

ETHNICITY AND CLASS CONFLICT AT MAILLARDVILLE/FRASER MILLS:
THE STRIKE OF 1931

by

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ABSTRACT

During the Depression Canadian workers faced a series of assaults on their wages and working conditions. Threatened by shrinking markets, Canadian employers moved to reduce labour costs. When the Canadian Western Lumber Company at Fraser Mills, B.C., attempted to follow the pattern being set throughout the Canadian economy, the millworkers went out on strike. Lasting for two and a half months, the labour protest by the millworkers and their families ended in success.

The success of the 1931 strike stands in sharp contrast to the generally abysmal performance of organized labour during the thirties. The strength of this particular protest was derived from two totally unrelated factors. The strike was led by the militant Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, an affiliate of the Workers' Unity League. During the thirties the Workers' Unity League was one of the most dynamic labour organizations in Canada. The real strength of the protest, however, lay in features internal to the community. The worker community of Maillardville/Fraser Mills, originally a company town, was remarkably stable and socially cohesive. This was largely due to the existence of a persistent, tightly organized community of French-Canadian workers. The workforce at Fraser Mills had a well-defined associational network which not only facilitated organization prior to the strike but also ensured its success once the strike was underway. This study of the Fraser Mills strike of 1931 analyzes the relationship between labour protest

and the community from which it emerged.

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ABBREVIATIONS

P.A.B.C. (Provincial Archives of British Columbia)

P.A.C. (Public Archives of Canada)

P.A.O. (Provincial Archives of Ontario)

S.F.U. Archives (Simon Fraser University Archives)

U.B.C. (University of British Columbia)

C.H.A. (Canadian Historical Association)

PREFACE

In September of 1931 the Canadian Western Lumber Company at Fraser Mills, B.C., attempted to cut the wages of its six hundred employees. The men, already reduced to a marginal standard of living, countered management's decision with a show of collective strength. On September 5, led by the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, the men put up a picket line around the mill. For two and a half months the men held their ground and eventually achieved a limited victory. The gains were not dramatic but the strike represented one of the early steps towards unionization in British Columbia's lumber industry. In studying the strike it is essential to look at the development of the community which had been created by the company prior to World War I. While focussing on the 1931 strike, this study is equally concerned with community structures and life.

The historiography of the working class in Canada has expanded enormously in the last two decades. Revitalized by advances in quantitative methodology made by French, English and American historians, as well as by a sophisticated Marxist approach clearly exemplified in the work of E. P. Thompson, the history of the Canadian working class is rapidly unfolding. The most stimulating studies are those which consider both the objective and subjective dimensions of class, including material conditions within which the working class lived and worked, as well as the nature of working-class culture which evolved.

Although the characteristics of workers' reactions to industrial capitalism have been particular to each set of circumstances, they did actively respond. The industrial working class has been far more than a loose aggregate of men and women who laboured devoid of thought through most of their waking hours, then passively returned to their homes in the evening. Rather the working class, through institutions which it created or adapted, defined and protected its interests. Thus seen, class appears as a vital element in the societal dynamic.

Traditional labour historians have concerned themselves with only one structural feature of working-class culture, the trade union. The movement of organized labour is one focal point of class interaction in history. It continues to be the most visible and easily defined expression of working-class response to the industrial environment. Organized labour, however, left a vast majority of the working class untouched. One might even assume, reading the earlier labour historians with their careful emphasis on 'bread and butter' as opposed to 'ideological' unionism, that 'class-consciousness' was little more than an inflammatory catch-word thrown at the masses by radical demagogues. ¹

¹See, for example, J. R. Commons, History of Labour in the United States (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1966); Harold Logan, Trade Unions In Canada, Their Development and Functioning (Toronto: Macmillan, 1948); or Irving Abella's brief survey of The Canadian Labour Movement, Historical Booklet #28 (Canadian Historical Society, 1975)

Such histories have given way to much deeper analyses which study the full range of working-class life. The work now being produced, while often allowing trade-union and political activity to retain a strong position, branches out to investigate working-class participation in religious and voluntary associations, family economy, kinship, patterns of work, and social and geographic mobility. A clear attempt is being made to look at working-class life in as much detail as possible and to show working-class response to industrial capitalism as an agency of historical process.

While historians focussing on central and eastern Canada have produced a number of monographs and articles analyzing the class experience, British Columbia's labour historians have yet to make a parallel contribution. ² In British Columbia the history of the working class is still the history of organized labour and political parties. The development of the labour movement has been documented in No Power Greater by Paul Phillips and Radical Politics and Canadian Labour by Martin

² Many excellent books and articles have appeared in the last ten years. These include Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1900-1929 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974); Michael Piva, The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921 (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1979); Bryan Palmer, A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979); Gregory Kealey, Working Class Toronto at the Turn of the Century (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1974) and Gregory Kealey and P. Warrian, eds., Essays in Canadian Working Class History (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

Robin. ³ Order has been imposed upon the chaotic factionalism of the left in Ross McCormack's Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries.⁴ The Communist leadership in the British Columbian labour movement has been studied by Irving Abella in Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour.⁵ Moving closer to a study of rank-and-file activity, individual case studies have looked at striking fishermen, coalminers, and telephone operators among others. In addition, working-class authors have published their memoirs. Myrtle Bergren's Tough Timber and Ronald Liversedge's On to Ottawa Trek tell the history of the labour movement in human but not analytical terms.⁶ Finally the trade unions have presented their own histories, as in Grant McNeil's The I. W. A. in British Columbia, an informative but sketchy contribution.⁷

The few who address the class experience, such as Martin Robin in Radical Politics and Canadian Labour and Peter Ward in "Class and Race in British Columbia," do so in a traditional fashion, taking the political expression of the working class to

³P. Phillips, No Power Greater (Vancouver: Boag Foundation and B. C. Federation of Labour, 1967); M. Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour (Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, 1968).

⁴R. McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

⁵I. Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

⁶M. Bergren, Tough Timber (Toronto: Progress Publishers, 1966); R. Liversedge, Recollections of the On-To-Ottawa Trek, ed. Victor Hoar (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973).

⁷G. McNeil, The I. W. A. in British Columbia (Vancouver: 1967).

be only that voiced in the electoral arena. Furthermore, Ward contends that racial/ethnic cleavages in British Columbian society precluded the growth of class consciousness. While the argument may have some validity, this study of Fraser Mills will show that such a sweeping generalization is unsound. ⁸ Labour historiography in British Columbia must begin to move beyond such a restrictive, institutional framework.

The study of Fraser Mills is also a study of a French-Canadian community outside Quebec. It affords a look at the fluid nature of ethnicity. While the French Canadians came from a socially conservative environment, carrying with them traditional values, those values were not static. Strong arguments for viewing ethnicity as a dynamic characteristic of a given people can be found in Tamara Hareven's "Family Time and Industrial Time." ⁹ Within the American French-Canadian community studied by Hareven, ethnicity was far from a static determinant of social behaviour. The same findings hold true of Virginia Yans McLaughlin's study of Italian immigrants in Buffalo, New York. ¹⁰ Their well-defined value system adapted to the industrial environment. This theme is echoed in Daniel

⁸Peter Ward, "Class and Race In B.C.," in British Columbia Historical Readings, eds. R. McDonald and Peter Ward, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981), pp. 581-599.

⁹Tamara Hareven, "Family Time and Industrial Time," Journal of Urban History, I (1975), 365-389.

¹⁰Virginia Yans McLoughlin, "Patterns of Work and Family Organization: Buffalo's Italians," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, II (1971), 299-314.

Walkowitz's Worker City, Company Town , which studies French-Canadian immigrants to Cohoes, New York. ¹¹

The following study of Maillardville/Fraser Mills reflects the themes and approaches discussed above. Not only does the strike of 1931 deserve a place in the history of Western Canadian radicalism, a link can be made between the radicalism which emerged in the 1930s and the texture of working-class life up to that time. The strike is the logical focal point of the study and the company town of Fraser Mills and its sister community Maillardville present well-defined limits for the study.

The secondary sources are obviously limited in their application to the study. The primary sources, however, are excellent. The complete payroll records of the Canadian Western Lumber Company have been used. These records contain valuable data on the workforce, including wages and hours of work, as well as personal information. The personnel records have also been made available to the author and provide additional personal data on the workers. As the community was largely French Canadian, the parish records of Notre Dame de Lourdes have proven helpful as well.

Numerous oral histories, given by residents of Fraser Mills and Maillardville, are available. A common focus is the 1931 strike, obviously central in the community's past. Oral

¹¹D. Walkowitz, Worker City, Company Town (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

interviews have also provided information on social relationships and activities within the community during the early years. Unfortunately Fraser Mills did not have a community newspaper. However the British Columbian, published at New Westminster, covered social events at Fraser Mills from time to time.

Primary sources dealing with the strike are particularly good. The company records were dissapointing in this regard but other sources proved fruitful. The Minutes of the Strike Committee, part of the I. W. A./Pritchett Collection at the University of British Columbia, Special Collections Division, allow the strike to be reconstructed in some detail. As well as providing a record of negotiations and union activities elsewhere, the minutes recount the impact the strike had on the community. The 1931 strike received excellent coverage in the local and labour press, as well as the attention of the Federal Ministry of Labour. Thus it has been possible to use a diverse body of data to analyze the strike.

Labour protest at Fraser Mills during this early period presents the historian with an intriguing set of questions to address. The Depression years were not a time of escalating trade union activity. In fact the reported membership of organized labour in B.C. dropped steadily between 1930 and 1934, from 27,204 to 19,017. As a percentage of the non-agricultural

labour force, organized workers fell from 10.7% to 7.2%.¹² Furthermore, with unemployment reaching crisis proportions, particularly in the Vancouver area, strike activity carried a very real threat to the livelihood of the men whose only job protection lay in the remnants of company paternalism. As well, the workers at Fraser Mills were ethnically and nationally heterogeneous. Many of the workers at Fraser Mills were of British origin. Yet, in addition, at least four distinct ethnic communities can be isolated: the French Canadian, East Indian, Chinese and Japanese. Each had distinctive features and cultural institutions. In addition, by 1931, a sizeable Scandinavian population could be found at Fraser Mills. Yet the strike of '31 indicates a working unity sufficient to overcome national/ethnic cleavage and antagonism. The strike brought the men together, class interests pushing such conflict into the background.

The leadership role of the French Canadians in both initiating and sustaining the strike emerges clearly from an analysis of the dispute. Chapter One will trace the early history of both Fraser Mills and Maillardville where the majority of the mill's workforce resided. The cultural cohesiveness of the French-Canadian community will be examined, drawing on oral histories as a principal source. Although very little trace of the presence of the East Indian, Chinese or Japanese labourers can be found in the historical record, some detail about their communities will be provided.

¹²Phillips, op. cit., p. 169.

In Chapter Two the work force at Fraser Mills will be approached from a different angle. Examination of the company's payroll and personnel records has allowed a statistical profile of the workforce to be drawn. Personal data on the workers, supplemented by parish records, was coded and analyzed by computer using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. In Chapter Three these records, supplemented by descriptive sources, are used to examine employment and living standards at Fraser Mills. In addition the early organizational experience of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union will be discussed. The union focussed the discontent simmering at Fraser Mills; Fraser Mills in turn was a testing ground for the Lumber Workers Industrial Union.

Chapter Four reconstructs the formal aspects of the strike -negotiations and confrontation- while Chapter Five looks beyond this traditional focus to an analysis of community response.

The 1931 strike could have been approached as another study of early organizational frustrations and triumphs. Many of the elements seen in other attempts to introduce unionization to unorganized industries appear at Fraser Mills in 1931. The alignment of management, government and church against the forces of collectivized labour are echoed elsewhere in labour history. Fortunately the sources available allow an analysis of the strike to be taken a step further. The quantitative methodology applied in Chapters Two and Three exposes the deterioration in living standards which moved the workers to

organize. Only similar studies will show whether conditions were markedly worse at Fraser Mills than elsewhere. Certainly Fraser Mills was not unique in its deteriorating labour standards, and most likely wage scales and working conditions elsewhere in the industry were similar. Therefore the social features of the worker community itself must be taken into account to explain why labour protest grew out of labour unrest. Associational networks among the workforce can be established to suggest a social climate conducive to collectivization. The large French-Canadian community, in particular, was culturally and socially cohesive. This cohesiveness certainly facilitated organization prior to the strike and carried the men and their families through it. While the immediate cause of the strike lay in material conditions, the social characteristics of the workforce must also be examined to provide a holistic analysis.

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I. The Origins and Development of the Worker Community

The fortunes of Fraser Mills and Maillardville followed the dictates of industrial development in British Columbia. Fraser Mills, at one time home of the largest producer of manufactured lumber in North America, is situated approximately fifteen miles east of Vancouver on the north shore of the Fraser River, not far from New Westminster. Although still producing today, the mill is no longer as central a reference point for the surrounding communities as in years past. The community first began to take shape in 1907 under the direct supervision of the mill management. Carefully engineered, the paternalistic company town represented a show-piece for industrial capitalists. Twenty years later little semblance of earlier harmony could be found as the men and their families took on management in a violent and prolonged strike. The strike itself is the focus of later chapters. This chapter provides an introduction to life at Fraser Mills prior to that event.

Lumber production at Fraser Mills can be traced back to 1890 when the Ross McLaren Mills commenced operation.¹ However

¹The source of information for the discussion of Ross McLaren Sawmills Ltd., Fraser River Sawmills Ltd. and the first years of operation of the Canadian Western Lumber Company is J. Stewart's unpublished manuscript, "Early Days At Fraser Mills." This account consists of a chronology of developments in the area based on articles found in the British Columbian, Western Lumberman and Lumberman Contractor. Stewart often gives the exact date of the article but fails to indicate the exact source of the information. Hereafter cited as Stewart, "Early Days."

the tiny community established at Millside, the community's early name, in 1890 had little chance to prosper as uncertain markets left the mill idle between 1892 and 1902.² The sale of Ross McLaren Sawmills in 1903 to American capitalist Lester David, revitalized interest in Millside. Two years later the mill had been renovated and reopened as Fraser River Sawmills Ltd.

The site had only the most essential of services. The CPR lines to Millside which had been dismantled between 1892 and 1902, were once more in place, and a road had been constructed which ran from Pitt River Road (now Brunette Street) to the millsite. Street car service would not be provided until after 1912, in spite of pressure brought to bear upon the British Columbia Electric Railway (B.C.E.R.) by both the company and the New Westminster City Council/Board of Trade. In the early years the only tram service provided by the CPR, proved to be both a financial drain and undependable.

Although by 1906 Fraser River Sawmills Ltd. employed 160 men, many of whom seem to have lived at Millside, the millsite held few attractions. Certainly it would be erroneous to suggest the fledgling community experienced any organic development. Neither the business leaders of New Westminster nor the mill owners appeared strongly committed to the community's growth. The company balked at the prospect of providing increased

²J. Lawrence, "Markets and Capital: A History of the Lumber Industry of British Columbia (1778-1952)" (M A Thesis, U.B.C., 1957) ,p. 91.

services such as accommodation and stores for the convenience of its employees, preferring improved links to nearby New Westminster with its well established facilities. Not surprisingly, New Westminster merchants concurred.

The failure of the BCER to extend a tram line to the young community forced the company to turn its attention to establishing a fully serviced resident worker community. In 1906 the first general store opened, followed soon after by a two-room public school to accommodate children in the area. Initially the school would have provided education to the children of management as many of the other resident employees were immigrant East Indian labourers, brought in under contract and presumably unaccompanied by their families. ³

Development ended there for a time because Fraser River Sawmills did not achieve the economic vitality predicted by both the company and the New Westminster business community. Adverse market conditions in 1907, disruptive shortages of both lumber and labour, and an ongoing struggle to keep the river channel open, posed difficulties which Lester David and Fraser River Sawmills could not overcome. After 1907 the faltering mill operation was taken in hand by an investment syndicate headed by

³It was uncommon for contract labourers to come to Canada accompanied by their families; however personnel records which would verify the marital status of the men are not available. A number of witnesses appearing before the Department of Labour's 1908 Royal Commission were employed at Fraser Mills and, even when married, had left their wives and children in India. W. King, Department of Labour, Royal Commission to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to come to Canada (Ottawa, 1908), pp. 78,79.

A. D. McRae of Winnipeg and Senator P. Jansen of Nebraska, both of whom had access to considerable economic and political resources.

McRae and Jansen began a reorganization completed in 1910 with the formation of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, a company which would become a leading agent in the developing forest industry of British Columbia. With the reorganization of capital interests, Lester David, former owner-manager of Fraser River Sawmills, withdrew from the company in a flurry of writs. By 1910, the officers of the Canadian Western Lumber Company (C.W.L.C.) included such prominent entrepreneurs as W. Mackenzie, D. D. Mann and D. B. Hanna of the Canadian Northern Railway Company; R. M. Horne-Payne, President of the British Columbia Electric Railway; A. R. Davidson of the Saskatchewan Lumber Company; and James D. McCormack, Manager of the Columbia River Lumber Company at Golden, B.C. McRae served the C.W.L.C. as Vice-President and General Manager under the presidency of Andrew D. Davidson, while Senator Jansen sat on the Board of Directors. Ed Swift of the Chicago meat-packing firm was a major shareholder. *

The resources of the men at the helm of the C.W.L.C. were obviously substantial. With a capitalization of \$10,000,000 the C.W.L.C. undertook renovations to Fraser Mills and purchased extensive timber limits, 150,000 acres of largely Crown lands,

*Stewart, "Early days," p. 23. See also Margaret Ormsby, British Columbia: A History (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1976), p. 376.

on both Vancouver Island and the B.C. mainland. ⁵ Not only were the timber limits extended until, according to Ormsby, "they became the largest in the world,"⁶ but the mill "could compare with the world's largest mills."⁷

Improvements at a cost of over \$500,000 not only increased the productive capacity of the mill but also expanded the services available to the resident workforce. With 450 acres of land obtained to build a town dependent on the mill, ⁸ Fraser Mills now offered a store with a community hall built on the second floor, a post office and a railway station with resident agent. The residence of a former manager served as a hospital, with a New Westminster doctor in daily attendance. Millworkers paid for such services in the traditional manner of a company town. A hospital fee was levied directly through the payroll office as were any charges made at the general store, rent payments and, later, payments for lots and building supplies. By 1908 about twenty employees' homes had been built, serviced with electricity supplied by the mill. Residences for the managers were set off somewhat from the millsite along the northern perimeter of Fraser Mills.⁹ The British Columbian reported:

⁵Stewart, "Early Days," p. 27.

⁶Ormsby, op. cit., p. 357.

⁷Stewart, "Early Days," p. 15.

⁸British Columbian, June 20, 1908.

⁹The community became Fraser Mills formally in 1913, but took the name some years earlier.

Far up the hill north of the town and opening on to the Pitt River Road is the magnificent residence built by the company for the manager, Mr. Rogers and his family. It is an ideal home practically constructed and furnished in excellent taste under the supervision of Mrs. Rogers, who has not overlooked a cosy den for the master of the house.¹⁰

Clustered close to the mill, and meriting a starker description, were a "colony of bunk houses, Hindu homes, Japanese houses and separate quarters for the white men."¹¹

Over the next three years the community would be greatly expanded. Additional homes built by the company brought the number of family dwellings to at least thirty.¹² By 1909 only seventy-five of the approximately four hundred millworkers lived outside Fraser Mills.¹³ A hotel was built one year later, with ninety sleeping rooms capable of accommodating three hundred persons. Thus almost the entire workforce lived and laboured within the company's sphere. Other additions to the community included a barber shop, poolroom, bakery, butcher shop and shoe store, all owned and operated by the company. Fraser Mills' foundation was well laid by 1910. The town offered an Opera House for cultural and recreational events, a constabulary of four to keep the peace, and a Roman Catholic Church to serve the faithful.

