



Wildcat Unrests in Canada

Student Name

Institutional Affiliation

Course Name and Number

Instructor's Name

Date

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Union workers in Canada at the end of the 1940s seemed placid and imperturbable, as they had secured collective bargaining rights by the end of the Second World War (Palmer, 2009). The unending workers' plight was heard, and the specific law was drafted to solve their problems. These developments became possible due to the United Nations after its formation in 1945. The International Labor Organization of the United Nations had come up with fine rules and regulations that were to support the rights of workers. According to Palmer (2009), the participation of trade unions in maintaining upward mobility seemed inevitable as there were more job opportunities, and employers were willing to grant concessions to workers. Union workers appeared to be ignorant of how hard they should work in the next fifteen cloudy and gloomy years. The post-war agreement had exposed the trade unions to legal matters, and henceforth, any issues were to be resolved during litigations. This paper seeks to examine the approaches used by trade unionists to clamor for the right of workers in Canada in the 1960s and the role of women in the fight for labor equality in Canada. Also, the dissent of labor laws in Canada with many details being centered on the new left ramifications on the 1960s and the 1970s Labor Movements in Canada will be discussed.

The main protest that happened in Canada was the Wildcat riots, which were unsanctioned unrests. These demonstrations were organized to disobey labor injunctions in Canada and

objectively aimed at improving the welfare of the workers in Canada. The government and industrial organizations used labor laws to streamline the activities of trade unions in Canada, and they thought that leaving the unions unchecked would be catastrophic and disastrous to the employers. Some of these laws were harsh and very stringent towards the workers. McInnis (2012) asserts that trade unions and workers were very quick to reject and repudiate these harsh labor laws. They started organizing covert protests that lasted either an hour, a day, or even a week. These riots were initially peaceful and intended to address the plight of workers, such as the remuneration increase.

A big strike, commonly known as wildcat riots, was organized by postal workers in 1965 (McInnis, 2012). This strike was so massive that the federal government had to respond to the demands by raising salaries. Consequently, workers perceive those protests as the way to changes. The political class, especially the Conservative Labor Bureaucrats, was far from pleased by this. They claimed to speak for employees, but instead, linked trade unions that embraced wildcat protests with corruption and terrorism to undermine their credibility (McInnis, 2012). Injunctions were imposed on trade unions regarding industrial unrest and therefore, demonstrations and picketing were unequivocally disallowed.

In trying to express their displeasure with the labor practice in Canada, Canadian youths advanced dissent towards these practices (Antaya, 2016). They came up with the 'new left ideas' that were similar to those of the labor bureaucrats that had imposed injunctions on picketing. The 'new left ideology' movement consisted of more women than men (Antaya 2016). The campaign was famous for its fight for improved management in the labor force, anti-authoritarian policy, and clamor for participatory, rather than guided, democracy, as well as its aspirations for equality. Those who believed in this ideology were radical, and their activism was extremely destructive. They were, in fact, labeled economic saboteurs by Canadian economist. They organized the unannounced protest and engaged in running battles with the law enforcement authorities, something that made these demonstrations even more exciting.

The new ideology movement organized the Tilco strikes spearheaded by disempowered women of color who were confident of their disdain for the rule of law. They openly disobeyed labor injunctions and organized industrial unrest in Peterborough (Sangster, 2004). During the demonstrations, which literally contravened the law, a lot of buildings were pelted with stones. Most

participants were arrested for disobedience to labor injunctions (Sangster, 2004). According to Campbell (1967), 25 demonstrators were sentenced as per decision made by Chief Justice of Ontario. Also, the author claims that the results of this ruling could only be understood against the earlier backdrop in Oshawa in 1966 where disobedience to court injunctions were the order of the day. To wit, an injunction limiting the number of demonstrators to ten outside the struck Oshawa Times was openly disregarded, and more than three hundred pickers attended the press conference (Campbell, 1967). A newspaper recording had stated that the sheriff tasked with the responsibility of reading the injunction to the demonstrators was mercilessly pelleted with snowballs by the pickers.

In his book, *At War with Machines*, Antaya (2015) provides background information on changes observed in the labor movement in Canada between the 1940s and 1970s. The author notes that following the actions of the new left ideologies movement, it was very apparent that the conservative union movement would not fight for workers' rights. It had, in essence, denounced the activism of the new left beliefs and termed the movement a terrorist organization. To get their voices heard, the workers had to chant an original devoid of external influences. Some of them believed that they would never be treated justly, not until some progressive reforms were coerced in the organization (Antaya, 2015). To fight for their right, they formed a Socialist Cooperative Commonwealth that would not only act as a unifying factor for the radical workers but also equally campaign for the collective bargaining power of the employees.

According to Antaya (2015), most workers embraced extremist political ideologies that were particularly against capitalism and Taylorism following the influence of the new left ideologies. Workers openly defied court orders with the unconditional support of the Social Democratic Party and the Independent Labor Party in Ontario. The new left beliefs also contributed to the development and growth of radical trade unions in Canada, whose chief objective was to improve workers' welfare and campaign against the authoritarian and autocratic practices of the state.

It is imperative to note that Wildcard rioters were not, in essence, economic saboteurs, neither were they hardened criminals (McInnis, 2012). Their primary goal was to improve and stabilize the economy through the promotion of fair labor practices in Canada. This group has generally been accused by the political class of promoting crime and embracing violence in Canadian society, which is valid to a given extent. However, we should acknowledge that these forms of violence

would not exist if the labor laws were not instituted in the first place. The positive outcomes of these wildcat riots, if anything, is enjoyed by all, including the political class who were very quick to accuse these groups. It is, therefore, essential to remember the struggles and success of these rioting labor groups and not be too harsh on them based on the methods they used to communicate their grievances.

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