, postwar Fordism is historically anomalous given the economic regimes marked by income inequality and tenuous employment relationships that preceded and followed it.⁹

The death of postwar Fordism and the growth of the “consumer republic,”¹⁰ as Lizabeth Cohen refers to these developments in the United States, point to the reasons why the postwar restaurant industry, particularly fast food, is so important in understanding the changes in North American labour since World War II, and particularly in the last three decades. The Fordist bargain proved to be only a temporary detente between capital and a privileged class of largely industrial workers. Beginning in the 1970s, the weapons of globalization, deindustrialization, and the consequences of deskilling destroyed much of the arrangement. Jobs that were supposed to be

⁹ This thesis is part of the developing Canadian project of re-evaluating Fordism. See also Anne Storey, “Securing The Male Breadwinner: A Feminist Argument,” in Chris Schenk (ed) *Labour Gains, Labour Pains, Fifty Years After PC 1003: The Need For New Directions*. Winnipeg: Society for Socialist Studies, 1995, 139-152; Leah Vosko, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of A Precarious Employment Relationship*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000; and Joan Sangster, “‘We No Longer Respect The Law’ The Tilco Strike, Labour Injunctions, and the State,” *Labour/Le Travail* 53 (Spring 2004), 47-87.

¹⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics Of Mass Consumption In Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

for teenagers, or women earning “pin money,” with their high turnover, low commitment, low pay and no benefits, started to become everyone’s jobs.¹¹

The fact that these jobs, along with jobs in the discount retail sector, were on the crest of the wave that has swamped the postwar compromise in North American work by itself indicates that fast food and restaurant work is a key site of historical inquiry¹². Indeed, restaurant workers at White Spot and KFC bore the worst of postwar arrangements: fully subject to the essential capitalist conditions of labour division and management-dictated work processes, they lacked the high wages and stability that was capital’s half of the bargain, even with a union in place. Not only have many people’s jobs come to look like fast food jobs in many ways, they simply have been many people’s jobs. For so many, it is their first formative job. As sociologist Stuart Tannock points out, these first jobs are not just a summer gig for spending money but part of a low-wage trap for youth employment that extends well into a worker’s twenties. The employment practices spearheaded by these chains have done crucial hegemonic work in communicating the realities and possibilities of workplace life to first time workers. Perhaps a reason for the

¹¹ The definitive text on the process of deskilling, or more accurately, the advancing segregation of populations into groups of polarizing skills and rewards, remains Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in The Twentieth Century*, New York,: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

¹² Along with fast food, discount retail is the workplace most influential in shaping today’s jobs. On its history and development, see Thomas Jessen Adams, “Making the New Shop Floor: Wal-Mart, Labor Control, and the History of the Postwar Discount Retail Industry in America,” in Nelson Lichtenstein (ed), *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First Century Capitalism*. New York: The New Press, 2006, 213-230.

drop in worker activism over the past two decades is that young workers are experiencing their first jobs, not on the docks or an assembly line, but in a uniform behind the counter. For all of these reasons, it is time to stop treating work in chain restaurants as kid's stuff.¹³

Despite its importance, the study of fast food work has been neglected by historians, even though the fast food industry has been with us over fifty years, the chain restaurant even longer. Have historians believed that these workers are less important, their hands too far from the machinery of power or the state? No revitalization of working people's power can be achieved without this massive group of workers. Indeed, the lack of study of these jobs, perhaps because they are deemed unimportant, not subversive, or simply a type of work and culture academics wish would simply vanish, is indicative of a wider problem affecting working-class history. Perhaps the fast food industry represents an inversion of Marx's guiding dictum to always historicize that which is presented as eternal. Perhaps fast food has not been historicized, despite over a half-century of history, because it has been able to appear forever new.

Working-class history once spoke to the world because it successfully placed capitalism at the centre of historical change. The unavoidable fact is

¹³ Stuart Tannock, *Youth At Work: The Unionized Fast Food and Grocery Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 23-61.

that the shift to service work has been critical in the continued persistence and flourishing of capitalism in its consumptive model. To ignore it is to move the focus of labour history away from historicizing, problematizing, and critiquing capitalism, and further into a political irrelevance easily ignored microhistories. If it wishes to be heard again, labour history needs to update and sharpen its critiques of the new form of post-industrial capitalism that has an almost unquestioned hegemony in the West, and to link it with the protests against the imperial adventures, environmental catastrophes, and other injustices it underpins.

While it has not been much studied by historians, an industry as massive as the chain restaurant industry has attracted much study and analysis in other disciplines. Dorothy Sue Cobble wrote a fine history of mid-century restaurant unionism in *Dishing It Out: Waitresses And Their Unions In The Twentieth Century*, but her story ends at the dawn of the fast food age, and as such is of limited relevance to understanding the last forty years. Similarly, Constance Backhouse's excellent article on the restaurant as a locus for both immigrant Chinese-Canadian employment and survival and also the structural and cultural racism aimed at them, ends its inquiry well before fast food dominance.¹⁴

¹⁴ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses And Their Unions in The Twentieth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991; Constance Backhouse, "The White Women's Labor Laws: Anti-Chinese Racism in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," *Law and History Review* 1996 14(2): 315-368.

The work most valuable in understanding the power dynamics of gender, class, ethnicity, and institutionalism in the North American industry have been written by two sociologists. Robin Leidner and Canadian Ester Reiter look at the industry from different angles. Reiter skillfully draws out the machine-driven, standardized monotony of much fast food work. American sociologist Leidner focuses on the emotional labour that is extracted simultaneously as a vital part of the service process.¹⁵ In *Youth at Work: The Unionized Fast Food and Grocery Workplace*, sociologist Stuart Tannock studies how unionism operates in the fast food context, the vital economic role performed by young workers, and how their precarious and low-waged employment affects them and the wider world of work. His other articles on union campaigns in the service industry and the limited horizons afforded to young workers in North America have also been valuable in this thesis.¹⁶

Despite this excellent sociological literature, there is a glaring gap in our understanding of how the industry has developed historically. This means there is a significant blind spot in our understanding of the fast food industry, and an even more significant gap in working-class history's critique of the most

¹⁵ For their most in-depth studies of the industry, see Ester Reiter, *Making Fast Food: From The Frying Pan into The Fryer*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996; Robin Leidner, *Fast Food Fast Talk: Service Work And The Routinization of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁶ Stuart Tannock, *Youth at Work: The Unionized Fast-food And Grocery Workplace*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001. Tannock's other work valuable to this project is the output of the Berkeley Labor Center's Young Workers Project, which ran from between 2001-2003. Its work is collected online at http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/research/young_workers.shtml.

important employment development in North America since World War II - - the collapse of the postwar Fordist accord, and the replacement of stable jobs, benefits, and high rates of unionization with insecure, consumer oriented jobs in which the pay is lower and exploitation is higher. This history of the fast food industry hopes to reassert studying work and the persistence and success of consumer capitalism as part of a unified whole, instead of viewing them in artificial isolation. It will illuminate overlooked workplace issues and analyze the development of this work in historical context. Furthermore, it will evaluate the struggles of workers at White Spot and KFC, and consider the organization that grew out of those struggles.

By contrast, the wider field of the history of consumption, to which this work also belongs, is an exciting and developing one. In a 2003 article for *Labour Le/Travail*, Donica Belisle outlines some of the major texts in Canadian consumer history as part of an argument for its intensified study¹⁷. Belisle's survey makes several important connections, including the mutually reinforcing systems of liberalism and consumption and the need to examine retail workers. But too often, as in her discussion of consumer citizenship and organizing, consumption is divorced from relations of production. While a focus on the subjectivities of retail workers is one necessary approach, understanding how

¹⁷ Donica Belisle, "Toward a Canadian Consumer History," *Labour/Le Travail* Fall 2003 (52), 181-206.

their jobs have developed historically, the consequences of their underpaid work for themselves and other workers, how consciousness is affected by working in a sphere of pleasure, and most importantly, understanding how that work has helped bring about a post-industrial, consumer economy with power further concentrated in the hands of capital are more pressing concerns in the study of consumption. Furthermore, while Belisle and others have done good work on retail workers in Canada, much less has been written on workers who facilitate consumption directly, as workers do at White Spot and KFC.

Other important articles on contests of consumption that have been useful here include an excellent piece by Steven Penfold on the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of 1960s East York activists to halt the sprawl of highways and strip malls in their community. Penfold's examination marries historicizing our present consumer landscape with attention to the battles that shaped it, and the political economy that ultimately trumped the demands of activists for a sprawl-free community.¹⁸ Penfold reminds us that our current consumer landscape has not always been like this, nor was it simply enacted by fiat of great corporations; its establishment was contested and negotiated, just like the work of consumption was at White Spot. American work such as Andrew Hurley's account of how working -class diners were turned from bastions of

¹⁸ Steven Penfold, "'Are We to Go Literally to The Hot Dogs?' Parking Lots, Drive-ins, and The Critique Of Progress In Toronto's Suburbs, 1965-1975," *Urban History Review* 33. (Fall 2004): 8(16).

rough masculinity to mannered spaces of consumption for middle class consumption is another example of this approach, and augurs well for the analysis of consumption as a revelatory site of historical inquiry.

However, the history of consumption is still a developing field, with many theoretical and practical roads unexplored. This thesis aims to contribute to histories of consumption with a focus on production, by analyzing the effects a consumer culture has on work and service workers, and by understanding how processes of consumption play out in what is both a workplace and a site of pleasure. The restaurant is the best site for this type of investigation, for as Hurley notes, it was on the leading edge in the transition from a localized to a multinational culture of consumption.¹⁹

This thesis is also one of the first efforts to explore the history of the fast food workplace. Rather than using participatory investigation and surveys, this historical approach looks at the development of institutions, and the changing dynamics of power between management, the union, and the rank and file. Most importantly, it examines how material conditions have shaped both the fast food industry and the working lives of those behind the counter. To do so, it capitalizes on a singular aspect of Nat Bailey's fast food empire – it was, and is, a unionized one.

¹⁹ Andrew Hurley, "From Hash House to Family Restaurant: The Transformation of The Diner and Post World War II Consumer Culture," *Journal of American History*, 1997, 83(4), 1282-1308.

While researching the British Columbia locals of what is now UNITE-HERE Local 40, I came across the files of the White Spot Employees Union, later the Canadian Food and Associated Service Workers of Canada (CFASU), the Food and Service Workers of Canada (FASWOC), and currently Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 3000. Since 1958, this union in its various guises has represented fast food workers at White Spot and KFC. This is a labour organization unique in North America, and the local left an extensive documentary record. Since fast food unionism has been so sporadic and short-lived, there are no other fast food or chain restaurant unions in North America with a comparable history. As the major chains are unwilling to provide records about employment and workplace practices, this is one of the only documentary sources available. There are as yet unexplored options for writing this history – the high turnover means a staggering number of North Americans have worked in the industry at some point in their lives. I draw on interviews here, although the potential exists for a much more thorough oral history. Along with oral interviews, I used these sources to look at three key historical dynamics.

Chapter Two analyzes the workplace itself, using grievances, union minutes, interviews, union-management correspondence, and company literature to understand the nature of quick service restaurant work in the

1970s and early 1980s. Who performed this work? What were the demands of the job? To answer these questions, I have tried to reveal workplace power dynamics and hierarchies, management initiatives, and employee resistance and negotiation. An important theme of the chapter is how White Spot and KFC pioneered workplace practices that would become widespread in subsequent decades. Over the last thirty years the service industry, specifically the area devoted to the provision of consumption, has taken on a leading position in the North American economy and workforce. Consolidation by multinationals has resulted. The type of low-trust, high turnover employment relations central to the profit plans of large corporations were pioneered, either by the introduction of new strategies or the rediscovery of old, by the fast-food giants.

Chapter Two explores some of these nascent practices at White Spot and KFC and how workers responded. This chapter addresses one major flaw in the sociological literature. As noted by Tannock, the sociological analyses produced by Leidner, Katherine S. Newman, and Ester Reiter are founded on participatory research at one outlet of thousands. Tannock points out that their approach unintentionally validates the chains' public propaganda of total uniformity and, more importantly, ignores the significant differences in

workplace practice between different outlets, differences caused by management style and the makeup of the workforce.²⁰

In the third chapter, I look at how the union operated historically. Existing research has tended to focus mostly on how service workers have attempted to organize. While that is a focus here, the history of CAW 3000 gives us a rare opportunity to see the dynamics of a trade union in motion in this industry. Studying the union also contributes a historical dimension to Tannock's contemporary investigation of CAW 3000. The history of the local demonstrates that democratic, committed, unionism is absolutely necessary to build a union for vulnerable workers. It also shows that there were several historical structural factors, specifically the industry's economic realities, which hampered the union's effectiveness.