¹⁰British Columbian, June 20, 1908.

¹¹Stewart, "Early Days," p. 17.

¹²Twenty employee residences are mentioned in 1908, five were under construction that year and in 1910 five more were being built. Ibid., p. 18.

¹³Ibid., p. 20.

The spurt of development at Fraser Mills had been carefully planned and orchestrated by McRae and his colleagues. In addition to maintaining tight control over the workers' environment the company was unwilling to leave the composition of its workforce to chance, as had the former owner, Lester David. Evidently Oriental contract labour largely ensured the mill's operation prior to 1909, when workers recruited from Eastern Canada began to arrive. Oriental labour, however, had become a thorny issue in British Columbia by 1908. In The Rush For Spoils, Martin Robin notes that at this time "exclusionist sentiment rose to hysterical heights in the face of escalating immigration from India and Japan."¹⁴ The 1907 riots in Vancouver, which followed the formation of the Asiatic Exclusion League, reflected the violently racist currents running through British Columbian society during the period. Oriental labour was both a blessing and a curse to the managers of Fraser River Sawmills. While the management gave lip service to the popular cry for elimination of Oriental labour, it would remain an important component of the labour force throughout the First World War and interwar periods.

In spite of the claims of Fraser River Sawmills that "no mongolian labour (would) be used,"¹⁵ and a clause in a contract with the New Westminster Council and Board of Trade stating that

¹⁴Martin Robin, The Rush For Spoils (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1972), p. 105.

¹⁵Company spokesman quoted in Stewart, "Early Days," p. 6.

the mill would "employ not less than 100 white men,"¹⁶ the company did use East Indian and Japanese labour. In 1906 at least fifty East Indian workers were employed by the mill.¹⁷ Less than a year later management claimed that "they had one hundred twenty Hindus working at the mill and did not know quite what they would do without them because of the shortage of other help."¹⁸ In 1908, witnesses appearing before the Royal Commission to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to come to Canada estimated that "there were 150 Hindus employed at Fraser River Sawmills Ltd. and between 20 and 30 white men."¹⁹ The company's payroll records for that year show that thirteen Chinese, twenty-seven Japanese and sixty-three East Indians worked at the mill. According to the Royal Commission, the wages of the East Indian workers had dropped in 1907 from \$1.50 to \$1.25 a day "because the numbers of Orientals applying for employment were increasing."²⁰ And indeed by this time substantial Japanese as well as East Indian populations lived at Millside, in clearly defined ethnic

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 9. Stewart cites an article, from the British Columbian of April 10, 1906 under the heading "Millside Hindus Scorn Pick and Shovel," a reference to a dispute between the men and management.

¹⁸Company spokesman quoted in Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹Royal Commission to Inquire into the Methods by which Oriental Labourers have been Induced to come to Canada, p. 80.

²⁰Ibid.

communities segregated from the white workers.²¹

Like its predecessor, the Canadian Western Lumber Company could not eliminate Oriental labour without increasing wages and upgrading facilities to attract an all-white workforce. To some extent these moves had been made by 1909, with plans underway to provide an attractive alternative to Oriental labour by importing French-Canadian workers and their families from Eastern Canada. But Oriental labour remained a feature of the mill's workforce, therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that as B.C.'s racial tension abated so did the company's concern with the 'Oriental labour problem'.

The genesis of the plan to bring in French-Canadian lumber-workers is not known precisely. Glen Cowley suggests in his study of the French-Canadian contribution to B.C.'s early economic development that McRae "wanted the French-Canadians because of their value as employees with their occupational skill and their reputed docile nature."²² This traditional and doubtless exaggerated view of the French-Canadian workman was echoed by historian A.R.M. Lower in 1936. The French-Canadian lumberworker was:

reliable, docile, cheerful, efficient and cheap. He had a pride of calling, a low standard of living and an authoritarian type of society behind him to keep him contented with his lot. On the cheap and efficient labor

²¹Stewart, "Early Days," p. 17.

²²Glen Cowley, "In The Wake Of The Voyageurs: A Study of the French Canadians in British Columbia from 1793-1962," (research essay, Department of Geography, Simon Fraser University, 1973), p. 105.

of the French-Canadian - rarely did he rise from the ranks - the forests of Canada...had been exploited. ²³

With these ascribed attributes, as well as prior experience in the lumber industry, the importation of French-Canadian labour must have appeared an ideal solution to the company's labour problems.

Two company representatives were sent East by the C.W.L.C.: Theodore Thereux, the night watchman at the plant, and Father O'Boyle, an Oblate Cure from a New Westminster parish. The first recruitment in 1909 was successful. Thereux and O'Boyle returned in early 1910 to recruit a second group. The plan to import French-Canadian labour not only served the immediate interests of the C.W.L.C. and McRae, it also held appeal for political leaders and Roman Catholic clergy in British Columbia. In a 1910 letter to Premier Richard McBride, Thereux reported the campaign's success and proposed that "in view of further encouragement your kind grant of a few months ago be supplemented." Thereux further suggested that the "presence of an official government agent either at the Coast or in Montreal or even better in the New England states, U.S.A." would facilitate any efforts to direct French-Canadian labour westward. ²⁴

Obviously the scheme had received considerable attention in political circles. The proposed emigration from French Canada

²³A.R.M. Lower, The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest (Toronto: Ryerson, 1938), p. 189.

²⁴P.A.B.C., McBride Papers, GR 441, Box 39, File 1, Letter 372, Theodore Thereux to Richard McBride, June 1, 1910.

can be seen in larger terms than merely bringing workers out to Fraser Mills. Father O'Boyle, like Thereux, clearly saw the movement west in a wider perspective, as shown by his statement: "we want these men to turn west instead of south."²⁵ For British Columbians the plan to import French-Canadian labour presented a partial solution to the problems caused by Oriental immigration, while the Roman Catholic Clergy, in B. C. at least, saw it as a possible alternative to U.S. migration. ²⁶

Although the only French-Canadian community established in B.C. through C.W.L.C. design was the community at Fraser Mills, there had been some discussion of a similar experiment in Golden, to supply labour to the Columbia River Lumber Company, a C.W.L.C. subsidiary. Also, some interest in the plan had been generated among lumbermen in the Nelson area. The opportunities available to lumberworkers were advertised in the East, but active recruitment was never carried out.²⁷ While other pockets of French-Canadian settlement in B.C. can be identified, none were as substantial or enduring as the deliberately planned

²⁵Quoted in J. R. Stewart, "French- Canadian Settlement in British Columbia" (M A Thesis, U.B.C. 1956), p. 54.

²⁶The sentiments of the B. C. clergy were not echoed in Quebec. For a discussion of the attitudes of Quebec clergy towards migration westward, see A.-N. Lalonde, "l'intelligentsia du Quebec et la migration des Canadiens francais vers l'Ouest canadien, 1870-1930," Revue d'histoire de l'amerique francaise, XXXII, 2(1979) 163-185. While such migration was seen as preferable to migration to the United States, the Quebec clergy preferred that French-Canadians remain in Quebec, or migrate to Ontario.

²⁷Stewart, "French-Canadian Settlement," p. 55.

community at and adjoining Fraser Mills.

In its efforts to secure French-Canadian labour, the C.W.L.C. made the move west as attractive as possible. Thereux and O'Boyle offered the men wages of two dollars per day, and arranged rail transportation for them and their families at reasonable rates. Working through the parish priests of French-Canadian communities in eastern Ontario and Quebec, O'Boyle and Thereux presented the company's proposal at meetings held in church basements and parish halls. Men were recruited from Sherbrooke, Quebec City, Montreal and Hull in Quebec and Rockland on the Ontario side of the Ottawa Valley. In September 1909, 166 "souls", as Thereux wrote to McBride, came west accompanied by Father O'Boyle. They were followed eight months later by a further 219 French Canadians. ²⁸

Of the men who arrived in 1909, just under thirty percent were married and most of the married men were accompanied by their families. The average number of children in each family was three and a half, with one family having as many as ten. The family men proved to be the most reliable, for within four months a number of the single men had moved on.²⁹ The contingent of 1910 had a far higher incidence of married men (68%), although many of them came unaccompanied by their families. In

²⁸McBride Papers, Thereux to McBride, June 1, 1910. All information on the initial colonists is taken from a list of colonists and their families enclosed in Thereux's letter to McBride.

²⁹Stewart, "Early Days," p. 21.

fact, twenty-two of the total of forty-nine men came alone in 1910. One of the original colonists recalls that many wives and children stayed behind until a proper house could be built.³⁰ The recruitment of married men would have served a dual purpose for the C.W.L.C. Not only would family men be more likely to remain on the company payroll, their families held the promise of a second generation of mill workers. Indeed forty-four percent of the French Canadians working at the mill in 1931 can be traced back to these original families.³¹ Thus the C.W.L.C. managed to procure the stable work force it envisaged when it sent its agents east in 1909.

Their move west was influenced by more than one factor. Lower's characterization of the French-Canadian lumberworker suggests a passivity not wholly justified. While they did provide the C.W.L.C. with reliable and efficient labour, they were hardly docile sheep to be herded across the country. Most of the men were experienced millworkers from urban backgrounds; many were skilled. They came to the west coast "not with the mentality of slaves,"³² as one long time resident recalls, but with confidence in their abilities and expectations of an improved standard of living. By 1909 the lumber industry in central Canada had entered a period of decline. In addition, the

³⁰ Interview with Jean-Baptiste Decaire, January 12, 1979. Vancouver Oral History Project.

³¹ McBride Papers, Thereux to McBride, June 1, 1910.

³² Interview with Leo Canuel, March 28, 1972, S.F.U. Library.

immigration boom of the 1890s had introduced a new source of cheap labour to Eastern capitalists.³³ Thus the French-Canadian lumberworkers were receptive to the envoys sent by the C.W.L.C. The forests of British Columbia had yet to be fully exploited, and the skills and experience of the French Canadians were sorely needed.

As well as having a more advantageous labour market, British Columbia offered both a far more attractive climate and the psychological pull of the frontier. The French Canadians who attended the meetings listened to O'Boyle's and Thereux's promise of steady work at decent wages, but they also listened to members of their own community with personal knowledge of conditions in the west. A few who had visited British Columbia spoke enthusiastically of the prospects. One of the original colonists recalled the first recruitment meeting held in Hull, Quebec:

the basement of the church was very crowded and right away my dad got up and asked if he could have the floor...and he said "Look, folks, I been in that country before...and it's a wonderful country...I'm taking my boys there because here it's just a city and they will work in the city and over there they have a better chance."³⁴

It is likely that many of the families attracted to British Columbia would have turned otherwise to the United States. One worker who had heard, while in Ottawa, of the young community at

³³As Lower notes, the French Canadians were thrown into competition with immigrant workers who "furnished a still cheaper source of labour," Lower, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

³⁴Decaire interview, January 12, 1972.

Fraser Mills worked briefly in Michigan before moving his family out to B.C.³⁵

When the French-Canadian families arrived at Fraser Mills, after what must have been a gruelling trip, especially for those with large families, the immediate reaction of many was disappointment. One of the colonists recalls, "it was so primitive... we had to stay over the store for a few weeks and all we had was a two-room cabin to move into...we stayed down there for about a year."³⁶The C.W.L.C. had built a number of houses for the colonists, but these were not adequate to shelter everyone. In fact, when the second group arrived in 1910, many of the families were forced to share accommodation. But the company did present the men with the opportunity to purchase land at a reasonable price, and it also supplied good quality lumber at cost. Prior to the arrival of the French Canadians, the C.W.L.C. had arranged purchase of Lot Forty-Six, District of Coquitlam, along the northern side of Pitt River Road. The C.W.L.C. made this land available to the French-Canadian workers for purchase. The next few years saw much of the French-Canadian population gradually move out of the townsite at Fraser Mills to form a community known as Maillardville, named after their first parish priest.

³⁵Interview with Hercules Lamoureux, April 25, 1972. Vancouver Oral History Project.

³⁶Ibid.

The religious and cultural traditions of the French Canadians remained intact in the new community. The first church, Notre Dame de Lourdes, was built in 1909. Although it soon burned down, not to be rebuilt until 1913, services continued in the community center. The Catholic church was one important focal point for the community. Early photographs show the parishioners gathered for the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Houses were decorated, the gravel was raked off the sidewalks and the children were turned out in their finest to make their first communion.³⁷ Christmas was celebrated by the traditional reveillons, and consummation of marriages was frustrated by the Chivaree, when the community turned out to an all night affair with food, drinks and dancing.³⁸ At the annual picnic at Booth's farm "everybody of the town used to show up."³⁹ Social parties sponsored by the church group as well as card parties and community dances occupied the leisure time of the French Canadians and one resident recalls, "that's what kept us together."⁴⁰

The cohesiveness of the French-Canadian community was also marked by a strong kinship network. When one colonist took his family of six girls and one boy to board the train in Quebec

³⁷ Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

³⁸ Interview with Omera Pare. April 12, 1972. Vancouver Oral History Project.

³⁹ Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

⁴⁰ Decaire interview, January 12, 1972.

City, Father O'Boyle protested that the company was looking for boys, not girls. The father responded prophetically, "well, you'll have to have girls to marry the boys you're bringing in there, so I'm going."⁴¹ The families intermarried extensively. Table I shows an example of the links by marriage in the community between 1911 and 1931. The Pare family became linked by marriage to twenty-seven other French-Canadian families in Maillardville. ⁴² The families linked to the Pares, for example the Allards, also intermarried within the French-Canadian community. The Allards were linked by marriage to eight other French-Canadian families. In a small community like Fraser Mills/Maillardville such bonds reinforced social cohesiveness. Furthermore, many of the families which came West in 1909 and 1910 probably were already related.

Although the French-Canadian community did establish itself outside the boundaries of Fraser Mills, it remained highly dependent on the mill. While actually within the municipal boundaries of Coquitlam, Maillardville was more closely linked to Fraser Mills. Both lots and lumber for homes built in Maillardville were purchased from the C.W.L.C. Fraser Mills and Maillardville were for all intents and purposes one community and the mill was the only major employer for area residents. Virtually all economic activity centered around the mill,

⁴¹Decaire interview, January 12, 1972.

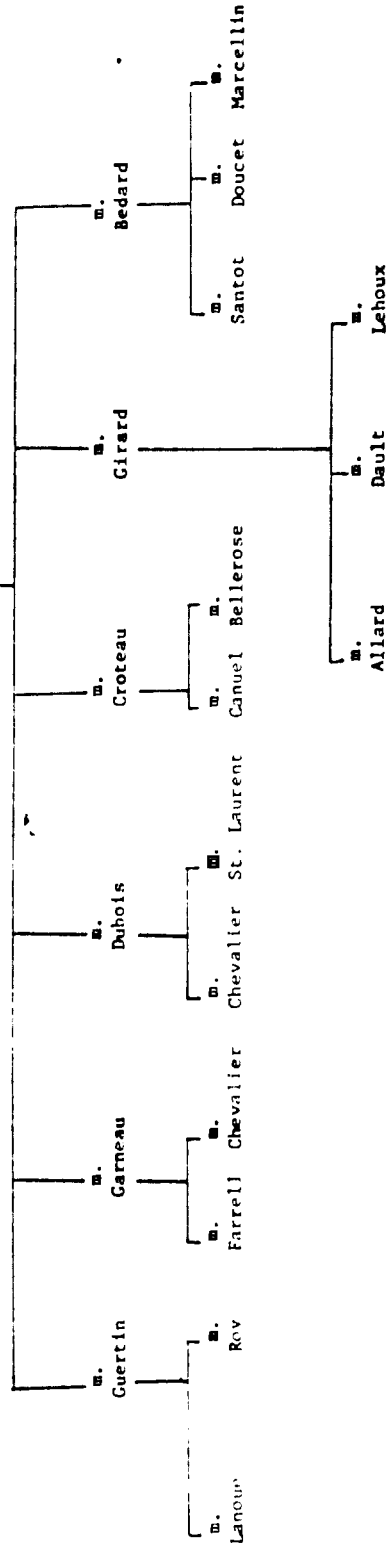
⁴²It must be kept in mind that one marriage actually links four families rather than two.

TABLE I

AN EXAMPLE OF FRENCH-CANADIAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS IN FRASER MILLS/MAILLARDVILLE:

MARRIAGES BETWEEN 1911 AND 1931

The Paré Family (colonists, 1909)



Source: La Société Historique Franco-Colombienne, "Regard Sur Maillardville avec la Liste des Mariages Célèbres de 1911 à 1950" (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1980).

although in time shops and services did appear along Pitt River Road. The children of Fraser Mills and Maillardville attended the same schools⁴³, the families shared the same leisure activities and everyone shopped at the company store which was also used as the community center.

Although the French-Canadian community has been the subject of greater interest than any other, it must be noted that there were distinct East Indian, Japanese and Chinese communities at Fraser Mills. The importation of an alternative source of labour did not stop the C.W.L.C. from utilizing Oriental labour. In fact, the practice escalated. ⁴⁴ Men were brought in by contractors who had control over their wages and living conditions; both were abysmally below standard. The East Indians lived east of the Sawmill, next to the Fraser River in a shacktown most often remembered for its striking temple. The temple served as a gathering place for those sharing their faith from all parts of Vancouver. Early residents can recall the construction of funeral pyres for religious services being held at Fraser Mills.

The Chinese and Japanese communities are remembered in greater detail by residents. They had their own stores and six

⁴³The school at early Millside was short-lived. All children attended school in Coquitlam.

⁴⁴Payroll records, C.W.L.C. 1911. All records of the Canadian Western Lumber Company cited are held in the private possession of Crown Zellerbach Limited. In addition to C.W.L.C. records, Crown Zellerbach holds many of the municipal records of Fraser Mills, B.C. Unless otherwise cited, this collection is the source of all company and municipal records referenced.

or seven large boarding houses with ten to twenty sleeping rooms in each, as well as game rooms and large dining rooms.⁴⁵ The Chinese are most often noted in the historical record for their Fan-Tan games and 'opium dens'.⁴⁶ The gambling house was apparently run by the Chinese labour contractor, Lim Sing,⁴⁷ thus ensuring that the men's wages would end up in his pocket. Almost all the men, East Indian, Chinese and Japanese, were single or had left their wives and families in their country of origin. These communities were still very much in evidence by 1931 when contract labour continued to supply almost one-third of the mill's work force.

Fraser Mills has been referred to as a "model industrial village" by author G. W. Taylor. ⁴⁸ From its earliest days business and community leaders considered Fraser Mills a showcase. The nature of the community was described in the 1912 "Report to the Directors of the Canadian Western Lumber Company":

Your company gives very careful consideration to the welfare of its employee. Modern homes are provided...provisions and supplies are sold at a normal advance over cost, all with a view of making the living expenses of our employees less than elsewhere in the Province. These advances, together with the steady

⁴⁵Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

⁴⁶A survey of the British Columbian during the twenties reveals that Fraser Mills seldom made the news unless a drug charge was involved.

⁴⁷Leo Canuel, Written submission, June 12, 1980, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

⁴⁸G. W. Taylor, Timber (Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1975), p.93.

employment assured by the continuous operation of your mills, the pleasant surroundings under which your employees work and with all the community spirit developed at Fraser Mills - not only attracts to us and gives us the privilege of selecting the best men, but makes it easy for us to retain them...We have no labor troubles, a general feeling of content prevails among the employees.⁴⁹

The company was not motivated by altruism. By supplying housing and services, or making property available to its employees, the C.W.L.C. encouraged the dependence of the men and their families on the mill. The company reached into all facets of daily life, operating a clubhouse and community center as well as organizing the Circle F dancing club and baseball team to fill their employees' leisure hours. The company had tight control over their employees' buying power: a company store was widely favoured by employees, a function of the community's geographic isolation and the necessity of buying on credit toward the end of the month. ⁵⁰

In the early years relations between the company and its employees were marked by symbolic gestures implying cooperation between capital and labour. At Christmas every married man would be given a turkey; in return the men would present gifts to the general manager, who, according to the British Columbian, "was gratified to know that such a feeling of harmony existed between

⁴⁹"Report to the Directors of the Canadian Western Lumber Company," Financial Statement of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, 1912.

