

Life in an Age of Restraint: Recent Developments in Labour Union Archives in English Canada

by **PETER DeLOTTINVILLE***

In October 1940, R.A. Pyne, a founding member of the International Association of Machinists' Winnipeg lodge, wrote:

We do well to review the past and look back over the road we have travelled, not only for the pleasures that such a review will recall, but from the experiences related, we may learn if possible how better to plan our course for the future.¹

Although he was neither historian nor archivist by profession, Pyne was performing both duties during the fiftieth anniversary of his union lodge. As the only founding member at the ceremony, Pyne gave his fellow union members an "oral history" of their early years and returned the original minute book of the lodge, which had been in his possession for fifty years, to its rightful owners. Preserving the record and appreciating its meaning came naturally to Pyne because he had lived the history of Lodge 122.

When handing over the responsibility for the preservation of their history to his lodge brothers, Pyne wrote the above inscription on the inside cover of the minute book, linking the act of transfer with the document itself. Modern archivists would resist Pyne's personal touch, but would support the motive for his act. In 1977, Nancy Stunden described the early developments in the preservation of labour archives in Canada as a "struggle for a heritage."² In the 1980s, that struggle continued, but within a substantially changed environment. During the past ten years, the archival community has witnessed a remarkable growth in archival institutions and organizations, and in the continued evolution of the archival profession itself. Like R.A. Pyne, it is hard to resist looking over the road travelled in order to find some points of reference for the future.

This article intends to give a general overview of developments in the preservation of labour archives in English Canada, and attempts to place these developments within the context of those larger changes that have affected the Canadian archival community. Specifically, the article examines the acquisition efforts at the national level and notes some of the activity on the regional level, discusses some experiments in acquisition strategy for labour records and in the estab-

lishment of a "network" for labour archivists, and looks at the changing research use of labour union records in the last ten years. In light of these developments, I shall try to look ahead (or perhaps simply look up from the immediate problem of labour archives) to discuss some long-term issues which need to be confronted: automated records created by unions; records management issues in the union context; and the changing nature of the current trade union movement. The very act of looking into the future may give a different perspective on changes currently affecting the archival profession. The article does not, however, deal with the role of government records in documenting the labour movement, nor examine in detail many local initiatives in the labour field.

Since the last *Archivaria* issue on labour archives, many changes have affected archivists working in Canada as part of the continuing development of the archival system across the country. The growth of archival councils, archival associations and grant programmes, and other developments has laid the groundwork for a national system which a decade ago was still at the discussion stage. Parallel to this growth of organizations, the archival community has increased its efforts to establish the distinct professional identity of the archivist. Among archivists, there is an increased awareness that traditional historical and archival skills complement such disciplines as records management and computer science. On the whole, the last decade has led to a better understanding of the complexities of preserving the archival record of contemporary society.

Since few archivists specialize exclusively in labour archives, these general changes in the archival community have had a direct bearing on how the historical records of the labour movement are being preserved. Those archivists active in the preservation of labour records in the early 1970s spent as much effort in convincing their archival colleagues of the legitimacy of their endeavours as they did in convincing labour unions of the value of archival records. Fortunately, it is no longer the case that one must argue for the legitimacy of such activity. Having a place in the archives, however, only prevents the immediate disappearance of the labour record. If the labour archivist in the last decade has served as a special advocate for proper consideration of the labour movement in the archival community, the challenge of the next decade will be to participate in the wider debates confronting archivists without losing that appreciation of the labour movement's own struggle.

During the 1970s, acquisition efforts were the predominant activity of labour archivists, with relatively little attention being paid to the archival activities of selection, description, and public service. The 1980s have been characterized as a decade of restraint for archives, and this reduction in resources has had an impact on acquisition efforts at the national, regional, and local level. Since 1977, the National Archives of Canada has actively continued to acquire labour records of national significance, both from labour organizations and from individuals involved in labour relations.³ In the early stages of the labour archives programme, breaking new ground was the dominant activity, but we have now reached the point where those ongoing commitments initiated in the early 1970s mean that fewer resources are available for new acquisitions. In most years since 1977, as much as ninety per cent of the records received in the programme have been additional accessions to existing union archives.⁴ This trend

emphasizes how ongoing commitments can rapidly consume the resources of an acquisitions programme.