Finally, Chapter Four examines the more recent case of CAW 3000's organizing at McDonald's in 1998. While the campaign attracted extensive media attention at the time, and some scholarly comment since, this thesis is the first to examine the inner workings of the organization drive. This has been enabled by unprecedented examinations of the union's files on the campaign. Therefore, I am able to give a detailed perspective on the effectiveness of corporate tactics in a neo-liberal state framework in defeating bargaining unit

²⁰ Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in The Inner City*. New York: Knopf, 1999.; Tannock, 61-82.

organization and to document the strengths and weaknesses of the union's response. This perspective also places it into a historical context of service organizing with an understanding of later developments.

The story of what would become CAW Local 3000, then, belongs to a much wider narrative of North America since the 1960s. It is a story of consumption outstripping production, of livable jobs replaced by bad ones, and of local capital inexorably swallowed up by multinational conglomerates. It is a story of highways clustered with KFCs and McDonald's, then Wal-Marts and Chapters, stretching in a lonely, glittering strip to the horizon of the North American dream. In another important sense it is also a smaller story, of BC workers turning a sham union good, giving each other pride, dignity, and better work through strength and struggle. This too, I hope, is a story with much wider resonance.

Chapter 2

Serving, Sweating, Smiling, and Selling: Work at White Spot and KFC

The fast food worker has long been a cultural cliché, shown in various television shows and films as lazy, stupid, incompetent, immature, or high. The hapless, nameless, “squeaky-voiced teen” of *The Simpsons* both embodies and parodies this theme. Another oft-repeated device is the job itself as an instrument of degradation. Characters in movies like *Reality Bites* and *American Beauty* confront a job in the fast food sector as the ultimate workplace indignity. These stereotypes serve mostly to degrade the workers and reinforce capital’s insistence that this work is not real, which means living wages and benefits do not have to be provided. The history of these jobs and workers is far more complex. Understanding the history of fast food workers means going beyond the illusions of culture to examine who worked in Canadian fast food during the 1970s and 1980s.

This chapter examines the historic nature of the fast food and restaurant workplace in post-war North America, specifically British Columbia in the 1970s and early 1980s. Not only is analyzing this workplace essential to understanding the specific dynamics of these workers’ response to both management and the union, it also allows us a new perspective on a workplace sector as unhistoricized as it is ununionized.

The history of restaurant unionism in Vancouver starts in 1911, over 50 years before the birth of a company union at White Spot, with what was then Local 28 of the Hotel, Restaurant, Culinary, and Bartenders Union, or HERE, known today as Local 40 of UNITE-HERE. The union enjoyed its most fertile period during the labour radicalism of the 1930s. Two women in particular, Emily Watts and May Ansell, who became involved during the militancy at the end of the Second World War, were tireless organizers who believed not only in signing up members, but in their education and empowerment. Longtime union leader James Morrison recalled in a 1979 interview that “I don’t think anybody has equaled their drive in bringing new members in. I couldn’t keep up with them, and I was younger than them.”¹ Both were shrewd, often pressuring employers on health and safety violations in order to clear the way for organizing or to rectify grievances. Under their leadership, Vancouver became the centre of restaurant organization in Canada.

Unfortunately, just as they rose on the surging tide of worker consciousness during the war, Watts and Ansell would be sunk by the reactionary currents of the postwar era. Attending HERE’s international conference, Watts and Ansell were shocked by the cronyism, pork-barreling,

¹ Watts and Ansell’s hiring is detailed in the union minutes, 28 November 1944 general meeting, Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary Employees’ and Bartenders’ Union, Local 40 Fonds, (HERE Fonds), Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia, Box 6. The Morrison quotes are from a 1979 interview with Sara Diamond, HERE fonds, Box 20.

and outright gangsterism of the restaurant union. Upon returning home they attempted to rally the local to be a voice of reform at the next convention. By then, however, they had made too many enemies. The restaurant local was put into trusteeship, Watts and Ansell were rebaited with accusations of communism, and removed because of their critique of union corruption. Morrison marked the incident as the “decline” of local restaurant unionism, saying, “I haven’t seen anybody ever replace them.”²

HERE never recovered as a restaurant local after the purge. It drifted into two decades of corruption and embezzlement under the leadership of Al Morgan before rebounding in the 1990s to become a successful and effective hotel industry union. In the 1950s, though, it was still a significant enough force to spur Nat Bailey into action when the local launched repeated organizing drives at his growing hamburger chain. It is unclear how much headway HERE made at White Spot, but a November 1956 HERE resolution to have all locals placard and picket White Spot indicates that Bailey had cause for concern about organization drives tarnishing the White Spot brand. The union’s repeated efforts at White Spot would have showed him that White Spot was a target.³

² Diamond interview with Morrison, *ibid.* The notes on the purge of Watts and Ansell can be found in HERE, Box 6.

³ Details of the placard plan are found in the 7 November, 1956 general meeting minutes, HERE fonds, Box 6; the Executive Board meetings of March to September 1958, HERE fonds Box 7, contain several references to White Spot, including hiring an organizer there, attempting to usurp the company union, and presenting the Labour Relations board with letters from employees resisting being formed into a company union.

So it was that in March 1958, the White Spot Employees Union (WSEU) was born, a company union designed to keep White Spot employees away from the trade union movement. By the 1970s, after Bailey's sale of White Spot and BC's Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises to multinational General Foods, WSEU, renamed the Canadian Federation of Food and Allied Service Workers (CFASU) in 1973, and later the Food and Allied Service Workers of Canada (FASWOC) would begin steps towards becoming a legitimate and effective trade union. In the 1990s, after a merger with the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), the union, now CAW Local 3000, would make worldwide headlines with its certification of a Squamish McDonald's franchise, and its successful organization of a number of Vancouver Starbucks outlets.

The workers represented by these unions in the 1960s and 1970s comprised three different restaurant workplaces. The original White Spots were, and are, divided into two types of food service: White Spots, which offer sit-down, mid-priced family dining, and Triple-Os, fast-food style hamburger stands, many without indoor seating. The BC Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets, referred to by the company and the union as the "Ernie's Fine Foods" division, were similar to Triple Os in their no-frills, quick service orientation. Indeed, because of their limited menu and often takeout-only service, KFCs have always employed fewer workers per shift than other fast-food giants such as

McDonald's and Burger King. As a result, as we shall see, KFCs had a different set of workplace dynamics.⁴

All the outlets relied upon high customer volume. In a period when the Vancouver area was expanding rapidly, White Spot became one of the first places to feature explicitly accessible family dining, as opposed to the dominant restaurant types, namely cafeterias and diners that catered to single workers and the clubs the rich patronized. Triple O and KFC were at the forefront of the fast food explosion, which was geared to families and teenagers.

The rise of Bailey's empire owed much to a British Columbia that was exploding demographically and economically. In the thirty years between 1941 and 1971, the population of the province more than doubled, growing from 817,000 to almost 2.2 million. Much of this growth was attracted by BC's booming postwar economy, which increased its industrial work force by over a quarter in the first postwar decade. Strong union organization contributed to the prosperity. Forty-six per cent of eligible BC workers belonged to unions, compared to thirty-three per cent in the rest of Canada.⁵

⁴ Tannock, 19, 72-73

⁵ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Society In The Twentieth Century," Hugh Johnston (ed), *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*. Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 1996, 273-312; and John Belshaw and David Mitchell, "The Economy Since The Great War," *The Pacific Province*, 313-342. On population growth, see Strong-Boag, 280; on its growing industrial work force and union density, see Belshaw and Mitchell, 322.

While employment in the resource industries was often cyclical and seasonal, and the province's wealth distributed unevenly, overall postwar BC was a place of rising incomes. This meant more discretionary money to spend on Bailey's burgers. Furthermore, it was an urbanizing population. In 1961, barely fifty per cent of BC residents lived in urban areas; by 1971, over seventy per cent lived in cities. Another development driving White Spot growth was the rate at which British Columbians purchased cars. In the same ten-year period of 1961-1971, the number of private cars on BC roads grew by over 200,000. These developments dovetailed perfectly with an expanding fast food industry in the province. It also bolstered a new space of consumption, the car, and made drive-in restaurants like Bailey's more attractive.⁶

The effect of these changes was to strengthen White Spot as a BC giant. Denise Kellahan waitressed at White Spot throughout the 1970s before later becoming a key force behind the union's transformation, and a CAW leader. She recalls lineups for tables stretching around the block many evenings. While White Spot's fast food operations were challenged by chains like McDonald's which opened its first outlet outside the United States in Richmond, BC in 1967, it remained a leader in the province. Similarly, KFC was not seriously

⁶ On BC's resource industries, see Belshaw and Mitchell, 322. For more about urbanization see Strong-Boag, 280; on car ownership see Strong-Boag, 288.

challenged in the fried chicken market until the rise of Brownie's Fried Chicken in the late 1970s.⁷

This popularity, built on the business's appeal of speed, cleanliness, and friendliness, may have appeared effortless to BC residents. In reality, an enormous amount of hard work kept White Spot at the top. Bailey's workers had to be quick and competent to match demand, especially given the tendency of management to schedule the fewest possible number of workers per shift to reduce labour costs. Many workers could not handle the pace. One new KFC worker, faced with a long lineup, was too quick to submit orders, leaving her unprepared when customers changed their minds. Unfamiliar with the system, she repeatedly forgot to complete orders over the microphone, sending the kitchen into chaos. After this disastrous shift, the woman came in two hours early the next day to quit.⁸

This example highlights several truths about working at White Spot and KFC. Despite the perceptions of the public and the discourse of employers, fast food work is actually very challenging, as has been well-documented by Reiter, Tannock, and Leidner. The worker at Brouwer's KFC had to process a large volume of customer orders at speed and with the mandated courtesy and friendliness, and communicate those orders effectively to the kitchen. When she

⁷ Interview with Denise Kellahan, 20 February 2007; for more on dining out becoming a middle class, family pursuit, see Hurley.

⁸ Diana Brouwer, Shop Stewards Report, 9 November 1973, FASWOC Box 1.

was unable to do so, the production line of the kitchen broke down, for management of the flow of work was also an essential skill. Nor did she receive support from management or the union. She quit, and they hired someone else. Fast food work was a sink-or-swim situation for many workers.

A White Spot employee evaluation form from the 1970s reveals the job expectations customer service workers had to meet. Workers were graded on output, relations with coworkers, appearance, ability to follow instructions, courtesy, speed and efficiency, effort, reaction to pressure, industriousness, and application, which was separate from industriousness because it stressed “initiative and imagination.”⁹ While unionization provided some protection, arbitrary mistreatment, dismissal, turnover, low wages and stressful work were an inescapable presence in the lives of FASWOC workers. Turnover was the underlying dynamic dictating the nature of work and the range of responses available to these workers and their union.

Fast food and restaurant workplaces have often been compared to a factory, a paradigm adopted notably by Ester Reiter. In one respect, the characterization is very accurate. Raw materials arrive on a truck, and are extensively processed by the “machine tenders” in the kitchen into a profitable

⁹ “White Spot #1080 employee evaluation,” undated, FASWOC Box 1.

finished product. But this formulation hides as much as it reveals. Unlike a manufacturing line, where the speed of work was determined by company production targets, speedups and slowdowns at White Spot and KFC occurred because of human rhythms of consumption, such as a lunch rush, that determined the busiest periods. Therefore, management goals sought to maximize the speed at which these customers were processed while scheduling as little labour as possible.¹⁰

The biggest factor determining the difference between a Triple O or a KFC and the Oakville Honda plant is the labour required of the front of the house employees. Besides efficiency and skill, the friendliness and appearance of these workers is constructed by management in order to maximize profit. So though Reiter's conception of the "fast food factory" contains much truth, it must be emphasized that this is a significantly different type of factory work.

Sociologist Robin Leidner has focused on the face-to-face service work performed in fast food restaurants and other workplaces. In her book *Fast Food, Fast Talk*, and in subsequent writing she has identified the emotional labour that interactive service workers do as a key passageway of control and resistance between workers, management, and consumers. The fast food workplace has existed historically as both a factory and a theatre. Employers

¹⁰ Ester Reiter, "Life In A Fast Food Factory," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey (eds), *On The Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1986, 309-326.

try to routinize the job as much as possible, yet also expect employees to give genuine emotional performances for customers and improvisation in the event of unexpected breakdowns to keep the production line, and the production, running. While the employment practices described by participant researchers like Leidner, Reiter, and others had reached maturity at the time of their placement in the late 1980s and 1990s, a study of BC's White Spots and KFCs in the 1970s and early 1980s shows this workplace still in a formative stage. This permits a look at how practices taken for granted in the employment world today were introduced, contested, and reconfigured.