⁵⁰Shopping in New Westminster was an "outing" and "most of the people used to do all their shopping at the general store...they used to buy on credit...and at the end of the payday part of the cheque was gone for groceries." Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

him and the men."⁵¹ Yet this "model industrial village" with its "feeling of harmony" would not long enjoy such organic unity. By 1931 the only unity which remained served to polarize the workmen and management. The workers engaged the company in a bitter, drawn-out struggle over wages, hours, union recognition and the right to decent living and working conditions. A three month strike brought workers of all ethnicities together, united behind common interests.

⁵¹British Columbian , January 4, 1911.

II. The Workforce on the Eve of the Strike

The immediate causes of the labour unrest of 1931 lay in deteriorating labour standards and the organizational efforts of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union. Yet both these factors were present at other Lower Mainland sawmills during the same period. Only at Fraser Mills did labour unrest become labour protest focussed through strike action. It therefore seems likely that the community's internal features played a determining role in the 1931 strike. This chapter builds a sociological profile of the men at Fraser Mills, suggesting various characteristics which may help explain the community's collective impulse. The men at Fraser Mills need not be anonymous. An analysis of the mill's payroll records allows the workforce to be drawn in statistical profile.¹ Characteristics of the workforce which explain the men's positive response to the union can be identified.

The workers at Fraser Mills were drawn from over twenty different national/ethnic groups, although some groups were represented only marginally. Table II categorizes the 1931 workforce by country of origin. Where further distinctions can

¹All tables are drawn from data provided in the company's payroll and personnel records and supplemented by the parish records of Notre Dame de Lourdes. Copies of the Parish Records of Notre Dame de Lourdes are held at S.F.U. Archives, on microfilm.

be made, as with French or English Canadians for example, this has been done. The largest group is English Canadians at twenty-two percent. They varied somewhat in their ethnic heritage, representing both second-generation immigrant families of diverse national origin, and those who were British by heritage as well as by citizenship. The French Canadians accounted for eighteen percent of the workforce, making them the second largest group and in many ways the most dominant. Both in 1911 and 1920, the French Canadians accounted for thirteen percent of the workforce. The continuing practice of using imported contract labour meant a sizeable number of Japanese, Chinese and East Indian workers were employed at Fraser Mills. ² Oriental labour accounted for 150 of the millworkers in 1931, just over twenty percent. Scandinavian workers, many of whom came to the mill under contract as well, accounted for a sizeable percentage of the total workforce: Norwegians made up almost eight percent, while Finnish and Swedish workers each accounted for approximately five percent of the millworkers. The British (at thirteen percent) and Americans (at three and a half percent) were the other national groups best represented. While heterogeneous, the majority of the workers at Fraser Mills fall into seven broad categories as indicated in Table III. ³

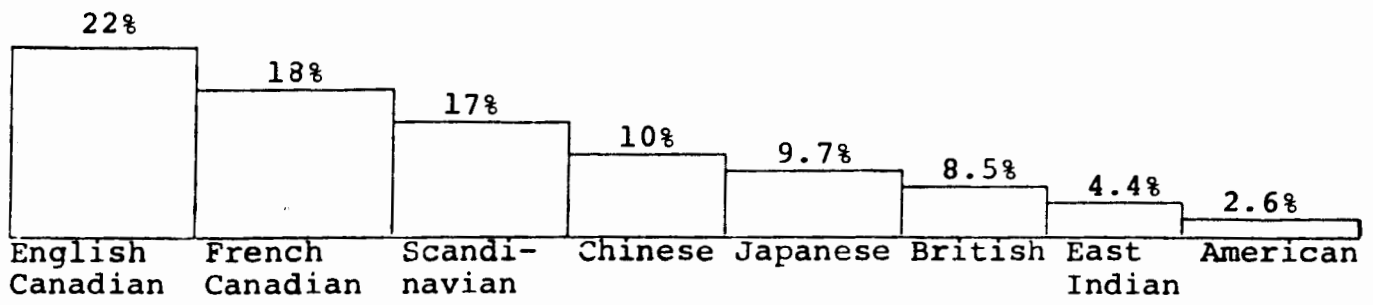
²In 1926 there were six Japanese and Chinese contractors at Fraser Mills. Municipal Records, Fraser Mills, Notation made in response to a letter from the Inspector of Municipalities to the Municipal Clerk at Fraser Mills, January 28, 1926.

³Surprisingly, although a Greek town is often mentioned by the early inhabitants, by 1931 only five Greeks worked at the mill.

TABLE II
WORKFORCE BY NATIONAL ORIGIN, 1931

	<u>#</u>	<u>% of Total</u>	<u>% of Caucasians</u>	<u>% of Orientals and East Indians</u>
French Canadian	121	18.0	24.1	0.0
English Canadian	145	22.2	28.9	0.0
Chinese	66	10.1	0.0	43.7
Japanese	56	8.5	0.0	37.0
Norwegian	51	7.8	10.2	0.0
English	45	6.8	9.0	0.0
Finnish	31	4.7	6.2	0.0
Swedish	31	4.7	6.2	0.0
East Indian	29	4.4	0.0	19.2
Scottish	19	2.9	3.8	0.0
American	17	2.6	3.4	0.0
Other	40	6.1	8.0	0.0
Unknown	2	.3	.4	0.0
	<u>653</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>

TABLE III
CLASSIFICATION OF WORKFORCE BY NATIONAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND



Of the Caucasian men at Fraser Mills almost fifty-three percent were married, with thirty-eight percent being single and seven percent married but separated (separated only in a geographical sense). Only two and a half percent had been widowed or divorced by 1931. Table IV shows marital status by ethnicity/nationality. Clearly more married men than single men earned their livelihood at Fraser Mills; this was true regardless of country of origin. Two things should be noted here. The category indicated a status resulting from the importation of contract labour. The high numbers of men married but separated among the Chinese, Japanese and East Indian indicate how prevalent this practice must have been. In addition, over half the Finnish workers fell into this category.* Secondly, the high numbers of married men (particularly high when those married but separated are included) meant that a man's wages often provided the primary, if not sole, means of support for an entire family.

It is impossible to know the exact dispensation of wages paid to contract labourers. Part of the paycheck went to room and board, part went into the contractor's pocket and, for those with wives and families in their country of origin, part would have been sent home. For those men with families living in the

* There is no indication in the payroll records whether a man came to Fraser Mills under contract or not, but descriptive sources indicate Oriental workers as well as some Scandinavian workers came in under contract. The Scandinavians are mentioned in an interview with Leo Canuel, taken August 14, 1981 by the author.

TABLE IV

MARITAL STATUS BY NATIONAL ORIGIN

	Married		Single		Married but Separated		Other (Widowed, Divorced)		Row Total (%)
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
French Canadian	65	53.7	52	43.0	2	1.7	2	1.7	100.0
English Canadian	72	49.7	68	46.9	2	1.4	3	2.1	100.0
British	50	71.0	9	12.8	2	2.8	8	11.4	100.0
Finnish	2	6.5	12	38.7	17	54.8	0	0.0	100.0
Norwegian	29	56.9	19	37.3	2	3.9	1	2.0	100.0
Swedish	14	45.2	13	41.9	4	12.9	0	0.0	100.0
American	12	70.6	2	11.8	0	0.0	3	17.6	100.0
Chinese	0	0.0	6	9.0	54	81.0	6	9.0	100.0
Japanese	25	44.6	13	23.2	16	28.5	2	3.5	100.0
East Indian	7	24.1	5	17.2	16	55.0	1	3.4	100.0
Other	18	46.0	14	35.0	7	17.9	0	0.0	100.0

Fraser Mills area, their semi-monthly paycheck would have been virtually the sole means of support for dependents numbering from one to as many as ten or more. ⁵ Women, at least the French-Canadian women of Fraser Mills/ Maillardville, generally did not work outside the home. ⁶ Not only did they have few employment opportunities, but there were traditional prejudices within the community mitigating against the practice. While the working-class family had many ways of coping with financial pressures, and women made important contributions, the men at Fraser Mills were by and large carrying an economic burden which must have been awesome as the Depression intensified.

Although many of the men were married, they were still relatively young. Data on age could not be found for the Oriental workers, but the Caucasian workforce at Fraser Mills can be categorized by age. Table V shows that sixty-three percent of the Caucasian workers were under forty with the largest concentration in the age group twenty-one to thirty. Frustrated by the company's offensive, these men were able and willing to fight back: able, because they were young and determined; willing, because they had less experience with company paternalism than the older employees. While many had lengthy employment histories with the C.W.L.C., most had entered the company's employ during the twenties, when the beneficent

⁵S.F.U. Archives. Parish Records, Notre Dame de Lourdes, Baptismal Records, 1911 to 1931.

⁶Pare interview, April 12, 1972.

TABLE V

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF CAUCASIAN WORKERS, 1931

<u>Age in Years</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
15 - 20	43	10.7
21 - 30	116	28.8
31 - 40	95	32.6
41 - 50	77	19.1
51 - 60	53	13.2
61+	19	4.7
		<u>100.0</u>

TABLE VI

MARITAL STATUS BY AGE, CAUCASIAN WORKERS, 1931

<u>Age in Years</u>	<u>Married</u>		<u>Single</u>		<u>Married but Separated</u>		<u>Other (Widowed, Divorced)</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
15 - 20	2	0.9	41	26.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
21 - 30	45	20.0	66	43.4	5	20.8	0	0.0
31 - 40	62	38.8	23	15.0	10	41.6	0	0.0
41 - 50	49	22.7	15	9.8	7	29.1	6	50.0
51 - 60	42	19.5	6	3.9	2	8.3	3	25.0
61+	15	<u>6.9</u>	1	<u>0.6</u>	0	<u>0.0</u>	3	<u>25.0</u>
		100.0		100.0		100.0		100.0

paternalism of the company had begun to erode.

Table VI provides a crosstabulation of age by marital status for the Caucasian workers at Fraser Mill. Not surprisingly, almost seventy-five percent of the married men were between the ages of twenty-one and fifty. These men account for almost forty percent of the entire Caucasian workforce. Their age and marital status place them at a stage in the life-cycle in which dependents would be a probability. Although information on family size could be gathered only for a few of the men (less than ten percent), the knowledge that so many men were household heads will allow the impact of lowering wage rates between 1929 and 1931 to be assessed. ⁷

The workforce was relatively stable as well. Of the 502 Caucasian men working at Fraser Mills in 1931, 111 (twenty-two percent) had worked there for at least eleven years. Notably, fifty-seven percent had been employed by the mill for five years or more. Obviously this workforce had strong links to the community. As well they would have had sufficient work experience to evaluate the assault on their employment standards as a radical departure from previous conditions.

Some differences can be found in the stability of different national/ethnic groups. Tables VII and VIII indicate the persistence rates broken down by national/ethnic background as

⁷Records of children in Fraser Mills attending and not attending school in 1925 frequently show families of at least three and four. Families of five and six or even ten children can be found. Correspondence S - Z, Municipal Records, Fraser Mills.

well as by marital status. The American, British and French-Canadian workers had the highest percentage of long term employees. In fact, thirty-six percent of the French Canadians had been at the mill at least eleven years, as had thirty-nine percent of the British and fifty-two percent of the Americans. Many of the Scandinavians were newcomers to Fraser Mills, with roughly half of the Norwegian and Swedish men having worked at the mill for less than five years. The Finns were even more recent arrivals with forty-five percent having been at the mill less than four years and thirty-five percent having the joined the workforce in 1930 or 1931. Their brief employment time at Fraser Mills may well explain their attitude towards the strike, that of passive support. Whereas the Scandinavian loggers were active unionists in the logging camps of B.C. these workers , although supporters, took no active role in the strike. English Canadians had also been in the workforce for relatively shorter periods of time, with fifty percent having worked four years at the most, and many having entered the workforce only in 1929 or 1930.

As one would suspect, the men who had worked at Fraser Mills for five years or longer were more likely to be married than single. Table VIII categorizes the number of years worked at Fraser Mills by marital status. Little wonder that the C.W.L.C. had actively recruited married men twenty-one years earlier. Family ties and increased economic responsibilities made the married men far more persistent than the single men.

TABLE VII

YEARS EMPLOYED AT FRASER MILLS BY NATIONALITY, (%)

	<u>5+</u>	<u>7+</u>	<u>1-2</u>	<u>3-4</u>	<u>5-6</u>	<u>7-8</u>	<u>9-10</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>Row Total</u>
French Canadian	66.0	48.7	12.7	21.0	17.6	7.6	5.0	36.1	100.0
English Canadian	48.0	34.0	24.1	26.9	14.5	10.3	8.3	15.9	100.0
British	50.0	40.3	6.4	20.0	9.6	9.6	12.9	40.3	100.0
Finnish	19.0	3.2	35.5	45.2	16.1	3.2	0.0	0.0	100.0
Norwegian	49.0	29.4	27.5	23.5	19.6	13.7	5.9	9.8	100.0
Swedish	70.0	22.5	6.5	38.7	32.3	16.1	3.2	3.2	100.0
American	70.0	52.0	17.6	11.8	17.6	0.0	0.0	52.9	100.0

TABLE VIII

YEARS EMPLOYED AT FRASER MILLS BY MARITAL STATUS, (%)

	<u>Married</u>	<u>Single</u>	<u>Married but Separated</u>	<u>Other (Widowed, Divorced)</u>
1 - 2 years	10.7	25.0	36.1	16.7
3 - 4 years	19.9	31.9	33.3	0.0
5 - 6 years	17.2	16.5	16.7	8.3
7 - 8 years	13.4	9.0	5.6	8.3
9 - 10 years	6.9	5.9	5.6	25.0
11+ years	31.8	11.7	2.8	41.7
	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Ironically, the longer the time worked at the mill the more apparent falling labour standards would have been. It is no coincidence that, among the strike leaders, one third had worked at the mill for at least eleven years, with almost sixty percent having worked at Fraser Mills for at least five years. Nor is it merely by chance that almost seventy-five percent were married men and household heads.

There are further features which suggest that organization at the mill may have been facilitated by close associations already present among the workers. The payroll records show the workforce at Fraser Mills to have been distinguished by two important features: residential concentration and a kinship network. Residential concentration is immediately apparent in Table IX. In 1931 Maillardville was the home for most of the workforce. Certainly almost all the French Canadians lived there. Table X shows ethnic distribution in the three major residential areas. As mentioned in Chapter One, the French Canadians quickly began building in Maillardville so that by 1931 very few remained in Fraser Mills. The worker population of Fraser Mills was largely Scandinavian, English Canadian and Oriental. Almost all the latter lived in the townsite. The British and English Canadians clearly preferred New Westminster to either Fraser Mills or Maillardville, although eighteen percent of the British and twenty-four percent of the English Canadians lived in the predominantly French-Canadian Maillardville. In 1931 Fraser Mills/Maillardville, where

TABLE IX
RESIDENTIAL CONCENTRATION, 1931

	<u>Fraser Mills</u>	<u>Maillardville</u>	<u>New Westminster</u>	<u>Other</u>
Caucasian workforce (%)	30.5	35.2	28.9	5.4

TABLE X
RESIDENTIAL CONCENTRATION BY NATIONAL BACKGROUND, 1931

National background	<u>Fraser Mills</u>		<u>Maillardville</u>		<u>New Westminster</u>		<u>Other</u>		<u>Row Total</u>
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	%
French Canadian	10	8.4	94	79.0	13	10.0	2	1.6	100.0
English Canadian	28	19.6	35	24.5	63	44.1	17	11.0	100.0
British	12	19.6	14	22.9	29	47.5	6	9.8	100.0
Finnish	27	87.1	2	6.5	2	6.5	0	0.0	100.0
Norwegian	34	66.7	6	11.8	11	21.6	0	0.0	100.0
Swedish	22	75.9	3	10.3	4	13.8	0	0.0	100.0
American	11	64.7	1	5.9	4	23.5	1	5.9	100.0
Other	6	15.3	18	46.0	15	38.4	0	0.0	100.0

sixty-six percent of the workforce lived, was still isolated from Vancouver and lay only on the outskirts of New Westminster. The community was neither large nor spread out, and homes were concentrated on the flats of Fraser Mills directly adjacent to the mill or on the slopes of Maillardville still within walking distance of the workplace. With the mill as the major employer in the district, and the workforce living in close proximity, ample opportunity would have presented itself for discussion of working conditions, which would gradually give rise to expressions of discontent. Naturally, the geographic concentration would reinforce the social closeness of the working-class community.

Residential concentration is certainly not the only evidence of a tight associational network among the millworkers. A strong kinship network is apparent as well. In fact, the payroll and personnel records show that between thirty-five and forty percent of the millworkers had at least one other family member working at the mill. Doubtless many had more. Family members could ease each other into the job and share common concerns off the job as well. As family members working at the mill often shared a single address, the above indice of kinship also suggests a high degree of co-residence. Among French Canadians, a high incidence of intermarriage provides evidence that the kinship network was even more extensive than indicated above. Although an employee might not have a blood relative working at the mill, he could easily have had relatives by

marriage among his co-workers. As an example, six members of the Pare family worked at Fraser Mills. As we have seen, the Pare family was related, by marriages performed between 1911 and 1931, to at least twenty-six other French-Canadian families - seven of these had members employed at Fraser Mills. One of the families related to the Pare family had nine men working at the mill; another had five. Thus the interconnections in the mill were intricate indeed. The kinship network, which functioned both in the workplace and community, proved capable of creating and sustaining impressive solidarity.

At the workplace, the men were not segregated by nationality or ethnicity to any great degree. Table XI shows the composition of the workforce in the major departments and occupational categories of the mill. While there was considerable ethnic diversification within principal departments and occupations, certainly enough that no structural barrier to the growth of class solidarity is discernible, some patterns do appear. For example, foremen were American or English Canadian, while contract labourers were concentrated in the most menial job categories: working in shipping, in the drying kilns, stacking lumber, packing shingles and pulling off the chains. These jobs were not, however, the exclusive preserve of Oriental labour. The Chinese, Japanese and East Indian men worked side by side with Caucasians, albeit for twenty cents an hour while white workers made at least twenty-seven.

