

# The Craftmen's Spectacle: Labour Day Parades in Canada, The Early Years

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*Labour Day became a statutory holiday in Canada in 1894, but labour days and craftsmen's parades had been summer events in several Canadian cities and towns for a number of years. Its creation as an official holiday responded to two demands: one for public recognition of organized labour and its important role, and another for release from the pressures of work in capitalist industry. It was up to unions, however, to produce the parades and shape the day's events, and this task could prove to be too much for local workers' movements with limited resources. The tension between celebration and leisure eventually undermined the original grand ideals, as wage-earners and their families began to spend Labour Day pursuing private pleasures rather than participating in a display of cultural solidarity.*

*Lorsque la fête du Travail devint un jour férié au Canada en 1894, il y avait déjà plusieurs années que plusieurs villes et villages du Canada tenaient, l'été, des fêtes du travail et des parades d'artisans. La création d'une fête du Travail officielle répondait à deux demandes : la reconnaissance publique du syndicalisme et de son rôle important et l'allègement des pressions du travail en régime capitaliste. Il appartenait cependant aux syndicats d'organiser les parades et les activités de la journée, une tâche parfois trop lourde pour des syndicats locaux aux ressources limitées. La tension entre le goût de célébrer et celui de se divertir en vint à miner les grands idéaux de départ de la fête du Travail, les salariés et leurs familles commençant à consacrer ce congé à des activités de loisir privées plutôt qu'à une manifestation de solidarité.*

THE MARSHALS HAD their hands full pulling together the 3,000 wage-earners who converged on Market Square in London, Ontario, on September 3, 1894, the first nationally recognized Labour Day in Canada. In due course the first union contingents headed off down the city's main streets under the blazing noonday sun. The first was a group of 75 butchers on

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horseback, who set the tone of respectable craftsmanship with their crisply white shirts and hats and clean baskets on their arms. Several other groups presented themselves in identical outfits: the firemen from the railway car shops in their white shirts and black felt hats; the printers in their navy blue yachting caps (the apprentices wore brown); the barbers in their plug hats and white jackets. Each group of well-dressed unionists sported at least a distinctive badge. At intervals in the procession, floats depicted the craftsmen at work as they rolled along the streets. The plumbers showed men working around “a statue of Venus taking a shower bath in public”. The Industrial Brotherhood injected a political message with a small but impressive float, which “conveyed a world of meaning”, according to a local newspaper: under the banner “Strike Here”, a large ballot was suspended over a ballot box with the words “Masses” and “Classes” and a large X beside the “Masses”. Another display was described simply as “Coxey’s Army on a wagon”. The city firemen and their various fire-fighting equipment also caught plenty of attention. Spread throughout the parade were several marching bands and the decorated delivery wagons of three butchers, a brewery, three steam laundries, a fuel company, a newspaper, a roofing company, and two furniture companies, whose exhibits “gave the young people matrimonially inclined something to talk about in their evening rambles”. The press reported that thousands had greeted the marchers along the route and followed them into Queen’s Park, where, after brief words of welcome from the mayor and labour leader Joseph Marks, they cheered the victory of the Patrons of Industry tug-of-war team over the Grand Trunk railwaymen and watched Norval Wanless easily win the 100-yard race and Mrs. A. Lockwood triumph in the married ladies’ race, along with numerous other amateur sporting events. The day concluded with a “burlesque entitled ‘China vs. Japan’”, in which mock battles were waged by participants in oriental outfits.<sup>1</sup>

This was the public programme organized by workers, without any national co-ordination and with many minor local variations, in industrial towns and cities across the country to celebrate Canada’s first national Labour Day.<sup>2</sup> It soon became the most widespread form of collective working-class cultural creation in the country. The essential shape of the festivities had emerged over the previous decade in unofficial or merely local events as part of the working-class upsurge often called the “Great Up-

1 *Advertiser* (London), September 4, 1894, p.1.

2 Much of the following discussion is based on a review of annual reports on Labour Day events in local newspapers in major Canadian cities from Halifax to Vancouver. For the striking similarities in the celebrations in another part of the British Empire, see Bert Roth, “Labour Day in New Zealand” in John E. Martin and Kerry Taylor, eds., *Culture and the Labour Movement: Essays in New Zealand Labour History* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 1991), pp. 304–314. Labour Day was even transported to colonial Africa by British and Australian miners as a festival of the white elite of the working class. Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 213.

heaval''. From the beginning, however, the project of creating this workers' holiday was inherently ambivalent. Labour Day embodied two distinct demands — one for public recognition of organized labour and its important role in industrial-capitalist society and the other for release from the pressures of work in capitalist industry and for expanded leisure time. Once Canadian labour leaders had won an official public holiday, it was up to unionists to shape the day's events to serve labour's needs. That task could often prove too much for local workers' movements with limited resources, whose confidence and morale could be sapped by unemployment, bitter strikes, hostile courts, and transient members. It could also be frustrated by the open-endedness of a public holiday that allowed wage-earners and their families to turn the time off the job to private pleasures, rather than cultural solidarity. The tension between celebration and leisure eventually undermined the grand ideals of the original proponents of Labour Day. In many parts of the country it died out completely as a workers' festival or limped on as a spiritless exercise in commercialized civic boosterism on a public holiday without focus or common purpose. Moreover, Marxist workers' movements would mount serious cultural alternatives, especially in western Canada, that drained away much of the festival's early vitality.

### **The Birth of a Workers' Festival**

In June 1894 the Canadian House of Commons passed legislation making the first Monday in September a statutory holiday alongside only three other secular celebrations — New Year's Day, Victoria Day, and Dominion Day.<sup>3</sup> Labour Day thus became the only legal public holiday in Canada devoted to the interests of a specific class or group. Canadian labour leaders had been lobbying for this legislation since the mid-1880s and had won the support of both panels of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital in 1889.<sup>4</sup> Legalizing this labour festival was only to confirm

3 The first public holidays declared by Parliament in 1872 were Sundays, New Year's Day, Good Friday, Christmas Day, the birthday of the reigning sovereign, and an unspecified thanksgiving day. Dominion Day was added only in 1879. Quebec had several additional holidays — The Epiphany, All Saints' Day, The Ascension, Conception Day, The Annunciation, Corpus Christi, and St. Peter's and St. Paul's Day (the last three were removed from the list in 1890). *Statutes of Canada*, 1872, p. 33; 1879, p. 305; 1887, p. 4; 1893, p. 107.

4 Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (abridged) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 15, 36, 54. The only words exchanged in the House of Commons about the bill were a question about whether workmen wanted the measure and Prime Minister Sir John Thompson's reply that there had been 'hundreds of petitions presented to this House from all quarters'. Canada, *House of Commons Debates* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1894), vol. 1, p. 2410; vol. 2, p. 4594; *Statutes of Canada*, 1894, pp. 57–58. It is likely that the national executive of the Trades and Labor Congress ultimately pressed Thompson into recognizing the day as a public holiday, although it is not clear that the TLC leaders felt it was a priority. Although the annual TLC convention passed resolutions calling for the executive to lobby for a Labour Day holiday on four occasions (1888, 1890, 1892, and 1893), the executive never reported doing so until 1894. See Public Archives of Canada, Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, *Proceedings*, 1886–1894.

what it had already become — an established event on the local holiday calendar in several cities and towns. It was first celebrated in Toronto in 1882, Hamilton and Oshawa in 1883, London and Montreal in 1886, St. Catharines in 1887, Halifax in 1888, and Ottawa and Vancouver in 1890. Typically it was either a self-declared day off work or a local civic holiday proclaimed by the mayor. In many smaller towns and cities, however, the local labour movements used the new legal recognition in 1894 to launch their first annual celebrations; others would not follow this example until the turn of the century.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of event must have been in widespread discussion within the North American labour movement, especially the Knights of Labor, in the early 1880s. The Central Labor Union of New York City is usually credited with declaring the first North American Labour Day and holding the first labour festival with a parade and picnic in September 1882, but the Toronto unions took to the streets several weeks before the New York “pioneers”.<sup>6</sup> Local labour organizations evidently responded to this inspiration at their own pace, though there was a more centralized call in 1884 from the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada (the predecessor to the American Federation of Labor), which urged its affiliates to organize their own Labour Days. In 1885 it was widely celebrated in the United States. City councils and, after 1887, state governments legalized the holiday. In 1894, in the same month that the Canadian Parliament took action, the American Congress declared Labor Day a national holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories.<sup>7</sup>

5 *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6; August 4, 1883, p. 2; *Herald* (Halifax), August 3, 1888, p. 3; *Advertiser* (London), September 6, 1892, p. 5; *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1883, p. 1; *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 11, 1883, pp. 1, 6; August 18, 1883; *Journal* (Ottawa), August 30, 1890, p. 6; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 7, 1886, p. 3; September 3, 1889, p. 5; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism, 1860–1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), p. 57; Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812–1902* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 293–299, 302, 311–312, 315, 317–318, 320, 324–325, 330–331, 335, 339. Saint John also witnessed a labour demonstration in 1883, when a large trades procession was held in conjunction with the centennial of the United Empire Loyalists. This type of piggy-backing onto other events was not an uncommon form of “first” local Labour Day celebration. In Ottawa, for example, the first Labour Day was proclaimed by the city’s mayor in 1890 to coincide with the national convention of the Trades and Labor Congress, which was held in the capital that year. The Saint John procession’s connection to the Labour Day tradition seems tenuous, however, since no other Labour Day celebrations were apparently held there until the official declaration of the day in 1894. For details on the 1883 trades procession, see Bonnie Huskins, “Public Celebrations in Victorian Saint John and Halifax” (Ph.D. dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1990).

6 Jonathan Grossman, “Who Is the Father of Labor Day?”, *Labor History*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Fall 1973), pp. 612–623. Ironically, the supposed “father” of Labour Day in the United States, the New York carpenters’ leader P. J. McGuire, was invited to speak at the 1882 Toronto “demonstration”, but was unable to attend because of his wife’s illness. *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6.

7 Michael Kazin and Steven J. Ross, “America’s Labor Day: The Dilemma of a Workers’ Celebration”, *Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4 (March 1992), pp. 1294–1323.

Labour Day emerged out of the more aggressive, class-conscious workers' movements of the 1880s. They were drawing together a broad range of workers into new craft unions, local assemblies of the Knights of Labor, trades and labour councils, the first independent labour political campaigns, and, beginning in 1886, the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada.<sup>8</sup> Like so much else in this "Great Upheaval", the new workers' festival marked a major shift in the consciousness of many wage-earners — a rejection of industrial paternalism and a recognition that they had separate interests in industrial capitalist society that had to be promoted and defended. The first unofficial Labour Days were often appropriately called "Labor Demonstrations"<sup>9</sup> and were intended to be a public show of strength, determination, and high moral tone. Organizers hoped these events would build stronger bonds among unionists, inspire the unorganized to join the movement, and impress the general public with the worthiness of their cause. "The demonstration is an object lesson to the public and to the participants is very valuable," a Halifax unionist explained in 1890. "The public see the power of unions and the workers themselves get a new idea of their importance in society."<sup>10</sup> In Toronto's first celebration, a labour leader went further: "Such a demonstration, he thought, would teach their detractors that within the workshops there were men of sufficient executive ability to plan and carry out works of magnitude and importance", including filling public office.<sup>11</sup>

Labour Day was a bold act of public cultural creation. Neither the federal government nor civic leaders prescribed any official programme for the day. Any public events would have to be organized by the unions themselves. Labour leaders thus set out to invent a new labour festival built on well-established traditions of public celebration but designed to serve new needs. In this process they paralleled other social groups that in this late-nineteenth-century period also undertook to redesign annual public holidays for their own large purposes, notably Anglo-Canadian imperialists who transformed Victoria Day into Empire Day<sup>12</sup> and francophone Catholics who refashioned Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

8 On Canadian workers' movements in the 1880s, see Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada*; Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880–1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Ian McKay, "'By Wisdom, Wile or War': The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in Nova Scotia, 1879–97", *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 18 (Fall 1986), pp. 13–62; Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: B.C. Federation of Labour, 1967), pp. 11–26; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), pp. 117–154.