One example of the impact of interactive service work on employees was the construction of their appearance by management. As Leidner points out, service employers "generally take a direct interest in more aspects of the workers' selves than other workers."¹¹ At White Spot and KFC, all employees wore uniforms adhering to strict company guidelines, and had to comply with dictates on makeup, hair, shoes, and jewelry. Shortly after the General Foods takeover in 1972 the hair of male employees became one of the first battlegrounds. One cook in Nanaimo was told to cut his hair or expect immediate dismissal; three workers in Penticton were fired for the length of the hair. Another part of the policy that irked employees was that the new

¹¹ Leidner, "Emotional Labor in Service Work," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Emotional Labor in the Service Economy, January 1999 (561), 81-95.

grooming policy did not apply to White Spot's middle-class office employees, but only those serving the public at store level. Workers on the front lines were expected to mold their appearance to please the customer, while the stratum of office workers retained the privilege of personal style.¹²

Though a compromise on hair was eventually reached, requiring nets for long hair regardless of gender, General Foods established that employees' bodies were to be packaged for public consumption just as they packaged a cheeseburger or a chocolate milkshake. Furthermore, workers realized that appearance was also a pressure point utilized by the company to pursue more prosaic objectives. Brad Wilson, one of the workers dismissed for long hair, noted in his letter to the union that those fired were the highest paid male staff and fulltime workers. Wilson wrote, "our layoff appears to be due to the increase in minimum wage."¹³ He alleged that a recent increase in the provincial minimum wage led General Foods to seek to cut labour costs elsewhere. This gambit provoked employee anger, and was a factor in the decision to move the union away from company domination towards some militancy.

More often, however, the construction of worker appearance and personality was usually an end in itself. Service employers, Leidner notes, "feel

¹² Letter from Don Morris to L Pye, 23 October 1972, FASWOC Box 1; letter from Brad Willson to CFASU, 13 November 1972, FASWOC Box 1; Minutes of Shop Stewards Meeting, 16 May 1972, FSW Box 1.

¹³ Letter from Brad Willson to CFASU, 13 November 1972, FASWOC Box 1.

that in exchange for wages they are legitimately entitled to intervene in workers' looks, words, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and demeanour.¹⁴ Without a conventionally recognized set of skills, these types of measurements loomed over White Spot and KFC workers, for they could be quickly replaced.

The public face that White Spot and KFC wished to present to British Columbians was not only to be well-groomed and free of excessive makeup, but white. As a job with a perceived low-skill entry threshold, the fast food restaurants were workplaces that housed many immigrants, as BC in the 1970s began to accept Asian immigrants in significant numbers again after decades of exclusion from Canada. Still, the place for Asian Canadians at White Spot and KFC was largely in the back of the house, in the kitchens away from customers.

Racism was a serious problem in the workplace. Members reported racial discrimination at the Ernie's division at one of the very first general meetings that signaled a move toward legitimate unionism, in 1970.¹⁵ South Asians also faced prejudice from their fellow workers. A stewards' meeting in 1973 reported that "several shop stewards complained about the work habits of some of our new Canadians, specifically people from India. It was alleged they are personally dirty, violate Company policies, and managers let them get

¹⁴ Leidner, "Emotional Labor In Service Work," 84.

¹⁵ Minutes of General Meeting, 29 September 1970, FASWOC Box 1.

away with it. Their clothes are dirty and they wear jewelry. F. McRae explained that some of their jewelry, like a stone or a ring through the nose, is a wedding item.” While McRae may have attempted to explain some of the unfamiliar practices of South Asian workers, there is no serious discussion of combating intra-union racism. These attitudes hindered efforts to build a unified and effective union, much as anti-Chinese discrimination, both legal and informal, segmented the restaurant industry and its workers into unfriendly groups in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁶

A 1981 survey of shop stewards demonstrates that discontent with General Foods’s racist practices continued well after the 1968 buyout. Steward Jai Singh wrote, “there is restriction [sic] to where a person work as a dishwasher or as a hostess. Because looks, color, ect. Ect. [sic]” Another steward attempted to explain this disparity in terms of skill. Steward Lacey wrote “Sometimes the person wanting a fountain position from a dishwasher does not have the knowledge of the English language in written form.” But another steward contended that discrimination at his store went further, saying “when an East Indian applies for a job, there [sic] never hired.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Minutes of Shop Stewards Meeting, 21 August 1973, FASWOC Box 1; Backhouse, “The White Women’s Labour Laws.”

¹⁷ All responses are from a Shop Steward questionnaire circulated in 1981. D. Lacey and Jai Singh (whose manager was of East Asian origin) 9 February 1981, Lorne Switzer, 17 February 1981, FASWOC Box 4.

Gender discrimination accompanied racism in hiring practices, as women entered the North American workforce in unprecedented numbers after the war.¹⁸ In BC, the majority of White Spot and KFC in-store service workers were women. Government records compiled in 1974 show White Spot had 670 male and 880 female employees, and interviews and other union records suggest that the women did the bulk of the in-store work, both in the kitchens and serving customers. Overall, a gendered division of labour prevailed, in which very few men worked at the front, in direct customer service. Most other men employed by the company worked at the central commissary where food was prepared for all outlets, or at the company-run chicken farm outside Vancouver. Throughout the 1970s, the company relied on women workers who could be paid less, and were outside the union mainstream, to deliver profits and maintain the female-gendered model of customer service. White Spot was a leader in “sticky floor” employment for women, in which female workers were trapped in a low-wage ghetto, both in the jobs it provided women and the stereotypical female labour it reinforced.¹⁹

Throughout the 1970s, General Foods would extend the scrutiny applied to their workers. Beyond packaging of appropriate employee appearance, race and gender, they undertook secret surveillance of on-the-job performance.

¹⁸ Palmer, 270.

¹⁹ Department of Labour survey, 6 June 1974, FASWOC Box 1.

This stepped-up scrutiny is an example of how the fast food industry pioneered a number of what have been termed “low-trust” employee relations. These strategies are omnipresent in the service workplace today, from security cameras that point at employees to Wal-Mart associates being informed that on-the-job small talk is actually “time-theft.”²⁰

While these practices go back decades in factory work, they were largely abandoned during the years of the postwar compromise. The fast food industry was a leader in re-establishing these toxic workplace dynamics. Furthermore, as the fast-food industry has been the first job for millions of North Americans, workers are inculcated with the idea that these low-trust practices are normal, enabling their outward spread into other employment sectors. FASWOC records give us a sense of these practices as applied historically at White Spot and KFC, and some idea of how workers reacted.

The first signs of the new surveillance regime came in 1974. The CFASU leadership discovered that management was keeping “black books,” or secret personnel files, on employees. Several shop stewards reported seeing these books, but when the union questioned management about it at a liaison meeting, their existence was denied.²¹ Management surveillance was intensified with the introduction of a program of mystery shoppers at KFC in the late

²⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich, “Time Theft,” *The New Internationalist*, 351 (November 2002).

²¹ Minutes of Shop Stewards meetings, 20 August and 10 September 1974, FASWOC Box 1.

1970s. Under competitive pressure from Brownie's Fried Chicken, the Ernie's division adapted a program first used at the American KFC in 1975. The "Quality/Service/Cleanliness" (QSC) program was ostensibly a quality service initiative, but was also used as a way to further Taylorize, or subdivide and rationalize, work processes, reward and shame certain employees, and intensify the emotional and sales labour performed by frontline workers.

Under the QSC program, stores received unannounced visits from a mystery shopper, a management representative who would grade the employees on the store's operation. The representative would then submit grades of stores to the company to be published in the newsletter, a shaming exercise for lower-ranked stores. The union objected to it on the grounds that any employee evaluation was a matter for that store only. Workers were also angered with the devaluation of their labour in the program. If stores received perfect scores, workers were rewarded with dinners or \$5 bonuses, while their store managers were given trips to San Francisco, Las Vegas, and profit sharing. Union official Jeff Shindler expressed resentment at this unequal treatment in a letter to management. Commenting on a recent newsletter article praising the efforts of store managers he wrote "Again, no credit to the

employees who undoubtedly had some involvement in \$278,717 worth of total sales.”²²

Instead of crediting employees, General Foods aggressively courted managers during its QSC campaign to win their consent and ensure their loyalty was with company goals, not with store-level management issues. Store managers were in a very difficult position in the restaurant industry. Though ineligible for union membership, managers were on the front lines of store operations, and faced many of the same challenges and conditions as rank-and-file workers. Paid only slightly more than regular workers, they were often squeezed between the demands of management to see policy implemented and profits grown and workers’ desire to perform the job in ways they felt efficient and just. By undercutting local managerial control the QSC program brought those tensions to the fore. In turn, the managerial stress demonstrates the challenges workers could face from an abusive supervisor under pressure from above.

In 1982, Kitimat KFC manager Roger Gibbs received the worst QSC scores in the province. Gibbs reacted by posting a series of abusive notices in the store, addressed to his workers. The first hectored employees for the restaurant’s insufficient cleanliness, threatening to call workers back in the next

²² Letter from Jeff Shindler to Kamerling, 28 January 1979, FASWOC Box 4; information on the QSC incentive program is in *Ernie’s Newsletters*, 31 March and 8 October, 1979.

morning if he deemed the night's cleanup unsatisfactory. In the second, he threatened to fire workers, saying "If you are just here for the money, well like I said 'there is just no job here for your kind.'" Gibb continued by attacking the workers social habits, writing "your friends can wait for you outside the store the customers don't like it! You are here to work....I will be keeping notes on all of you, and if you don't improve in work etc., I will be telling you to leave!"²³

The union sent a strongly worded letter to White Spot personnel manager Jim Galbraith about Gibbs's conduct. While acknowledging there were some problems with workers at the Kitimat store, the union pointed out that "the level of competency evident in resolving these issues is appalling" and "threats and slurs against our members must not go uncontested."²⁴ At the union's insistence, Gibbs issued a written apology to Kitimat staff, but while Gibbs's letter began as an apology, it quickly devolved into more name-calling and finger-pointing. The union renewed its protest, seeing that Gibbs offered no apology at all. Clearly, QSC evaluations encouraged problem managers

²³ Roger Gibb, notice to staff, 17 July, 1982, FASWOC Box 1.

²⁴ Letter from Jim Campbell to J.N. Galbraith, 27 July 1982, FASWOC Box 1.

who would use negative scores to harass and threaten workers. Even the union could do little to prevent such behaviour.²⁵

The QSC program itself was about appearances and control. Upon entering the store, the mystery shopper turned her stopwatch on and waited for her order to be taken. During the interaction, the salesperson was required to be “visible to customer within 15 seconds” and to take the order within 90 to 120 seconds. When taking that order, the salesperson was required to meet four criteria – greeting, eye contact, smile, and courtesy, the last expressed by platitudes such as “Have a nice day” or “Enjoy your meal.” If one of the four were missed, no points were awarded out of a possible four. In addition to the greeting and order, service staff were also evaluated on appearance, uniform, repetition of order, avoidance of gum-chewing and horseplay, display of nametags, giving correct change, and using approved packaging. These are examples of the subjective nature of many of the criteria that made up this purportedly objective evaluation.²⁶

The final criterion applied to frontline staff was suggestive selling, an innovation that attempted to grow profits by turning cashiers from pleasant, efficient, wait staff into a sales team that was an extension of corporate advertising. The QSC program pushed employees to upsell specific additional

²⁵ Roger Gibb, notice to staff, 23 July 1982, FASWOC Box1; Letter from Campbell to Scott Hickin, 30 July 1982, FASWOC Box 1.

²⁶ L. MacKenzie, Memorandum to Ernie’s District Managers, 10 October 1979, FASWOC Box 4, 3-5.

items to customers. "Anything else?" received zero points.²⁷ The new scheme was justified to workers on the grounds that "Selling is a part of your job, it will make your work more fun." In fact, selling was additional labour, specifically emotional labour, added to a frontline worker's job as part of the QSC program. Fun was linked explicitly to adherence to corporate objectives. The concept of fun on the job was applied as a motivator, instead of offering a tangible reward for adding tangible sales to the bottom line. Again emotional labour was crucial, as employees were told, "In this business, you've got to like the job, you've got to like people."²⁸ The company directive equated failure to carry out a new management directive with a deep-seated personal failing. It should be kept in mind that emotional labour cut both ways. Not just an expectation of a performance of friendliness and courtesy, it also meant keeping ones real emotions in check, no matter the stresses of the job. One White Spot employee evaluation form contained a category named "Reaction to Pressure." Employees who "tended[s] to react emotionally" ranked lower than those who could "almost always keep[s] control."²⁹

After the exhaustive breakdown of the customer service interaction, assessors took the food to their cars, where they jabbed the food with thermometers to ensure the correct temperature, weighed it, and judged it on

²⁷ L. MacKenzie, Memorandum, 6.

²⁸ All selling quotations from Ernie's Newsletter, 15 August 1980, FASWOC Box 4.

²⁹ White Spot #1080 Evaluation Form, undated.

colour and appearance to ensure it met corporate directives and standards. It is a testament to the fast food industry that there were no directives about how the food should smell or taste.

The QSC program was aimed at having employees create only the appearance of quality, service, and cleanliness. Strictly enforced, guaranteed cleanliness was one of the early advantages fast food chains had over single-outlet restaurants, as dining out became a business that targeted families. The family on the road was attracted to the White Spot or KFC not only because the food was familiar and the advertisements encouraged children to pressure their parents. It was also because they believed they were guaranteed a sterile environment in any of the many outlets, unlike the unsanitary cafeterias they may have used as single workers.³⁰

As much as executives may wish otherwise, however, it is impossible to remove the human factor from restaurant operations. This is especially true in a low-wage, low-respect environment, where the employees' motivation to uphold management dictates like "time to lean, time to clean" was questionable at best. Cleanliness varied from store to store, and obviously programs like QSC existed to try to enforce a standard of cleanliness more rigidly. But this concern for upkeep and standards was more about the

³⁰ For information on how the fast food chains, especially McDonald's, made cleanliness and family dining central to their appeal, see Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; 228-29.

appearance of cleanliness and thus stopped at the areas invisible to the consumer's eye. Working conditions in many locations were allowed to degrade to the point that they often hindered worker performance, and in many cases were uncomfortable and dangerous to the worker.