ETHNIC REPRESENTATION WITHIN

MAJOR DEPARTMENTS AND OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES, 1931

SHINGLE MILL

Foreman - English Canadian

Shingle Weavers - French Canadian 9 (45%)
 English Canadian 4 (20%)
 English 2 (10%)
 Norwegian 2 (10%)
 Swedish 1 (5%)
 American 1 (5%)

General Labour - French Canadian 9 (42%)
 English Canadian 7 (33%)
 Belgian 2 (9%)
 Finnish 1 (5%)
 Norwegian 1 (5%)
 Swedish 1 (5%)

Shingle Packers - Chinese 19 (100%)
 59

SAWMILL

Foreman - American

General Labour - English Canadian 11 (28%)
 French Canadian 8 (20%)
 Russian 4 (10%)
 Japanese 3 (7%)
 English 2 (5%)
 American 2 (5%)
 Norwegian 1 (2%)
 Swedish 1 (2%)
 Scottish 1 (2%)
 Other 6 (15%)

39

PLANING MILL

Foreman - English Canadian

General Labour - English Canadian 22 (36%)
 French Canadian 19 (31%)
 English 8 (13%)
 Russian 3 (5%)
 Scottish 3 (5%)
 East Indian 2 (3%)
 Norwegian 1 (2%)
 Belgian 1 (2%)
 Other 1 (2%)

60

VENEER PLANT

Foreman - English Canadian

General Labour - French Canadian 5 (26%)
 English Canadian 5 (26%)
 English 4 (21%)
 Russian 1 (5%)
 American 1 (5%)
 Greek 1 (5%)
 Scottish 1 (5%)
 Other 1 (5%)

19

TABLE XI (cont'd)

ETHNIC REPRESENTATION WITHINMAJOR DEPARTMENTS AND OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES, 1931

<u>MACHINE SHOP</u>			<u>CHAIN</u>
Head Millwrights	- American	1	Swedish 6 (23%)
	English Canadian	1	East Indian 6 (23%)
Machinists	- English	2	Finnish 4 (15%)
	- Norwegian	13 (48%)	Norwegian 3 (11%)
Millwrights	Swedish	5 (19%)	Chinese 2 (8%)
	English Canadian	3 (11%)	English 2 (8%)
	English	2 (8%)	English Canadian 1 (4%)
	French Canadian	1 (4%)	Other 2 (8%)
	Finnish	1 (4%)	
	Scottish	1 (4%)	
	Other	1 (4%)	26
		29	
			<u>DRY KILNS</u>
			Chinese 10 (76%)
			Japanese 1 (8%)
			Scottish 1 (8%)
			French Canadian 1 (8%)
			13
			<u>TRAM</u>
Grading Shed	English Canadian	9 (45%)	English Canadian 11 (40%)
	French Canadian	7 (35%)	Norwegian 6 (20%)
	Scottish	3 (15%)	French Canadian 3 (10%)
	English	1 (5%)	Other 9 (31%)
			29

TABLE XI (cont'd)

ETHNIC REPRESENTATION WITHINMAJOR DEPARTMENTS AND OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES, 1931

<u>YARD</u>		<u>SHIPPING</u>	
General Labour - Finnish	9 (31%)	Foreman - American	
Swedish	7 (24%)	General Labour - Chinese	10 (18%)
Norwegian	4 (13%)	Norwegian	9 (16%)
Chinese	3 (10%)	Finnish	8 (14%)
East Indian	2 (7%)	Japanese	7 (12%)
French Canadian	1 (3%)	English Canadian	6 (11%)
English Canadian	1 (3%)	English	5 (9%)
Russian	1 (3%)	Swedish	4 (7%)
Greek	1 (3%)	Scottish	2 (4%)
Yard Sizers - French Canadian	8 (50%)	Russian	1 (2%)
English Canadian	3 (18%)	Greek	1 (2%)
English	2 (12%)	East Indian	1 (2%)
Other	3 (18%)		<u>1</u>
	45		54
<u>DOOR FACTORY</u>		<u>POWER PLANT</u>	
General Labour - English Canadian	7 (43%)	Head Electrician-American	
Japanese	5 (31%)	Electricians - English Canadian	1
Scottish	2 (12%)	American	1
	<u>2</u>	General Labour - Japanese	9 (56%)
	16	English Canadian	3 (19%)
		French Canadian	2 (12%)
		English	1 (6%)
		Norwegian	<u>1</u> (6%)
			18

While most of the men employed at Fraser Mills took jobs requiring little skill, there was an upper echelon of skilled workers which included millwrights, filers, sawyers, machinists, and engineers. Table XII shows the workforce in a breakdown by occupational level and ethnicity. As pointed out earlier, English Canadians and Americans emerge as the top strata of the workforce. In fact, there were only seventeen Americans working at Fraser Mills in 1931 and seven were foremen. Four of these had been foremen at Fraser Mills since at least 1921. English Canadians, French Canadians, British and Norwegians were all represented among the skilled workers as, to a lesser degree, were the Swedish. Many of the millwrights were Norwegians (48%) while sawyers were more often French Canadian (45%) or English Canadian (20%) than American, British or Norwegian. English Canadians and British workers dominated among the engineers and machinists.

Of the eighty-two percent of the men who laboured in semi-skilled or unskilled positions the Americans, British and Norwegians had the weakest representation. All other national/ethnic groups had at least eighty percent of their members in low-paying, low-skill level positions. Some, such as the Oriental or Finnish contract workers, were almost exclusively found in that category. Eighty-eight of the French Canadians, many of whom were long-standing employees, ended up in occupations requiring limited skills. The office staff was predominantly British or Canadian-born anglophones.

TABLE XII

SKILL LEVEL BY NATIONAL BACKGROUND, 1931

<u>National Background</u>	<u>Managerial/ Foremen</u>		<u>Skilled</u>		<u>Semi or Unskilled</u>		<u>Clerical</u>		<u>Row Total</u>
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
French Canadian	0	0.0	14	11.7	105	88.2	0	0.0	100.0
English Canadian	7	4.8	17	11.8	116	81.1	3	2.0	100.0
British	2	3.1	9	14.2	49	77.7	3	4.7	100.0
Finnish	0	0.0	1	3.2	30	96.7	0	0.0	100.0
Norwegian	0	0.0	16	31.3	35	68.6	0	0.0	100.0
Swedish	0	0.0	6	19.3	25	80.6	0	0.0	100.0
American	7	41.1	3	17.6	7	41.1	0	0.0	100.0
Other	0	0.0	2	5.0	37	92.5	1	2.5	100.0

Although the occupational categories indicated on the personnel cards are broad (unless a man was a skilled worker his card indicated where he worked, i.e. sawmill, planing mill, etc., but not exactly what he did within that department) there is little indication of any upward occupational mobility at Fraser Mills. While this might have been a cause for frustration, it paled in comparison to the more immediate concerns of the Depression economy.

The general description of the workforce made above can be compared with a similar profile of the twenty-three (of twenty-six) strike leaders who can be identified. The men on the Strike Committee were younger, on average, than the general workforce. Over half were between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. As well, almost seventy-five percent of the strike leaders were married men. French Canadians, while accounting for only eighteen percent of all millworkers, made up almost half of the Strike Committee; other Committee members were predominantly anglophone, five born in Canada and five in England. The strike leaders had a long employment relationship with the Canadian Western Lumber Company. One-third had worked at Fraser Mills for at least eleven years, while seventy-eight percent had been employed there for five years or more. The residential concentration apparent of the workforce as a whole was even more pronounced among strike leaders. Fourteen of the Strike Committee lived in Maillardville, six in New Westminster, with three others in Fraser Mills, Burnaby and Vancouver. About the

same ratio as the general workforce, approximately forty percent, had relatives working at Fraser Mills.

At twenty-five percent, the skilled workers were slightly better represented among the Strike Committee than among the general workforce. The income levels of the leaders fell into the same categories as most of the men they represented; over half earned less than seven hundred dollars in 1931, and more than one-third had annual earnings of under six hundred dollars that year. (See Table XV, Chapter Three). Thus these characteristics found in the general workforce which were conducive to the growth of labour protest appear equally evident among the strike leaders.

The workforce on the eve of the strike can be described in some general terms. The workers were predominantly young to middle-aged men. Many were married and household heads. With relatively stable employment histories at Fraser Mills, many of the men had roots in the community. A kinship network helped bond the workforce, as did a high degree of residential concentration. Indeed, co-residence of workers was not uncommon. For the most part, skill-level could not divide a workforce which was predominantly unskilled. Further, ethnic/national divisions among the workers were offset by structural integration in the workplace. These features help account for the rise of labour unrest and the translation of that unrest into labour protest.

Sociological profiles which stand frozen in time and space are of no more than passing interest to a social historian. Societal relationships cannot be reduced to a series of statistical tables, nor can human motivation, attitudes and behaviour be inferred solely from structural analysis. The quantitative methodology applied above has allowed observations which could not have been drawn from traditional, descriptive sources. While the above sociological profile is vitally important to an analysis of the 1931 strike at Fraser Mills it must be considered in conjunction with more traditional sources. The following chapter considers other factors operative on the eve of the strike; the escalating crisis of the Depression and the growth of the militant Lumber Workers' Industrial Union.

III. The Lumber Workers Industrial Union

When the workers at Fraser Mills voted to strike in September of 1931, they secured a place in British Columbia's labour history. This chapter will examine the status of organized labour in British Columbia during the 1920s, the early organization of the province's lumberworkers and the subsequent decline and rebirth of the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union (L.W.I.U.) under the auspices of the Communist Party of Canada (C.P.C.). As well, this chapter discusses living and working conditions in the context of the deepening Depression, seeking to define the forces which lay behind the fusion of the L.W.I.U. and the men at Fraser Mills.

Generally it is agreed that labour organization in the lumber industry made uneven progress until the late thirties. The founding of the International Woodworkers of America (I.W.A.) in 1937 marks the beginning of sustained growth and cumulative progress under the union banner for woodworkers in British Columbia. However the I.W.A. was built on a foundation laid long before 1937. It emerged from a support base wrought through the efforts of its predecessors: the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.); the B. C. Loggers' Union (which became the Lumber Workers' Industrial Unit of the O.B.U.); the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union; and the Lumber and Sawmill Workers'

Union. ¹ Although conditions within the lumber industry during the 1920s were conducive to the growth of both radicalism and militancy, lumberworkers remained largely unorganized. The organizers of B.C.'s lumberworkers felt the same tensions affecting the entire labour movement in the province.

The 1920s were lean years for labour in British Columbia. As measured by trade union membership the number of organized workers declined from a high of 40,070 in 1919 to less than 20,000 in the early twenties, rising slightly to 27,204 in 1930. The decline was even more severe than the above numbers indicate for in some years, 1920-1922 and 1924, membership fell below 20,000. The number of strikes and lockouts in British Columbia fell from sixty-eight in 1920 to only seven in 1930 and eleven in 1931. ² This decline in strike activity, coupled with the decline in union membership indicates the faltering status of organized labour in the province. Paul Phillips notes, in his study No Power Greater, that "by the end of 1925, B.C.'s once strong labour movement had been reduced to a core centered in Vancouver and district." ³

¹The Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union and the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union are actually the same organization. In 1935 when the Comintern called for a United Front the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, like the rest of the W.U.L. unions, returned to the fold of the A.F.L. In the case of the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union, the union was granted non-beneficiary status within the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Interview with Harold Pritchett by author, October 23, 1981.

²Phillips, op.cit., pp. 92, 169, 172.

³Ibid., p. 96.

Both external and internal forces threatened the existence of the labour movement in B.C. The war years had brought economic growth and an increase in the number of organized workers. However the post-war economy began to decline in 1920 and conditions improved only slightly between 1923 and 1925. With soft markets and high unemployment dominating the economy, the labour movement fell into recession. Clearly on the defensive, labour faced an aggressive union-busting campaign by employers and government. The 'Red Scare' and Winnipeg General Strike prompted changes to the Criminal Code, allowing a broader definition of sedition. Amendments to the Immigration Act facilitated the deportation of British-born immigrants. ⁴ Government and employers turned to the use of dominion and provincial police as well as armed troops to break strikes and impede organizational efforts. ⁵ The early 1920s were a time when the open-shop campaign and use of the blacklist escalated, advanced just as enthusiastically by Canadian employers as by their American counterparts. ⁶

Organized labour could not counter the offensive as working unity within the labour movement was seldom achieved. The rise of the One Big Union (O.B.U.) had deepened the rift between east

⁴R. McCormack, Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 162-163, 167.

⁵C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement in Canada: 1827-1959 (Montreal: Canadian Social Publications, 1966), pp. 207-208. See also Ian Angus, Canadian Bolsheviks (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), p. 120.

⁶Angus, op. cit., p. 238.

and west, between craft and industrial unionism, isolating an important sector of the Canadian labour movement. To make matters worse, the eclectic radicalism of the O.B.U. failed to provide Western Canadian labour with a unifying force. ⁷ The Lumber Workers' Industrial Unit of the O.B.U., forerunner of the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union with which this study is concerned, was particularly hard-hit by internal dissension. Conflict over geographical versus industrial organization as well as objections to the centralist tendencies within the O.B.U. resulted in the eventual withdrawal of the Lumber Workers' Industrial Unit. The withdrawal of the lumber workers seriously weakened both parties. Cut off from the O.B.U., the Lumber Workers Industrial Unit, at one point 20,000 strong, entered into a rapid decline after 1920.

The Lumber Workers' Industrial Union is an unwritten chapter in the history of the trade union movement. While afforded a mention here and there, its organizational endeavours have yet to be examined in detail. The background presented here sketches in broad outline a history too rich to be contained within the scope of this study, a reminder that much work in B.C.'s labour history remains to be done.

⁷ Ross McCormack claims that "two radical tendencies fused" at the Western Labour Conference of 1918: the militant industrial unionism of the syndicalists and the political processes favoured by the Socialist Party of Canada (S.P.C.). Fusion, however, hardly seems an apt description. Not only did the revolutionaries of the S.P.C. clash with syndicalists on philosophical issues, but the O.B.U. was troubled by other, more practical rifts. McCormack, op. cit., p. 164.

Over 4000 members of the B.C. Loggers' Union had joined the O.B.U. as the Lumber Workers' Industrial Unit. By the end of 1919 the L.W.I.U. had a membership of 17,000, the majority being from B.C. In 1921 the L.W.I.U. split into two factions, one reaffirming its ties with the I.W.W. and one affiliating with the Red International of Labour Unions (R.I.L.U.). The split, coupled with slumping markets, weakened both factions. The Communist faction saw its membership decline through 1920 to 1922 due both to a series of defections to the I.W.W. faction and to the stagnant economy. Paul Phillips notes that, for the Communist faction, "The final blow came in December of 1922, when the Cranbrook District of the union in effect allied with the I.W.W.. After an unsuccessful convention, the district secretary defected to the Wobblies." ⁸ However the Wobbly faction fared little better than the L.W.I.U.-R.I.L.U. Although remaining active in Cranbrook and Prince George as well as in the Vancouver area, by 1924 the L.W.I.U.-I.W.W. had been reduced to a membership of 126 men. ⁹ Obviously there were serious problems in the industry. The death of the L.W.I.U.-I.W.W. was slow, however, for it lingered on until 1926.

Although the lumber workers of British Columbia desperately needed union representation the craft dominated Trades and Labour Congress (T.L.C.) failed to recognize the task. When the

⁸Phillips, op. cit., pp. 82, 86, 90, 92.

⁹J. Scott, Plunderbund and Proletariat (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1975), pp. 148, 151.

L.W.I.U. reorganized in B.C. in 1928, its leadership included men who had been active in the original lumber workers' union in the early twenties. ¹⁰ Links to the Communist Party, whose trade union activities had increased over the decade, developed rapidly. In 1928, B.C.'s L.W.I.U. leaders turned to the Lumber and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union, centered in Northern Ontario, for support in reorganizing the lumber workers of B.C. ¹¹ The L.W.I.U. was closely tied to the Trade Union Educational League (T.U.E.L.), the forerunner of the Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.) in the United States, and the Workers' Unity League (W.U.L.) in Canada, which were in turn directly linked to the Communist Party.

Canadian Communists had formalized the T.U.E.L. in 1923, with Canada as the Fourth District of the U. S.-based organization. The policies of the T.U.E.L. in Canada followed those of its U.S. parent closely, and in both countries leadership remained in the hands of C.P. executive officers. Despite internal struggles, the C. P. C. followed the strategies demanded by the Comintern. As elsewhere, the Fourth District of the T.U.E.L. called for amalgamation of the craft unions, organization of both the unskilled and unorganized as well as infiltration of the reformist unions with a view to eventually

¹⁰M. Bergen, Tough Timber (Toronto: Progress Books, 1966), p. 26.

¹¹The Lumber and Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union changed its name to Lumber Workers' Industrial Union in 1932. In the interests of clarity, L.W.I.U. will be used to refer to the union during both periods.

establishing Communist Party control over the most powerful unions. ¹² Canadian members of the T.U.E.L. continued to work within the international unions of the T.L.C./A.F.L. until 1929.

When the Comintern veered left in 1928, denouncing social democracy as 'social fascism', the Communist activists within the labour movement changed tactics. ¹³ The T.U.E.L. leaders jettisoned the policy of 'boring from within' which had been withstood by the T.L.C./A.F.L., to adopt a policy of dual unionism and organization of the unorganized. Their objective - to wrench control of the labour movement from the reformist union center. The Fourth District of the T.U.E.L. redefined itself as the Workers' Unity League in early 1930.

In British Columbia the W.U.L. presence was particularly strong. Table XIII outlines the various organizations affiliated with the C.P.C. by 1935. ¹⁴ Although the W.U.L. was directly linked to the R.I.L.U., the leadership of the W.U.L. and the C.P.C. overlapped. The W.U.L. affiliates of particular interest in B.C. include the Mine Workers Union of Canada, the Fishing and Cannery Workers Industrial Union, the Longshoremen and Transport Workers of Canada with its many branches, the Relief

¹²Angus, op. cit., p. 115.

¹³Ibid., p. 276. See also, Andree Levesque, "Le Quebec et le monde communiste: Cowansville, 1931," Revue d'Histoire de l'Amerique Francaise, XXXIV (1980), 173.

¹⁴The table is compiled from a table in an R.C.M.P. file on Communist activities in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s. P.A.C. Department of Labour, RG 27, Volume 835, File 1-28-1, part 1.

TABLE XIII

ORGANIZATIONS AFFILIATED TO THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL PRIOR TO 1935

<u>C. P. C. AFFILIATES</u>	<u>W. U. L. AFFILIATES</u>	<u>ACTIVE IN B. C.</u>
Young Communist League		Yes
Workers' Ex-Service-men's League		Yes
Farmers' Unity League		No
National Unemployed Workers' Association		Yes
Canadian Labour Defense League		Yes
Friends of Soviet Russia		Yes
Ukrainian Farmer - Labour Temple Association		Yes
Finnish Organization of Canada		Yes
	Auto Workers Industrial Union	No
	Fishermen & Cannery Workers' Industrial Union	Yes
	Food Workers' Industrial Union	Yes
	Furniture and Woodworkers' Industrial Union	No
	Lumber Workers' Industrial Union	Yes
	Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers	No
	Shoe and Leather Workers' Industrial Union	No
	Textile Workers' Union	No
	Relief Camp Workers' Union	Yes
	Longshoremen and Transport Workers of Canada	Yes
	Mine Workers Union of Canada	Yes

Camp Workers Union, and, more specific to this study, the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union. In addition to these unions, the National Unemployed Association is noteworthy because it participated in the 1931 strike at Fraser Mills. ¹⁵ The C.P.C., while never commanding the membership it sought, nonetheless had a substantial support base and it proved itself an effective force in the labour movement through the activities of the W.U.L. In fact, the 1931 arrest of Tim Buck and seven other C.P.C. leaders illustrates the state's perception of the C.P.C. as a viable force. By 1935 the membership of the W.U.L. is estimated to have been 40,000. ¹⁶ The lumber workers organized in B.C. alone would have accounted for a sizeable percentage of the W.U.L.'s membership. The number of British Columbian lumber workers organized in 1935 has been estimated at 20,000 by Myrtle Bergren. ¹⁷ The Fraser Mills strike was thus part of a much larger whole.

Although reorganization of the lumber workers began in 1928 it would be three years before the L.W.I.U. would prove itself an effective representative for the men. By 1929 the membership

¹⁵The exact membership is unknown but was substantial. In 1931 unemployment in B.C. stood at 27%. The N.U.W. published its own paper, The Unemployed Worker, which provides some record of its activities and illustrates the link to the C.P.C. Phillips, op. cit., p. 101.

¹⁶H. Logan, Trade Unions In Canada (Toronto: MacMillan, 1948), p. 346.