9 In the nineteenth century, the word "demonstration" had not taken on its late-twentieth-century connotation of protest. Many other groups such as fraternal societies and the YMCA had "demonstrations".

10 *Herald* (Halifax), July 24, 1890, p. 3.

11 *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1892, p. 6.

12 Robert M. Stamp, "Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario: The Training of Young Imperialists", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3 (August 1973), pp. 32–42.

The rationale for the timing of this labour festival is not immediately apparent. Unlike May Day, it does not correspond with any well-established pre-industrial celebration. Initially it was a mid-summer event. The Toronto workers kicked off the country's first "labor demonstration" in late July 1882, and most of the Labour Days of the 1880s were held in July or early August, sometimes piggy-backing onto regular half-holidays on Saturday or Wednesday or on municipal civic holidays.<sup>13</sup> Yet gradually the timing shifted to the end of the summer and was eventually fixed on the first Monday in September by Parliament, probably to correspond to the American holiday. This was a date chosen by labour leaders, not politicians, and it suggests a working-class interest in regularizing leisure time alongside capitalist worktime — like the parallel demand for the shorter work week with a Saturday half-holiday.<sup>14</sup> Labour Day fell at the end of what would normally be the effective change of seasons and rhythms of manual work in the communities where it first took hold. It was also a convenient time to fill a hole in a rationalized holiday calendar between Dominion Day and Thanksgiving that did not interfere with the many local civic holidays.

Agitating for this late-summer holiday set the Canadian and American labour movements apart from most of the rest of the industrialized world, where the workers' holiday most often became May Day. Eventually, as we will see, this difference would become overtly political, but in the late nineteenth century Canadian and American workers were not rejecting May Day in favour of Labour Day.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the first May Day was declared in 1886 in the United States in the same working-class upsurge that created the demand for a labour festival in the fall. The nascent American Federation of Labor declared a "day of revolt — not of rest" on May 1, 1886, to demand the eight-hour day for wage-earners, and continued to call for such annual spring protests until the turn of the century. Beginning in 1890, European socialists and anarchists emulated the American example and embraced May Day as an occasion to demonstrate for shorter hours and other political demands, only intermittently rolling recreational and folkloric dimensions into the event. (The initial 1889 resolution calling for the first European May Day made no mention of a festival, which was actively opposed ideologically by some elements.) May Day, then, was a day of protest, Labour Day one of celebration. In practice, the major difference was that May Day was a voluntary, one-day work stoppage

13 See, for example, *Free Press* (London), July 10, 1886, p. 3.

14 Gary Cross, *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 9–12.

15 It has too often been assumed that there was a right-left split from the beginning of May Day and Labour Day; see, for example, Claude Larivière, *Le 1<sup>er</sup> mai : fête internationale des travailleurs* (Montreal: Éditions coopératives Albert St-Martin, 1975), for a labelling of the first Labour Day as "une diversion des boss" (p. 24).

often launched in defiance of government edict and employer wrath, not a state-sanctioned holiday — a distinction that would have considerable implications.<sup>16</sup>

The first Labour Day organizers created a festival of several parts that borrowed from the standard set by other holidays and community events — a parade, speeches, spectator sports, concerts, dancing, and more.<sup>17</sup> Each reflected a social and political vision of a properly ordered world. As the holiday evolved into a full-fledged, legalized shutdown of all workplaces, however, the labour-sponsored events would face increasingly stiff competition: not from a manipulative bourgeoisie (who undertook to inject little of their own culture into this new workers' holiday), but from new political foes within the house of labour and from the merchants of working-class leisure.

### The Craftsmen's Spectacle

The centrepiece of the first Labour Day celebrations in Canada was the parade. Here was the public face that organized workingmen wanted to present to their fellow citizens and that drew far more attention than any other part of the day's festivities. The labour leaders who put together these events were making use of a well-established, extremely popular form of public display in the streets of nineteenth-century Canadian towns and cities. Civic leaders and voluntary societies occasionally organized parades to celebrate both the Canadian and the imperial public holidays — Dominion Day and Victoria Day (often known as “Queen's Birthday” and later in some parts of the country as Empire Day), as well as municipal anniversaries. The Irish paraded on their respective religious holidays, St. Patrick's Day and the “Glorious Twelfth”. The Catholic Church staged huge public processions, especially in Quebec, where religion and ethnicity were interwoven, particularly on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Politicians and political parties mobilized their supporters into parades before and after elections. Some voluntary associations, from fire companies and fraternal orders to

16 Philip S. Foner, *May Day: A Short History of the International Workers' Holiday, 1886–1986* (New York: International Publishers, 1986); Maurice Dommanget, *Histoire du premier mai* (Paris: Éditions de la Tête de Feuilles, 1972); George Seguy, *1<sup>er</sup> mai : les 100 printemps* (Paris: Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1989); Michelle Perrot, “The First of May 1890 in France: The Birth of a Working-Class Ritual” in Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick, and Roderick Floud, eds., *The Power of the Past: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 143–171; Andrea Panacchione, ed., *May Day Celebration* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1988); Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914” in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 283–291. Some Canadian workers at least tried to distance themselves from European socialist traditions in these parades; in Montreal in 1892, in the only known incident in which a union contingent showed up with a red flag, the parade's marshals swooped in and had it removed. *Gazette* (Montreal), September 6, 1892, p. 3.

17 A morning parade followed by afternoon leisure events (usually sports or a picnic) with a dance or concert in the evening was an extremely common way to commemorate significant days.

Sunday Schools and temperance groups, also developed their own parading traditions. Funerals produced parades of varying size depending on the social status of the deceased. In the first hint of commercialization of these events, circuses also heralded their arrival in town with exotic, colourful parades. There were also much more disorderly parades — burlesques of public events or rowdy protests, from charivaris to spontaneous marches of angry strikers. There were clearly many reasons for parading in urban streets and many different ways of doing so. In constructing their first parades in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, Canadian labour leaders selected judiciously from among these many traditions and assembled their own unique version.<sup>18</sup>

Parades were an important form of communication in nineteenth-century North America. As public events that passed by the doorsteps of households, shops, and manufactories in compact nineteenth-century urban spaces, they were intended to convey powerful symbolic, largely non-literate messages about appropriate social and political values and acceptable social relationships. Parades, however, were a privileged mode of communication with urban populations, since not everyone could have this kind of access to the streets. They began as spectacles of pageantry designed by the dominant classes to legitimize their class rule. Some elements of subordinate classes could be incorporated into these ceremonies, but their only independent access to this kind of street theatre was either through outlandish, carniva-

18 Peter G. Goheen, "Symbols in the Streets: Parades in Victorian Urban Canada", *Urban History Review*, vol. 18, no. 3 (February 1990), pp. 237–243, "Parading: A Lively Tradition in Early Victorian Toronto" in Alan Baker and Gideon Biger, eds., *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 330–351, "The Ritual of the Streets in Mid-19th-Century Toronto", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 11 (1993), pp. 127–145, and "Negotiating Access to Public Space in Mid-Nineteenth Century Toronto", *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1994), pp. 430–449; Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Mary Ryan, "The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order" in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 131–153; Huskins, "Public Celebrations"; J. M. S. Careless, "The First Hurrah: Toronto's Semi-Centennial of 1884" in Victor L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 141–154; Michael Cottrell, "St. Patrick's Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto: A Study in Immigrant Adjustment and Elite Control", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 25, no. 49 (May 1992), pp. 57–73; Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 122–124; Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 115–123; Remi Tourangeau, *Fêtes et spectacles du Québec : région du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean* (Quebec: Nuit Blanche Éditeur, 1993); Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism, 1860–1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979), following p. 152; Earl Chapin May, *The Circus From Rome to Ringling* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963); Doug A. Mishler, "It Was Everything Else We Knew Wasn't: The Circus and American Culture" in Ray B. Browne and Michael T. Marsden, eds., *The Cultures of Celebrations* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), pp. 127–144.

lesque mockery (sometimes shading over into ritualized violence) or through emulation of the traditions of the powerful.<sup>19</sup>

In shaping a new tradition of parading, labour leaders, like parade-makers of ethnic and other voluntary organizations, took the second route.<sup>20</sup> They drew primarily on nearly half a century of British North American experience of “trades processions”, a parading tradition stretching back through generations to the processions organized by craft guilds in early modern Europe. These European craft organizations had not reappeared in the New World to any significant extent, but organizations of artisans had emerged and reasserted what they understood to be the symbolic and ceremonial forms of the craft. Trades processions became familiar features of important public celebrations, in which master craftsmen and early industrialists led their journeymen and apprentices through the streets as part of civic events. As the crafts began to splinter along the rupture between capitalist employer and waged worker, the new unions adopted some of the “ancient” symbols of the craft. They, too, were often incorporated into such public ceremonies as welcoming a new governor general, opening a new railway, burying a prominent politician, or launching a new nation-state in 1867.<sup>21</sup> In the 1860s and 1870s craftsmen in Canada began to hold their own street processions as part of their first struggles for rights and recognition. In June 1867 a huge procession through the streets of Montreal organized by the *Union nationale* and the charismatic Médéric Lanctot was

19 Davis, *Parades and Power*; Bryan D. Palmer, “Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America”, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, vol. 3 (1978), pp. 5–62. These sorts of rougher traditions of street theatre should not necessarily be confused with social commentary. By the 1880s carnivalesque parading, stripped of its political bite, could fit comfortably into quite respectable public events, even those organized or sanctioned by prominent citizens and civic leaders. In Ottawa, for example, the Confederation parade of 1886 included prominent citizens in the grotesque garb of the “Terribles” marching alongside military bands and voluntary societies. The year before, the Terribles had a separate, night-time march with the mayor and several aldermen in grotesque garb alongside butchers on horseback and a shoemaking display including machines and workmen from Alderman W. E. Brown’s factory. *Citizen* (Ottawa), July 2, 1886, and July 2, 1885. This combination of respectable marchers and “rougher” style (though not substance) in the same parade was not uncommon in this period. See, for example, *Globe* (Toronto), May 25, 1878 (report on Hamilton St. George’s Society Victoria Day march with Calithumpians); May 25, 1875 and 1876 (reports on Chatham Victoria Day processions with Calithumpians alongside veterans and civic leaders).

20 On Labour Day, the “rougher” traditions of parading surfaced only in a few settings, usually small towns. At the turn of the century, in 1901 and in 1903, for example, press reports in Sydney, Port Colborne, Stratford, Victoria, and, oddly enough, Toronto mentioned “calythumpian” or “polymorphian” contingents, meaning some costumed paraders who engaged in mocking street theatre. *Herald* (Halifax), September 3, 1901, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1901, p. 12; September 6, 1904, p. 11; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1901, p. 5; Davis, *Parades and Power*, pp. 113–154. As noted above (note 19), Calithumpians occasionally appeared in the parades marking other holidays and anniversaries.

21 Huskins, “Public Celebrations”, pp. 176–217; Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada*, pp. 10–13, 311; Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, pp. 56–57.

undoubtedly the first craftsmen's parade wrenched out of its previous place in the hierarchically structured civic and religious parades.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, five years later, the Nine-Hour Leagues in southern Ontario and Quebec sponsored public demonstrations in support of shorter hours. The most celebrated, held in Hamilton on May 15, 1872, was a strike parade that wound through the industrial district of the city with dramatic, colourful craft and industrial displays.<sup>23</sup> A decade later the practice was revived as the workers' movement in the larger cities again found its feet. Unions would often rejoin civic processions in the future,<sup>24</sup> but the custom of holding their own parades was soon firmly established. Indeed, strike parades remained a separate and recurring tradition throughout the twentieth century. By the turn of the century labour processions were a central feature of Labour Day events in industrial communities across the country.<sup>25</sup>

The late-nineteenth-century Labour Day parade was the collective creation of many different groups within the scattered working-class communities, each with its own special flavour based on local industries and occupations, cultural mix, recent industrial relations, and resident artistic talent. Local Labour Day Committees co-ordinated the overall shape of the event and determined the order of the participants, perhaps giving the oldest union or a group of newly organized workers a place of prominence at the head of the parade. They would also attempt to stimulate creativity with prizes for the best displays. But individual unions and groups of company employees generally organized, designed, and most often built their own contributions (no doubt with some help from the women in their families). Collectively they shaped the ceremonial form for their new public celebration. They did

22 Jacques Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme québécois : des origines à nos jours* (Montreal: Boréal, 1989), pp. 25–26.