For example, many KFC kitchen workers complained about the lack of air conditioning and proper ventilation in the kitchen area. On a busy summer day, with the deep-fat fryers going full-blast, temperatures could reach well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The bulky stoves also posed hazards to workers. At one location, the fryer would pull away from the wall during regular use. Its legs would catch in the tiles of the floor, forcing the employees to jiggle and push a vat filled with boiling oil. So dangerous was this employees resorted to trying to hire a welder themselves to install steel plates under the fryer's legs to stabilize it. Fryer-related injuries were among the most common workplace incidents, and other injuries were caused by collector pot burns, slippery floors, and corndog cooker burns.³¹ The dangerous conditions demonstrate that QSC was a one-way, top down discussion, despite the rhetoric of teamwork and fun. While workers were expected to do extra sales and emotional work and endure surveillance, little was given back in terms of economic incentives or improved working conditions.

³¹ Letter from Gary Wunch to L Pye, 20 September 1971, FASWOC Box 1; Shop Stewards Report, July 1973, FASWOC Box 1; *Ernie's Newsletter*, 15 February 1980, FASWOC Box 4.

The QSC program underlined that unlike a factory or a coal mine, the need in service work to manage and massage the customer's experience alters the traditionally conceived power dynamic in the workplace. Instead of a "tug-of-war" between labour and management, there is a "three-way contest for control between workers, management, and service recipients."³² The tripartite nature of quick service restaurant work was exploited by management to ensure employee compliance. In company newsletters sent out to stores, Ernie's management repeatedly insisted workers owed a debt to the customer as a way of triangulating pressure on employees to carry out jobs the Ernie's way. One newsletter framed the customer service encounter to tug at employee's heartstrings and conscience, writing, "Today this man has decided to give his family a treat. It is a rare treat for this man's children and he has chosen us to help him...."³³ While employees may have chosen to resist orders that came directly from management, Ernie's would use anecdotes like this and a steady stream of printed customer feedback, to enlist the person on the street to help win worker consent and self-regulation.

Such efforts were necessary because workers were positioned economically at the sharpest end of this triangle. Compared with other sectors of the economy, profit margins are thin in the restaurant industry, especially for

³² Leidner, "Emotional Labor In Service Work," 84.

³³ "Ernie's Newsletter," 28 January 1980, FASWOC Box 4.

quick service restaurants. As a result, workers were seen as a manageable cost and were paid as little as possible. Because repeat business was essential, significant pressure was exerted on employees to perform emotional labour. Low pay for high stress work increased turnover, which was likely part of a larger strategy to keep employees transient and thus disempowered and low-paid. Additionally, the fact that even in the 1970s, fast food was designed as a low-skill threshold occupation meant the White Spot and KFC attracted a large number of vulnerable workers, seen especially in the high concentrations of females, young workers, and recent immigrants. Mechanization and standardization also allowed employees to be replaced quickly, with little need for training, and precluded any attempt by workers to guard their skill to control the labour supply and thus boost their own power in the fashion of tradespeople.

One collection of monthly shop steward reports illustrate how turnover worked. Unlike most stewards of the time, Diana Brouwer included the details of worker movement each month. Not a month goes by with the same team, as workers were fired, quit because of disputes with supervisors or to find better work, left town, or had their hours reduced until they could no longer continue at the job. In June, six workers left, followed by five more in July and three more in August. At an outlet like KFC, which had few per-shift workers, this

meant that a significant portion of the workforce was turned over every month.³⁴

Employees were aware of how quickly they could be replaced, which created fear in the workplace. Pauline Hunter, a worker at KFC in Penticton, regularly did three hours of restaurant cleanup until 2:00 AM, working without overtime pay or legally mandated breaks. So fearful was she of termination, she had a friend write the union about it. Her bookkeeper friend, not a KFC employee, wrote on Hunter's behalf that "in a servitude position such as this you are constantly at the mercy of company rip-off - - say anything and you can be instantly replaced." Even in a union shop, Hunter was too afraid to directly point out that her employer was breaking the law in making her work unpaid until the early morning. Her fear was a sad comment on both the union's effectiveness at the time and management's callousness. It also demonstrates how large the fear of firing could loom.³⁵

Long service offered little protection from a precipitous firing, demonstrated by the 1977 grievance of Teresa Connelly. Connelly was fired after five years for not working fast enough. Even in a unionized workplace, high turnover was a major factor at White Spot and KFC, for the reasons discussed above. This was the most important determining factor for workplace

³⁴ Diana Brouwer, Monthly Shop Steward Reports, 1973, FASWOC Box 1.

³⁵ Letter from Joan Albrecht to John Hunter, 22 May 1974, FASWOC Box 1.

dynamics and also for union effectiveness. While FASWOC could grieve for workers, protect them from some of the more capricious manifestations of management and policy, and win wage rates and benefits that were better than most available in the industry, high turnover remained a major factor in worker's lives.

High turnover contributed to two serious challenges for the union. With little incentive to stay, workers tended to quit if dissatisfied, rather than attempt to change the situation for the better. Why fight for better working conditions when the pay will still be terrible? Why not go down the road to try a different job? FASWOC thus lost many potential union activists. Solidarity and communication were also hampered by a constantly shifting group of employees. Because unionism in high turnover industries is relatively rare, its effects are rarely studied. However, it is reasonable to suggest high turnover had a deleterious effect on the union at KFC and White Spot.

The link between tenuous jobs and dampened worker activism is further borne out by research done on non-union workers. In "Everyday Forms of Employee Resistance," James Tucker surveyed 250 workers in unstable jobs, around a quarter of whom worked in fast food, about their methods of dealing with problems on the job. Tucker found that workers usually quit, stole, gossiped, or sabotaged instead of presenting formal grievances or organizing,

and found “non-confrontational forms are most likely among those in transient and subordinate positions.”³⁶ Tucker depicts this behaviour as a form of social control from below, as he believes workers feel social inferiority to managers. Without proof of a feeling of social inferiority, I would categorize this type of behaviour, of which examples exist in the union’s grievance files, as an expression of what E.P. Thompson referred to as a “moral economy,” where workers act according to their own beliefs of what is equitable and just. But where Thompson’s peasants used this moral economy to spur collective, open resistance, workers at White Spot and KFC opted for resistance that was covert and individualized.³⁷ Knowing that legitimized channels are closed or too difficult to access, workers pass judgment on employer practices and seek appropriate redress. Whether quitting the job or sabotaging it, this discontent was directed away from union activism.

Another problem that high turnover caused for FASWOC was that it enabled existing union problems to grow unchecked. Until the mid-1980s, FASWOC leadership was often out of touch with members, and more concerned with the trappings of trade unionism than with delivering benefits to workers. A constantly shifting workforce made it easier to keep members in the

³⁶ James Tucker, “Everyday Forms of Employee Resistance,” *Sociological Forum*, March 1993 (8), 25-45; 26.

³⁷ Though he would expand and refine the theory in later years, its fullest explanation is found in E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of The English Crowd in The Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, February 1971(50), 76-136.

dark, as so many moved on before becoming long-term workers with a greater stake in their specific jobs and representatives. This does not excuse the incompetence and occasional corruption of the union between 1975 and 1982, but it does help us understand the conditions that allowed it to flourish.

This survey of unionized workers in the BC fast-food sector in the 1970s and early 1980s shows a group composed of some of the most vulnerable workers of the day, working a high stress, low-wage job in demanding and often dangerous conditions. Management policy, previewing the backlash that would roil North America in the coming two decades, was to extract the absolute most labour for the lowest remuneration. Spying on and intimidating workers were employed to achieve this goal. These workers needed democratic unionism, willing to take on challenges in the workplace and to organize to improve workers lives outside the workplace, especially in challenging hierarchies of class, gender, and ethnicity. Unfortunately, White Spot and KFC workers did not get the union they deserved for a very long time.

Chapter 3

“I Didn’t Even Know We Had A Union”

Bailey’s system of company-union paternalism worked well for a decade and a half. HERE backed off on organizing drives, and the company union was a passive organization. However, Bailey had provided employees with the structure of a union, which would eventually be reached for in the early 1970s as workers became frustrated with their treatment by the company. After that, making the union work for employees would take almost another fifteen years.

If Bailey had kept the company, perhaps the White Spot Employees Union (WSEU) would have continued on as before, as an organization more suited to organizing Christmas parties than winning improvements in wages and working conditions. But external forces prompted a change in the WSEU that would propel it toward becoming a legitimate, and eventually effective, trade union. On 1 April 1968, Nat Bailey announced the sale of White Spot and the KFC franchises under the Ernie’s Fine Foods umbrella to multinational conglomerate General Foods for \$6.5 million dollars. The move was unexpected, as Bailey had rejected outside offers for years, but was foreshadowed by his advancing age and his move the previous year to merge the KFC and White Spot operations, with himself as majority shareholder.

The union's leadership was immediately concerned about what the changes might mean. In July, new president Les Pye made the first move towards turning the WSEU into a real union, likely to have real options in case General Foods sought to make radical changes in their new acquisition. He inquired about joining the BC Federation of Labour, saying that the now 600-strong membership "would be interested in joining the mainstream of labour affairs."¹ No response from the Federation is recorded, but as the WSEU's constitution and organization still did not meet the minimum requirements of a trade union, it is likely he received a polite dismissal.

The WSEU continued to "certify" KFC outlets under the master agreement, having accomplished this in most stores by 1973.² For members of the WSEU, it gradually became apparent that General Foods' White Spot was to be a much different workplace than Nat Bailey's. The General Foods takeover meant White Spot and BC KFCs were now just one part of a mammoth corporate structure. In earlier years, Bailey would visit an outlet to settle issues with the worker and manager. General Foods favoured a more impersonal, corporate style. While at base one style of exploitation had merely been exchanged for another, the new management style pushed workers towards union activity.

¹ Letter from Pye to BC Federation of Labour, 15 July 1968, FSW Box 1.

² General Correspondence, 5 July 1973, FASWOC Box 2.

Despite Pye's initial concern, it took four years before discontent translated into action. While records are sketchy, it may be that Bailey's continuing role as vice-president of General Foods in charge of the White Spot division assuaged the early problems, or that the economic downturn of the early 1970s led to increased efforts by General Foods to squeeze more profit out of their BC operations. In any case, the WSEU was soon chafing at its relationship with General Foods. In 1971, Pye hired an organizer, with the reasoning that "In the past we have been a strictly amateur organization, but with the size we have now attained, we are going to have to take a more professional outlook."³ He also brought in a shop steward system, albeit with the cautious proviso that the union sought "a responsible person who can keep in mind both the Welfare of the Union as well as that of the company."⁴ Nonetheless, the steward system did provide a voice to grievances the workers experienced under the new system. Gary Wunch, the newly elected Penticton steward, began by writing that he felt workers were being "laughed at" by General Foods.⁵

Wunch was certainly not alone in his frustration. Some of the other problems reported by the new stewards that year included late pay, unsent

³ Letter from Pye to Gary Wunch, 18 September 1971, FASWOC Box 1. The contention that it was the General sale which intensified discontent is repeated in a union pamphlet, FASWOC Box 1.

⁴ Letter from Pye, 7 August 1971 FASWOC Box 1.

⁵ Letter from Wunch to Pye, 3 September 1971, ASWOC Box 1.

medicare, then Medical Services Association (MSA), cards, delays of almost two years in processing health insurance claims, kitchens that were freezing in winter and 170 degrees Fahrenheit in summer, and long-term employees having their shifts cut back, with the shifts given to management favourites.⁶ There was also some unhappiness about the new contract, which, though including 15 1/2% raises over two years, was nonetheless described as “disappointing” by Pye.⁷

Low pay, poor conditions, and capricious management were and are endemic to the restaurant industry. However, unlike most other workers, especially those in the fast food sector, White Spot and KFC employees had a union system already in place. 1971 saw the WSEU turning to this system in the face of rising employee resentment. The minutes of the final general meeting of 1971 noted angrily that “it is evident that mgmt is manipulating people and not honouring the contract, primarily at units 1 and 10, ... a lot to learn about labour relations; they must be made to realize that it is not good enough to just patch up the errors.”⁸ They had had a union at their disposal since 1958; the frustrations of the first two years after the General Foods

⁶ Letter from Wunch to Pye, 20 September 1971, FASWOC Box 1.