¹⁷Bergren, op. cit., pp. 54, 93.

was still only twenty-five strong. ¹⁸ The difficulties facing early organizers were numerous. They were hampered by financial constraints: travelling from camp to camp, organizers had no resources, other than the few dues collected, to meet expenses.¹⁹ Organizers were often the victim of employer discrimination. When reporting on the progress being made in the west at the L.A.W.I.U. Convention in 1931, union organizers reported that a "close and vicious blacklist" was being used "against the militants." ²⁰ The difficulties of organizing in these early years are recounted by Jack Gillbanks, who was very active in the L.W.I.U.:

As soon as you got the money from the delegates, from the members, well, it was spent and so we decided, well by golly, the best thing for us to do was just to step right out here and go after the loggers, take in some of these camps, you know. I went out with a fellow by the name of Andy Hogarth and we used to hitchhike in these camps. We mainly concentrated on the island although we took in some of the sawmills on the Fraser River and on Burrard inlet.We went over on Vancouver Islandwe used to have to sneak into these camps ... when the crew was in for supper. As long as we got into the bunkhouse well, we were good for a little while. But sometimes we used to make a miscue and we used to get into the wrong bunkhouse and maybe there were a lot of anti-union guys or even stool pigeons. We had to get out sometimes. Sometimes we used to try to pick a bunkhouse that we had a few sympathizers in and then we would make

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 27. The account on which this section of Bergren's book is based comes from Bergren's correspondence with Arne Johnson, undated, now held by International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

²⁰P.A.O., Records of the Attorney-General, RG 4, MS 367, Reel 3, Correspondence 1931, Report of the 6th Convention, L.A.W.I.U., May 7, 1931. This collection will be cited hereafter as P.A.O., Communist Party Collection.

some headway. ²¹

While the struggle to return unionization to the forest industry was long and hard, some gains were being made. As records of the Communist Party show, at the W.U.L. Conference held in Vancouver in 1930, "Comrades Lamont, Moe and Woodhead reported for the lumber industry. Comrade Lamont stressed the need for concentrating on the large mass of unskilled and unorganized workers in the district." ²² By May of 1931, the B.C. section of the L.W.I.U. was reported to be in "a slightly better position than a year earlier" although "still numerically and influentially very weak." ²³

In the summer of 1931, L.W.I.U. organizers stepped up their campaign and the workers at Fraser Mills began to talk openly about a union. Organizing the men may have begun in 1930 or even earlier, but this cannot be verified. Early meetings were conducted secretively and word of the union spread through on-the-job contacts. The organizational role of Harold Pritchett, a shingle weaver with prior organizational experience and a strong commitment to unionization, is well remembered by all who participated in the 1931 strike. Pritchett later would serve as Chairman of the Strike Committee.

²¹Jack Gillbanks, June 12, 1980. Interviewed by Clay Perry, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

²² P.A.O., Communist Party Collection. W.U.L. Conference, September, 1930.

²³P.A.O., Communist Party Collection, Report of 6th Convention, L.A.W.I.U., May 7, 1931.

When the strike began on September 17, 1931, H.J. Mackin, the General Manager of Fraser Mills, argued that the 640 workers at the mill were being manipulated by a handful of Communists. This statement was widely reported in contemporary newspapers. Indeed it was a popular position to adopt. J. R. Stewart's brief mention of the strike in his 1956 dissertation, "French-Canadian settlement in British Columbia" states erroneously that French Canadians did not take positions of leadership. He further notes that "some of the leading spirits in the strike were outsiders and one or two were quite candid about their Communist background." ²⁴ While there were outsiders involved who had connections to the C.P.C., it is impossible to overlook the degree of support enjoyed by the L.W.I.U. at Fraser Mills. In fact, at Fraser Mills, fifty percent of the employees held a union card prior to the first day of the strike. Over the duration of the strike this number grew to 461, or more than seventy percent of the employees. Obviously the L.W.I.U. had achieved a wide base of support at Fraser Mills well before the strike began. ²⁵

The years 1921 to 1929 had provided the men with relatively stable incomes. The next two years, 1930 and 1931, brought an assault on the men's wages. The payroll records provide hourly

²⁴Stewart, "French-Canadian Settlement", p. 67.

²⁵U.B.C. Library, Special Collections, I.W.A./Pritchett Collection, Minutes of the Strike Committee, files 10-11, 10-12. As the Minutes of the Strike Committee serve as a base reference they will be cited only when quoted directly or when used to substantiate a controversial point.

TABLE XIV

HOURLY WAGES FOR CAUCASIAN WORKERS, 1921 - 1931

	<u>1921</u>	<u>1927</u>	<u>1931</u>
Mean	\$.417	\$.488	\$.344
Median	\$.351	\$.449	\$.314
Mode	\$.35	\$.40	\$.313
Range	\$.20 - \$1.08	\$.25 - \$1.25	\$.185 - \$.84
Standard Deviation	\$.161	\$.135	\$.085

wage rates as well as annual earnings for the men at Fraser Mills. Table XIV gives an indication of the hourly wage rates being received by Caucasian workers. The Orientals, it must be remembered, were almost all paid less than twenty-one cents an hour. Hourly rates were collected for all men at Fraser Mills in September of 1931. The mean hourly wage for white males of thirty-four and a half cents is actually higher than most would have received. The curves were skewed by extremes on the top end of the range. The median \$.314 and mode \$.313 give a much better indication of typical hourly wages. Table XIV shows that, for the men who had worked at Fraser Mills from 1927 to 1931 or even

1921 to 1931, wages had declined. The early years of the twenties were not a time of economic buoyancy, yet wages averaged substantially higher than in 1931. While only one-fifth of the Caucasian workers would be able to compare conditions in 1921 and 1931, 255, or fifty percent, had been at Fraser Mills from 1927 on, and the decline must have appeared striking. Furthermore, wages did not begin dropping until early 1930. The personnel records show five major cuts between January of 1930 and September of 1931; some men's wages were cut up to six times during that twenty month period. Approximately one-third of a man's wages were withdrawn, a few cents at a time, until the going rate at the mill had fallen to thirty one cents for married men, twenty-seven cents for single men and twenty cents for Orientals.

In terms of annual earnings the figures are even more dramatic. Table XV shows that in 1931, forty-five percent of the workforce earned less than six hundred dollars for the year's work. Even had they not been on strike for two and a half months the average still would have been well below income levels reached in 1930.²⁶

²⁶ For example, a man earning \$600 in 1931 might have earned as much as \$757 had the mill not been shut down for two and a half months and had the company not kept reducing wages below the levels reached by September of 1931. It is probable that the men would have seen further wage cuts, which were the company's solution to slumping markets. The above figure is derived from the following formula: $\$600/9.5 = \$63.15 \times 12 = \$757.00$, where \$600 is actual earnings in 1931, 9.5 is number of months worked, \$63.15 is average monthly income and \$757.00 is projected by multiplying average monthly income by twelve months or a full work year. If this formula is applied to the figures in Table XV close to half of the men would have earned less than \$757.00 in

TABLE XV

INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY PERCENTAGE, 1921 TO 1931

Annual Income (dollars)	1921	1923	1925	1927	1929	1930	1931
1 - 399	0.0	0.8	0.6	1.2	0.6	0.5	1.4
400 - 499	2.3	0.0	0.6	1.2	0.8	1.4	12.2
500 - 599	3.4	1.7	2.4	3.2	1.7	1.0	31.7
600 - 699	1.1	0.0	1.8	1.2	3.4	3.8	16.7
700 - 799	8.0	0.0	5.4	5.6	2.5	11.9	9.3
800 - 899	10.2	5.0	7.2	9.7	9.3	16.2	10.6
900 - 999	13.6	10.8	18.7	16.5	18.6	22.1	5.4
1000 - 1009	9.1	11.7	6.6	10.9	13.8	8.8	3.8
1100 - 1199	6.8	10.0	7.8	8.1	8.5	5.2	2.7
1200 - 1299	12.5	6.7	6.0	5.6	5.4	4.3	1.1
1300 - 1399	6.8	6.7	8.4	3.6	4.2	7.1	0.7
1400 - 1499	6.8	10.0	4.8	5.6	5.1	4.3	0.9
1500 - 1999	10.2	25.0	21.1	19.8	18.9	9.3	1.8
2000 - 2999	6.8	8.3	6.0	6.0	4.8	3.6	1.4
3000 - 3999	1.1	1.7	1.8	1.2	1.1	0.5	0.0
4000 - 4999	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5000 - 5999	1.1	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
6000 - 9999	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.2	0.2
Over 10000	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
MEAN	\$1268	\$1525	\$1327	\$1262	\$1343	\$1105	\$ 739
MEDIAN	\$1117	\$1350	\$1166	\$1107	\$1085	\$ 959	\$ 616
STANDARD DEVIATION	\$ 670	\$1007	\$ 634	\$ 594	\$1084	\$ 483	\$ 397

The median is perhaps more useful a figure than the mean. By 1931, more than fifty percent of the men earned less than \$615.00 as compared to \$959.37 in 1930 and \$1085.00 in 1929. While prices were indeed falling during these years they did not fall thirty percent between 1929 and 1931 while wages did. In fact, the Labour Gazette of February, 1932, provides figures on the cost of living, in Canada, from 1913 to 1932. They show that retail prices began to drop in mid-1930. By September, 1931, prices had dropped approximately twenty percent. Prices for housing, fuel and utilities dropped only slightly although food costs dipped sharply. Nonetheless, the loss in real income is most definite. ²⁷

This substantial decrease must have had a strong impact on the standard of living in Fraser Mills/Maillardville. The yearly index of food prices given in the Labour Gazette for 1931 allows a broad indication of the cost of living for working families in British Columbia. The Labour Gazette figures show the cost of living to have been notably higher in British Columbia than in the other provinces. The estimated weekly cost for twenty-nine staple foods for a family of five amounted to \$9.10. ²⁸ This figure can be reasonably used because the fact that a majority of the men working at Fraser Mills were married and would have

²⁶(cont'd) 1931, a \$200.00 drop over earnings in 1930.

²⁷Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, 1932 (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1933), p. 231.

²⁸Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, 1931 (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1932), p. 1143.

had families has already been determined. Fraser Mills was far enough away from Vancouver to allow for somewhat higher food costs because of increased transportation. Also many people still stopped at the company store where prices (unless this particular store was a rose among thorns) were doubtless inflated. On the other hand, many of the married millworkers, particularly the French Canadians in Maillardville, had built their homes on large lots and could produce some of their food, thus defraying costs. Unfortunately such factors cannot be measured.

Working with the figure of \$9.10 a week for basic food costs, the average family would have seen an annual expenditure of \$473.20. When housing costs are added it takes little imagination to envisage the despair and frustration engendered by news of a further wage cut. Thirty-four percent of the Caucasian employees lived in the townsite, as did almost all of the 151 Chinese, Japanese and East Indian workers. Some of the Caucasian workers living at Fraser Mills owned their own homes, but the vast majority rented from the company. Rents in the townsite ran from eight dollars to eleven dollars per month on average. Foremen paid a little more. Rents outside the townsite commonly ranged from twelve to twenty-two dollars.²⁹ Housing advertised in the British Columbian was available at a cost of anywhere from ten to thirty dollars per month, with most rents

²⁹As an example, a six room house with "modern conveniences" would rent for eighteen dollars or more. Ibid., p. 1145.

falling between fifteen and twenty dollars. Rooms or suites ran from eight to twenty dollars per month, while room and board could run as high as twenty-eight dollars for one month. ³⁰ Estimating on a monthly basis, using median wage figures derived from Table XV, a man with a wife and three children would have a monthly income of approximately \$64.00. Of that amount, the family would spend \$39.43 on food, leaving \$25.30 for rent or other housing costs, fuel, light, clothing and miscellaneous expenses. Even a family renting from the C.W.L.C. at eight dollars a month, which was abnormally low, would have seen over seventy-three percent of the household head's wages go for basic costs - food and shelter. For a family living outside the townsite, paying perhaps fifteen dollars monthly rent, as much as eighty-five or ninety percent of a man's income could be taken up by mere subsistence costs. ³¹

There are other factors to consider which will never show up on even the best price index. Many of the French Canadians in Maillardville, as mentioned above, had sufficient garden space to allow produce to be grown for domestic consumption. By such means, at least some families could have eased the cost of

³⁰British Columbian, September 1931. The classified ads were surveyed to estimate rental costs at the time of the strike.

³¹As Terry Copp points out in The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1900-1929 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 31, the modern Statistics Canada definition of poverty-"any family spending more than seventy percent of total income on food, clothing and shelter,"-places the majority of the population which he studied below the poverty line. Certainly the majority of Fraser Mills workers were in similar circumstances.

living. Also, co-residence of working family members was not uncommon; sons working at Fraser Mills presumably supplemented the family income as did more distant male relatives paying room and board. Unmarried workers could certainly have lowered expenses by sharing accommodation. The working class community of Fraser Mills/Maillardville was resilient enough to exploit at least some of these features to make ends meet. The company's proposal to cut wages, however, would have eroded the quality of life intolerably. Rather than passive acceptance of this condition, the worker community opposed the C.W.L.C. and, for the first time, focussed their discontent through a clear course of action.

Fraser Mills thus presented the L.W.I.U. organizers with fertile ground. As one of the largest mills in B.C., it was an obvious attraction for the union men who found, in deteriorating standards, target after target to shoot at. Working conditions gave rise to grievances beyond poor wages and long hours. Minimal safety precautions in an industry using hazardous machinery led to industrial accidents. As one worker recalls:

It was go, go, Jack and never mind. If you got hurt, well, there's lots of them outside... get another one... the man was nothing to them. ³²

The work environment carried a range of hazards. In addition to the dangers of working with heavy machinery, lumber chains and saws, respiratory problems plagued the men who spent their days inhaling the dust raised in the mill.

³²Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

Yet poor working conditions went well beyond such structural features. Throughout the twenties the foremen at the mill hired and fired men at will:

If a foreman didn't like a man ... it does not matter if he was a hard working man ... he used to fire him and put his friend there. ³³

A bottle of rye could buy a man a job and perhaps get him fired again. One millworker remembers a morning when a foreman in the grip of a hangover fired the whole crew and physically assaulted one of the men, only to rehire them all the next day. ³⁴ Such practices most certainly did little to sustain the 'feeling of harmony' noted so many years earlier. Indeed, residents of the community note that a distinct shift in worker/management relations had occurred by the thirties. The change is stated in general terms by early residents who recall that "years ago when we started down there the boss was still friendly," ³⁵ and that Mackin, who had replaced Rogers, as General Manager, was far less amiable than his predecessor. ³⁶

Discontent over working conditions at the mill increased as wage-cuts and extended hours became common practice at the mill. Although declining wages were undeniably the central issue, they were hardly the only issue in the discontent surfacing in 1931.

The payroll ledgers show instances of men working twelve and

³³Hammond interview, May 2, 1972. Canuel interview, August 14, 1982.

³⁴Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

³⁵Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

³⁶Hammond interview, May 2, 1972.

thirteen days consecutively, while working overtime was not uncommon. In September of 1931 men were being asked to work overtime "three nights a week till 9 o'clock... after working nine hours a day."³⁷ The refusal of some men to do so prompted their dismissal. This action would become an issue in the strike, as would a wide range of concerns including living conditions in the townsite itself. Obviously, unrest had been escalating for some time.

Heading into the strike, both labour and management had arrived at their positions logically. The pressures of the Depression placed both the men and the company in a precarious position. For the men, the collapse of international markets meant shrinking paychecks while prices of many essential consumer goods remained high. The rising unemployment rate meant a surplus of labour more than willing to work for low wages, thus posing a direct threat to those employed. Although many of the men had worked at the mill for years they had absolutely no job protection. A lost job meant not only a lost paycheck, but the risk of losing all ties to the familiar and comforting facets of their lives; homes, relatives, friends and neighbours. Yet conditions were such that the risk seemed worth taking.

For the company's part, the shrinking markets meant declining profits and anxious stock-holders. The threatened enclosure of the American market behind tariff walls sent B.C. lumbermen scrambling to secure markets in the Commonwealth

³⁷Hammond interview, May 2, 1972.

nations of Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain. ³⁸ Fraser Mills still showed a profit in 1931, albeit a declining one. ³⁹ There is no indication in the company's records that the economic situation might have forced a shut-down. Yet this did not prevent Mackin, the General Manager, from threatening to do so. On more than one occasion Mackin stated that the mill would not continue to run unless the wage-cut was accepted:

We are quite willing to shut down. In fact for months we have been operating merely to relieve the unemployment situation. In our effort to relieve unemployment we have been operating six hours a day and four hours Saturday. ⁴⁰

This statement is contradicted by the dismissal of men refusing to work overtime just days before. One employee charged that the company would first reduce the work week from six to five days, ostensibly to prevent overproduction, then cut wages arguing soft markets, and finally resume normal operations once the wage-cuts had been secured. ⁴¹ Obviously the company did not

³⁸U.B.C. Library, Special Collections, Minutes of the Lumber and Sawmill Manufacturer's Association, 1931. The entries throughout 1931 are largely concerned with this issue.

³⁹The small profit realized at the mill operation was offset by higher profits in the company's subsidiaries such as the Columbia River Logging Company. Furthermore, four times during the previous ten years Fraser Mills had shown a profit of over one million dollars. The Canadian Western Lumber Company had substantial capital reserves with which to weather the lean years of 1931 and 1932. In 1933 the company once again began showing strong profits. Financial Statement of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, 1930, 1931.

⁴⁰Daily Province, Sept. 17, 1931.

⁴¹Interview with Stuart Almsbury, Feb. 23, 1979, taken by Clay Perry, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

appear as benevolent to its employees as management officials would have hoped. *2 Production at Fraser Mills continued because it was still profitable, not out of concern for the workers' welfare. This situation, understood by the leadership of the Strike Committee, polarized workers and management.

On September 17, 1931, the workers at Fraser Mills began their two and a half month strike. The strike grew out of the poor working conditions in the lumber industry, exacerbated by the economic pressures of the Depression. The abilities and determination of the L.W.I.U. organizers helped to harmonize the collective voice of the millworkers, while the strike itself revitalized labour organization in the industry, which had been virtually stagnant for close to a decade. This particular strike thus holds a vital place in British Columbia's labour history; it is far more than a spontaneous and ill-advised outburst fuelled by radical agitators.

*2The Annual Report of the Vice-President cited the company's moral obligation to continue producing for its employees' welfare. The report went on to state that production was also being maintained to prevent the loss of established market relationships. The Vice-President further pointed out that if the market improved the company should be prepared to escalate production. Indeed the market for manufactured lumber did begin improving the next year. Report of the Vice-President, Financial Statement of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, 1931, 1932.

IV. On Strike

Chronicling the 1931 strike at Fraser Mills exposes a variety of themes. For those interested in the development of the labour movement, the strike affords an inside view of the tensions and obstacles faced by workers embarking on a unionization campaign. The anti-union bias of management and government, intensified by the ideological bent of the strike leaders, is readily discernible. It is apparent not only on the picket line but also in management attempts to split the workforce during the negotiation process. Those interested in cultural development, defined here as the growth of ideas, attitudes and behaviour, may find Fraser Mills an intriguing anomaly. During the 1931 strike, and later as the Unemployed Movement (N.U.W.) grew, the French Canadians openly defied the directives of the Catholic church, working with militant radicals of the C.P.C. while simultaneously struggling to maintain their identification with the church. For the social historian, Fraser Mills, 1931, represents a community in which identification along ethnic and religious lines did not cancel out identification along class lines. Solidarity of class interests propelled the strike forward. This chapter addresses the formal aspects of the strike negotiations and confrontation on the picket line. A less traditional focus will be taken in Chapter Five, where community response to the strike

situation is discussed.