23 *Globe*, April 16, 1872; *Mail*, April 16, 1872; Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, pp. 141–142; John Battye, "The Nine-Hour Pioneers: The Genesis of the Canadian Labour Movement", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, vol. 4 (1979), pp. 25–56.

24 See, for example, Careless, "The First Hurrah", p. 150; Huskins, "Public Celebrations", pp. 205–206. The term "trades procession" seems to have been a relatively flexible one. On one hand, it could be applied to parades that combined manufacturing products, labour process, and union messages. On the other, the term was applied to parades that seemed to be simply rolling advertisements or display cases for manufacturers' products, with less emphasis on labour process and virtually no union content. See *Galt Reporter*, May 29, 1885, and July 5, 1889; *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883; *Mercury and Advertiser* (Guelph), July 2, 1891. A *Globe* (Toronto) report on a Dominion Day trades procession in Norwich described it as having the "character of an industrial exhibition" (July 2, 1881). In Guelph, the *Mercury and Advertiser* used the phrase "Gypsy march and trades procession" to refer to a Salvation Army march where converts simply walked in the procession carrying their tools (May 25, 1887).

25 At various points before World War I, there were parades in at least 42 centres, namely St. John's, Sydney, Glace Bay, Halifax, Westville, Moncton, Saint John, Charlottetown, Quebec City, Sherbrooke, Montreal, Ottawa, Carleton Place, Brockville, Kingston, Peterborough, Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, London, Brantford, Berlin, Guelph, Galt, Stratford, St. Thomas, Windsor, Sarnia, Fort William, Port Arthur, Winnipeg, Rat Portage, Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Fernie, Vancouver, Nanaimo, and Victoria.

so, however, within broader social constraints that defined public order and limited use of the streets. Municipal ordinances and professional policing had brought new definitions of acceptable collective behaviour in public.<sup>26</sup> Beyond getting parade permits, avoiding repression on the one hand and being recognized as respectable on the other meant conforming to well-established conventions about orderly processions.

The parade was designed to send a series of messages. Above all, it was meant to show the massed strength of the local labour movement, but it was also to convey the meaning of the movement to the wage-earners' families, neighbours, and fellow citizens. The first Labour Day organizers were centrally concerned with presenting the respectability of workingmen within a democratically constituted society of producers. They wanted to ensure that workers could lift their heads proudly and march through the main streets of the town or city as full citizens without scorn or condescension and with respect for their valuable contributions to the evolving urban society. In the process they also implied what in their eyes constituted the legitimate elements of this society. The most important step towards respectability came when workingmen shed grubby overalls and aprons and strode forth in their best shirts, ties, jackets, and hats. Although some wore special outfits to symbolize their particular trade, they never marched in their actual working clothes. Some even donned fancy-dress clothes with silk top hats.<sup>27</sup> They also insisted on full public acceptance by marching along the main public streets of the towns and cities, not merely in the working-class districts where they lived.

Respectability was inherent in the very structure of the Labour Day parades. Like so many other parade-makers in the period, labour leaders took military processions as a legitimizing model.<sup>28</sup> Each procession was headed by a marshal mounted on a horse, often followed by a contingent of mounted policemen or uniformed firemen. All participants marched in disciplined and orderly formation, kept in line by assistant marshals, "marking time with soldierly precision", according to one reporter.<sup>29</sup> The bands

26 John Weaver, "Crime, Public Order, and Repression: The Gore District in Upheaval, 1832-1851", *Ontario History*, vol. 78, no. 3 (September 1986), pp. 175-207; Nicholas Rogers, "Serving Toronto the Good: The Development of the City Police Force, 1834-84" in Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus*, pp. 116-140; Patricia E. Roy, "The Preservation of the Peace in Vancouver: The Aftermath of the Anti-Chinese Riot of 1887", *BC Studies*, vol. 31 (Autumn 1976), pp. 44-59.

27 For example, *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; September 2, 1895; September 1, 1902, p. 1; September 7, 1903, p. 1; *Herald* (Halifax), September 5, 1899, p. 1; September 3, 1901, p. 7; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 4, 1894, p. 5 (16 years later the same paper regretted that "the traditional silk hat only shone out occasionally in faded splendor", September 6, 1910, p. 6); *Advertiser* (London), September 4, 1894, p. 1.

28 Davis, *Parades and Power*, pp. 49-72. Mary Ryan has suggested that "This particular type of celebratory performance seems to have been an American invention." See Ryan, "The American Parade", p. 132.

29 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 2, 1913, p. 1.

interspersed through the parade specialized in heavily syncopated marching music. The various kinds of uniforms on display had some military inspiration. The bands were invariably clad in quasi-military outfits, while specific unions often turned the work clothes of their trade into a stylized, though certainly non-military, uniform that all their members would wear. Little or nothing in the parades drew on the more disorderly customs of masking, mocking, and defaming that had flourished on urban streets throughout the nineteenth century.

Yet emulation of the powerful had its limits. Despite the debt to military conventions, the militia itself, with all its pomp, hierarchy, and weaponry, was never invited to participate (that is, until veterans joined the processions after World War I).<sup>30</sup> The lack of military content is a significant departure from the parading traditions of other public holidays, where the military might be the only institution sustaining a formal recognition of the holiday in the locality. The lack of military content also seems to be a departure even from the tradition of trades processions, which might occasionally contain the local regiment or military band.<sup>31</sup> Nor were the clergy invited to participate. Until the Catholic labour movement reached sufficient strength in the 1920s to hold separate mass processions, Labour Day parades were thoroughly secular and contained no religious imagery. Catholic bishops could bless the marchers beforehand, as they often did in Montreal,<sup>32</sup> and clergymen might grace Labour Day platforms later in the day. But churches and their various moral-reform offshoots were never invited to contribute floats or marching contingents to the parades.<sup>33</sup>

The parade-makers were quite prepared to highlight workers' identities as citizens in a democratic country. Generally the only non-unionists regularly included were the mayor and aldermen, who were invariably given places of prominence, generally in carriages near the head of the parade, as the popularly elected representatives of the people. The Union Jack appeared prominently at many points in every procession, though in many English-Canadian cities it was frequently paired, or "entwined", with the Stars and Stripes in an assertive declaration of international labour solidarity.<sup>34</sup> In Quebec parades the flag most often displayed was the French tricolour (which often flew in Ottawa parades as well).<sup>35</sup> At the turn of the century, working-class citizenship in Canada could have another international dimen-

30 Hamilton workers provided an exception in 1895 when they integrated army and navy veterans into their Labour Day parade. *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 3, 1895, p. 5.

31 For military content in trades processions, see *Mercury and Advertiser* (Guelph), July 2, 1891; *Galt Reporter*, May 29, 1885, and July 5, 1889.

32 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 5, 1893, p. 5, and September 4, 1894, p. 5.

33 In Calgary local clergymen were invited to ride as guests in a carriage. *Herald* (Calgary), September 3, 1907, p. 1, and September 8, 1908, p. 1.

34 *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1883, p. 1.

35 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 4, 1888, p. 3; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 2, 1890, p. 1; September 7, 1891, p. 1; September 6, 1892, p. 1.

sion — membership in the British Empire. Beginning with Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and extending through the Boer War, some paraders introduced the imperial theme into their presentation. Union Jacks fluttered from many more floats, and portraits of the Queen and figures of Britannia looked down from a few floats. In 1902 a section of the Winnipeg parade was devoted to a presentation of the British Empire in which a float with Britannia enthroned was followed by several marchers costumed to represent the various ethnic groups within the Empire.<sup>36</sup> This whiff of jingoism was rare before the war, however. In fact, in the early years of Labour Day parading and from time to time thereafter, there could be hints that citizenship was a contested concept. The Saint John ship labourers carried a banner in 1883 with the inscription "We demand universal suffrage" and another in 1894 declaring, "The bone and sinew of this country must be recognized in its politics." The slogans in a Montreal procession included "We Want to Be Aldermen", "We Want Honest Government", and "Abolish Property Qualifications for Aldermen" (along with calls for free public education, playgrounds, and free libraries). As we have seen, some London workers used their float in 1894 to assert the rights of the "masses" over the "classes".<sup>37</sup> In London in the 1890s and in Toronto and Port Arthur just before the war, suffrage organizations joined the parades with their provocative slogan "Votes for Women", though these were rare moments in the long series of parades.<sup>38</sup> Overall the emphasis on democratic citizenship declined in the 1890s along with the Knights of Labor.

Craftsmen were more than citizens, however: they were producers. Their parade organizers aspired to artistic representation of the distinct and "ancient" traditions of specific trades and the values and practices they carried forward into the new industrial period. By the end of the nineteenth century there were still some visible forms of craft symbolism in the parades. King Crispin, for example, appeared in the first Labour Day procession in Toronto in 1882.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, butchers kept alive their tradition of participating in the parades on horseback and dressed in white.<sup>40</sup>

36 *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1897, p. 2; September 5, 1899, p. 7; September 4, 1900; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1898, p. 5; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1898, p. 5; *Province* (Vancouver), September 7, 1898; September 5, 1899, p. 2.

37 *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883, p. 1; September 3, 1894; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 8, 1891, p. 2.

38 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1895, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 2, 1913, p. 9.

39 *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6. King Crispin (along with Queen Crispiana) reappeared, probably for the last time in a Canadian parade, in the Saint John trades procession in 1883. *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883, p. 1.

40 *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 3, 1895, p. 5; September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1894, p. 3; September 6, 1898, p. 2; September 6, 1904, p. 11. It is not clear why butchers paraded on horseback, but obviously this was their standard practice. For examples of butchers on horseback in other parades, see *Globe* (Toronto), July 2, 1889 and 1890 (Dominion Day); *Mercury and Advertiser* (Guelph), July 2, 1891 (Dominion Day); Leo Johnson, *History of Guelph 1827–1927* (Guelph: Guelph Historical Society, 1977), p. 261 (account of the celebration of attaining city status, 1879).

Printers frequently brought along one or more boys dressed in red and adorned with horns and tail as “printer’s devils”.<sup>41</sup>

More commonly craftworkers unfurled beautiful silk banners with striking symbolic depictions of their craft and its central symbols, along with slogans declaring universal principles. Their themes and images had Christian and masonic inspiration, but increasingly reflected the new industrialism of the period. Typically local artists commissioned to produce the banners incorporated some combination of the tools and products of the trade. The Halifax shipwrights’ and caulkers’ banner, for example, bore a shield showing the tools of the two crafts and “a marine view having a schooner on the slip abreast of the lighthouses, shortening sail as she approaches the harbor”. Some dealt more directly with immediate issues. The Halifax carpenters and joiners carried “a representation of two men working on an arch, and another about to put on his coat, at the same time pointing to a clock in the background and exclaiming: ‘Nine hours constitutes a day’s work.’” The labourers’ new banner was more conciliatory, displaying two happy human figures representing labour and capital.<sup>42</sup>

The inscriptions beneath this imagery declared either universal principles — “Unity Founded on Equity is the Strongest Bond of Society”, “By Diligence and Perseverance We Overcome All Things”, “Labor Creates All Wealth”, or the ubiquitous “Labor Conquers All” — or more specific claims of one craft group, such as the printers’ claims to be “The art preservative of all arts”. The banners floating over early Labour Day parades increasingly contained less allegory and more slogans and allusions to current concerns. They announced themes of craft brotherhood, the value of the manual producer and his toil, a commitment to shorter hours, and a determined but open-handed approach to employers.<sup>43</sup> By the turn of the

41 *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883, p. 1; September 3, 1894; September 2, 1895; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1895, p. 1; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1901, p. 7; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 7, 1897, p. 7; September 2, 1902, p. 5; September 6, 1904, p. 9; September 5, 1905, p. 5; *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1900, p. 7; September 8, 1903, p. 16; September 5, 1911, p. 7; September 3, 1912, p. 8; *Herald* (Calgary), September 8, 1908, p. 1; September 6, 1910, p. 1; *Herald* (Halifax), September 7, 1909, p. 1.