⁷ Letter from Pye to Wunch, 18 September 1971, FASWOC Box 1. While 15 ½ % may seem like a good offer in the present day, what is important to note is that this letter shows that the union was unhappy with the results of their last set of negotiations. It also should be kept in mind that 15 ½ percent may have seemed inadequate in a time of rapidly rising inflation. It is likely that Pye was upset at a contract which contained what he felt was a negligible raise, especially if he wanted more attention given to the other workplace issues noted above.

⁸ General Meeting Minutes, 22 November 1971, FSW Box 1.

takeover highlighted the need for a collective voice. In 1972 they finally decided to form a legitimate union to protect their interests.

In the first meeting of 1972, the WSEU voted unanimously to change their name to the Canadian Food and Allied Service Workers Union (CFASU). This change, along with some constitutional adjustments, allowed them to organize outside of White Spot and KFC. While actual organizing would take time, the importance of the change is that it broke away from the a one-company union setup which precluded them from being a legitimate trade union, especially in terms of being accepted by other labour organizations. They also looked to align themselves with the wider labour movement. To that end Jess Succamore, Secretary-Treasurer of the upstart Council of Canadian Unions (CCU), was invited to address the membership at a general meeting.⁹

The members voted unanimously to join the CCU, which was a better fit for CFASU than the BC Federation would have been. The CCU had been formed in 1969 by legendary Quebec trade unionists Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley, as a reaction to both American domination of Canadian unions and the corruption and political quietism of many of the unions in the mainstream Canadian Labour Congress.¹⁰ In Western Canada, the CCU was bolstered by the formation of the Canadian Association of Industrial,

⁹ General Meeting minutes, 27 March, 1972, FSW Box 1.

¹⁰ Errol Black and Jim Silver, *Building A Better World : An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2001; 116.

Mechanical and Allied Workers (CAIMAW), a breakaway union from the Winnipeg local of the international moulders union. Dissatisfied with what they felt was unrepresentative leadership in the US, they broke away and raided several Canadian locals. Another breakaway union known as the Canadian Electrical Workers (CEWU) was born in BC in 1966 during a bitter strike at Lenkurt Electric, and would later join the Winnipeg moulders in CAIMAW.¹¹ CAIMAW and its affiliated unions became outspoken critics of American domination of Canadian unions, reflecting the rising economic and cultural nationalism in Canada, and the period's rebellions against the entrenched labour bureaucracy.¹² The advantages of membership for CFASU were twofold. Most immediately, the CCU's smaller size meant that CFASU's novice trade unionists received more support and attention than they might have in the BC Fed and the CLC. Secondly, the greater militancy of CCU unions and their commitment to democratic unionism would eventually help provide a solid foundation for the fast-food union.

While the CCU welcomed CFASU and its hundreds of members, it did so with reservations. It was obvious that Pye, incoming president Frank McRae, and other CFASU executive board members were inexperienced when it came to running a union and dealing with an employer. Compounding the problem

¹¹ Jess Succamore, *CAIMAW History Notes*, 11 October 1990, 2-7.

¹² Interview with Jess Succamore, 16 February 2007.

was the fact that union leadership was not drawn from or representative of the larger workforce. Union leadership remained an exclusively male preserve, and most stewards were also men while a solid majority of the workforce were women. Unrepresentative leadership would be an ongoing issue with CFASU. Succamore claims to have pressured CFASU leadership to involve more women and even encouraged the fledgling feminist union the Service, Office, and Retail Workers of Canada (SORWUC) to get involved with the union with a possible takeover in mind. SORWUC members declined, and so the potential of combining White Spot and KFC's membership with SORWUC's militancy and political program, remained a "what if?" question.¹³

In 1975, the union faced its first major challenge since certifying independently. In 1973 it had achieved a blanket certification at the Ernie's and White Spot locations it had previously held as a company union. And though the union still had trouble attracting member participation, with only 31 of about 1400 members at both locals attending the 1974 AGM, it was not for a lack of worker discontent. Rank and filers talked openly of wildcat strikes to protest General Foods' refusal to insert a cost of living adjustment clause (COLA) into contracts, and the union leadership had to send out a notice to dampen the flames of discontent. General Foods's refusal no doubt angered

¹³ Interview with Jess Succamore. SORWUC's own organizing handbook, issued in the late 1970s, discusses the union's experience organizing a "fast food chain restaurant with 24 employees in 3 stores." Unfortunately, no information is given on what chain it was, or how long it was successfully unionized. SORWUC fonds, UBC Special Collections, Box 1, File 8.

low-wage workers who were struggling to get by in a time of rising inflation. Their reaction can was in context with the wave of wildcat strikes that gripped Canada in the 1960s and 1970s, often spurred by the frustration of young workers with the quiescence and accommodation of mainstream union leaders.¹⁴

Despite the low turnout, CFASU elected John Philpot as their first fulltime president, at an annual salary of \$13,500. While it may have been the right choice to professionalize the union by installing a fulltime officer, the tendency to take care of executives at the expense of solidifying the union's foundation would haunt the organization over the next decade. Furthermore, Philpot would soon show that he was not a conscientious professional. Representing a dissatisfied membership who had not taken to the new union as quickly as leaders may have hoped, CFASU brass entered into their second legitimate wage negotiations with the company in 1975. Unfortunately, the negotiations would be a disastrous demonstration of CFASU's inexperience and slapdash procedures.¹⁵

The major issue in these negotiations was a wage raise. Some job category adjustments, dictating what pay and seniority group different classes

¹⁴ On wildcat strikes, see Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980*. Toronto: Butterworth, 1983. 280-281; Joan Sangster, "We No Longer Respect The Law: The Tilco Strike, Labour Injunctions, and The State," *Labour/Le Travail*, Fall 2003 (53), 47-88. On inflation in the 1970s, see Palmer, 266, 290-91.

¹⁵ Annual General Meeting minutes, 26 March, 1974, FASWOC Box 1.

of workers belonged in, were resolved fairly quickly. Wages remained contentious, and after six weeks of negotiation, both sides proceeded to mediation. At mediation, White Spot president Peter Main presented what he called the company's "final offer": an 80 cents an hour increase, given out in two increments over a two year deal. The union put the offer to the members without a recommendation 5-7 August 1975, and it was overwhelmingly rejected. A proposal of the same wage adjustment over a 12-month contract was also rejected on 18 August. It is unsurprising workers rejected this offer when one considers the wage increase would have been quickly eaten up by an inflation rate that had reached 12 to 13.5 per cent by 1975. Inflation obligated White Spot and KFC workers, like their counterparts in any other industries, to ask for more.¹⁶

While negotiations were taking place, many rank-and-filers were taking action independently. Some workers, not waiting for the mediator's formal rejection, were staging walkoffs and spontaneous strikes. The disruptions provoked management into locking out the workers at their Lonsdale store. However, picketing continued, with members carrying signs that read "\$2.85 an hour is not enough to eat lunch here."¹⁷ Though the Lonsdale staff was

¹⁶ John Hunter, Statutory Declaration to Labour Relations Board, 16 September 1975, FASWOC Box 1. On inflation, see Palmer, 266. He notes that in the mid-70s, strikes and lockouts chewed up 0.53 per cent of all working time. The service workers on strike against General Foods were part of a larger strike pattern which included railway workers, teachers, health care providers, and factory employees.

¹⁷ "White Spot Workers Protest Suspensions," *The Citizen*, 8 August 1975.

suspended for illegal picketing, strikes would soon shut down White Spot. By 13 August, workers at the commissary, now in a legal strike position, had gone on strike, forcing the closure of all 20 White Spot locations. The company tried to save face by donating the day's food to the Salvation Army, but company president Main acknowledged the impact of workers' strategy, commenting "They sort of hit at our Achilles' heel."¹⁸

The strikes strengthened the union's bargaining position. On 20 August, Main backed down from his "final offer" ultimatum, presenting a revised package that upped the wage raise to 90 cents in two increments. Union lead negotiators John Hunter and Peter Quinn brought this offer to members with a strong recommendation to accept. Workers voted in favour of the new deal and went back to work.¹⁹

Within days, however, employees were calling the union office, demanding to know why the promised increase had not shown up in their pay packets. It turned out that management's wage increase only applied to waitresses, dishwashers, and kitchen porters. Forty per cent of the workforce, about 500 employees, was not included in the increase. Unfortunately, Hunter, Quinn, and Philpot did not know this as they had not bothered to fully read management's last offer before recommending it to the membership and

¹⁸ "Commissary Strike Forces Closure of White Spots," *Victoria Daily Times*, 13 August 1975.

¹⁹ Labour Relations Board decision, Edward Peck, 29 October 1975, FASWOC Box 1.

signing a memorandum of agreement. CFASU grieved the contract to the BC Labour Relations Board, where it was discovered that the negotiators had only looked at the wage scale for waitresses, and assumed that the proposal extended to all workers. The union's case was not helped by Philpot's admission that he had also failed to fully read the 30 July offer, with the lame excuse that he had seen "no need to study something that would be rejected by the membership,"²⁰ and the union's claim that it had not realized the memorandum they signed was binding.

The Board's arbitrator, Vice-Chair Edward Peck, was not impressed with the union's submission, pointing out that a comparison of just the first pages of the two July offers would be enough to see the company had not made an across the board wage offer, and that "any effort on the part of union negotiators would have made this abundantly clear." In a scathing decision in favour of White Spot, Peck concluded that the union's "misunderstanding is attributable more to plain inattention than lack of experience," and that "the conduct of the Union negotiators in this case provides an outstanding example of how not to negotiate."²¹ Peck did show Quinn, Hunter, and Philpot mercy in one respect. The letter from union counsel that accompanied the decision explained that Vice-Chairman Peck "was sensitive to the union's concerns

²⁰ Peck, LRB Decision, 5.

²¹ All quotes from Peck, LRB decision, 16.

regarding the decision and would not alert the press to the decision” as was normal practice.²² Presumably this was to spare CFASU leadership public humiliation and the rage of its members. Workers had demonstrated impressive power in the workplace only to be failed by leaders who could not even be bothered to read through an agreement before signing it.

The 1975 strike represented the union’s first major confrontation with management. It was an opportunity squandered. It revealed that CFASU members were ready and willing to take militant collective action, and that the White Spot system, particularly its use of the commissary to supply every outlet, could easily be shut down. While that may have been an encouraging legacy to take into future conflicts, it was overshadowed by leadership’s failure in almost every aspect of negotiations and strike action. Despite their careless inattention to something as basic as management’s offers, the leaders were in a good position to win more for the workers after they had interrupted the company’s operations so quickly and effectively. The brief strike also reveals a leadership that was out of touch with its workers, unable to effectively communicate strategy and goals or to co-ordinate actions at the ground level to maximize success.

Furthermore, union leadership had little idea of what was going on at the store level, let alone how to manage it. The situation was worse the further

²² Letter from Ian Donald to Philpot 10 November 1975, FASWOC Box 1.

from Vancouver headquarters a store was. One Victoria outlet staged a one-day walkout on 30 July to protest not the company, but the union. They felt CFASU was asking for too much, and were outraged when they learned of a possible strike from a radio news report rather than their leadership.²³

Unfortunately for members, the same leadership would remain in place for nearly a decade, and would plunge the union into a series of crises that almost sank CFASU. The three most important failings, overexpansion, the carelessness with and misappropriation of funds, and failure to service membership, best explain the stunted development of the union.

Overexpansion and overspending stemmed from CFASU's speedy transformation from a company union to a national union in the early to mid-1970s. While some efforts were made to organize in the regional and industrial areas that made sense for a fledgling union on a tight budget, such as organizing drives at Pizza Hut in North Vancouver and Surrey in the late 1970s, too much was spent on campaigns with no results, and on campaigns that were much too far removed from the union's geographical base and area of expertise.

The best example of union overreach and the biggest drain of resources was the establishment of CFASU's Toronto office. CFASU's first major organizing in Toronto was not in the restaurant industry at all, but in the hotel

²³ "Rest Staff Stage Walkout," *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 July 1975.

sector. Organizing the Windsor Arms took well over a year, and the cost to the union was amplified by President Quinn's decision to hire lawyers to sign up workers and negotiate the contract. He made the decision because of the hotel's distance from Vancouver and his own inexperience at negotiating. But the lawyers ate up money and had no real connection to the rank and file. Rather than proceed slowly in light of the union's limited finances and organizing experience, Quinn then hired three more organizers to sign up 190 cleaners at an office tower in Toronto. Again the negotiations were handled by lawyers. This considerable expense came to nothing when the union dropped the campaign after seven months.²⁴ Undaunted, the union hired full time organizers for the Toronto office. These organizers continued to drain resources, though their results were spotty. They even received a car and expenses on top of salary, despite providing little information as to where the money was actually going.²⁵

Organizing closer to home too was rudderless and expensive.