On September 14, 1931, the L.W.I.U. called its Fraser Mills membership to a meeting in the parish hall. Two hundred sixty-six men met to determine a course of action in the face of further wage cuts and the company's dismissal of men refusing to work overtime. Demands were set and the question of strike action, if necessary, came to a vote with 181 in favour and 81 opposed. (Four ballots were discounted.) The demands set forth included a ten percent increase on all wages; time and a half for overtime; an upward adjustment in the rate for shingles; and a closed shop for union men. Two delegates approached Mackin the following day to present the demands. On September 16 the secretary recorded in the Minutes of the Strike Committee that Mackin "simply said no."

A second meeting on the evening of September 16 upheld the earlier decision to back the demands with strike action by a vote of 251 to 71. ¹ Both union membership and the list of demands were growing. The number of men voting under the leadership of the L.W.I.U. had risen to 322 (or fifty percent) of the Fraser Mills men in just two days. Additional demands included an end to wage discrimination between single and married men, as well as a further request for upward adjustment in the rate of shingles. ² The L.W.I.U. also called for

¹Daily Province, September 17, 1931.

²The new demands included a raise of two cents per thousand for No. 1 shingles and twelve cents per thousand for No. 2 shingles.

reinstatement of the men fired earlier for refusing to work overtime.

A picket line went up at the mill at 6:00 the next morning, bringing operations to a stand-still. Strikers blocked vehicles attempting to cross the line; "Mackin's car was stopped ... his cigar jerked out of his mouth" while "other cars were stopped and four men taken out." ³ The strikers allowed two loads of lumber to leave the mill after securing the drivers' word that the action would not be repeated.

Although the picket line may have grown in the telling over the years, it was clearly immense. The line was reinforced by one hundred fifty members of the National Unemployed Workingmen's Association, many of whom were unemployed loggers living in Vancouver, as well as by non-union men who had arrived at the mill unaware of the union's activity. ⁴ Harold Pritchett, Chairman of the Strike Committee, recalls that some of the organizational work took place on the line. ⁵ T. F. Ryan, the plant superintendent, estimated the strength of the line at six hundred fifty men. He would later testify, regarding the crowd's constitution: "Some I did recognize as our men: quite a few of our men." ⁶ Estimates presented by witnesses called to testify

³Minutes of the Strike Committee, September 17, 1931.

⁴ Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

⁵ Interview with Harold Pritchett by Clay Perry, October 30, 1978, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

⁶P.A.B.C., Records of the Attorney-General, GR 419, Box 381, File 105/31.

at the trials of arrested strikers varied from three hundred to six hundred. ⁷ The Strike Committee's estimate of one thousand may have been high, but the Daily Province's of three hundred fifty was surely low.

The scene at the mill carried the threat of violence but the strikers were not an undisciplined mob. The L.W.I.U. quickly formed a Strike Committee of thirty-one, then organized picket squads. ⁸ Such sophistication reflects upon the skill and experience of the L.W.I.U. organizers and leaders. When outbreaks of violence did occur, the Strike Committee and picket captains showed considerable control and restraint. The first day of the strike passed in relative calm. The picket line held and , among the strike leaders, attention focussed on initiating a support system, to be discussed in Chapter Five.

Tensions began escalating the following day with the picket line standing at four to five hundred men monitored by thirty-eight provincial police and six Mounties. With confrontation imminent, the provincial police responded swiftly to the municipality's request for assistance for its meagre force. ⁹ On the morning of the 18th, vehicles attempting to cross the line were bombarded with rocks, wood or whatever the strikers had at hand. A trucking contractor received a facial

⁷Ibid.

⁸ For a discussion of the characteristics of modern strikes, see Peter Stearns, "Measuring the Evolution of Strike Movements," International Review of Social History, XIX (1974), 1-27,

⁹Municipal Records, Fraser Mills, Correspondence.

cut from a piece of wood or rock thrown at his truck as he crossed the line. "I shouldn't have done it," he was heard to comment on leaving the first aid station. ¹⁰ The same incident resulted in a slight injury to a municipal constable; criminal charges were later laid. The crowd also smashed the window of a street-car carrying longshoremen across the line. By afternoon tension had abated, although the line still blocked incoming vehicles.

Although the Strike Committee maintained considerable control over the line, the crowd was not entirely disciplined; one participant recalls that some of the 'Vancouver Boys' promoted unrest on the line. (The 'Vancouver Boys' were the unemployed, members of the N.U.W.) Some firearms circulated among the strikers, but only until the practice came to the attention of the Strike Committee. ¹¹ The company, fearing their property threatened, had the grounds patrolled by an armed 'Special Watch', comprised of foremen and superintendents. ¹² With machine guns mounted at the entrance to the mill, and police in constant surveillance, violence would be met with violence - an uneasy truce prevailed. ¹³

¹⁰British Columbian , September 18, 1931.

¹¹Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

¹²Pritchett interview by Clay Perry, October 27, 1978, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

¹³Minutes of the strike Committee, September 24, 1931. Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

The third day of the strike brought action from provincial authorities. According to the British Columbian of September 19, 1931, 'John Doe' warrants had been issued for the arrest of men alleged to be ringleaders of the previous days' events. Mounted city police from Vancouver, directed by W. R. Dunwoody, Assistant Commissioner of the British Columbia Provincial Police, ¹⁴ drove demonstrators away from the mill entrance, arresting ten men:

Police had picked the men among the crowd whom they wished to arrest, and the whole procedure was methodically arranged ... Officers walked into the crowd and picked up the men they wanted. ¹⁵

Of the ten men arrested, only two were on the Strike Committee; however at least four, and perhaps six, were millworkers. Four of those arrested were from Vancouver with Gastown addresses (the center of N.U.W. activities), and were likely N.U.W. members. One of the arrested men had been active in the heyday of the O.B.U. ¹⁶ All ten were charged with unlawful assembly, and two faced additional charges of assaulting a constable. The first charge was later reworded and finally dismissed; the two

¹⁴Daily Province, September 19, 1931.

¹⁵British Columbian, September 19, 1931.

¹⁶ This particular strike supporter, who will not be named, is well remembered and was instrumental in securing provisions for strike relief, often through illegal means. He is rumoured to have liberated cattle from a government farm close to Maillardville. Canuel interview, August 14, 1981 and Canuel's written submission to International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

men charged with assault received a two-day jail sentence. ¹⁷
The city police remained on the scene, and later in the day
R.C.M.P. arrived to help disperse the crowd which had regathered
at the mill entrance. As the Unemployed Worker, the N.U.W.
press, put it, "Bingham's Bloody Cossacks" had been sent to
"club workers back on the job." ¹⁸

As the strike went on week after week, so did
confrontations between police and strikers. The B.C. Provincial
Police maintained surveillance at the mill throughout September
and October, often joined by the R.C.M.P. ¹⁹ Clearly efforts to
contain the Fraser Mills strike and to prevent its extension to

¹⁷As reported in the British Columbian of September 25, 1931:

Originally the charge was that of unlawful assembly.
That has now been dropped and the following charge
substituted, that they did "with divers other persons
unknown to the informant, and with intent to carry out a
common purpose, to wit, interference with the operations
of the Canadian Western Lumber Company at Fraser Mills,
assemble together at Fraser Mills and to conduct
themselves when assembled, to wit by making a great
noise and throwing sticks and stones, and causing damage
to property and injury to persons, as to cause persons
in the neighbourhood of such assembly to fear on
reasonable grounds that the persons so assembled would
disturb the peace tumultuously."

¹⁸Unemployed Worker, September 19, 1931.

¹⁹ Workers at the Barnet Mill (their implication in the Fraser
Mills strike will be discussed later in the chapter) found
themselves face to face with infantry as well as provincial and
federal police. See P.A.B.C., GR 367, Daily Office Diaries,
British Columbia Provincial Police, 1931. Specific mention in
made of Barnet Mills on October 30, 1931, while detachments of
provincial police to Fraser Mills are a common entry.

other mainland sawmills, were well coordinated at all levels of government. At Fraser Mills, skirmishes between police and strikers continued, but only occasionally developed into major incidents. The Strike Committee held strikers in check, losing control on only two occasions. On October 4, the men smashed the window of an incoming car driven by the sales manager at the mill. ²⁰ Police dispersed the line but did not make any arrests. The police also clashed with strikers on October 15, over the loading of the freighter "Ravnaas". The picket line had worked its way from the main mill entrance to the docks along the Fraser River, blocking access to the ship. Twenty-five strikers were injured when the police moved in to break up the crowd. Women's attendance on the line, a common occurrence, resulted in women as well as men being caught in the attack. ²¹ After the confrontation on the 15th, the line abated. As the British Columbian reported the following day:

The scene at the mill was in striking contrast to the conditions prevailing since the strike started by reason of the complete absence of mass pickets. There was no gathering of the strikers such has been in evidence every other day since the strike began. ²²

But tensions still ran high.

On October 18, the Strike Committee, well aware of the tactical danger of further violence, decided "to take more pickets in ...to use parliamentary rules ... to use more

²⁰British Columbian ,October 5, 1931.

²¹Ibid., October 15, 1931.

²²Ibid., October 16, 1931.

discipline all over." ²³ That day confrontation between strikers and police had been narrowly averted. A call for pickets, following a routine dispersal of the line by police, had brought four hundred men and women to the mill entrance. Members of the Strike Committee arrived in time to prevent further violence, as well as to give "a good call down to the sub captain" for "having made a false alarm." ²⁴ The Strike Committee, attempting to negotiate a settlement, realized that the picket line, while presenting an impressive show of solidarity and preventing the use of scab labour, could easily provoke management and government into unleashing the considerable forces of repression at their disposal. The Secretary recorded the Strike Committee's apprehension:

no fighting was done although a very good chance was presented... but had we done this the place would have been court-martialled and scabs would have been put in to work. ²⁵

After October 18 picketing continued on a consistent but modified basis. The mass pickets disappeared, to be replaced by hand-picked squads of twenty-five per shift.

While strikers struggled to hold positions on the picket line, the union's negotiators engaged in a head-on battle with Mackin. Negotiations were aggravated by the L.W.I.U.'s partially successful attempts to extend the strike to other mills in the

²³Minutes of Strike Committee, October 18, 1931

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

area. In fact the union's activities provoked such consternation from industry and government leaders that any analysis of the Fraser Mills strike must encompass external activities by the union.

On September 23 the L.W.I.U. organizer, Tom Bradley, and union President, George (also known as Glen) Lamont, neither of whom worked at Fraser Mills, addressed a meeting of workers at Barnet Mills. The management had proposed a twenty percent wage cut which would bring wages down to nineteen cents an hour, the fourth such cut in two months. ²⁶ Rejecting the proposal, the millworkers called a strike. This was not the first protest action by Barnet millworkers. They had struck for two days in July under the leadership of the L.W.I.U. Max Herndl, an L.W.I.U. organizer, was jailed in August under charges of inciting to riot and assaulting a peace officer. ²⁷ The General Manager at the plant had indicated in conversation with F. E. Harrison, the Dominion Fair Wage Officer and Western Representative of the Federal Department of Labour, that the July strike at his mill was "organized by Communists." He had contended that "with the elimination of Herndl from the scene" there would be no further trouble. ²⁸ Most of the employees at

²⁶British Columbian, September 23, 1931.

²⁷P.A.C., Department of Labour, RG 27, Strikes and Lockouts File, Barnet Lumber Company, 1931. F. E. Harrison, Dominion Fair Wage Officer, to H. H. Ward, Deputy Minister of Labour, August 18, 1931.

²⁸Ibid.

the Barnet Lumber Company were organized, however, and the company underestimated the union's strength. ²⁹ When the proposed wage cut was announced in September, workers responded swiftly. This time the Barnet Lumber Company's response was just as swift. The mill closed the same day, locking out its employees. Management indicated that it was willing to remain shut down rather than reconsider its proposal. Still considering themselves to be on strike rather than locked out, the strikers picketed to no avail under the watchful eye of provincial police and Infantry. The mill would not reopen in 1931.

The day after the L.W.I.U. shut down the Barnet Lumber Company, they moved to another Lower Mainland mill, the Mohawk Mill, urging employees to strike in sympathy with the men at Fraser Mills. ³⁰ A strike vote held September 29 was defeated. The same evening, in an address to a mass meeting of the Fraser Mills men, Tom Bradley spoke, too enthusiastically under the circumstances, of the imminent organization of the men at Mohawk Mill. Tom McEwen, National Secretary of the Workers' Unity League, also addressed the meeting. McEwen served as a reminder of the C.P.C. link to men in industry and government circles. For the millworkers, McEwen's presence was a reminder that their struggle was not confined to immediate concerns. ³¹

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰British Columbian, September 24, 1931.

³¹Ibid., September 24, 29, 30, 1931.

Although organizational attempts continued at Mohawk, the L.W.I.U. turned its attention to conditions at Thurston-Flavel Ltd. in Port Moody, where two men had been fired for attending a union meeting. On October 5 the L.W.I.U. sent men into the mill to help conduct a strike vote. The employees went out the next day. Although 211 men had attended an earlier union meeting, the strike had limited support. Of the seventy-six picketers, only forty-six were from Thurston-Flavel, a significant contrast to the strength of the Fraser Mills line. Twenty men came from Vancouver and ten from Fraser Mills to bolster the weak picket, which was matched, almost man for man, by provincial police. ³² The strike ended on October 8 when the company agreed to reinstate the union men. Although no other concessions were granted, the vote to return to work passed by 101 to 20. ³³

The L.W.I.U. also had some involvement at the Boundary Road Shingle Mill in Burnaby, where seventy employees refused to work on September 23 after receiving notice of the fifth wage reduction in eighteen months. ³⁴ The outcome is unknown.

The activities of the L.W.I.U. not only agitated Mackin, but prompted a committee of lumbermen to seek assistance from the provincial government. On October 13 a committee, including Mackin, H. R. McMillan, A. Flavelle, F. E. Harrison and twenty other lumbermen, met with the provincial Cabinet. The

³²Daily Province, October 6, 1931.

³³British Columbian, October 7, 8, 1931.

³⁴Ibid., September 23, 1931.

Conservative, business-conscious government of Premier Tolmie issued a warning to labour agitators:

Industry in this province is going to be protected to the fullest extent of the law. We have assured the lumbermen that when men want to work they are not prevented from doing so by any intimidation or otherwise. The lumbermen assure us that their troubles lately have been due to agitators and Communists and they have given us detailed facts on various difficulties they have had in labour matters to support this contention. ³⁵

Small wonder the scene at the picket line continued to be tense.

The free contract doctrine espoused by both lumbermen and the provincial government defended a man's right to work at whatever wage an employer deigned to offer. The union was painted as an institution threatening this 'right'. Obviously labourers and capitalists differed in their views on basic human rights. In embarking upon unionization, workers asserted through their action that the right to work could not be divorced from the right to dignity in the workplace and to a living wage. Lumbermen and government closed ranks in their fight to keep this sedition out of B.C.'s most lucrative industry. The Attorney-General, R. H. Pooley, declared that the full resources of the province, backed by the federal government, would be available to enable men to work. "British Columbia," said Mr. Pooley, "did not intend to stand for the fomentation of industrial disputes in its mills and plants by imported

³⁵Ibid., October 13, 1931.

radicals." ³⁶ Most of the radicals, however, were not "imported" but came from the mills and logging camps of British Columbia.

The L.W.I.U. recognized the need for industry-wide organization in the face of the consolidation of interests by B.C. lumbermen. Assistance of the L.W.I.U. organizers at other mills served a dual purpose for the Fraser Mills men. Firstly, if other mills in the area had gone out, the strikers' demands would have been strengthened. As it stood, other mills continued to produce lumber for the C.W.L.C. ³⁷ Secondly, the Strike Committee shared the L.W.I.U.'s commitment to industry-wide organization. A statement made by George Lamont, L.W.I.U. President, before a meeting of the New Westminster Trades and Labour Council, illustrates this intent rather succinctly:

In a short time 40,000 lumber and logging employees in B. C. will be organized in one union... the lumber workers will enlist all trade unions in their cause to secure improved living conditions from the lumbermen. We intend to fight the Fraser Mills company and the Federated Timber Mills of B.C. not on the basis of communism but on the basis of bread and butter. ³⁸

Thus the objectives of the L.W.I.U. were sufficiently clear as were those of the lumbermen. Small wonder they found themselves on a collision course.

Lamont's statement indicates the status of the L.W.I.U. relative to the wider labour movement. He spoke of enlisting all trade unions in the cause of the lumberworkers. This is hardly

³⁶Ibid., October 13, 1931.

³⁷Ibid., September 30, 1931.

³⁸Ibid., October 22, 1931.

in keeping with the isolationist tendencies of the W.U.L. depicted by Ian Angus in his recent work, Canadian Bolsheviks. Taken in context, "enlisting all trade unions" clearly refers to seeking their support and aid, thus suggesting that the L.W.I.U. leadership had a pragmatic streak, downplaying the party line when necessary.³⁹ President Lamont tended to emphasize the immediate issues of wages and working conditions. While it would have been impolitic for him to do otherwise, this was not simply a case of political posturing. As Andree Levesque points out in her study of the 1931 strike at Cowansville, Quebec, the economic crisis of the Depression transformed the W.U.L. from revolutionary to reformist.⁴⁰ Thus the "revolutionary trade unions", as they were called in the Labour Gazette, hardly deserve the label. While the W.U.L. unions were extremely militant, this was "a matter of style not substance." As Don Muldoon puts it in "Capitalism Unchallenged," "...the only revolutionary aspect of the W.U.L. was its affiliation to the R.I.L.U."⁴¹ In B.C. the L.W.I.U. filled a void and laid a foundation upon which later organizations could build. It did so by appealing to lumberworkers on a practical level.

³⁹Angus has distorted the history of the Workers' Unity League. Not all the W.U.L. unions were as ineffectual and divisive as he argues. The Lumber Workers' Industrial Union is a case in point. See Angus, op. cit., pp. 281 - 285.

⁴⁰Levesque, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴¹Don Muldoon, "Capitalism Unchallenged; A Sketch of Canadian Communism, 1939-1949" (M. A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1977), p. 20.

With relations between Mackin and the union strained, negotiations followed an inconsistent course. After Mackin's initial refusal to negotiate, representatives of the Department of Labour offered their services to mediate the dispute "in the interests of industrial peace."⁴² Mackin declined the offer, replying that "he did not consider the time yet opportune for intervention."⁴³ He also refused to meet directly with the L.W.I.U., while nonetheless stating that he would be willing to meet with an employees' committee. The committee, however, would have to be composed of employees of three years standing.⁴⁴ The overture generated no response from the workers. Mackin's only avenue of appeal to the workforce led via the Strike Committee.

On September 21 a conference between Mackin and the Strike Committee yielded no movement on either side. The scene at the mill entrance was far more dynamic than the scene at the negotiating table, as mass pickets remained in evidence. The same day the Provincial Minister of Labour, W.A. McKenzie, announced his intention to keep in close touch with the situation.⁴⁵ When the next meeting, held September 25, again proved unproductive, the Strike Committee passed a motion that

⁴² P.A.C., Department of Labour, RG 27, Strikes and Lockouts File, Fraser Mills, 1931, Harrison to Ward, September 25, 1931. All following correspondence is from the same source unless otherwise indicated.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Daily Province, September 21, 1931.

no further meetings be requested. Negotiations had reached an impasse.

F. E. Harrision, the Labour Department representative, judged the time "opportune for intervention", and persuaded Mackin to confer with the men. Enlisting the aid of Reeve Macdonald of Coquitlam, he scheduled a meeting for September 30 in the municipal hall at Maillardville. In addition to Mackin, Macdonald, and Harrision, the meeting was attended by Adam Bell, B.C.'s Deputy Minister of Labour, the mill managers and seven members of the Strike Committee. Harrision, who chaired the meeting, suggested a secret ballot be taken to determine the validity of the strike vote. Mackin still entertained the notion that the L.W.I.U. represented only twenty percent of the men. ⁴⁶ The company offered no concessions on wages, instead proposing to "reduce the number of men employed and work forty-eight hours a week." ⁴⁷ The Strike Committee returned Mackin's proposals to the men who, not surprisingly, rejected them the next day.

