

G.S. Kealey, ed. — *My Life as a Newfoundland Union Organizer: The Memoirs of Cyril W. Strong, 1912-1987*. St. John's: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1987. Pp. 166.

This book is the result of a happy collaboration between the Committee on Canadian Labour History and the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. Following his retirement as the Canadian Labour Congress representative in St. John's, Cyril Strong began writing his recollections of a lifetime's activity in the labour movement. Before Strong died, in 1987, Greg Kealey of Memorial University completed several interviews with him and subsequently prepared the manuscript for publication. The Federation of Labour supported the publication of Strong's memoirs and Federation President Bill Parsons has contributed a short foreword. This is mainly a book of personal observation and experience, and for a more thorough survey of Newfoundland labour history, readers will turn to Bill Gillespie's excellent book, *A Class Act: An Illustrated History of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Nevertheless, as Bob White's bestselling autobiography has confirmed, there is a growing taste for reading labour history in the form of the public memoir, and Cyril Strong's book serves to introduce several important themes to the reading public.

The story begins with some vivid family and work history. Strong's father had been to sea and the Klondike, returning with the nickname Millionaire Strong. Following his father's early death, Strong was raised in genteel poverty by his widowed mother, who ran a St. John's boarding house. At 16 years of age, Strong hired on as a bellboy at the Newfoundland Hotel, for \$10 a month, plus tips, food and uniform. He later graduated to become a waiter and bartender. His involvement with organized labour began in 1941 when he became the first president of the local Hotel Workers' Protective Union. Strong's abilities were quickly recognized and he was soon being elected to executive positions in the Federation of Labour. This put him in an excellent position to witness the impact of Confederation on local labour history. With Confederation, the many independent Newfoundland unions found themselves within the territorial jurisdiction of rival mainland organizations. Already, the steelworkers and other industrial unions associated with the Canadian Congress of Labour were showing interest in Newfoundland. The 1948 Grand Falls convention of the Federation of Labour agreed that the unions would enter the appropriate unions of the Trades and Labour Congress and the American Federation of Labour. In return, the AFL promised an organizing campaign in the province, and Strong himself was appointed as AFL organizer for Newfoundland. Only two of the five promised organizers were ever appointed, and Strong was responsible for supervising the transfer of local unions to the AFL, carrying out much of the servicing, and also issuing a large number of direct charters to local unions among miners at Buchans and St. Lawrence, factory and fishplant workers, airline employees, watchmen and other groups. There are a few rueful comments here about AFL obsessions with jurisdiction and anti-communism, but candid as he is in many places, it is obvious that Strong cannot tell the full story. For instance, an account of CCL activities would be secondhand at best, and Harold Horwood, who was the responsible organizer for part of this period, is well-equipped to tell that story himself.

Strong's memoirs also remind us of the changing role of the state in labour relations during this era. Before Confederation, the appointive Commission of Government had been reluctant to implement labour reforms requested by the Federation of Labour, but Joey Smallwood was much more sympathetic to the cause of labour.

After Confederation, he gave organized labour unexpected scope to write labour legislation, including a *Workmen's Compensation Act* and a *Labour Relations Act* which introduced the labour standards of the 1940s to Newfoundland. The coming of industrial legality forced Strong to learn new skills, including book-keeping and the complexities of legal language. Again and again, Strong found that following the completion of negotiations employers did not hesitate to alter the text of agreements, shifting "shalls" to "mays" or simply omitting undesirable clauses; through experience, he learned to be vigilant, even to the extent of carrying an old typewriter and a pile of carbons with him to negotiating sessions around the island, so that contracts could be fully executed before he left town. The biggest adjustment for Newfoundland labour leaders, however, was Smallwood's vigorous opposition to the entry of the International Woodworkers' Association into Newfoundland. Strong devotes a full chapter to a discussion of the 1959 loggers' strike, which was such a significant turning point for Newfoundland labour. Like other union leaders of his generation, Strong was astonished by Smallwood's sudden reversal of attitudes towards labour and his "complete abrogation and disregard for the law". The story is told effectively, supplemented by a selection of pro-union cartoons from the pages of the *Corner Brook Western Star*; interestingly, the managing editor of that newspaper, Ed Finn, who resigned during the strike, went on to be a highly effective labour journalist on the national scene in Canada.

There is much more here in the way of local histories, episodes and observations which make up the raw material of history and will be of interest to students of 20th-century Newfoundland. Yet with the exception of the first two chapters, the focus is on public life. Between the lines, we can see that Strong's own personal history was itself one of perseverance and achievement, but we are left with the feeling that, at least among the more modest of public figures, this is one of the characteristic silences of public memoirs, which even the questions and answers of oral history cannot easily elicit. Strong, nevertheless, emerges as a thoughtful and engaging individual, well-remembered in the warm testimony of family and friends. This is an autobiography composed without cant or polish, the straightforward testimony of a man who served his cause with skill and dedication for many years. It is a useful contribution to a tradition of self-expression by Canadian workers, and the publication of this book marks a welcome collaboration between activists and scholars in the field.

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Richard A. Lebrun — *Joseph de Maistre: An Intellectual Militant*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988. Pp. xi, 366.

Professor Richard A. Lebrun's study of Joseph de Maistre is the latest major monograph on that very important ideologist and great writer. Moreover, it is the first such study based on a rich and systematic use of the Maistrian family archive, hitherto generally closed to researchers. Indeed, together with the relatively recent appearance of the *Revue des études maistriennes* and some other works in the field, it signals, and is meant to signal, a new and higher level in the scholarly investigation of its subject.