Certifications at Pizza Hut were lost amid feeble excuses from the leadership of "interference from the parents [of employees] and manager." CFASU then attempted to raid a hotel held by scandal-ridden HERE Local 40, before backing out. It spent a year organizing a sweetheart deal, in which the union

²⁴ From minutes of National Executive Board Meetings, 22 June, 19 October, 7 December 1977, 21 June 1978, FASWOC Box 1

²⁵ Minutes of National Executive Board Meetings, 25 April, 7 September, 3 October 1979, FASWOC Box 1.

organized the company with the owner of the Sourdough Restaurant in Kamloops, presumably in return for a promise to manage the employees and keep wages low. Despite union executive Mike Wakelin's concerns that "it could appear we are in the pocket of the employer," Quinn still spent a year fighting the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which had an overlapping catering certification in Kamloops. Quinn also squandered resources attending several out of town meetings and hearings to sign up only a few dozen employees. The Sourdough eventually closed. Quinn even considered a campaign with bank tellers, but common sense prevailed when he decided, "we have decided to remain in our field in which we have considerable expertise."²⁶ The union would have been much better served if this advice had been followed consistently.

The largesse with which CFASU pursued its grandiose dreams in Toronto was matched by the executive's approach to personal compensation. Despite problems attracting local members to the yearly convention, CFASU sent out \$2,000 to bring in Toronto delegates for a longer stay at the request of Toronto organizer Wendy Iler, "as some in Toronto wish to combine their trip with a holiday."²⁷ One meeting was given over to the purchase of a minibus with a feature "most important to those trips into the interior - Factory Air."

²⁶ Minutes of National Executive Board Meeting, 15 February, 1978, FASWOC Box 1.

²⁷ National Executive Board minutes, 23 January 1980, FASWOC Box 1.

Later, the van ended up parked disused beside the Secretary's house while officers continued to rent cars at union expense.²⁸ At the same meeting where the van's purchase was passed unanimously, it was also decided to eliminate travel expenses for shop stewards attending meetings. This decision isolated out of town members at a time when communication with peripheral locals was already a problem. The move was justified by Quinn, who reasoned, ironically, given his spendthrift ways, "We will likely suffer a short term reduction in stewards but this will likely weed out those just in it for the expenses."²⁹ Raises were also regularly doled out for officers during these years. At the same time, the union turned down a request for a paltry \$50 to help striking CAIMAW members, citing "the heavy financial drain that Toronto has caused."³⁰ It would be possible to paint a more detailed picture of this period's waste were it not that Quinn refused to produce detailed financial reports or hire a chartered accountant to look through CFASU's books.³¹

With attention focused on buying minibuses and organizing office workers 5000 kilometres away, it is no surprise that the core of the union, members at White Spot and KFC, were often forgotten. In examining the executive's operating files of the period, it is striking how rarely workers or

²⁸ The quote is from the minutes of the National Executive Board Meeting, 7 September, 1979, FASWOC Box 1. The note about the continued rentals is from the 11 June, 1980 meeting.

²⁹ National Executive Board minutes, 7 September 1979, FASWOC Box 1.

³⁰ Raises were awarded executive officers at the meetings of 21 December 1977 and 20 December 1978. The CAIMAW request is from the National Executive Board Meeting of 30 August 1978, FASWOC Box 1. Quinn justified the second raise by claiming officers "had not taken their legal wage increase since 1975." No one corrected him.

³¹ National Executive Board minutes, 17 January 1979, FASWOC Box 1.

issues at KFC and White Spot are mentioned, an afterthought though they made up the vast majority of the membership.

Longtime CCU leader Jess Succamore claims that Quinn rarely did anything with the members' interests in mind, was often ready to collaborate with managers over firings, and was generally unwilling to pursue grievances.³² A statement at an executive meeting in 1979 revealed where the core workers were placed in the executive estimation. Quinn outlines CFASU's long-term goals, which were "expansion of hotel organizing, members from the interior and more organizing of members in Toronto and the prairie provinces. Other items include the acquisition of a computer terminal and a Mini-bus type van to visit the units in the interior to avoid the necessity of renting meeting rooms."³³ Workers at White Spot and KFC were not even mentioned.

The period can thus be summed up by the comment of one Vancouver Island worker that "I didn't even really know we had a union, except when they sent out a new contract."³⁴ Nevertheless, people close to the workplace in that time are unanimous in agreeing even a poor union, with its ability to win some wage rises, benefits, and access to grievance procedures, was better than nothing. The preceding chapter shows that even with poor leadership,

³² Interview with Jess Succamore, .

³³ National Executive Board Minutes, 14 March 1979, FASWOC Box 1.

³⁴ Interview with Elaine Gardner, 19 March 2007.

White Spot and KFC workers had better wages and benefits than they would have without representation. Unfortunately, they deserved much more.

Chapter 4

“I Guess This Kinda Puts Squamish On The Map”¹: A Rebuilt Union Takes On McDonald’s

The 1980s were years of challenge, crisis, and rebirth for the union. Before it grew into a force that could challenge the world’s most powerful restaurant chain, it faced challenges to its very survival. FASWOC withstood a financial crisis caused by the overspending of the Quinn years and a raid on its membership by the British Columbia Government Employees Union (BCGEU). Fortunately, after Quinn’s ouster the union had much more committed and capable leadership at the helm. By the time of the unionization campaign at the Squamish McDonald’s, FASWOC had been transformed from a corrupt, incompetent organization to, as CAW 3000, one of the most effective service unions in Canada.

The union’s move towards more representative leadership began in the early 1980s. Under the leadership of Larry Reid, a veteran White Spot unionist, the union began to amend the corruption and overexpansion of the Quinn years. The new tone can be seen in the minutes of a 1982 meeting, “Reid read a letter from White Spot’s personnel director, Jim Galbraith expressing his concern about our apparent deteriorating relationship and more

¹ Uttered by Tessa Lowinger when she found out the union had been certified, the quote appears in Liza Featherstone, “The Burger International,” *Labour/Le Travail*. Spring 1999. (43). 301-306.

'adversarial' approach. Obviously, our decision to improve our membership's awareness is working."² This by itself represented a major departure from Quinn's disinterest in workplace issues. But there was still a long way to go.

Emboldened and energized, workers would push the union to a more democratic and confrontational approach with management, eventually deciding that Reid himself was too accommodating. Former rank-and-filer Denise Kellahan would take the reins along with Leila Harding. The new leadership transformed the union, merging with CAIMAW and later the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), and winning a major strike at White Spot in 1988.

After merging with FASWOC and its membership, the CAW could have simply maintained the existing organized restaurants and collected dues. To its credit, the new union parent was eager to continue organizing in the fast-food sector. CAW 3000, the new name for the White Spot and KFC local, made headlines internationally in 1998 for fighting a campaign to organize a McDonald's in Squamish, BC. It was just one of several campaigns in the late 1990s to organize workers in the industry. The Teamsters and HERE had nationally noted drives at McDonald's franchises in Montreal and Orangeville respectively, the Teamsters campaign resulting in the owners shutting down the

² Minutes of Western Regional Executive Board Meeting, 11 May 1982, FASWOC Box 7.

restaurant rather than operate a union shop. CAW 3000, unlike these unions, had experience organizing the fast food sector. However, the fight at the Squamish McDonald's proved to be its most challenging, and most high-profile restaurant campaign yet.³ It is of particular interest as an example of the franchise system acting as a powerful barrier to unionization, an indictment of labour law in British Columbia, and also an evaluation of how well Local 3000's organizing techniques fared in something close to the present day,

As the campaigns in Montreal and Orangeville demonstrate, the confrontation at Squamish did not occur in an organizing vacuum. A variety of efforts, spearheaded by different unions, had been aimed at our fast food nation, as a part of a broader effort by an aging and shrinking Canadian union movement to engage and empower young workers. The renewed militancy of many restaurant workers provoked extensive commentary in the mainstream media. These observers identified the main reasons for this activism as a desire for dignity and union recognition of Canada's changing economic base. Tessa Lowinger and Jennifer Wiebe, the young leaders of the Squamish drive, faced many of the same challenges that women like Emily Watts and May Ansell battled in the 1930s. Their jobs were poorly paid, turnover was high, and workers were used by management as disposable parts of the

³ John Schreiner, "McDonald's is a Trophy for the Canadian Auto Workers: Newly Unionized Burger Outlet in Squamish is a Symbol of a Changing Workforce," *Financial Post*, 28 August 1998; Jennifer Prittie and Donna LaFramboise, "Union Finds McDonald's Pitch No Small Potatoes;" *Windsor Star*, 15 August 1998

machine. It was poor treatment and conditions, not money, that spurred the union drive at Squamish.

The campaign at Squamish is significantly different from the others undertaken in the same period, and these differences make it the key campaign to study. Unlike HERE, the Teamsters, and the SEIU, CAW 3000 had extensive experience in fast food unionism. After many early struggles, the union had built itself into a responsive democratic local with a keen understanding of the needs of fast food workers, and experience fighting, and winning, against management. In his 2001 study of Local 3000 and stopgap workers, sociologist Stuart Tannock noted the reputation the local had won across Canada as one of the most dedicated and effective representing youth and service workers. Given these attributes, and the advantage of being part of a well-financed national union, the CAW, the campaign at Squamish appeared to be almost an ideal venue to organize a McDonald's. If an experienced, democratic local with the resources to win could not beat the only McDonald's in a union town, what hope was there for success elsewhere?

Opened in 1987 by Michael Savage, the Squamish McDonald's sat beside the Sea-to-Sky highway, a busy stretch of road connecting the populous Lower Mainland to the leisure mecca of the Whistler-Blackcomb region. The town itself still contained many unionized workers in the shrinking railroad and

pulp and paper industries.⁴ The restaurant was often busy, and Grade 12 students Lowinger and Wiebe soon tired of being screamed at by managers for trivial mistakes, often in front of dozens of customers. "I was taken out into the lobby and yelled at in front of customers and made to cry," reported Lowinger.⁵ Eighteen year-old Billie Harrison also reported being dressed down in front of customers and sent crying to tell the customers the mistake she had made. She said "They made me feel really small."⁶ This treatment of workers represented a failure in executing McDonald's ideology. Hoping to avoid unionization, the fast food chain had stressed positive reinforcement for workers and instilling a team/family concept to keep workers motivated and quiescent.⁷

There were also safety concerns at the workplace. Sick employees were routinely pressured to stay on the job. If workers were absent because of illness, they were told to find a replacement before their absence would be condoned. Both Wiebe and Lowinger reported being forced to stay on site in the employees' bathroom for two hours after arriving at work sick with cramps and nausea, waiting for a replacement to arrive. Lowinger described unsafe

⁴ James Risdon, "Does He Deserve a Break Today? A Squamish McDonald's Franchisee Takes on The Canadian Auto Workers," *BC Report*. 19, April, 1999, Vol.10.,12, 34.

⁵ Dene Moore, "Teens Take On Fast Food Giant." *Canadian Press*, 23 August 1998.

⁶ John Gray, "Is Labour's Mac Attack A Losing Battle?," *The Globe and Mail*, 9 September 1998.

⁷ Schlosser discusses the McDonald's strategy of "transactional analysis" or "stroking" young workers: giving them positive feedback and instilling a team or family dynamic in place of wage raises or benefits; 74.

work conditions. "One light switch had no panel," Lowinger said. "You'd actually get a shock when you touched it."⁸ In July 1998, the two women voiced their concerns to Lowinger's father, Hans, a BC Rail worker and CAW member. Hans called his steward, who contacted Roger Crowther, an organizer at CAW 3000. Wiebe and Lowinger canvassed their coworkers at their homes, and quickly signed up over the 55 per cent of 78 workers necessary for an automatic union certification. Franchise owner Paul Savage challenged the vote at the Labour Relations Board, claiming that not all workers had a chance to cast ballots. In fact, the 28 workers he claimed were disenfranchised were new employees hired specifically to dilute union support and halt the drive. In one early pay period during the dispute, the number of employees skyrocketed from 74 to 104, part of Savage's plan to dilute the mass of pro-union workers.⁹

It should be noted that the certification would likely never have happened without the BC labour law provision for certification by card check. Under card check certification, once a mandated percentage of workers have signed a union card, certification procedures can begin. By contrast, the United States and other Canadian jurisdictions first require card signing and then an election for certification. This is a lengthy process that allows employers time to

⁸ Details on working while sick from Moore; Lowinger's quote from Liza Featherstone, "The Burger International," *Labour/Le Travail*. Spring 1999, (43). 301-306.