At about this time the strikers included a further demand - the abolition of contract labour and the dismissal of one particularly notorious Japanese labour contractor. ⁴⁸ The Orientals and East Indians, with few exceptions, honoured the picket line although they faced the threat of deportation. In

⁴⁶British Columbian, October 1, 1931.

⁴⁷"Report on Sawmill Workers At Fraser Mills, B.C.," Strikes and Lockouts File, Fraser Mills, 1931.

⁴⁸The Unemployed Worker, October 3, 1931.

addition their spokesmen played an active role in supplying relief, addressing mass meetings and occasionally acting as negotiators. Chapter Three has shown that, under the C.W.L.C.'s management, the Oriental and East Indian labourers fared far worse than the white workers. ⁴⁹ The depressed living conditions and discriminatory wage structure, coupled with the fact that many of the men were separated from their families by miles of ocean, aligned the Oriental, East Indian and white workers. Thus the appearance in the strikers' demands for an end to the contract system reflects the degree of unity among the men, regardless of ethnic or racial background. It should also be kept in mind that contract labour undercut wages in general. This issue was not resolved in the workers' favour. The C.W.L.C. continued the practice throughout the thirties. ⁵⁰

The C.W.L.C., less intransigent on other issues, made the next move during the first week in October. The company's new attitude of conciliation came in the wake of the enforced closure of the Comox Logging Company, (a C.W.L.C. subsidiary),

⁴⁹As a further example of discrimination, an automatic deduction for rent came off their cheques whether they lived in the townsite or not. A report in the British Columbian of October 22, 1931, cites instances where "a married Japanese, with a family, after paying the various levies made on his wages, would have \$9.00 left for a month's wages." The same report alleged that in one case five East Indian workers shared a "leaking shack," each paying \$10.00 a month in rent.

⁵⁰The Japanese labour contractor would eventually leave under questionable circumstances, after being implicated in a murder case. Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

which employed 300 men and supplied lumber to Fraser Mills. ⁵¹ With two operations threatened, the company proved more willing to bargain. In response to Harrison's report on an October 2 meeting with Tom Bradley and the Strike Committee, Mackin stated that he was prepared to make a substantial offer, subject to the approval of J.D. McCormack, Vice-President of the C.W.L.C. On October 7, Harrison and a colleague from the Provincial Ministry of Labour, took the following offer to the Strike Committee:

1. An upward adjustment of wages for all employees who had been receiving forty cents an hour or less, by restoring the wage cuts made on or about July 1, 1931.
2. An increase in the rate paid for shingles of two cents per thousand for No. 1 shingles and three cents per thousand for No. 3 shingles.
3. The manufacturing plants would work not more than forty eight hours per week.
4. The company would meet with a committee of their own employees to discuss matters affecting their work at any time. (This did not mean the company would recognize the union, nor would it meet with a committee formally affiliated with the L.W.I.U.)
5. The company would make every effort to reemploy as many men as possible, and would operate as many hours as possible: no

⁵¹Harrison to Ward, October 8, 1931.

discrimination would be shown in the re-employment of men.⁵²

The offer, while less than the union sought, was not unreasonable in its immediate concessions. In making the offer, Mackin stipulated that it be put to a vote by secret ballot under the direction of Reeves Macdonald of Coquitlam and Pritchard of Burnaby, as well as Mayor Gray of New Westminster. Ballots would be sent by mail to every man on the payroll. Reaction to the offer was mixed among the Strike Committee; union organizer Bradley opposed it strenuously, arguing against both the offer and the voting method. Not only did the offer dismiss the union's role, it was inadequate in its failure to address many outstanding grievances - "the dismissal of certain foremen, the elimination of payment of rent for some Orientals and the re-instatement of certain men ... dismissed two months before the strike." ⁵³ Bradley and the Strike Committee agreed nonetheless to present the offer at the next union meeting.

They did so, but hardly impartially. After hearing Bradley and a Communist leader identified only as Finley, "ridicule the proposal" and denounce Gray, Macdonald, Pritchard, Bell and Harrison as "tools of the capitalists," the men voted down the proposal by a show of hands. All 389 men at the meeting voted to

⁵²The company's offer was recorded by F. E. Harrison in his October 6 and 7, 1931, letters to Ward.

⁵³Harrison to Ward, October 7, 1931.

reject the company's offer. ⁵⁴

Harrison and Mackin felt that, if permitted to vote without outside influence, the men would accept the offer. ⁵⁵ Their decision to go ahead with a registered vote by ballot proved them wrong. The vote, held October 16, received a dismal turn-out. Only 109 men cast the mailed ballots: of these, 104 wanted to return to work. Of the men voting, sixty-nine were Oriental labourers. Despite their support of the strike, these men would have been far more susceptible to coercion than the rest of the workforce. The forty non-contract workers returning ballots cannot be identified. Not strong union men, they may have been totally peripheral to the strike movement. Or possibly they were those who called themselves 'the old man delegation' or 'old-timers', a faction which engaged in negotiations semi-independently of the L.W.I.U., taking the more familiar individualistic approach to negotiations which had characterized past grievances. This group, also calling itself the Employee's Committee was headed by Tom Allard, Coquitlam Councillor as well as mill-worker, who was instrumental in settling the strike. ⁵⁶

⁵⁴Harrison to Ward, October 14, 1931. See also Minutes of the Strike Committee, October 9, 1931.

⁵⁵Harrison to Ward, October 7, 1931.

⁵⁶ The existence of a dual committee has been overlooked in published recollections of Harold Pritchett. An example is Pritchett's autobiographical sketch in the Municipal History Society's 1980 publication, Your Worship, Members of Council, p. 101. Pritchett, when questioned directly about Allard, refused to acknowledge Allard's leadership role. Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981.

The existence of a dual committee indicates that intra-union relationships were not always harmonious. On October 22, for example, the Strike Committee, responding democratically to criticism regarding the administration of relief to the weary community, decided to "stand trial." Although the committee retained the men's support, some discontent was clearly evident. Conflict directly concerning Allard appeared slightly later in the Minutes of the Strike Committee. The October 24 entry reported, "Comrade Allard wanted to get his rights back but was remanded to a membership meeting," suggesting tension between Allard and the other L.W.I.O. men. Tension notwithstanding, the November 13 entry indicates he still enjoyed a working relationship with the union:

Comrade Allard was to go down to produce a list of wages. But late in the afternoon Allard came back... with the information that Mackin had completely denied, and furthermore did not want anything to do with the union. ⁵⁷

"Comrade" Allard was nonetheless "taken out of the union" on November 17. The next day he unsuccessfully sought to address a membership meeting. Pritchett, in discussing Allard's role, has stated that he was an "honest, erratic and very confused alderman," who "went along the best he knew how." ⁵⁸ Pritchett does recall Allard making a proposition before a union meeting to modify demands, only to be rejected by the membership.

⁵⁷Minutes of the Strike Committee, November 13, 1931.

⁵⁸Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981.

Late in the strike's second month, Allard, in spite of his uncertain status within the union, began to negotiate on behalf of the men. The Employees' Committee headed by Allard met with Harrison on November 10. Harrison suggested that they call a mass meeting for November 12 to re-submit the company's offer of October 6. ⁵⁹ The meeting drew three hundred employees, according to Harrison, and after discussion it was decided the men would meet again November 18 to address the question of returning to work. ⁶⁰ Although the Employees' Committee was by this time a non-union committee, L.W.I.U. President Lamont was invited to address the strikers. Mackin had hoped that the meeting would be run independently of the union, but the ties were obviously far from completely severed. ⁶¹ All/ including the union men, agreed to reconsider the company's offer. On November 17 the two factions met independently, the L.W.I.U. asking that the vote be delayed until November 20. The non-union committee agreed to the new date. Mackin, however, charged that "the Communists had again got control of the situation", and stated further that "until they were eliminated, there would be no attempt at negotiations with the employees." ⁶² Harrison, who

⁵⁹Harrison to Ward, November 12, 1931.

⁶⁰Harrison to Ward, November 14, 1931.

⁶¹W. Mathew to Harrison, November 14, 1931. Mathew served as Vice-Chairman for some meetings of the New Westminster Trades and Labour Council and had attended negotiating sessions between the C.L.W.C. and the L.W.I.U. on October 30, 1931.

⁶²Harrison to Ward, November 19, 1931.

had been forewarned of Mackin's extremely tenuous mood of conciliation by trade unionists keeping an eye on the dispute, persuaded Mackin to keep the offer on the table. ⁶³ The vote on November 20, conducted in separate halls, passed by 406 to 65 among the union men, with all non-union men voting to return to work. Judging from the minutes of the Strike Committee the decision was enthusiastically taken. As the Secretary jubilantly entered on November 20 -"Voting day ... the whole of the Dominion is looking for this day."

The offer accepted on November 20 had originally been made on October 6, 1931. It was not modified in the slightest. Only voting procedures had been relaxed. Why had it not been accepted earlier? The answer seems fairly obvious. The majority of the men were not willing to allow the C.W.L.C. to circumvent the union. Although the company would brook no part of the original demand for union recognition and a closed shop, union of the men was a fact which Mackin could not negate. In the end, he could only ignore it. His eventual concession to meet with a committee of employees indicates a slight softening of attitude, albeit a temporary one. Although he originally rejected any overture made by the "Communitistic element", his later communications with Allard show a flexibility born of necessity:

The company wishes it distinctly understood that in meeting with a committee of its employees... it is not in any measure whatsoever dealing with the union and is dealing only with employees directly regardless of what

⁶³Harrison to Ward, November 16, 1931; Harrison to Mathew, November 16, 1931; Mathew to Harrison, November 14, 1931.

affiliation they may have elsewhere.⁶⁴

Interpretation of this statement may differ, but as one contemporary trade unionist saw it, "He states in his agreement that he is not interested in the employees' affiliations ... that covers a lot... the question of union need not enter into it." ⁶⁵

When backed against the wall, Mackin adopted a relatively liberal stance. Yet, once the strike had ended, he resumed a reactionary posture, firing union men and framing a black-list which imposed continuing hardships on many of the strikers. The L.W.I.U. continued its activities underground.⁶⁶ One worker, who had been fired just prior to the strike and briefly rehired in 1933, recounts the difficulties faced by union men:

In the early part of '33... some uprising again... and the union would get a little bit stronger, we were signing up men all the time, and I was working under cover nearly all the time... Finally one night we called a great big meeting ... we had about two or three hundred men in the hall ... I got elected secretary of the damn outfit. Well, the next morning they knew about it down at the mill and I got fired right off the bat.⁶⁷

In spite of the continuing struggle between workers and management at Fraser mills, this particular strike is remembered

⁶⁴Mackin to Allard, November 12, 1931.

⁶⁵Matthew to Harrison, November 14, 1931.

⁶⁶Arne Johnson, Secretary of the N.U.W. at the time of the strike and active in the L.W.I.U., stated that "The union, for a number of reasons, deteriorated in Fraser Mills until there were hardly any members left in 1932." Interview with Arne Johnson and H. Bergren by Myrtle Bergren. Undated. Regional Council #1, I.W.A.

⁶⁷Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

by the workers themselves as a turning point in labour/management relations. Although the union's efforts met with continuous resistance, the growth of solidarity and collective identity made manifest in the workers' resistance to company proposals, imposed limits on future company actions. Concrete examples are few and far between, but the company records show that in June of 1932, when management at Fraser Mills received a directive from the C.W.L.C. to cut wages, Mackin presented the company's position to the men in writing. He offered some compensation in the form of reduced rents. Furthermore, management salaries were also cut. ⁶⁸ Thus the strike of 1931 doubtless affected change which cannot be measured solely in terms of its immediate outcome. Working through the L.W.I.U., the men at Fraser Mills took the first step towards unionization. In so doing, they helped lay a functional framework which would eventually lead BC sawmill workers, via the Lumber and Sawmill Workers' Union, into the International Woodworkers of America.

⁶⁸Records of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, held at Crown Zellerbach Limited's Coast Wood Products, Division, Coquitlam, B.C.

V. Community Response - The Strike Support System

Although the Labour Gazette of November, 1931, considered the strike a compromise, the concessions won by the strikers were substantial. The formal aspects of the strike, detailed in Chapter Four, tell only half the story. While the formal progress of the labour movement, as measured by trade-union growth and increasingly sophisticated collective bargaining remain important features of labour history, a growing emphasis on the attitudes and behaviour of the working class allows a more comprehensive analysis. Such an analysis serves as a reminder that Labour is not an impersonal economic force at all, but a human collective. This chapter considers the following questions - why did labour organization succeed at Fraser Mills when it failed elsewhere, and to what extent was the community radicalized during the period under discussion?

Fraser Mills was an obvious target for the organizers of the L.W.I.U. Not only was it one of the largest sawmills in the Pacific Northwest, it was one arm of an industry giant with extensive holdings, including lumber yards, railways and logging operations. The union sought to secure a support base within Fraser Mills from which to extend its influence throughout the industry. In taking on the C.W.L.C., the union initially seemed no match for its opponent. Yet the strike was remarkably successful, particularly in view of the many forces working

against it. The reason is three-fold: firstly, as Chapter Three has shown, the material conditions were ripe; secondly, the leadership core of the union proved to be both effective administrators and skillful politicians in their own right; and lastly, the community of Fraser Mills/Maillardville exhibited characteristics conducive to both labour organization and labour protest. This chapter addresses the latter two factors.

The kinship network and associational framework of the community explains, in part, why labour protest emerged at Fraser Mills in 1931. Other studies of worker communities suggest that labour protest is facilitated by social cohesion. In Worker City, Company Town, for example, Daniel Walkowitz attributes the growth and sustenance of labour protest in 19th century Cohoes, New York, to the arrival of French-Canadian labourers. Walkowitz argues that it was the arrival of the French Canadians, with their distinct cultural traditions, which helped break the hold of company paternalism in the textile mills. This was not because their experience led them naturally to resist authority, but because "the French-Canadian community could provide impressive coherence and solidarity once such protest was underway." ¹

Like Walkowitz's study, Thomas Dublin's Women At Work , ²

¹Daniel Walkowitz, Worker City, Company Town (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 258.

²Thomas Dublin, Women At Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1866 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

(which focusses on the female textile workers of Lowell, Massachusetts prior to 1850), stresses the function of the kinship network in the workplace and community, while examining the link between community cohesion and labour protest. In Dublin's study, the highly cohesive nature of the workforce appears to have been conducive to the growth of collective interests, coalescing in the Ten-Hour Movement and strike action of the 1840s. Similarly the social characteristics of the Fraser Mills workers were conducive to the growth of shared interests and collective identity. When living and working conditions began to deteriorate in 1930, the framework which would facilitate labour protest was firmly in place.

As shown in Chapters One and Two, a strong kinship network is evident in both workplace and community. While social cohesion may be seen as both cause and effect of a kinship network, there is little doubt that the worker community of Fraser Mills/Maillardville was tightly knit. Family ties in the community were reinforced by residential concentration outlined in Chapter Two. Living in close proximity, helping friends and relatives to adjust to mill-work, the workers of Fraser Mills had numerous opportunities to meet, share experiences and discuss conditions on the job. While associational links are highly noticeable among the French-Canadian workers, they certainly are not restricted to this single ethnic group.³

³The Chairman of the Strike Committee, Harold Pritchett, commented of the Chinese workers at the mill before the strike, "they didn't have a union, but they were organized nonetheless." Individual injury would bring a collective

Kinship ties, residential concentration, and co-residence were features of the workforce as a whole.

While Maillardville was not a company town in the strict sense of the word, Fraser Mills most certainly was, and the municipal line separating them was of little consequence. Management and workers formed two distinct social groups early in the community's history. There is no evidence of any spontaneous social interaction between them, although frequently managers and their families lived in the community. Although it may be that managers and foremen frequented the social gatherings of mill-workers and their families, certainly the reverse is most unlikely. No workers' names appear on the lists of those taking part in "fishing and picnic excursions" held in the community's early years. ⁴ Although foremen joined mill managers for "social evenings", other millworkers did not.⁵ And very few of the mill-workers' wives would have had time to join the Fraser Mills Ladies Alpine Club for hiking expeditions, even had an invitation been extended. ⁶

The working class had different social outlets. Often coordinated by the company or the church, the men and their families gathered for dances, ball games, picnics and sports events. As well, the family and neighbourhood ties of the

³ (cont'd) response. Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981.

⁴ British Columbian, July 31, 1911.

⁵ Ibid., April 2, 1907.

⁶ Ibid., May 1, 1911.

millworkers afforded plenty of opportunity for "social evenings" of their own. ⁷ Fraternal Associations such as the Modern Woodmen of America, prior to World War I, and the Liberal Catholic Foresters Association, a few years later, counted workers at Fraser Mills among their membership. ⁸ Service and religious organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, the League of the Blessed Heart, la Confrerie du Tres Saint Sacrement, and the Ladies of Ste. Anne were also part of the associational framework, at least for the Catholic workers. ⁹ Thus, although managers and foremen lived in the same community, social distance was great. The vast discrepancy in wealth underlay the social relationships which developed, discrepancies which were easily seen in the highly insular community. Visible symbols of the economic and social polarization could be found in the large gracious homes of the mill managers, some of which still stand today.

⁷Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

⁸ Records which would allow a study of the membership of these organizations simply cannot be located. See the British Columbian, 1911-1914, for a record of the Modern Woodmen's social affairs. The Liberal Catholic Foresters' Association was active later, during the twenties and early thirties. Canuel interview, August 14, 1981 and H. Pritchett's biographical sketch of Tom Douglas in the Municipal History Society publication, Your Worship, Members of Council (Vancouver: 1980), p. 90.

⁹ S.F.U. Archives. RG 91, Parish Records, Notre Dame de Lourdes, Scrapbooks and Photos, Annual Report to the Vancouver Archdiocese, 1931, See also Father Teck's Notebook, November 1929 to December 1934. This collection is hereafter cited as S.F.U., Parish Records, Notre Dame de Lourdes.

At Fraser Mills, the social cohesiveness of the working class allowed a clear expression of collective identity. To borrow a phrase from E. P. Thompson, community members pooled resources and "articulated the identity of their interests," through their actions during the strike. The behaviour of the millworkers presupposes certain values and attitudes indicative of collective, not individualistic interests. If considered in context, political content can be easily seen. Throughout the long strike the men and women of the community worked together to ensure their mutual welfare. Although French Canadians took the lead, the entire community was involved in building a support system. Polarization of interests - "the company wouldn't give in and the men wouldn't give in"¹⁰ - cemented working class bonds.

Numerous measures were undertaken to ensure the community's survival. A relief kitchen, run by wives and mothers of strikers, supplied meals to single men. The second day of the strike, a relief committee was elected at a mass meeting to begin the task of keeping the kitchen operating and to provide food and fuel to families. The relief committee included many members of the Strike Committee, as well as representatives from the Japanese and Chinese communities. A Bunning Committee of three was designated, with two centres set up to receive donations, one in Maillardville and one at the National Unemployed Workingmens Association headquarters in Gastown,

¹⁰Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

which also served as headquarters for the union. ¹¹ Food, donated by a variety of associations and communities as well as by local merchants, brought relief to many families. Skills and services were traded. Whether particular talents ran to repairing shoes, cutting hair, keeping wood supplied, organizing fund-raisers or soliciting donations on the street corner, the community pitched in.