42 The Saint John and Halifax press provided the fullest descriptions of the banners carried in labour parades there in the 1880s and 1890s; see *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883, p. 1; September 3, 1894; September 2, 1895; *Herald* (Halifax), August 3, 1888, p. 3; July 24, 1890, p. 3. Virtually all these early banners have disappeared, but the one known to exist in Saint John and scattered references in nineteenth-century newspapers suggest that the first probably came from British banner-makers. Rosemary Donegan, “The Iconography of Labour: An Overview of Canadian Materials”, *Archivaria*, vol. 27 (Winter 1988–89), pp. 36–45; R. A. Leeson, *United We Stand: An Illustrated Account of Trade Union Emblems* (Bath: Adams and Dart, 1971); John Gorman, *Banner Bright: An Illustrated History of the Banners of the British Trade Union Movement* (London: Allen Lane, 1973) and *Images of Labour* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1985); Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada*, pp. 10–13.

43 For examples, see *Globe* (Toronto), August 16, 1887, p. 3; September 3, 1896, p. 1; September 2, 1902, p. 12; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1889, p. 5; September 8, 1891, p. 2; September 5, 1893, p. 1; September 3, 1895, p. 6; *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 7, 1897, p. 6; September 5, 1899, p. 5.

century, more of these messages were appeals to consumers to buy goods marked with the union label or to support the early closing of retail shops.<sup>44</sup> The artistry and mythology were also fading by this point. They more often contained only the names and numbers of the union locals with a simple emblem of an international union.<sup>45</sup>

In most Labour Day parades, skilled workmen also carried on the tradition of putting their craftsmanship on display as a kind of street theatre, to the evident delight of spectators.<sup>46</sup> Some proudly carried the tools of their trades — the moulders' tampers or the boilermakers' hammers.<sup>47</sup> Others showed off the equipment they worked with — the longshoremen's huge model ships,<sup>48</sup> the firemen's glittering wagons and apparatus, and the electrical workers' blazing electrified floats,<sup>49</sup> among others.<sup>50</sup> Other groups showed off heaps of the products of their crafts.<sup>51</sup> Occasionally skilled men presented a symbolic creation constructed from the materials of their trade — such as the Toronto and Winnipeg carpenters' intricate banners of the 1890s made of different coloured wood shavings and the Ottawa tinsmiths' 1898 float constructed entirely of zinc in the patterns of fancy cornice work.<sup>52</sup>

Most fascinating for the crowds were the more animated floats that

44 *Herald* (Calgary), September 3, 1907, p. 1; *Herald* (Halifax), September 7, 1909, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1912, p. 8.

45 The shift away from the rich allegorical images of the nineteenth century is plainest in the Saint John parades; see *Globe* (Saint John), October 2, 1883, p. 1; September 3, 1894; September 2, 1895; September 1, 1902, p. 1; September 7, 1903, p. 1. See also the description of the banners in the 1908 Calgary parade in the *Herald* (Calgary), September 8, 1908, p. 1; also Donegan, "The Iconography of Labour", pp. 45–48.

46 For early examples of these craft performances in Saint John and Halifax, see Huskins, "Public Celebrations", pp. 199–203.

47 *Herald* (Halifax), September 3, 1901, p. 7; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1912, p. 8; also the electrical workers' giant wrench and hammer, *Herald* (Halifax), September 7, 1909, p. 1.

48 *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1883, p. 1; September 3, 1895, p. 5; September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6; September 12, 1892, p. 6; September 7, 1897, p. 9; September 6, 1898, p. 2; September 5, 1899, p. 7; *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; September 2, 1895; September 1, 1902, p. 1; September 7, 1903, p. 1; *Province* (Vancouver), September 7, 1898; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1912, p. 8.

49 *Herald* (Calgary), September 5, 1911, p. 8; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 5, 1911, p. 20; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1912, p. 8; *Leader* (Regina), September 3, 1913, p. 8; *Globe*, September 4, 1906, p. 14; September 5, 1911, p. 7; September 2, 1913, p. 9.

50 In 1910 Fort William's grain trimmers operated on their float "a miniature elevator from which grain was poured into a small counterpart of the steamer Ames". *Times Journal* (Fort William), September 6, 1910, p. 1. Even the less skilled could put their equipment on display, as the civic workers did in Winnipeg in 1899 with remarkable floats showing road building and laying of waterworks and as the maintenance-of-way men demonstrated with a hand car and signals several years later. *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 5, 1899, p. 1; September 5, 1911, p. 1; September 8, 1914, p. 14. See also *Province* (Vancouver), September 7, 1898; *Herald* (Calgary), September 6, 1910, p. 1.

51 See, for example, *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1900, p. 7; *Herald* (Halifax), September 8, 1903, p. 1; *Times Journal* (Fort William), September 8, 1903, p. 1.

52 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1895, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 8, 1896, p. 1; September 7, 1897, p. 9; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1898, p. 5.

showed craftsmen at work — what late-nineteenth-century journalists liked to call “allegorical cars”. Printers often manned a press from which a printed sheet was thrown to the crowds.<sup>53</sup> Cigarmakers and bakers tossed out samples of the goods they also made as they rolled through the streets.<sup>54</sup> Barbers could sometimes be seen shaving faces or cutting hair.<sup>55</sup> Almost everywhere, building tradesmen put on a good show: bricklayers put up walls, chimneys, or even small cottages; stonecutters shaped granite; lathers nailed up their wooden frames; plasterers fashioned fancy arches; painters slapped on paint or papered a room; and carpenters constructed small buildings, all while riding atop a wagon.<sup>56</sup> Blacksmiths, boiler-makers, and moulders could put on dazzling displays of sound and light with their small furnaces and hot iron.<sup>57</sup> In Nanaimo coal miners presented a

53 In London’s 1892 parade, it was a special poem entitled “The Song of the Printer” and in Vancouver the same year a one-sheet newspaper called the *Vancouver Typographer*. *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 8; *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 18, 1884, p. 7; *Free Press* (London), July 10, 1886, p. 3; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 7, 1891, p. 1; September 6, 1898, p. 5; September 7, 1909, p. 3; *Advertiser* (London), September 6, 1892, p. 5; September 3, 1893, p. 3; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1898, p. 5; *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; *Province* (Vancouver), September 5, 1899, p. 2; Vancouver City Archives, copy of *Vancouver Typographer*, August 11, 1892.

54 For cigarmakers: *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1892, p. 1; September 6, 1910, p. 3; *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6; July 23, 1883, p. 6; September 3, 1895, p. 6; September 4, 1900, p. 7; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 2, 1890, p. 5; *Globe* (Saint John), September 1, 1902, p. 1; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 2, 1920, p. 7. For bakers: *Journal* (Ottawa), September 8, 1903, p. 6; *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1897, p. 9; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 2, 1902, p. 7.

55 *Free Press* (London), July 10, 1886, p. 5; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 3, 1895, p. 5; September 2, 1902, p. 6; *Province* (Vancouver), September 4, 1900, p. 8; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 5, 1905, p. 5; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1912, p. 8; *Whig Standard* (Kingston), September 3, 1918, p. 3.

56 *Journal* (Ottawa), September 7, 1891, p. 1; September 5, 1899, p. 5; September 3, 1901, p. 6; September 7, 1909, p. 3; *Globe*, July 24, 1882, p. 6; September 3, 1895, p. 6; September 3, 1896, p. 1; September 7, 1897, p. 9; September 5, 1899, p. 4; September 3, 1912, p. 8; September 2, 1913, p. 9; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 2, 1890, p. 5; September 8, 1908, p. 7; September 2, 1913, p. 12; *Province* (Vancouver), September 7, 1898, p. 2; September 5, 1899, p. 2; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 8, 1903, p. 8; September 5, 1905, p. 1; *Times Journal* (Fort William), September 8, 1903, p. 1; *Daily Examiner* (Peterborough), September 8, 1903, p. 5; *Herald* (Calgary), September 2, 1902, p. 4; September 3, 1907, p. 1; September 8, 1908, p. 1; *Leader* (Regina), September 2, 1907, p. 3; September 7, 1909, p. 9; September 3, 1913, p. 8; *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 3, 1912, p. 2; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1901, p. 5; September 4, 1912, p. 8; Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives: Vancouver, 1886–1986* (Vancouver: New Star Press, 1985), p. 140; Doug Smith *Let Us Rise: An Illustrated History of the Manitoba Labour Movement* (Vancouver: New Star Press, 1985), p. 22.

57 For blacksmiths: *Globe* (Toronto), July 24, 1882, p. 6; September 12, 1892, p. 6; September 3, 1896, p. 1; September 7, 1897, p. 9; September 5, 1899, p. 7; September 3, 1901, p. 12; September 2, 1902, p. 12; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 3, 1895, p. 5; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 8, 1896, p. 6; September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1898, p. 5; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 6, 1899, p. 8; September 4, 1912, p. 8; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 5, 1905, p. 5; *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 3, 1912, p. 2. For boiler-makers: *Province* (Vancouver), September 5, 1896; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 7, 1897, p. 1; September 2, 1902,

tableau of their work underground, “even to the miner with his fuse about to set off a blast, and an immense lump of coal”, while fishers from the Fraser valley had two boats on their floats in the 1900 Vancouver parade “illustrating the catching of sockeye”.<sup>58</sup> Even some new skills working with machinery in lumber mills or machine shops were on display.<sup>59</sup>

In the second half of the nineteenth century, this craft cultural tradition had taken a new turn as exhibitions of workmanship were often set up on floats bearing a company name, a visible symbol of the widespread industrial paternalism of the early industrial era in Canada. The working-class paraders thus simultaneously demonstrated their technical skills and advertised their employers’ products. When wage-earners began to construct their own street spectacles, they incorporated both craft and commercial forms of display and even encouraged local firms to contribute decorated floats or carriages purely aimed at advertising their products.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes these businesses provided entertainment with employees working on the back of a float, occasionally offering free samples.<sup>61</sup> Again, however, the working-class parade-makers had recast the traditions. They rejected the older industrial paternalism and celebrated independently the high value of skilled

p. 7; September 5, 1905, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 5, 1899, p. 7; September 3, 1901, p. 12; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1901, p. 7; September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1901, p. 5; *Herald* (Halifax), September 6, 1904, p. 1; September 5, 1905, p. 1; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 3, 1907, p. 10; *Herald* (Calgary), September 3, 1907, p. 1. For moulders: *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1895, p. 6; *Daily Examiner* (Peterborough), September 3, 1903, p. 1; see also *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 18, 1883, p. 7; *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1896, p. 1; September 7, 1897, p. 9.

58 *Colonist* (Victoria), September 6, 1898, p. 6; September 6, 1899, p. 8; *Province* (Vancouver), September 4, 1900, p. 8. From time to time, there were tableaux of other old crafts rolling through the streets: carriage workers (*Globe* [Saint John], September 3, 1894); coopers (*Advertiser* [London], September 6, 1892, p. 5); tanners (*Advertiser* [London], September 3, 1893, p. 3; *Globe* [Toronto], September 5, 1899, p. 4); tinsmiths (*Journal* [Ottawa], September 5, 1893, p. 5, and September 8, 1903, p. 6); butchers (*Colonist* [Victoria], September 3, 1902, p. 8); machine woodworkers (*Journal* [Ottawa], September 5, 1893, p. 5, and September 8, 1896, p. 1); tailors (*Globe* [Toronto], September 5, 1899, p. 7; *Journal* [Ottawa], September 8, 1903, p. 6; *Manitoba Free Press* [Winnipeg], September 5, 1911, p. 1).