⁹ "McDonald's Employees Vote to Certify Union," *Canadian Press*, 19 August 1998.

intimidate workers and hire new ones to dilute union support. In his book *Differences That Matter: Social Policy and The Working Poor in The United States and Canada*, sociologist Dan Zuberi identifies card check as the major reason for the higher union density among British Columbia workers compared to workers in the US. Abolishing card check was one of the first acts of the right wing BC Liberal government after their election in 2001.¹⁰

Another challenge to the certification vote came from within. In August, Vancouver labour lawyer Randy Kaardal, representing a group of “a dozen or so” anti-union employees, submitted a brief to the Labour Relations Board contending that Squamish employees could not accept a contract for union representation because they were below the age of majority. The Board recognized that these workers were old enough to accept employment, and thus were old enough to join a union. It also pointed out that Kaardal’s argument contradicted labour law precedent. The nature of Kaardal’s involvement raised several questions. How could a group of teenagers making between seven and nine dollars an hour afford the services of a lawyer who customarily billed \$250 hourly? How they were old enough to hire a lawyer to assert they were too young to sign contracts? Kaardal denied that he had been

¹⁰ Dan Zuberi, *Differences That Matter: Social Policy and The Working Poor in The United States and Canada*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, 53-54.

hired by McDonald's or Savage, asserting that he had slashed his fees for this case because of "principle reasons."¹¹

After the board's decision, Savage temporarily retreated, and agreed to recognize the certification. Unlike the Cappellis of Montreal, who closed down their St-Hubert franchise in response to the union drive, Savage stated he would not close the Squamish location. With that, the Squamish McDonald's became the only unionized Golden Arches in North America. Unlike Orangeville or St-Hubert, Lowinger, Wiebe, and the other Squamish workers had made their McDonald's a union shop.¹²

The victory received widespread media attention. Most focused on the youth of Wiebe and Lowinger and the David-vs-Goliath dynamic of their struggle. When observers moved beyond treating the women and their union as some sort of novelty act, many reverted to the standard operating practice of criticizing labour. In a telling revelation of how antagonistic restaurants had become towards organized workers, the chief of the employers group, the BC Restaurant and Foodservice Organization, was quoted as calling the certification "obviously disappointing." This was quite a departure from the cooperative attitude of the 1950s and 60s, and he was quick to reassure other

¹¹ Petti Fong, "McDonald's Workers Split On Union, *Vancouver Sun*, 18 August, 1998.

¹² Moore; Canadian Press.

bosses that Squamish was “not a trend. It’s optimistic for them to think that it is.”¹³

The Vancouver *Province*’s editorial board too raised the usual spectres in response to the CAW victory. According to the *Province*, this action by a few workers at one of hundreds of BC McDonald’s threatened the future of the entire province. Saying that the victory would be an inspiration to organizers and workers across BC, the newspaper paused to worry about the people “who want to invest their money somewhere.... Will they look at BC, freeze at the thought of this precedent and then take their business elsewhere?” While the *Province* congratulated the Squamish workers on their victory, its conclusion both demeaned their work and highlighted the shaky internal logic of the previous few sentences. The statement that “these kids are flipping burgers, and many aren’t in it for the long haul. Isn’t the job itself enough?” raises some obvious questions. If these “kids” are only “flipping burgers,” how can their unionization be “D-Day for the health of British Columbia,” an action so radical and far-reaching that it would drive away outside investment and plunge the province into recession?¹⁴

The frenzied media speculation was premature. Before Wiebe, Lowinger, and CAW 3000 could torpedo the BC economy, they would have to

¹³ CP, “McDonald’s Workers Certify Union.”

¹⁴ Editorial, “The Golden Thud; Vancouver *Province*. 23 August 1998.

move beyond certification and become the only union in North America to sign a collective agreement with McDonald's. Negotiations began in September, and immediately bogged down in the face of employer intransigence. On the face of it, the CAW's demands were modest: a small wage increase, some employee benefits, seniority considered in scheduling, and an anti-harassment policy. But to McDonald's, the demand for a collective agreement was outrageous in itself. The corporation and Savage endeavored to slow the process to a halt. This would be the cornerstone of their method to remain union-free.¹⁵

After weeks of desultory negotiations, Crowther held a successful strike vote to try to jump-start the proceedings, maintain union solidarity, and give the bargaining committee a strong mandate. By March, after eight months of negotiations with mediator Jim Breckenridge, a settlement package was completed. Crowther was disappointed by the workers' emphasis on fair treatment, as opposed to a more equitable pay package, but noted the workers had already won their anti-harassment and seniority provisions, "legal rights in the workplace that no other employees at McDonald's [have]."¹⁶ The Squamish workers voted 100 per cent in favour of the contract, but it quickly became apparent McDonald's had not been bargaining in good faith, and its

¹⁵ Kelly Sinoski, "Squamish McDonald's Staff Taste-Test a Contract," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 March 1999.

¹⁶ Also in Sinoski.

stall tactics were not being used merely to win concessions at the bargaining table. Instead of accepting the mediated agreement, they petitioned the Labour Board to allow the parties to proceed to a strike or lockout, in hopes of a decertification battle. Their initial strategy, to play for time until they could destroy the union, had not changed since the first certification vote.

Crowther and the CAW attempted to keep workers onside throughout the negotiating marathon by stressing the gains the union had made for workers at organized fast-food outlets elsewhere. In a notice posted to employees explaining the purpose of the strike vote, Crowther pointed out that “it is agreed by most observers that the CAW/KFC contract covering 47 KFC restaurants is the leading fast food contract is [sic] North America. The start rate is \$8.07 per hour.” In comparison, BC’s minimum wage was \$7.15 in 1998. However, Crowther well knew that these restaurants were organized at a much earlier time, and the union then had possessed two advantages, the corporate ownership of those KFCs, and the union density provided by the 1973 blanket certification and later master agreement, that were not in place in organizing the Squamish McDonald’s.

Meanwhile, McDonald’s argued at the Labour Relations Board (LRB) that the strike vote was invalid. Because workers were told that there would necessarily be another vote before strike action, they held that this vote was

administrative in nature, and therefore meaningless. While the appeal was yet another stalling tactic dismissed by the LRB due to lack of merit, the testimony provided contains valuable information about the campaign.¹⁷

LRB testimony demonstrates that the union did a good job of providing information to its members, largely teenagers with little trade union experience. Crowther took pains to underline that the strike vote was primarily intended to bring a strong mandate to the bargaining table, mandatory to proceed to mediation and that no strike was possible during mediation. He also tried to soothe employees who had learned of McDonald's reaction to successful unionization, as the threat of a shutdown was a common scare tactic during a union drive. Crowther reassured them that "the company stated once again in front of the mediator – they will not close the restaurant. Don't listen to rumours or those who are not at the bargaining table."¹⁸ These reassurances show the union understood that keeping workers together would be even more difficult than the initial organization. This was especially true for workers with little security to begin with.

The union also attempted to drive home who bore responsibility for the numerous challenges and delays. In one update, the CAW noted that of the union's demands, Savage's lawyer only objected to a laundry allowance and

¹⁷ Chad Skelton, "McDonald's Union Faces Vote," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 June 1999.

¹⁸ CAW 3000, "Notice Of Strike Vote," 4 December 1998.

a higher start rate. Crowther and Kellahan asked “If we are only dealing with the franchise owner, why the worry...? They have spent thousands of dollars in legal fees just to prevent a higher start rate? Who is really calling the shots here?”¹⁹ The union repeatedly demanded to know who was paying Savage’s legal fees, estimated at half a million dollars by the end of the dispute. Savage claimed loans and pro bono work were carrying the load.

In his own series of notices to employees, Savage attempted to sow fear and dissent. He pointed out that the mediator could pursue several options, including granting parties their right to a strike or lockout, raising fears that a contract was really no closer. In his handouts to employees, Savage also raised the spectre of union red tape, saying the union’s proposals would result in “less [sic] employees and far less flexibility than we currently have.”²⁰ He also reiterated that the restaurant was in poor financial shape, a claim he said the union had agreed with. Implicit in statements such as “it may be hard to believe the restaurant is performing so poorly” or “this business has to turn around and become profitable” is the threat of closure in an “intensely competitive” market like Squamish.²¹ Even the pro-business *Globe and Mail* was skeptical of Savage’s tales of financial distress, writing that, because of its

¹⁹ Letter from Crowther and Kellahan to CAW 3000 members, 3 June 1999.

²⁰ Letter from Savage to all employees, 11 December 1998.

²¹ Letter from Savage to all employees, 30 December 1998; Paul Savage, “Negotiations Update,” 15 November 1998.

location on a major highway and near a high school, the Squamish outlet was “reputed to be the third most prosperous in British Columbia.”²²

Furthermore, some of Savage’s losses and his lower per shift profit averages were not based on normal operations, but on his attempts to buy his way past the union, according to Kellahan and a *Globe and Mail* article on the dispute. Kellahan claims that during the drive, Savage followed a policy of placating young employees by vastly over-scheduling workers per shift, allowing them a chance to earn more money in a very social atmosphere, with much less work to do. This was an attempt to chip away at pro-union sentiment by making him over into the friendly boss who made McDonald’s a fun workplace.²³ Savage and his team of new managers and advisers also responded to unionization by fixing the electrical outlets, holding meetings to hear grievances, and buying a new staff room stereo. They showered staff with free pins, meals, and banana splits. Worker Dan Duggan noted, “if it was always like that, I wouldn’t be for the union.”²⁴

Indeed, throughout the strike Savage countered the union’s rhetoric of brother and sisterhood with his paternalism. In addition to parties and social shifts jammed with employee shifts, he tried to inculcate a family feeling in his notices. One relates his pride in his workers graduating from high school,

²² John Gray, “Is Labour’s Mac Attack...”

²³ Interview with Denise Kellahan, 21 February 2007.

²⁴ John Gray, *ibid.*

concluding that "Watching our students succeed at school and at work is one of the big reasons I enjoy operating this restaurant."²⁵ Another notice began brightly, talking about the "great time" Savage had at the Christmas party where "everyone was enjoying themselves." "Unfortunately," the letter continues, "I have to respond once again to the recent question and answer from Denise Kellahan."²⁶ Here Savage shrewdly constructed himself as a friendly boss who could provide fun for everyone, if the union would just stop interfering.

When his appeal of the strike vote was rejected by the LRB, Savage next claimed that employees did not have "adequate time" to decide. One union employee, Ben Thompson, claimed that only 15 of 85 employees had participated in the strike vote. In fact, since certification, the McDonald's had undertaken a churn of employees. Pro-union workers had their hours cut as an incentive to leave. New anti-union workers were hired, with opposition to CAW 3000 purportedly a condition for employment. Though it is uncertain how many employees participated, it was reported that at least 18 boycotted the vote, meaning many more anti-union employees were at the store.²⁷ Despite this, even employees testifying in favour of Savage agreed that the strike vote meeting was clear, informative, and free of harassment or coercion. Again, the

²⁵ Letter from Savage to all employees, 10 June 1999.

²⁶ Letter from Savage to all employees, 11 December 1998.

²⁷ "Squamish McDonald's Workers Near Landmark Agreement," *Vancouver Sun*, 8 March 1999.

practices of the union were proven to be legal and transparent, unlike the practices of Savage and McDonald's.

The dispute dragged on. The longer it went, high turnover at the restaurant and the deep pockets and rabid anti-unionism of McDonald's turned the advantage to the employer. While the Labour Relations Board upheld the original strike vote and upheld it again in appeal, one piece of BC labour law dealt a critical blow to the fight to obtain a collective agreement. BC law allowed decertification, a vote to disband the union, to proceed after just 10 months after a union was in place. Unlike Ontario law, which mandated that at least one collective agreement being signed before a decertification, workers in BC could decertify without even having the chance to see the pros and cons of a union contract.²⁸

This provision made it possible for Savage and McDonald's to stall and flood the workplace with pro-management workers to wait the union out and prepare for a decertification vote without bargaining seriously. Crowther and Kellahan alleged that was what had happened. On 3 July 1999, a vote took place, with 45 workers voting for and 25 against decertification. Over 50% of the voters had not been working there just 10 months earlier, when the union drive took place.

²⁸ Chad Skelton, "Squamish McDonald's Workers to Vote on Decertifying Union," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 June 1999.

The varied reactions of workers were an apt reflection of their now-bitterly divided workplace. Some, like Jenn Thiele, clearly believed the Savage-McDonald's line, saying "if we get the union then McDonald's will buy out [owner] Paul Savage and [the workers] will lose their jobs." Kris Pienakowski seemed to believe that the union was unnecessary to ensure lasting changes at his workplace. He predicted hopefully that "I think that having this thing, it scared them. Now they are going to treat us good, because we have power to do stuff."²⁹ Joe Mahlberg, the 19-year-old employee who was the face of the anti-union campaign, exulted in the result, saying, "We finally got our say. We've been heard. We'd like to see the union pack up and march away."³⁰

Wiebe and Lowinger were crushed, but still claimed a partial victory, and expressed optimism that their struggle would be taken up by other workers. "Of course I'm disappointed," Lowinger commented. "I don't understand what people wanted, why they thought they had no right to health and safety and to be treated fairly." Despite her obvious frustration, Lowinger concluded with a message of hope: "Don't let this discourage you," Lowinger said. "If more people try, then one day McDonald's is going to be union."³¹

At this writing, the Squamish outlet remains operating and non-union, like every other McDonald's in North America. Reflecting on the dispute, CAW

²⁹ All quotes in this section from David Hogben, "Squamish McDonald's Employees Vote to Decertify," *Vancouver Sun*, 3 July, 1999.

³⁰ Christina Montgomery, "A Big Mac -- And Hold the Unions," *Vancouver Province*, 4 July 1999.

³¹ Montgomery.

youth organizer and former White Spot worker Ryan Krell opined, "one of two things happens when an employer finds out about an organizing campaign. They call lawyers or they go ballistic, immediately harassing and disciplining employees unjustly. Of the two methods, lawyers and union-busting consultants are far more effective because they can turn the workers against one another."³² These were the tactics used by McDonald's in all three Canadian union campaigns.