Women as well as men played an active role in maintaining services and morale. The Women's Labour League claimed a membership of ninety, "all in favour of a good , long fight." ¹² Women, predominantly but not exclusively French Canadian, ran the relief kitchen (with the help of two kitchen boys), addressed meetings, organized petitions in aid of the arrested men, and served on the bunning committees. They also attended on the picket line and demonstrated, with their children, in support of the strikers. The British Columbian reports a demonstration held September 25 outside the Coquitlam municipal hall:

While provincial police mounted guard on the hall, a crowd gathered on the lawn, the boulevard and across the road. Fifty children of school age, marching two abreast, were brought from Millside school, led by a determined looking lady with a stout stick.¹³

This demonstration would end peacefully, but on other occasions

¹¹Undated letter from Arne Johnson to Myrtle Bergren, International Woodworkers of America, Regional Council 1.

¹²Minutes of the Strike Committee, October 1, 1931.

¹³British Columbian, September 25, 1931.

women became involved in direct confrontations with police. ¹⁴
The women's support was indispensable and a strong indication of
unity, community of interest and determination.

Backing for the strike came from other sources as well.
Representatives of the Oriental workers not only sat on the
Relief Committee, but were instrumental in securing donations.
In the early weeks of the strike the Minutes reported that a
"Japanese Comrade was appointed to the Relief Committee also a
Hindu and a Chinaman. They were very successful." ¹⁵ Vegetables,
donated by the Japanese farmhands of Hammond municipality,
stretched out food supplies. The Oriental workers also set up
bumming committees which enabled them to make direct cash
contributions to the relief fund.

Relief funds, which often ran dangerously low, were
bolstered by sports events, concerts and dances, all organized
by the strikers. An amateur show troupe performed in aid of the
men and their families. Some financial assistance came from the
New Westminster Trades and Labour Council, and the organized
fishermen donated part of their catch for strike relief.
Residents of Coquitlam donated generously to rummage sales held
to generate strike funds. Some took an active role in soliciting
funds even though they they did not work for the C.W.L.C. and

¹⁴Canuel interview, August 14, 1981. See also Minutes of the
Strike Committee, October 18, 1931.

¹⁵Minutes of the Strike Committee, October 10, 1931.

had no connection with the L.W.I.U. ¹⁶ The money raised sufficed to keep the relief kitchen running for a month and a half until it finally closed on November 5, about two weeks before the strike ended. Through early November almost two hundred families continued receiving direct relief supplies which, while barely adequate, improved a desperate situation. Many of the fund-raising techniques first used during the strike were employed again during the ensuing Depression years, indicating community response was more than just an isolated reaction to a specific and short-term situation. Those individuals who were instrumental in coordinating relief work continued their activities for the Unemployed Movement in the early thirties. ¹⁷

The community coped remarkably well, but the problems were severe. One family began the strike with a cheque for \$65.00. By careful management - "we had to be careful ... We'd eat fish once in awhile... and we got a few free vegetables," ¹⁸ - they made ends meet. Yet "there were a lot who were worse off," among their neighbours. ¹⁹ Another resident, who had left the mill's employ just before the strike in protest against wage cuts, was granted municipal relief of six dollars per week. By moving to a smaller house and taking odd jobs, he and his wife scraped by

¹⁶Such instances are recorded throughout in the Minutes of the Strike Committee.

¹⁷Canuel interview, August 14, 1981.

¹⁸Lamoureux interview, April 25, 1972.

¹⁹Ibid.

until he was rehired in 1933 with a warning to "stay off the soapbox." ²⁰

Although the Coquitlam Municipal Council could not extend relief to the striking workers, there was considerable moral support for their fight against the company. Councillors Tom Douglas and Tom Allard both upheld the workers' position. ²¹ Despite resistance from some members, some support came from Council after the strike ended. The Council allocated thirty dollars a day for "the relief of Fraser Mills workers to assist families from strike settlement to resumption of operations." ²² While the strike was in progress, however, not only were the councilmen's hands tied, but Reeve Macdonald took the company's part throughout. The strikers and their families were largely thrust upon their common resources.

That the worker community was willing to fight for its interests was itself a political statement. Yet there are further indications of radicalization within the community. During the strike the parish priest, Father Teck, tried to intervene directly to send the men back to work. In his endeavors to redirect his spiritual charges, Father Teck used a variety of tactics. In his September 28th sermon, he spoke out

²⁰Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

²¹Tom Douglas, shot in 1933, is well remembered for his work during the strike and later among the unemployed. Motive for his murder was not conclusively established. See H. Pritchett's article, "Tom Douglas," in Your Worship, Members of Council.

²²S.F.U. Archives, Municipality of Coquitlam, Council Minutes, January 1930 - December, 1936.

against "Communists and radical revenge," ²³ while sending up a "priere pour la bonne fin" to the labour dispute. ²⁴ This censure, widely interpreted as a denouncement of the union, created tension in the rank and file. Nonetheless they stayed off the job. Father Teck then moved from general condemnations to specific threats. If the men did not surrender their union cards they would not receive absolution in the confessional. Members of the Strike Committee approached the priest at a neighbouring parish, and for a time residents of Fraser Mills/Maillardville attended Sunday mass in New Westminster. ²⁵ The priest did acquire a few union cards, which ended up in company hands, but the numbers were inconsequential.

Father Teck also prevented the union from renting the parish hall on most requested occasions. The strikers held most of their meetings in a hall owned by a French-Canadian resident not on good terms with the church. ²⁶ In barring the strikers from the use of the parish hall, Father Teck was following the directives of Archbishop W. Duke of the Vancouver Diocese. The Archbishop's antipathy towards the L.W.I.U. was predictable given its affiliation to the Communist Party. The Archbishop had been particularly distressed by attacks on the church appearing

²³Minutes of the Strike Committee, September 28.

²⁴S.F.U. Archives, Parish Records, Notre Dame de Lourdes. Father Teck's Notebook, September 27, 1931.

²⁵Canuel interview, August 14 and 18, 1981. Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981.

²⁶Canuel interview, August 18, 1981.

in the Unemployed Worker. He made his position quite clear in meetings with the Strike Committee. ²⁷ Father Teck proved more malleable than the Archbishop, eventually allowing some fund-raising events, although never union meetings, to be held in the parish hall. Perhaps this was because he was closer to the strike situation than the Archbishop and aware of the conditions at the mill. Or possibly he realized that he risked losing a number of his parishioners if he pushed them too far. Astonishingly, his daily journals make virtually no mention whatsoever of the strike.

The community's response to the church's position was mixed. Many were devout Catholics. Yet, their adherence to the strike action suggests that materialism was a strong part of their value system. The tensions brought forward by Teck's pronouncements did not seriously split the community. Teck was a thorn in the side of the strike leaders, but he hardly commanded the blind allegiance he would have needed to break the strike. When compared to contemporary strikes in Quebec, the church shows markedly less influence. ²⁸ In Quebec the church's voice was brought directly into the workplace by the Catholic "syndicats", effective instruments of social control. In Maillardville/Fraser Mills the institutional ties to the church

²⁷Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981; Canuel interview, August 18, 1981; Minutes of the Strike Committee, November 9, 1931.

²⁸See, for example, Andree Levesque, op. cit., or Evelyn Dumas, The Bitter '30's In Quebec, Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1974.

remained traditional. In 1931, a large percentage of the French Canadians in Maillardville/Fraser Mills could be found in religious organizations such as the League of the Blessed Heart, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrement and the Ladies of Ste. Anne. Indeed, the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrement had a membership of 249, in a parish of approximately 950. In 1933, membership in religious organizations was still high. From the 195 families in the parish, 210 individuals belonged to the League of the Blessed Heart and 190 to the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrement. That year, Father Teck reported to the Archdiocese that only thirty-five members of his parish had failed to receive Easter Communion, that no parishioners were being married by civil authority, and that participation in religious organizations remained strong. ²⁹

Yet, although the French-Canadian workers at Fraser Mills retained many of the cultural structures brought from Quebec (language, religion and many of the same societal institutions), the cultural substance had begun to change. Their adherence to Catholicism did not deter the French-Canadian workers of Fraser Mills from taking militant action. ³⁰ These French Canadians

²⁹S.F.U. Archives, Parish Records, Notre Dame de Lourdes, Scrapbooks and Photos.

³⁰Gregory Baum points out that, during the thirties, Catholics protested the existing social order in a variety of ways. Some lent their support to the C.C.F. As Baum puts it, these "non-conformist Catholics...demonstrated diversity within the Catholic Church even in a period when great stress was put on conformity." Gregory Baum, Catholics and Canadian Socialism (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980), p. 8.

were in transition. While still tied to the Church, they were undergoing a realignment of loyalties and readjustment of values. The process of assimilation, exposure to a wider frame of reference and diverse values without reinforcement from the traditionalism still deeply entrenched in Quebec, effected changing attitudes. Indeed, by 1951, less than half the francophones in British Columbia would even consider French to be their mother tongue and only two-thirds would state their religion as Roman Catholic.³¹ In addition to the general pressures of assimilation, the French Canadians, particularly the second-generation millworkers, found a new cultural source to be the mill floor, seeing the associations formed in the workplace as equally, or more, fundamental to their lives than those developed through the church. In the midst of their cultural redefinition, the assault on their standard of living was the catalyst which prompted the French Canadians to start thinking and acting as a class, rather than simply as a parish.

Many of the strike leaders developed a well-defined class analysis and voiced their critique of capitalism in no uncertain terms, even though they chose to downplay revolutionary ideology. Some of them became members of the C.P.C. after the strike. The local section of the CPC claimed between thirty and forty members,³² including some prominent community

³¹Cowley, "In the Wake of the Voyageurs," p. 175.

³²Canuel interview, August 18, 1981. Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981. Oddly enough, Father Teck's Annual Report of 1933 stated that thirty five of his parishioners were failing to observe their religious duties. S.F.U. Archives, Parish Records,

figures. ³³ The Unemployed Movement enjoyed popular support as well. Yet the community as a whole showed more support for traditional political processes of the Independent Labour Party, and later, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) Both Ernie Winch and Dr. Telford, prominent in the C.C.F., worked with community members to consolidate the political shift to the left. In fact the strength traditionally enjoyed by the Liberal Party in the community was shifted to the C.C.F. ³⁴

The men at Fraser mills sought reform, "a betterizing of things for the working-class," as one worker put it. ³⁵ They began to think "...well, the company can make so much money, why the hell can't we get a little of it." ³⁶ Their political expression, however, may well have been tempered by both the church and the company. Father Teck's campaign against

"Communists and radical revenge" went on long after the strike

³²(cont'd) Notre Dame de Lourdes, Annual Report to the Vancouver Diocese, 1933.

³³Canuel interview, August 18, 1981. Pritchett interview, October 23, 1981.

³⁴In the 1933 provincial election the C.C.F. candidate for Dewdney electoral district received strong support, although he was defeated. British Columbian, November 3, 1933. Two years later C. G. MacNeil, the C.C.F. candidate running federally for Vancouver North, would be elected with the help of the voters of Fraser Mills/Maillardville. British Columbian, October 15, 1935. For a more detailed look at the Depression-era voting patterns of the the French Canadians of Maillardville/Fraser Mills, see Stewart, "French-Canadian Settlement, p. 143.

³⁵Decaire interview, January 12, 1972

³⁶Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

had ended. While he could not break the workers' solidarity during the strike, he could identify and isolate the more radical of the parish, subjecting them to criticism and ridicule.³⁷ Furthermore, as already noted in Chapter Three, the C.W.L.C. fired many of the union men in early 1932. Thus the most politically astute of the strike leaders saw their link to the workers severed. Not only were they barred from working at Fraser Mills for a number of years, but the blacklist extended to mills throughout the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. Those that were eventually rehired found themselves under the watchful eye of supervisors. The following exchange sums up the antagonism between union men and management: "You're going to be by yourself on the job!Well, don't expect me to organize the sawdust!"³⁸

The political experience of the workers at Fraser Mills was thus conditioned by a variety of factors. The initial impetus to organize, derived from falling labour standards, was facilitated by the social relationships and cohesion developed over the preceding twenty years. The French Canadians were instrumental in creating and/or adapting a support system in response to the exigencies of the strike. This support system functioned through the sustained efforts of the wider community; ethnicity created no discernible division. In fact, the strike served to overcome ethnic friction. This collective response and the bitterness

³⁷Canuel interview, August 14 and 18, 1981.

³⁸Laverdure interview, April 25, 1972.

engendered by the strike served to radicalize the community. Social protest did not end with the strike settlement and, throughout the thirties, the church and company continued working to hold protest in check. Yet, amidst these tensions, labour protest continued quietly but persistently, finding political expression in the Unemployed Movement and the widespread adherence of the community to the democratic socialism of the C.C.F.

VI. Conclusion

In this history of the 1931 strike at Fraser Mills, two themes have been stressed. The central theme concerns the internal structure and social relationships of both workforce and community, with the thesis that an explanation for labour protest at Fraser Mills lies therein. A secondary theme implicit in this work is the author's conviction that labour history must be the history of the men and women who worked, as well as of the institutions which they created as a collective. Thus this study has tried to recapture a sense of the quality of life prior to and during the strike.

The 1920s were lean years for labour, and the early 1930s were even worse. Not until the latter half of the decade, and the emergence of the Committee for Industrial Organization (C.I.O.), did the labour movement begin to regain lost ground. During the first years of the Depression, the Workers' Unity League was the only labour organization on the move. Its organizers could be found in the textile mills of Quebec, the coal-fields of Alberta, the garment factories of Toronto and Winnipeg, and the lumber camps and sawmills of British Columbia. (In fact, they could even be found on the golf courses of North Vancouver, organizing caddies!) The gains made for the working class by the Workers' Unity League are often overlooked, paling beside the bloody tragedy of Estevan, and

perhaps not over-riding the fratricidal struggles within the labour movement caused by the Communist unionists.

Their contribution, however, should not be ignored. As has been shown, the workers at Fraser Mills did not achieve large wage increases, their union was not recognized, and many of the demands were never seriously considered. Yet the downward spiral of wages stopped. Community residents remember that the 1931 strike not only improved company policy towards its workforce, but also brought an end to what one resident referred to as "nationalism", antagonism born of ethnic and national differences. The Communist leadership, in realizing these gains, must be acknowledged.

While the revolutionary leadership of the W.U.L. and C.P.C. doubtless had more far-reaching objectives, the strike was successful for them as well as for the workers. As at Cowansville the same year, the C.P.C., had made no secure inroads among the workforce prior to the strike. The organizers of the W.U.L. made the first viable contact between the workforce and the Party. This tactic of infiltration, which met with varying degrees of success, was used often by the W.U.L. Addressing practical rather than theoretical issues, they were met enthusiastically by the workers. Labour unrest was a fact at Fraser Mills before the Lumber Workers Industrial Union appeared on the scene, but it required a coherent outlet. The L.W.I.U. presented the men with an institutional structure capable of focussing that unrest.

The Lumber Workers Industrial Union had tried organizing elsewhere with little success. Therefore features internal to this particular community and workforce must be considered. Fraser Mills/Maillardville was still somewhat isolated geographically in 1931. Most of those who lived there were working-class, and most worked for a single employer. The employees came into daily contact on the job as well as off. In addition to a high degree of residential and occupational contact, the millworkers and community members were linked by a strong kinship network. The French-Canadian community, in particular, was extremely cohesive. While there is no doubt that ethnic or national origin played a large role in determining social relationships, it is equally clear that it did not give rise to alienation among the workers. The vast majority of workers were semi or unskilled, earning similar wages which were declining bi-monthly. The men, mostly young and married with roots in the community, vented their frustrations through strike action. The network born of residential, familial and class bonds sustained communal survival during the long strike. Indeed, unionization came relatively naturally to the workers at Fraser Mills. In many ways they were already organized by virtue of their associational network.

Had the workers at Fraser Mills been nationally or ethnically homogeneous, the features mentioned above would serve as conclusive explanation of the strike's success. Of course they were not, as has been stressed throughout this work. Their

backgrounds varied considerably. Yet this workforce was not a transient group, fragmented by constantly changing composition within each group. There was considerable continuity within the community as a whole. The French Canadians were a particularly stable group who remained an important component of the workforce from 1909 until well past the strike. Their presence did not diminish but, in fact, increased over the period under study. Some of the men had been employed by the Canadian Western Lumber Company for twenty years; almost forty percent had worked at Fraser Mills for at least eleven years.

Other sectors of the workforce are more difficult to analyze. Unfortunately the Oriental labourers and East Indians received little attention from the payroll office. We do know that immigration had been sharply curtailed after 1909, yet evidence can be found of a continuous Japanese, Chinese and East Indian community at Fraser Mills between 1911 and 1931. The non-Caucasian workers employed in 1931 may have had a considerable employment history at Fraser Mills. Certainly the same labour contractors had been at Fraser Mills for some years and many of the same names appear on the 1911, 1920 and 1931 payrolls. ¹ Through the twenties, some of the men were joined by their families, indicating intentions of making Canada a permanent home. This presupposes some change of attitude, an acceptance of life in an industrial environment and a shifting

¹The absence of complete personnel files before 1921 makes identification of the mill's early employees extremely difficult. Often the payroll records show only a last name and initial.

cultural perspective.

The English Canadian and British-born were also a relatively stable lot. While many lived in New Westminster rather than Fraser Mills/Maillardville, a sizeable percentage had worked at the mill for over five years. In fact the British-born had very lengthy employment histories at Fraser Mills. In addition, many of the Norwegians and Swedish had worked at Fraser Mills for at least five years, although the Finnish were newcomers. The workforce was thus persistent enough to have allowed community relationships to have developed.

While the workforce was indeed heterogeneous, Chapter Two has shown that they were not segregated on the job. To some extent there may have been limits to community interaction as families of different background belonged to different churches and social clubs, and spoke different languages, but on the mill floor men worked together. A certain commonality grew out of the industrial environment and allowed bonds born of class relations to develop. While there is no evidence that national or ethnic boundaries were porous, neither is there evidence to suggest that people could not speak across them, linguistic difficulties notwithstanding. National/ethnic affiliations did not preclude a conscious decision to render mutual assistance for the common good. At Fraser Mills precisely such a decision was taken. It is doubtful that the strike could have succeeded had national/ethnic divisions not been pushed aside.

It has been stated periodically throughout the text that the strike has some significance in the annals of labour history. Its significance is two-fold. Firstly, it shows the response of a segment of the working class to the exigencies of industrial capitalism during a period of economic depression. It is the history of action by the working class and of reaction by the repressive forces of capital, state and church. Thus a study of the strike has afforded a look at class conflict on a microcosmic scale. But the 1931 organization of the men at Fraser Mills is also part of the wider history of organization in the lumber industry. When seen in context, as the first strike in a B.C. sawmill to derive support from an industrial rather than craft base - support which enabled the men to wrench concessions from the employer - the strike was clearly a step forward for labour in British Columbia. The 1931 Fraser Mills strike would be followed by further organizational efforts which signalled that L.W.I.U. organizer Tom Bradley's prediction of industry-wide organization would be fulfilled. In many ways the 1931 Fraser Mills strike rekindled unionization in the industry, although the boost to unionization provided was primarily functional rather than structural. Not only did it prove that the union provided an effective vehicle for the realization of collective interests, it provided men with early organizational experience. Harold Pritchett, for example, would become the founding president of the International Woodworkers of America just six years later.

Much work remains to be done on British Columbia's labour history. The study of the workforce at Fraser Mills itself could be carried through the 1930s and 1940s when union gains would be finally consolidated. British Columbia is in great part a province of company towns, and further studies similar to this one would allow a comparative perspective currently not possible. Yet these are only two suggestions for further research, both directly linked to this study. In British Columbia working-class history could be richly detailed and preserved. Historians must undertake this responsibility.

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