59 Saint John millmen contributed a float in 1894 that showed all the stages of production of wood products from chopping a tree to sawing lumber on a small sawmill. *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; see also *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1892, p. 2. Spectators could also sometimes see machinists handling a variety of lathes. *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1897, p. 9; September 6, 1898, p. 2; September 5, 1899, p. 7; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 7, 1909, p. 1; September 5, 1911, p. 1.

60 *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 11, 1883; *Globe* (Saint John), September 2, 1895.

61 In Winnipeg in 1895, for example, spectators got glimpses of workers making soda water, binding books, baking buns, shaving faces, making tents, and milling lumber — all on wagons sponsored by companies, not unions. Three years later, one of that city’s brewers had quite a crowd following his wagon. *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 9, 1895, p. 1; September 6, 1898, p. 5. For years Winnipeg had the most elaborate company floats. See also *Journal* (Ottawa), September 5, 1893, p. 5; *Province* (Vancouver), September 5, 1896; September 7, 1898.

manual labour to the specific firms for which they worked and to the well-being of their communities in general. As much as the practice of their craftsmanship might be tied to specific local firms, their employers were not invited to march with them.<sup>62</sup> This was a parade of wage-earners.

Not just any wage-earners, however: more specifically, it was a parade of wage-earning craftsmen who had organized themselves into unions. Above all else, Labour Day in its infancy was a celebration of craft unionism. It flourished only where craftsmen had reached sufficient numbers and shared a sufficient sense of injustice in their workplace to organize successful unions. It never appeared in company towns, and much less often in resource-based communities, such as mining towns.<sup>63</sup> The organizers were generally a committee of the local trades and labour council, and, aside from the commercial floats, participation in the procession was normally limited to unionists.<sup>64</sup> Prizes for the largest union turnout were part of the incentive to present a show of impressive strength, so that the entire community could be reminded of how big and powerful the local craft union movement was. It was not uncommon to read a journalist's report on popular amazement at the actual size of the local labour movement that marched through the streets.<sup>65</sup> Here, then, was a crucial ingredient in the working-class definition of respectability. These men were not just scrubbed, sober, and

62 The only exception to this generalization that has been uncovered was in the first few Halifax parades starting in 1888. Here employers were often invited as "guests", who rode in carriages or led their own (apparently non-unionized) employees in the march. Working-class solidarity and industrial paternalism mingled comfortably here in the absence of any serious industrial conflict in several industries and in a context of fluid lines between journeymen and small-scale owners. The hated Moirs bakery and confectionery firm, the model of the new industrial capitalist workplace, did not appear, however. *Herald* (Halifax), August 3, 1888, p. 3; July 24, 1889, p. 1; July 24, 1890, p. 3; July 23, 1891, p. 3; July 21, 1892, p. 6; July 20, 1893, p. 6; Ian McKay, *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax: Holdfast Press 1985), pp. 1-26, and "Capital and Labour in the Halifax Baking and Confectionery Industry During the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, vol. 3 (1978), pp. 63-108. In most cities, employers clearly co-operated in the production of the craftsmen's street theatre, allowing the men to use valuable machinery and raw materials and often company vehicles.

63 There were occasional Labour Day celebrations in coal-mining towns in Nova Scotia and British Columbia, but this labour festival never seems to have taken hold with the regularity of the celebrations in the metropolitan and larger manufacturing centres. Sydney, Nova Scotia, had a sporadic parading tradition, but this was mainly tied to the local Trades and Labour Council.

64 One of the earliest parades in the 1880s that emerged out of the more expansive spirit of the Knights of Labor made some space for a contingent of "Unorganized Labour", but, with the consolidation of a more exclusivist craft unionism by the end of the decade, this opportunity never again opened up. *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1884, p. 4; *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 9, 1884, p. 7.

65 One in London wrote in 1886: "the proportions attained by the grand parade of yesterday must have proved extremely surprising to many" (*Free Press*, July 10, 1886, p. 3). "The capitalist, if he was looking on, as no doubt he was, got a very good idea of the strength of the united labor organizations of the city," the *Montreal Gazette* reported on September 4, 1894 (p. 5). The *Ottawa Journal* also saw "indications in the demonstrations in the large cities that the vitality of the labor organizations is steadily increasing" (September 4, 1894, p. 4). See also *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1901, p. 3.

orderly; they were organized, determined, and proud of their collective independence of their employers' paternalistic, authoritarian control.

The exclusiveness of these organizations was clear to all those who watched them march by. At a minimum, each contingent of paraders had special badges and sometimes colourful sashes. More striking were all the uniform-like costumes that individual unions wore and that set them apart as occupations. Boilermakers in "spotless overalls of blue", painters in "natty white uniforms", blacksmiths in "coarse brown aprons emblazoned with a horseshoe", and fur workers in "the regulation costume of white, not omitting caps and aprons" in the 1900 Toronto parade were typical. Alternatively a union might decide to deck out all its marching members in the same distinctive outfits. In the same Toronto procession, for example, the cigarmakers wore black alpaca coats and white trousers, the bread drivers straw hats and white coats, the machinists blue coats and matching caps, the moulders "neat dark suits", and the plumbers straw hats, dark suits, and matching ties.<sup>66</sup> This kind of costuming both accented the tight bonds among the group of marchers and set them apart from their audience. A Labour Day parade was not a participatory event; there were no calls for onlookers to join in — in contrast to the first European May Day marches. This was instead a spectacle to be watched and admired and to convey important lessons.

Most striking, perhaps, was what was missing from this presentation of "Labour".<sup>67</sup> Occasionally in the 1890s and at the end of World War I, farmers' organizations were invited to join as fellow "producers".<sup>68</sup> But, until at least the 1930s, the only white-collar workers who found a place in these spectacles were a few male retail clerks (most unionized clerical and quasi-professional workers, including teachers, kept their distance from the labour movement in any case). Rarely did less skilled wage-earners find their way into the parades before World War I. Typically those who did were specialized workers such as builders' labourers, whose close working relationship with the craftsmen in their industry gave them some leverage in organizing and bargaining, or particular groups of transportation workers such as longshoremen, trainmen, or street-railway conductors and motormen

66 In several cities, the tinsmiths used their skills to make some combination of identical hats, ties, cuffs, and canes out of tin. *Journal* (Ottawa), September 5, 1893, p. 5; September 4, 1894, pp. 3, 5; September 3, 1895, p. 5; September 5, 1899, p. 5; September 4, 1900, p. 3; September 3, 1901, p. 6; *Globe* (Saint John), September 2, 1895; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Herald* (Calgary), September 8, 1908, p. 1; September 6, 1910, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 5, 1911, p. 7; *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 5, 1917, p. 3. Tailors in Ottawa and Toronto wore frock coats and silk hats to highlight their occupation. *Globe* (Toronto), September 12, 1892, p. 6; September 3, 1895, p. 6; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 8, 1903, p. 6.

67 Two studies of nineteenth-century parades, to our minds, exaggerate their participatory quality. See Ryan, "The American Parade", p. 137; Goheen, "Symbols in the Streets", p. 240.

68 *Globe*, September 2, 1919, p. 3.

who struggled to adapt the craft union model to their needs.<sup>69</sup> Unlike the craftsmen, poorly paid seasonal workers might not even be able afford the time off for an unpaid holiday.<sup>70</sup>

By the early 1900s the absence of the less skilled meant that these were preponderantly parades of white anglophones and francophones, inaccessible to African and Native Canadians and the newcomers from southern and eastern Europe and Asia who increasingly filled the jobs at the bottom of the occupational ladder and who were rarely unionized before World War I.<sup>71</sup> On the few occasions when people of colour appeared in these marches, they were presented as curiosities, not fellow workers. "It ... amused some spectators to see White's express led by a black man," a Saint John reporter noted in 1894. The "coloured gentlemen" who threw out plug tobacco at the end of Montreal's parade the same year were also an unusual sight and were, in fact, on board a company, not a union, float. Two "coloured men" marching with the Ottawa local of the builders' labourers in 1901 caught the eye of an obviously amazed reporter.<sup>72</sup> Plumbers' unions sometimes used black youngsters as comic accents to the gleaming white enamel fixtures on their floats. In one case in Toronto, the tableau was an older woman trying to scrub the "dirt" off the black boy.<sup>73</sup> The few Native people who appeared were incorporated as exotic athletes and as circus clowns: the 1883 and 1884 parades in Hamilton integrated an "Indian Band of musicians and their dusky comrades in feathers and paint, who were to contribute to the afternoon's amusement, a game of lacrosse"; the *Spectator* reporter recorded their image as "quite ferocious and romantic and all that sort of thing". Several years later the Vancouver parade organizers awarded a prize for the "most comical Indian float", and the three Natives who appeared on a float of the Montreal Harbour Commission employees were reported to have "caused lots of amusement with their an-

69 In Saint John in 1902 and 1903, for example, freight handlers' and hod carriers' unions contributed major floats showing their work on trains and building sites respectively. *Globe* (Saint John), September 1, 1902, p. 1, and September 7, 1903, p. 1.

70 In 1900 the Montreal *Gazette* noted that waterfront workers were not even able to get off work, "the stevedores claiming that the season is too short for sentiment", according to a reporter. "If a man wants to get off there are others to take his place said a foreman yesterday, the absentee being simply checked for lost time." *Gazette* (Montreal), September 4, 1900, p. 8.

71 The only exceptions that have surfaced are in Montreal, where an "Italian Brotherhood", decked out in Italian army uniforms, marched in the 1901 and 1902 parades and where separate groups of English, French, and Jewish carpenters participated in the 1906 event. *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1901, p. 7, and September 4, 1906, p. 5.

72 *Globe* (Saint John), September 3, 1894; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 3, 1901, p. 6.

73 *Globe* (Toronto), September 5, 1899, p. 7; September 3, 1901, p. 12; September 2, 1902, p. 12; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 2, 1902, p. 5. In a similar vein, a float in the 1911 Calgary parade depicted what the newsman called "a big black nigger wench" trying to do her laundry amid domestic turmoil, in contrast to the electrical appliances on display at the other end of the float. *Herald* (Calgary), September 5, 1911, p. 8.

tics''.<sup>74</sup> No Asian workers from British Columbia's fish-packing plants and sawmills ever got invitations to join the west-coast marchers. In fact, Victoria's tailors carried a banner in 1901 blaming the Chinese for their plight: "Only a few of us left; the rest driven out by Mongolian competition."<sup>75</sup>

Women were equally rare sights in the labour parades, though they were crucial participants in the cheering crowds. The few spaces they found in the processions epitomized the gender identities taking shape in working-class communities. No more than a handful of the thousands of "working girls" who were filling industrial jobs in Canada's First Industrial Revolution participated.<sup>76</sup> They entered the parades as wage-earners in two different ways depending on whether employers or unions had organized their participation. Long before the emergence of distinct Labour Day celebrations, some firms had incorporated women into the working tableaux on their company floats.<sup>77</sup> On the rare occasions when unions organized a contingent of female unionists (they seem never to have been allowed to organize themselves in these early parades), the women were almost never shown at work or in any version of their work-clothes.<sup>78</sup> Instead they were presented as respectable, well-dressed young ladies. In the first Labour Day march in Hamilton in 1883, the Knights of Labor gathered "a representative body of female operatives in the shoe and other factories of the city" and paraded them "with true gallantry" in union cabs. The next year, according to the local press, "whenever the ladies in the procession passed along they were

74 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 4, 1894, p. 5; September 8, 1903, p. 6; *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 11, 1883; *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1883, p. 1; August 4, 1884, p. 4; *Province* (Vancouver), September 5, 1899; see also *Evening Record* (Windsor), August 30, 1913, p. 1.