In many analyses of unsuccessful union drives, observers play "Monday-morning quarterback," breaking down the flaws in the union's approach in hopes of divining future tactics. In this case, though, it is difficult to fault Local 3000. In any campaign featuring such a disparity in resources between workers and management, particularly in a high turnover industry, speed is of the essence for success. The fact that BC labour laws allowed management to stall and make a farce of negotiations, all the while replacing workers with anti-union hires, is a failure of provincial law, a restive labour movement, and a prevailing pro-business hegemony, not of Local 3000. However, the defeat has put a chill on the local's restaurant organizing efforts, though it continues to represent many restaurant workers in BC.

³² Gavin McGarringle, "Hope in Hospitality: Winning a First Contract at the Cheesecake Café," *Our Times*. Jul-Sep 1999. Vol. 18 (4); .31.

Since the defeat of the Squamish campaign, organizing in the Canadian fast food industry has largely stalled, contrary to Lowinger's prediction. Bryan Palmer's comments during the Squamish saga identify the major cause. He noted that the dues money and political power gained by organizing these workers was limited. He also said, prophetically, "you spend all your money organizing one branch, employers can close it down, and move employees around," said Palmer. "You can't do that with an auto plant."³³

The effort to organize the Squamish McDonald's did not live and die in silence. It received an enormous amount of attention. The attempts to organize McDonald's franchises certainly provided ample publicity for the union movement. The amount of investment in branding undertaken by multinationals allows for a certain amount of asymmetrical warfare by smaller adversaries. The public profile of multinationals is so great and so key to their endeavors and financial health that these types of campaigns are highly visible. At the level of economics, however, the resources of multinationals and the unsympathetic climate of BC labour law, the result of business lobbying and anti-labour governments, have stymied unionization efforts.

A key factor in the failure of the organizing drive at Squamish was the franchise model under which the outlet operated. Some might scoff at Fraser Institute head Michael Walker's take on the dispute, where he opined that

³³ LaFramboise and Prittie, "McDonald's a Test Case For Unions," *Vancouver Sun*, 15 August 1998.

“Very often, unionization sounds the death knell for small businesses,”³⁴ but such a characterization was not entirely baseless. Despite owning an outlet of the richest restaurant chain on the planet, Savage was able to portray himself as a small businessman taking on a big union, and thus deflect some of the stigma of an unscrupulous owner fighting to deny rights from his teenage workforce. Furthermore, his claims of financial losses, incurred as part of the anti-union strategy, were much more credible as an owner-operator, than as part of a world-wide restaurant conglomerate as massive as McDonald’s. The McDonald’s corporation, of course, would have had neither advantage in fighting a drive at a company-owned store. Accounts of chain-wide losses would have been ludicrous, and the company could easily be portrayed as a faceless corporate giant crushing plucky local teenage workers. The remarks of Mahlberg and other employees after the drive’s failure signal that Savage’s rhetoric, as well as his self-presentation as a friendly boss trying to work things out with his employees without outside interference, resonated with enough workers to kill the drive. However, at base his success in stalling the drive was a simple matter of economics and staff turnover. This leads to the conclusion that the BC labour relations regime failed in responding to the clear desire of workers to unionize their McDonald’s.

³⁴ Dave Cunningham, “Brother Ronald McDonald: A Shift to the Service Sector Helps Unions Maintain Their Power in the Province,” *BC Report*, 7 September 1998 (48), 32.

The contrasting success of Local 3000 in organizing Vancouver Starbucks locations the previous year throws the differences in organizing a corporate chain, as opposed to a franchise, into sharp relief. At Starbucks, all outlets were owned directly by the corporation. The CAW had an easier time pressuring the chain, by applying resources at several locations, and eventually organizing them into a master agreement, similar to the one operating at White Spot and KFC. These provide a huge boost to unionization because instead of having to fight to establish a new local for each outlet, locations can be quickly added to a broad certification³⁵

Starbucks was also an easier target because of its brand positioning. The company has self-consciously modeled an upscale, quasi-hip image since its inception. Part of that image included marketing itself as good to workers. As Laurie Bonang, one of the Vancouver union organizers recalled, "I applied at Starbucks. I could get benefits. It was a really neat, trendy company to work for. I could say, 'I work at Starbucks, aren't you jealous of me?' But over time I could see that it [benefits, etc.] was a bone they could throw to us to keep us happy. When they could do so much more."³⁶ Starbucks' benefits, so good for public relations, rebounded on them. Emboldened workers, with more stability because of Starbucks' lower-turnover philosophy, pushed the company to live

³⁵ Interview with Laurie Bonang, "Baristas Of The World Unite! (First Anniversary Of The Union Drive)," *Labour/Le Travail*, Fall 1998, (42), 335-343

³⁶ Interview with Bonang.

up to its promises. McDonald's and other fast food restaurants have chosen to make no such offers. Ten years after Squamish, this strategy continues to work effectively for the burger behemoths.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Everyone's Jobs

Debates about publicity, economics, and the inability of McDonald's workers to cripple the economy with a national general strike by denying the public their opiate Filets-O-Fish threaten to obscure two important realities about work in the fast food sector. First, because of their youth, their numbers, their exploitation, and the fact that many are in their first jobs, fast food workers are precisely the type of workers the union movement must win in order to reverse its slide into irrelevance and powerlessness. The other conclusion, as we can see from our examination of restaurant history since World War II, is that, despite some peaks, the labour movement has been an ineffective vehicle for organizing and defending the rights of workers. This is especially true in the fast food multinationals that have achieved a hegemonic position in the restaurant industry since their advent in the 1950s. Furthermore, it is hoped that this thesis has demonstrated the importance of these workplaces in affecting the lives of North American workers in many other sectors of the economy.

History is often defined as the study of change over time. However, the story of fast food in BC and elsewhere is somewhat different. Ten years on, the Squamish McDonald's, like every other one on the continent, remains non-

union. Canadian labour's drive to mobilize young workers, such a crucial part of the context of the fast food drives in Squamish and elsewhere, has stalled. Nikki Hill, a leading young Canadian union activist said ruefully in 2002 "it's completely died. They're not doing anything anymore."¹

This is not a history of radical change, then, but more one of development, of a trap of low-wage employment expanding to bind North American workers ever tighter. Looking at White Spot and KFC in the 1970s and 1980s, we see in fast food work a developing system of exploitation, surveillance, and public pressure, a system that has more than persisted, it has flourished. In the fast food industry, it is still young workers, women, and recent immigrants who bear the brunt of this exploitation. It is still an industry that pays the minimum wage to the absolute maximum of its workers, while extracting labour that is physically and emotionally taxing. It can also be fatal. In 1998, US restaurant workers were murdered on the job more often than police officers.²

The study of unionism in the industry allows an unprecedented view of workplace processes, and an understanding of how a union worked in this sector. It also gives us an insight into the difficult process of growth from a company union to a legitimate and representative trade union. However, it

¹ Quoted in Tannock and Sara Flocks, "The Canadian Labour Movement's Big Youth Turn," Summer 2002, 1-20, 13.

² Schlosser, 83. He notes that the expansion of the fast food industry has coincided with "a rising incidence of workplace violence in the United States." This correlation deserves further investigation.

must be kept in mind that the unionism of Local 3000 is very much the exception, not the rule.

The rule is the political economy at work in the fast food industry. In the decades since the General Foods takeover of White Spot, the industry's workplace regime has become more refined and successful, and more widely copied and practiced elsewhere. Since the abandonment of the youth worker strategy, the organizing target of the CLC and the UFCW in the United States has been Wal-Mart, now the world's largest company as measured by annual revenues and number of employees. Battles to organize Wal-Marts, especially in Jonquiere, Quebec, where the company closed down an outlet to thwart a successful union bid, have mirrored the union-busting techniques perfected by McDonald's and the other fast food giants.³

Wal-Mart's rise to the top of the global corporate structure represents the final death knell of postwar Fordism, especially its paternalistic offer of stability. It has been replaced by installation of the labour principles experienced by CFASU workers, despite their unionization, in the 1970s as the bedrock of labour policy today in the service industry and beyond. This is the truly notable labour development of the last thirty years. It confirms fast food work as the precedent-setting type of labour that historians and other scholars

³ Anthony Bianco, "No Union Please, We're Wal-Mart," *Business Week*, 13 February 2006.

must reckon with in order to understand the growing exploitation of workers in an economy built on consumption.

While unionism in the fast food sector has been almost non-existent and corporate records unavailable, the opportunities for research into these developments are still immense. The greatest resource available is the millions of workers who do or have worked in the industry for the last five decades, a sample of workers unmatched in almost any industry. The time has come to, in E.P. Thompson's words, rectify "the enormous condescension of posterity"⁴ and listen to their stories.

There are also several lessons for workers and the labour movement in the historical developments outlined here. The Squamish campaign and the unsuccessful battles in Wal-Mart demonstrate that big capital in the service industry is able to defeat almost any traditional organizing drive, even ones as well-chosen, well financed, and hard-fought as the drives in Jonquiere and Squamish. The 2007 decertification of the Vancouver Starbucks outlets, whose organization by Local 3000 was discussed in Chapter 4, is a further reminder that, as for CFASU throughout the 1970s, maintaining a union of workers in a high turnover industry can be just as difficult as organizing one.

⁴ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*. London: Gollancz, 1963, xii.

Many observers, noting the failures of these efforts, are calling on workers and unions for a new kind of labour initiative in the service industry, one organized horizontally rather than vertically. They are attempting to build a critical mass of past and present workers before attempting to lock the company into a collective agreement. Wade Rathke, in his study of organizing possibilities at Wal-Mart, calls for a majority unionism, not tied to collective bargaining, but on building a huge group of present and past workers. These more informal workers organizations can give workers experience in democracy, combating capital, and developing leaders. Writes Rathke, "Building an organization has always been the prelude, not the consequence, of collective bargaining."⁵ Given the success of service industry union-busting, the importance of the labour, and the stark fact that the organizing laws will not become fairer until mass pressure is placed upon capital and the state, these types of options, which may place worker voice and unity ahead of union membership numbers, need to be seriously considered by labour and scholars. That "members only," voluntary, not mandatory, unions are still provided for in US law, and that the Canadian Supreme Court has recently held that a worker's right to a representative body in the workplace is protected by the

⁵ Wade Rathke, "A Wal-Mart Workers Association? An Organizing Plan," in Nelson Lichtenstein (ed.), *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First Century Capitalism*. New York: The New Press, 2006, 261-284; 275. Non-traditional organizing is a much-discussed subject among labour; see also Janice Fine, "Why Labor Needs A Plan B: Alternatives to Conventional Trade Unionism," *New Labor Forum*, Spring 2007 (16), 35-47.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, underline the promise of this strategic option. Further research is needed to challenge a labour-capital-state alliance that, labour scholar Roy Adams points out, leads Canadian workers to “believe that they have no legal right to organize and make representations out of the certification process” under a labour regime that “more generally denies the right of workers to exercise their constitutional rights.”⁶

The story of workers at BC’s White Spots and KFCs is one of workers who lived under these practices, and resisted and negotiated them. Despite several setbacks, notably an uneven union leadership and progressively more exploitative corporate ownership, they have won several battles with the company, both on the picket line and at the bargaining table. Today, their benefits and conditions are superior to any other workers in the North American industry. They built a union that came tantalizingly close to a major victory over one of the world’s largest and most exploitative corporations. Their story teaches not just the intensification of workplace exploitation, but struggle and solidarity in its face, a valuable lesson as we continue to recover the history of service workers.

In considering these developments, it becomes clear that the most important change tracked in the years of this study is contextual. In the 1970s,

⁶ Roy Adams, *Labour Left Out: Canada’s Failure to Protect and Promote Collective Bargaining as a Human Right*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, 2006; 30.

the high turnover, low wages, employer surveillance, and intimidation experienced by White Spot workers was, if not anomalous, outside the ideological mainstream of Fordist capital-labour relations in North America. But the experiences of these workers, especially their increased contingency, facilitation of consumption, and deskilling of their labour have set a pattern. They are cornerstones of what has happened to work in the West over the past fifty years. In particular, they are where we need to look to help understand the destruction of unions, rising inequality, diminished mobility, and corporate structure built on surveillance, control and fear.

A fuller explanation of that past will, I believe, help lay bare the capitalist practices and state initiatives that have given us not only these restaurants and jobs, but our endless suburban sprawl, disappearing rainforests, our unstable, diseased food chain, our public sickness, our polluted air, massive personal debts, overheating planet, and consumer politics. The history of fast food speaks to all of these developments. To paraphrase Eric Schlosser, this is becoming a fast food world, and historians, especially of the working class, must put these dynamics of capitalism at the centre of the study of the postwar West. This especially urgent if we are to mount an insightful, compassionate, and forceful critique of the persistent consumer capitalism,

exemplified by fast food practices, that perpetrates these afflictions. For in the words of the company itself, there's a little McDonald's in everyone.

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