75 *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1901, p. 5.

76 Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices: Canada's Industrial Women in the 1880s" in Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Readings in Canadian Social History, Volume 3: Canada's Age of Industry, 1849-1896* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), pp. 212-229; Bettina Bradbury, "Women and Wage Labour in a Period of Transition: Montreal, 1861-1881", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 17, no. 33 (May 1984), pp. 115-131; Sharon Myers, "'Not to Be Ranked as Women': Female Industrial Workers in Turn-of-the-Century Halifax" in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), pp. 161-184.

77 In Halifax's first Dominion Day festivities, the Virginia Tobacco Company had women making tobacco and cigars, and in the Hamilton Nine-Hours march in 1872 the Wilson and Lockman float had six young women running the sewing machines that the firm manufactured. Several years later a Brantford rag merchant had six girls sorting rags on the back of a wagon, a Winnipeg bottler had women packing pickles, and Halifax's Moir's had six girls wearing sailor suits throwing candy kisses to spectators. Bonnie Huskins, "The Ceremonial Space of Women: Public Processions in Victorian Saint John and Halifax" in Guildford and Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres*, p. 154; Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, p. 142; *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1894, p. 3; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1898, p. 5; *Herald* (Halifax), September 2, 1919, p. 1.

78 The inevitable exceptions were a Toronto bookbinder's float showing "a ruling machine which was being operated by a girl with flaxen ringlets" and a Winnipeg tailor's float showing men and women at work. *Globe* (Toronto), September 12, 1892, p. 6; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 7, 1897, p. 1.

greeted with loud cheers and continued applause” (they were led by the Knights’ only prominent female activist in Canada, Katie McVicar). The featured speaker in the 1884 event, Henry George, also praised the female participants in the procession and quoted one local unionist: “The women are the best men we have.” Yet, a decade later, a man in the Toronto parade also won applause for cross-dressing to clown as a woman on a bicycle, no doubt mocking the pretensions of the “New Woman” of the late nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup> In a more serious vein, the Winnipeg tailors arranged an unusually provocative melodrama on a moving wagon in 1898 to attack the sweating system, which highlighted the victimization of working women and, presumably, the degradation of the craft: “Several women, young and old, were busily plying their needles while over them stood the foreman whip in hand, ready to lay it across the shoulders of the first unfortunate wretch whom he should discover straightening her back for an instant.”<sup>80</sup> Women were treated with similar patronizing ambivalence elsewhere in succeeding years.<sup>81</sup>

Generally, as paraders, they were constrained both by the masculine aura of military-style processions and by the nineteenth-century bourgeois standards of feminine respectability that frowned on women walking in the street.<sup>82</sup> Only two parades before World War I had women actually walking in the street. In Montreal in 1907 the garment workers included “a strong contingent of women, who all walked, and were ornamented with brilliant sashes, thrown over one’s shoulder and knotted at the waist.”<sup>83</sup> Six years later one female shoemaker created a sensation in London by marching with her fellow unionists and carrying “her share of the regalia”. Despite the applause she received, her action was rare.<sup>84</sup> Well into the twentieth century, women in Labour Day parades would normally only be seen waving safely and primly from union carriages or automobiles.

In a few other instances, women appeared not as workers but as symbols of some higher principles — including nationalism or imperial sentiment.

79 *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1895, p. 6.

80 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1898, p. 5.

81 *Palladium of Labor* (Hamilton), August 11, 1883; August 9, 1884, p. 1; *Spectator* (Hamilton), August 4, 1883, p. 1; August 4, 1884, p. 4; *Globe* (Toronto), August 5, 1884, p. 5; September 2, 1902, pp. 4, 12; *Free Press* (London), July 10, 1886, p. 3; *Advertiser* (London), September 6, 1892, p. 5; September 3, 1900, p. 8; September 8, 1903, p. 3; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 7, 1897, p. 1; September 5, 1899, p. 1; September 4, 1906, p. 1; September 7, 1909, p. 1; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 5, 1903, p. 7; September 8, 1908, p. 7; September 2, 1913, p. 12; *Leader* (Regina), September 3, 1913, p. 8; *Evening Record* (Windsor), August 30, 1913, p. 1. In 1899 the Ottawa labour leaders solicited an article for their Labour Day Souvenir from Lady Aberdeen, feminist wife of the governor general, rather than from a local working woman. *Journal* (Ottawa), September 2, 1899, p. 9.

82 Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women”.

83 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1907, p. 7.

84 *Advertiser* (London), September 2, 1913, p. 9.

They would then play the role of a classically draped symbolic figure.<sup>85</sup> In 1872 the Hamilton sewing-machine manufacturer presented six women not only as seamstresses but also as clearly labelled symbols of the Canadian provinces. At the turn of the century the Winnipeg draymen's union put a woman at the centre of heaps of Manitoba grains to represent Canada, while the Ottawa painters' union sat a female statue of "Art" on its white and gold float, with "four little girls in white and wreathed in flowers". In Nanaimo a woman posed as the "Goddess of Commerce" and in Victoria as Queen Titania.<sup>86</sup> On a number of occasions, women on floats played the familiar role of Britannia.<sup>87</sup>

Aside from promotion of some products for domestic use such as sewing machines or furniture, no floats or carriages in these early Labour Day parades ever gave symbolic or ceremonial recognition to the domestic labour that working-class women were expected to perform for the collective survival of the working-class family. Nor did floats recognize or portray women's work in the home.<sup>88</sup> In a few places, they were honoured in the role designated for them by the male union leadership's role as supportive housewives, namely, as ladies' auxiliaries or as members of Union Label Committees. Again, they had to climb into the respectable patriarchal safety of carriages in order to participate.<sup>89</sup> Of course, behind the scenes, women often played a vital role in these labour festivals in preparing food for the spectators of the sporting events later in the day.<sup>90</sup>

Children were equally rare in the parades as clearly defined wage-earners. In some cases, apprentices might march behind the journeymen in their craft (actually, few crafts still had them), and in a few cities a contingent of newsboys might appear.<sup>91</sup> But the labouring children from large textile,

85 *Advertiser* (London), September 6, 1892, p. 5; September 1, 1900, p. 8; September 8, 1903, p. 3; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 5, 1903, p. 7; September 2, 1913, p. 12; September 2, 1919, p. 5; *Herald* (Halifax), September 2, 1919, p. 1; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 4, 1903, p. 2; September 2, 1919, p. 10; Ryan, "The American Parade", pp. 148–151.

86 *Colonist* (Victoria), September 5, 1900, p. 6; September 4, 1901, p. 5.

87 Huskins, "The Ceremonial Space of Women", p. 154; Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, p. 142; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 4, 1900, p. 3; *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1900, p. 7; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 2, 1902, p. 7; *Herald* (Calgary), September 8, 1908, p. 1.

88 In a partial departure from this pattern, an Ottawa float in 1900 organized by the Ottawa Co-operative Store — essentially a commercial element in the parade — had "a dozen children ... being supplied with a substantial meal". *Journal* (Ottawa), September 4, 1900, p. 3.

89 *Herald* (Halifax), September 6, 1909, p. 3; September 7, 1909, p. 2.

90 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1904, p. 7; September 6, 1910, p. 9; *Daily Times Journal* (Fort William), September 2, 1913, p. 1; *Examiner* (Peterborough), August 30, 1919, p. 1. Sometimes, too, they sold tags for labour causes. *Herald* (Halifax), September 3, 1920, p. 16.

91 *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 3, 1895, p. 5; September 7, 1897, p. 7; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 6, 1904, p. 5; September 5, 1905, p. 7; September 4, 1906, p. 5; September 3, 1907, p. 7; September 8, 1908, p. 7; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1910, p. 3; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 9, 1914, p. 14. In Montreal newsgirls regularly joined the boys, but rode in carriages like the other female paraders.

tobacco, or lumber mills never marched with their fathers, brothers, and neighbours.<sup>92</sup> In early Montreal parades banners decried child labour, and in 1893 London cigarmakers carried a large imitation cigar bearing the motto, “No child labor.”<sup>93</sup> Children typically found a role only as symbols or ornaments — the printer’s devil, the driver of a tiny pony cart, or figures in a symbolic tableau or a display of products.<sup>94</sup>

It is clear, then, that these processions were affirmations of respectable white working-class “manhood” — from the pride in manual strength and craft skill, to the message that these men were the breadwinners of their families who did not need other family members in the paid labour force. In the words of an Ottawa labour columnist, Labour Day was the “practical recognition of brotherhood and fatherhood.”<sup>95</sup> None of these features should be particularly surprising. Labour Day emerged out of the milieu of determined craft unionists and “Labour Reformers”, who were appalled at the degradation of their workplace customs and routines brought about since mid-century by the first generations of industrial capitalists. They had strengthened their craft organizations (in some cases by joining hands with their American counterparts) and had established tighter procedures for controlling their craft practices. They had also built organizational links of solidarity across occupational boundaries. In Canada the “Great Upheaval”,

92 The only exceptions we uncovered were the 200 boys from Tuckett’s tobacco factory in the Hamilton parade in 1895 and a number from the local lumber mills in Ottawa the same year. *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 3, 1895, p. 5. Child labour in this period is discussed in Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), pp. 118–151; Lorna F. Hurl, “Overcoming the Inevitable: Restricting Child Factory Labour in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario”, *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 21 (Spring 1988), pp. 87–121; Craig Heron, “Factory Workers” in Paul Craven, ed., *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 479–590.

93 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 2, 1890, p. 5; September 2, 1902, p. 5; *Advertiser* (London), September 3, 1893, p. 3.

94 *Free Press* (London), July 10, 1886, p. 3; *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1894, p. 3; *Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 4, 1900, p. 2; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 5, 1905, p. 5; *Herald* (Calgary), September 5, 1905, p. 1; *Times Journal* (Fort William), September 6, 1910, p. 1; *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 5, 1917, p. 3; *Whig Standard* (Kingston), September 3, 1918, p. 3; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 5, 1899, p. 5; September 6, 1904, p. 3. In 1910 the J. R. Booth company had five little girls sitting on its float, “wearing capes and hats made of light paper of variegated colors”. *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1910, p. 3. In the early 1900s Calgary’s parade organizers introduced contingents of marching school children. *Herald* (Calgary), September 6, 1904, p. 1; September 5, 1905, p. 1. Of course, gangs of boys might effectively join the parades by tagging along to beg for handouts from the merchants’ floats. *Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 8, 1903, p. 8.

95 *Journal* (Ottawa), September 2, 1899, p. 2. On working-class masculinity in this period, see Christina Burr, “‘That Coming Curse — The Incompetent Compositress’: Class and Gender Relations in the Toronto Typographical Union During the Late Nineteenth Century”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September 1993), pp. 344–366; Keith McClelland, “Masculinity and the ‘Representative Artisan’ in Britain, 1850–80” in Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 74–91; John Tosh, “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *History Workshop*, vol. 38 (Autumn 1994), pp. 179–202.

at the centre of which stood the Knights of Labor, was an expression of outrage at the accelerating pace of capitalist industrialization and the hollow promises of an earlier form of industrial paternalism. It was also a vigorous reassertion of the dignity of the respectable workingman, the wage-earning craftsman. Holding onto that respectability meant standing tall against the use of cheaper labour to degrade their crafts, including women and children.

Labour Day marchers nonetheless kept their demonstration polite. Parading through the streets on a labour holiday was intended as an implicitly political act aimed at publicizing the positive alternative to the apparent degradation of work in this new industrial order that this labour movement offered. Unlike the May Day demonstrations, in which the marchers carried a petition to state authorities, the Labour Day parade was not intended as an overt act of protest. In the words of the Toronto *Globe* in 1894: “With us Labor Day is less a demonstration of labor militant than of labor argumentative.”<sup>96</sup> Initially, then, Labour Day was the symbolic representation of the working-class struggle for independence from paternalistic or repressive control and for recognition as a secure, respected place in a reformed industrial society. It carried the clear message that securing that status would require separate, collective organization and solidarity. Labour Day was thus the cultural expression of the sober determination and optimism that also built craft unions, independent newspapers, labour-controlled co-operative businesses, and the independent labour parties in the 1880s.<sup>97</sup>

### **Decline and Decay**

Labour Day processions seem to have been quite popular with the broader public — indeed, local reports suggest they were among the most popular street events on the holiday calendar.<sup>98</sup> Well into the early 1900s, the parades and other official Labour Day activities were front-page news in local newspapers. Shopkeepers readily strung up coloured bunting along the parade route, and thousands of spectators packed the sidewalks each year to watch and often to applaud or cheer particular union contingents. Here in particular, local journalists noted, were the women and children of working-class families waving at their menfolk, demonstrating the bonds of community between paraders and their audience.<sup>99</sup> Certainly the parade-makers had public support for continuing their annual processions. At the turn of the century, in a new burst of economic activity and craft-union organizing, Labour Day parades were staged in far more industrial centres across the

96 *Globe* (Toronto), September 4, 1894, p. 7.

97 The ideological similarities with the working-class liberalism that has come to be known as Labourism is striking. See Craig Heron, “Labourism and the Canadian Working Class”, *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 45–75.

98 The Ottawa *Journal* claimed that on the first Labour Day in 1890 the “procession was the finest ever seen in Ottawa” (September 2, 1890, p. 1).

99 See, for example, *Herald* (Halifax), September 2, 1919, p. 1.

country, drew in many more workers, and blossomed into impressive street performances.

Yet the craftsmen's spectacle was in trouble in many communities in the decade before the war. Some unions began ignoring the call to participate, and those that did sometimes had to threaten fines for members who failed to appear for the march.<sup>100</sup> Journalists in many places also reported fewer floats and uniforms. The sparkle was disappearing from the spectacle. In this context, the surviving parades frequently took on a more commercial cast. Labour leaders came to see Labour Day programmes as a major source of funds for their other activities throughout the year and often grumbled about the poor returns for all the effort and expense involved in putting together these street spectacles.<sup>101</sup> In order to stimulate competition among the unions to create interesting displays, cash prizes had to be offered.<sup>102</sup> The money for prizes most often had to be raised from local merchants and businessmen, who had to be convinced that holding a parade would keep townfolk in town and even draw in visitors to stimulate the local economy. This fundraising became time-consuming and often unrewarding work for the volunteers on the Labour Day Committees.<sup>103</sup> Many trades and labour councils eventually cancelled their processions to concentrate on sports and entertainment, or gave up holding any kind of "demonstration" at all. There was a small revival that paralleled the renewed militancy of the immediate prewar years, but, in most of western Canada in particular, Labour Day parades died out forever with World War I.<sup>104</sup> What had gone wrong?

100 *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1920, p. 6; September 3, 1929, p. 16.

101 Sam Landers, "Labor Day and Its Origins: Why a Day is Observed", *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 2, 1911; *Herald* (Halifax), September 1, 1913, p. 4; September 6, 1937, p. 11.

102 When they were cancelled in Montreal in 1908 "to cease offering further encouragement to the circus parade features of the procession", the *Montreal Gazette* noticed a decline in quality: "there was practically no attempt at decorative effects; even the traditional silk hat only shone out occasionally in faded splendor" (September 6, 1910, p. 6). As floats began to dwindle in the Fort William and Port Arthur parade in 1913, the judges also concluded that larger prizes were needed "to encourage more decoration" (*Times Journal*, September 2, 1913, p. 1).

103 In Kingston the labour movement allowed the local Humane Society to organize the street spectacle in 1913 with a "Work Horse Parade". Immediately after World War I, the Labour Day parading tradition in several smaller communities passed briefly to veterans' organizations, which broadened the range of participants to include merchants, manufacturers, school children, and other community organizations, but few unions. Thereafter most small-town Labour Day parades, such as the perennial event in Bridgetown, N.S., had a variety of sponsors and a broad social mix of participants (that is, unless some serious labour struggle disrupted the community). *Standard* (St. Catharines), September 3, 1918, p. 3; September 2, 1919, pp. 1, 3-5; and September 4, 1920, p. 9; *Tribune* (Welland), August 28, 1919, p. 11; *Herald* (Halifax), September 8, 1925, p. 2; September 4, 1929, p. 2; September 5, 1933, pp. 3, 14; September 4, 1937, p. 3; September 6, 1937, p. 11; August 31, 1944, p. 9; and September 3, 1946, p. 9; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 1, 1919, p. 7.

104 Toronto and Calgary had no march in 1909, Halifax had only three between 1906 and 1913, Winnipeg had none in 1908 and none at all after 1919, Hamilton's 1906 march was the last for 40 years, and Vancouver had no parade after 1913. *Herald* (Halifax), September 1, 1913, p. 4; *Free Press* (Winnipeg), August 29, 1946, p. 3; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 3, 1956, p. 7; Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives*, p. 141.

Organizing parades with limited funds and volunteer labour had always taxed local unions. Few trades and labour councils could pull together a march every year before the turn of the century.<sup>105</sup> Often heavy rain or critical commentary in the local press about how a parade had not measured up to past performances could be demoralizing.<sup>106</sup> In some smaller centres, instead of making their own parade each year, a large contingent of marchers might leave town to join a procession in a neighbouring town.<sup>107</sup> But there were deepening problems. The deterioration of the parading tradition often reflected what has been called the “crisis of the craftsman”.<sup>108</sup> The first Labour Day parades had always drawn on the buoyancy and confidence of local craft unions, and it was the revival of these organizations across the country at the turn of the century that had temporarily reinvigorated the celebrations. After 1903, however, these unions were increasingly on the defensive in the face of employer hostility and state indifference. In fact, the foundations of craft unionism were under systematic attack. Many skilled men witnessed their role in industrial production destroyed or diminished in an emerging second industrial revolution. Across the evolving industrial landscape, fewer workers probably felt the craftsman’s independent pride in their contribution to industry and may well have been more interested in escape than in celebration. In this context, craft unions could often ill-afford the time and money to prepare for a parade that seemed to be doing little to strengthen their positions in the community. Many Canadian unionists seemed to quietly abandon the expectations of the earnest Labour Day founders that public displays of pride and determination could make much difference to the ongoing battles for the well-being of workingmen.<sup>109</sup>

105 Despite their well-established parading traditions, for example, Halifax, Hamilton, and Toronto workers had no procession for the first national Labour Day in 1894.

106 In 1895 the Halifax *Herald* published a blunt critique of that year’s “demonstration”, and no festivities were organized again until 1899. *Herald* (Halifax), September 4, 1895, p. 6; September 8, 1896; September 7, 1897, p. 8; September 6, 1898, p. 8; September 5, 1899, p. 1. For other mildly critical comments see *Herald* (Calgary), September 4, 1906, p. 1; September 8, 1908, p. 1.

107 *Globe* (Toronto), September 8, 1896, p. 9; September 7, 1897, p. 2; September 5, 1899, p. 4; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 8, 1903, p. 1; September 6, 1904, p. 9.

108 Craig Heron, “The Crisis of the Craftsman: Hamilton Metalworkers in the Early Twentieth Century”, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, vol. 6 (Autumn 1980), pp. 7–48.

109 These trends are discussed in Robert H. Babcock, *Gompers in Canada: A Study of American Continentalism Before the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Mark Leier, *Red Flags and Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Ian McKay, “Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901–1914” in P. A. Buckner and David Frank, eds., *The Acadiensis Reader: Volume Two, Atlantic Canada After Confederation* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1985), pp. 216–259; Heron, “The Crisis of the Craftsman”; Craig Heron “The Second Industrial Revolution in Canada, 1890–1930” in Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850–1930* (Aberystwyth: Llafur/Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1989), pp. 48–66, and *Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883–1935* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988); Craig Heron and Bryan D. Palmer, “Through the Prism of the Strike: Industrial Conflict in Southern Ontario, 1901–14”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 58, no. 4 (December 1977), pp. 423–458.

It is not entirely surprising, then, that the surviving union-sponsored parades often lost much of their original working-class vitality. With the emergence of more mass-production labour processes, it was increasingly more difficult to present small tableaux of workers practising their trade on the back of a wagon. Reporters across the country noted with regret the gradual disappearance of the “allegorical cars”. There was a noticeable shift to emphasizing the product, rather than the process, of workers’ labour and thus a higher identification with specific firms.<sup>110</sup> More and more, the parades relied for their colour and attractiveness on the company-sponsored floats, carriages, and cars that had always been woven through or tacked on to the end of the parade.<sup>111</sup> Ultimately, these commercialized parades became increasingly a form of civic boosterism. Municipal governments added their support with regular contributions of firefighting equipment and floats from various works departments.<sup>112</sup>

Increasingly, moreover, craft union leaders were not alone in defining the meaning of this holiday. Invariably local newspapers published editorials reflecting on workers and work, and some local clergymen preached “Labour Sermons” on the day before the festivities, often prompted by requests from local unions and, in many Protestant churches, eventually following guidelines distributed by the Social Service Council of

110 Rather than showing their actual work process, for example, Ottawa papermakers used the paper mass-produced in local mills to construct a colourful float with flowing streamers and a large paper canoe with two little girls seated in it. *Citizen* (Ottawa), September 3, 1912, p. 2.

111 By 1901, for example, the Toronto parade included 26 bakery wagons, 73 dairy wagons, 28 delivery vans from the Simpson’s department store, and dozens more. *Globe* (Toronto), September 3, 1901, p. 12. “There were in the procession some features which were not, strictly speaking, illustrative of Labor,” a Hamilton newspaper commented in 1902, “but as they helped to make up the show, their presence may be excused.” *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 2, 1902, p. 4. As an Ottawa paper noted the next year: “This is usually done for advertising purposes and while it detracts somewhat from the real labor aspect of the demonstration it always lends bulk.” *Journal* (Ottawa), September 8, 1903, p. 6. In 1903 the Welland *Telegraph’s* report on the floats in the “best trades procession ever seen in Port Colborne” said that “the business men are to be congratulated on the earnest manner with which they took hold of the affair” (September 10, 1903, p. 6). In 1918 the industrialists and merchants of Hull provided virtually the entire procession. *Journal* (Ottawa), September 3, 1918, p. 8. See also *Journal* (Ottawa), September 6, 1892, p. 1; *Advertiser* (London), September 3, 1893, p. 3; September 2, 1913, p. 9; *Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 4, 1894, pp. 1–2; *Evening Record* (Windsor), September 8, 1903, p. 1; *Herald* (Halifax), September 2, 1919, p. 1; September 7, 1920, p. 10; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 2, 1913, p. 3; *Cornwall Standard*, September 10, 1925, p. 2. In the early 1900s specific prizes were often awarded for merchant and industrial floats, decorated cars, and other specialized entries.

112 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 8, 1921, p. 5. The perennial Toronto march into the Canadian National Exhibition grounds and the tame speeches later delivered at the CNE directors’ lunch were probably the clearest example of this trend. Vancouver’s Labour Day parade was similarly shaped to promote the Pacific National Exhibition in 1913. *Sun* (Vancouver), September 2, 1913, p. 1.

Canada.<sup>113</sup> Politicians invited to address Labour Day crowds added their perspectives. These community commentators frequently proclaimed hyperbolically the great strides workers had made in overcoming oppression and exploitation and commended the labour leadership for their accomplishments. Yet these were also regular occasions to interpret the polite respectability of the parades as evidence of the alleged “prosperity” of Canadian workers and, by extension, of the local economy.<sup>114</sup> Frequently, too, commentators contrasted the “contentment” of these respectable workingmen with the radicalism of Europe’s May Day marchers.<sup>115</sup> They also seized the occasion to expand the definition of “Labour” to include more than unionized manual labour, since, as they argued, this was a holiday for the whole population, and lectured unions on the need for responsible, cautious behaviour in full co-operation with capital.<sup>116</sup> In fact, many newspapers liked to link the evident respectability of the event with class collaboration. In the words of a 1903 Toronto *Globe* editorial:

Anything that serves to obliterate a feeling of inferiority and cultivation among workmen a pride in their work must ultimately tend to lessen the social cleavage and caste distinction that now lead to such class movements as the celebration of Labor Day.<sup>117</sup>

The public discourses on Labour Day thus quickly shifted beyond the confines intended by its founders.

Lots of workers had stopped listening anyway. The tension between a labour festival and a less structured public holiday increased after the turn of the century. Local labour leaders found themselves trying to hold workers’ attention on the officially sponsored parades, amateur sporting events,

113 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 2, 1895, p. 2; September 5, 1904, p. 5; September 4, 1905, p. 8; September 3, 1906, p. 4; *Globe* (Toronto), September 8, 1896, p. 9; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 6, 1897, p. 1; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 3, 1900, p. 2; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 2, 1901, p. 5; September 7, 1903, p. 8; *Leader* (Regina), September 1, 1913, p. 5; *Sun* (Vancouver), September 2, 1933, p. 8.

114 In a typical burst of boosterism, the *Globe*’s reporter scanned the assembled masses at the 1883 Toronto parade and concluded that “the crowds of well-dressed, intelligent men, attended by wives, sisters and sweethearts equally well dressed and as intelligent, show that elevating tendencies have been at work.” Several years later, the same paper claimed to sense among the spectators a “thrill of pride in a city which can turn out such a large number of robust, intelligent, contented and well-dressed mechanics and workmen.... The Labor Day parade is a good barometrical index of the industrial progress of Toronto.” *Globe* (Toronto), July 23, 1883, p. 6, and September 5, 1897, p. 7. See also *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1895, p. 1.

115 *Gazette* (Montreal), September 2, 1890, p. 4; *Journal* (Ottawa), September 7, 1897, p. 6; *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1897, p. 9; *Leader* (Regina), September 3, 1907, p. 4.

116 *Herald* (Halifax), September 5, 1921, p. 6; September 4, 1922, p. 4; *Colonist* (Victoria), September 4, 1899, p. 4.

117 *Globe* (Toronto), September 8, 1903.

concerts, and other activities, while other forms of holiday fun proliferated. Many other organizations started holding their own social and athletic events to draw crowds. Sports associations in particular took full advantage of this summertime holiday to stage competitions and meets, and in most major cities exhibitions ran during the week of Labour Day to drain away fun-seekers (the Canadian National Exhibition drew from towns across southern Ontario).<sup>118</sup> Taverns, pool-halls, vaudeville and movie theatres, amusement parks, and ice-cream parlours likewise opened their doors to eager holidayers. "Baseball, football, automobile racing, and hundreds of private picnics, ministered to the pleasure of the holiday makers," a Winnipeg reporter noted in 1905. "Performances were given afternoon and evening at the various theatres."<sup>119</sup> Many workers simply took to the streets to enjoy the holiday casually. In 1913 a *Globe* reporter found on Toronto's Yonge Street "one long incessant crowd wandering aimlessly for the most part, but apparently enjoying to the full this easy, innocent form of Labor Day recreation." He encountered congestion at the entrance to every restaurant and movie theatre, and was particularly struck by the steady streams of workmen who "kept the doors in constant swing" outside bars.<sup>120</sup> Rather than spend the day in the town or city, more and more urban dwellers wanted to escape for the day. From the beginning, railroads and steamer companies arranged special Labour Day excursions to parks, beaches, or other points in the countryside.<sup>121</sup>

Labour Day thus lost its original focus. This was not the only public holiday drained of collective celebration. By the early years of the twentieth century, the main holidays on the Canadian calendar had similarly become occasions more for private pleasure than for public spectacle. Most years

118 John Withrow, ed., *Once Upon a Century: 100 Year History of the "Ex"* (Toronto: J. H. Robinson Publishing, 1978); David Breen and Kenneth Coates, *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982); *Herald* (Calgary), September 2, 1902, p. 4. The Calgary Stampede that started in 1912 had a similar drawing power.

119 *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 5, 1905, p. 1; see also September 3, 1907, p. 1.

120 *Globe* (Toronto), September 2, 1913, p. 8. Other retail outlets were closed on Labour Day, but, in keeping with the efforts of more and more retail trades to turn public events and celebrations such as Christmas, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and birthdays into occasions for special purchases, local merchants and major department stores urged shoppers to prepare for the holiday with a new tie or Kodak camera. *Times Journal* (Fort William), September 8, 1903, p. 1; *Gazette* (Montreal), September 4, 1920, p. 7; September 1, 1933, p. 5. (There is no record of any effort to market Labour Day greeting cards.)

121 *Journal* (Ottawa), September 2, 1919, p. 3. "Main Street presented a very quiet appearance except for an occasional pedestrian hurrying to catch the bus," the Welland *Telegraph* reported on September 6, 1910 (p. 2). "The entire population scattered through the waterways and trails of the neighbouring coast," the Vancouver *Sun* noted on September 4, 1918 (p. 9): "Every outdoor resort, every seaside and riverside picnic ground was utilized to the full extent. A great crowd went to Seattle, to Nanaimo, Victoria, and up the Chilliwack valley. The city beaches were black with pleasure-seekers, and the recreation grounds were jammed."

these holidays came and went with little or no attempt to use them for civic purposes.<sup>122</sup>

Some labour leaders had watched with amazement and disgust as workers drifted away from the forms of earnest, rational leisure envisioned by the founders of Labour Day toward more commercial and individualized pursuits. In 1903 the Toronto *Toiler* regretted that Labour Day had become “merely a day of meaningless parades and silly picnics.... The opportunity to set workingmen thinking when thus brought together is practically lost sight of.”<sup>123</sup> One unnamed “prominent laborite” standing amid the bustle of activity outside a bar on Yonge Street in 1913 declared that “it was a shame the bars were allowed to keep open on Labor Day in view of the weakness of many who might better have been with their families spending the nickels on innocent and educative entertainment at the Exhibition.”<sup>124</sup> Other more narrow-minded Labour Day organizers were simply frustrated at their inability to be better commercializers. All too often, their efforts to turn their programmes of sports and entertainment into successful fundraisers for local trades and labour council projects floundered in the face of competing activities. They added vaudeville shows, baby contests, and other commercial entertainment, with varying success.<sup>125</sup> Labour Day had become yet another terrain on which groups of workers split over an appropriate culture within industrial capitalist society, but it provided proof that after 1900 the moralists lost ground and the commercializers made rapid headway in providing leisure outlets.<sup>126</sup>

122 “Of late there has been some complaint of the paucity of local attractions on holidays,” the Hamilton *Spectator* noted on September 3, 1895 (p. 5). “Of the many holidays during the summer Labor Day is one of the few where there is something going on here to keep citizens at home,” it lamented a decade later (September 5, 1905, p. 5). A Peterborough editorialist also complained on September 8, 1925, in the *Examiner* that Victoria Day, Dominion Day, Civic Holiday, and Labour Day had “been allowed to become just holidays, that’s all — meaning nothing save that the stores are closed, and the factory whistles cease to blow” (p. 4). See also *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 6, 1904, p. 9.

123 *Toiler* (Toronto), September 18, 1902, p. 2.

124 *Globe* (Toronto), September 2, 1913, p. 8. A few years earlier the Winnipeg Labour Day organizers had announced that only “hot tea and hot water” would be available on their picnic grounds. *Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1900, p. 6.

125 *Province* (Vancouver), September 7, 1898, p. 2; *Manitoba Free Press* (Winnipeg), September 3, 1900, p. 6; September 2, 1902, p. 7; *Advertiser* (London), September 4, 1900, p. 8; September 6, 1910, pp. 8, 10; *Telegraph* (Berlin), September 4, 1900, p. 1; *Globe* (Toronto), September 8, 1903, p. 16; *Spectator* (Hamilton), September 5, 1911, p. 7; *Evening Record* (Windsor), September 2, 1913, p. 1; *Examiner* (Peterborough), August 30, 1919, p. 1; September 4, 1920, p. 11; *Free Press* (London), September 3, 1946, p. 24.

126 On this trend, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

The most disgusted critics of the diluted, commercialized Labour Day programmes were Canada's early socialists. The editor of the *Western Clarion* referred to the holiday as "Slave Day" and to the parade as a "display of toadyism" and "a tawdry, vulgar display of commodities for sale, including the commodity labor-power".<sup>127</sup> Another thought Labour Day had become equivalent to "Dollar Day, Raisin Day, Mothers' Day and sundry other such days as Commercial Democracy bestows on us once in a while".<sup>128</sup> After 1906 socialists in some large cities began organizing alternative activities on May Day (usually bringing down the wrath of the local police forces). For the next half century there would be a tug of war between the right and the left in the workers' movement over which festival to honour, though May Day remained a more limited event until the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>129</sup>

### Conclusion

Labour Day, then, began as the "invented tradition" of unionized craftsmen who created a popular festival of working-class pride, determination, and respectability and convinced the Canadian state to honour it. In its original design, parades were the most important public element in the day's planned activities. They became perhaps the richest collective art form that organized workers in Canada ever developed (though their dominant motif of orderly respectability certainly kept the fanciful and the fantastic under wraps). They were a dramatic public statement by organized craftworkers about themselves and their society. Within a decade after its official recognition by the Canadian Parliament, however, Labour Day was losing much of its original earnest moral tone and symbolic impact. The public spectacles declined along with the craftsman and his vision. Soon after the turn of the century, craft unions found themselves driven from the heart of the new mass-production industries, and their ancient symbols meant less and less in the new industrial order that had so little respect for the "arts and mysteries" of craftsmanship. Their corporatist vision of co-operation and mutual tolerance with capital was shattered by aggressive industrialists and challenged by sceptical socialists, who organized an alternative festival. Ultimately, too, a workers' festival with its roots in the small-scale, community-based, public celebrations of the nineteenth century was swamped by the widening commodification of popular culture after the turn of the century. Many workers

127 *Western Clarion*, September 10, 1904, p. 1; September 9, 1905, p. 1; September 10, 1906, p. 1; September 10, 1910, p. 1.

128 Quoted in Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives*, p. 141.

129 *Worker* (Toronto), May 15, 1922, pp. 1, 4; May 16, 1923, pp. 1, 4; May 17, 1924, pp. 1, 4; May 16, 1925, p. 1; May 15, 1926, pp. 1, 2; May 14, 1927, pp. 1, 2; May 19, 1928, pp. 1, 2; May 18, 1929, pp. 1, 2; May 3, 1930, pp. 1, 2, 4; *Globe* (Toronto), September 7, 1920, p. 6; *Tribune* (Winnipeg), May 2, 1924, p. 8; *Sun* (Vancouver), May 2, 1920, p. 5; May 1, 1924, p. 2; May 2, 1927, p. 4; May 2, 1929, p. 7; Larivière, *Le 1<sup>er</sup> mai*; Rouillard, *Histoire du syndicalisme québécois*, p. 109; Smith, *Let Us Rise*, pp. 21, 79, 84; Working Lives Collective, *Working Lives*, pp. 178–179.

turned their backs on the earnest public moralism of the Labour Day pioneers and found more comfort in private pleasures and commercialized fun.

The original craftsmen's spectacle was thus moribund by World War I. Yet Canadian workers never allowed the idea of an annual workers' festival to die. A second phase in the history of Labour Day emerged after World War I along with more militant and radical workers' movements. In several cities in central and eastern Canada, the September celebrations were revived or resuscitated and injected with a new note of protest alongside the merely colourful and festive. Throughout the twentieth century, the Labour Day parade was brought back as a theatre of protest in periods of intensifying industrial conflict. Thousands of working people in Canada apparently still believe that taking to the streets once a year will remind others that they are part of a movement united in pursuing common concerns and that they will not abandon hope of achieving them. In that sense, while their impact may be more limited, the spirit of the Labour Day pioneers is still alive and well.