As Philip Mason, Director of the Archives of Labour and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit, has pointed out, modern labour records are growing at a "geometric rate" and the National Archives experience certainly bears out this assertion.⁵ The original transfer of Canadian Labour Congress records to the National Archives, which included all the extant records of the Trades and Labor Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour, consisted of 45 metres of records. Since that original donation, the Congress has deposited an additional 100 metres of original records and 900 reels of microfilm. These transfers account for only a small part of the records actually generated by the Congress since 1970. The 20 metres of International Association of Machinists records donated in 1981 have now grown by an additional 60 metres. Having undertaken to become the official repository of a number of major Canadian unions, the National Archives has committed significant resources to the storage and control of contemporary records, as well as to public service for both unions and researchers.

As resources permit, however, records are accepted from other labour organizations. National unions in the cultural field, such as the Canadian Actors Equity Association and the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), have donated their historic records. In the field of electronics and communications, the programme has been particularly active, and has resulted in the acquisition of the official archives of the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), the Communications Union of Canada, and the Communications Workers of Canada. The papers of the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers (now CAW-Canada) dating mainly from the 1960s to the present, are an extremely important addition, which provide a good record of the activities of this influential union. The Canadian Air Line Employees Association (CALEA) has also deposited its historic records, and has subsequently become part of CAW-Canada. Personal papers of prominent individuals in the labour field continue to play a significant role in NA acquisition strategy, and supplement the "official" record of the labour movement. Many of these collections are those of active members of the Canadian Labour Congress: President Donald MacDonald; Director of Social and Community Programmes Jim MacDonald; long-time Director of Organization Joseph MacKenzie; Secretary-Treasurer Donald Montgomery; Director of Education Larry Wagg; and regional representative Frank Quaife. Although CLC activities figure prominently in these private collections, some of the more interesting material relates to the careers of individuals before they joined the CLC, such as Montgomery's years as a United Steelworkers organizer and director. "Joe Rubber" MacKenzie's founding role with the United Rubber Workers is richly documented in his personal papers. Other personal papers document the subject of labour relations and the legal structures in which unions operate; for example, the papers of former UE activist William Walsh deal mainly with hospital arbitrations in Ontario, and the Harry Douglas Woods papers document his years as an arbitrator and director of McGill University's Industrial Relations Centre.

While there have been significant accomplishments at the National Archives of Canada during the past ten years, there have also been major problems. A severe

shortage of storage space forced the Manuscript Division to impose a moratorium on new acquisitions in May 1987, accepting only those archival collections that were clearly in danger of destruction. Consequently, over the following year, the National Archives refused transfers from ten major Canadian labour organizations which had already entered into archival agreements with that institution.⁶ In addition, all plans for new acquisition initiatives were postponed indefinitely.

The ultimate effect of the last decade of acquisition activities has been a narrowing of the National Archives' acquisition focus in order to consolidate existing responsibilities. When only high-priority collections find space, the broad historical perspective that inspired the archival work of the early 1970s has been lost. Links between worker, union, workplace, and community are not pursued, at least at the national level, in any systematic fashion.

The labour archives programme of the National Archives of Canada depends upon the efforts of strong provincial, regional, and local archival institutions to preserve records of labour unions at all levels of archival jurisdiction. It is encouraging to see that the recent hard times facing Canadian archival institutions have not completely restricted the collection of labour records by a number of other repositories. In many regions of the country, however, the renewed interest in expanding archival collecting practices has coincided with limitations on resources, making major acquisition efforts difficult.

In British Columbia, the University of British Columbia's Special Collections Division has developed a sound labour archives strategy and plays a central role in the preservation of British Columbia labour records. That institution continues to acquire such significant collections as the records of Operation Solidarity and the Trade Union Research Bureau, and to advise unions on the preservation of their historically valuable records, and has taken the lead among labour specialists in using records surveys and acquisition strategies to focus its limited resources in key areas.⁷

Through the cooperation of Louis Broten⁸, longtime Edmonton resident and member of the United Transportation Union, the Alberta Provincial Archives acquired nationally-significant records of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen and its successor union, the United Transportation Union, and continued to pursue labour records in their area. In 1983, the renewed effort of the Glenbow Archives to contact Calgary local unions resulted in the acquisition of records from the United Mine Workers District 18, and UMW Local 2633 of Coleman, Alberta, records of the Construction and General Workers, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Typographers and Printing Trades Union, as well as Carpenters and Joiners, International Association of Machinists, and ACTRA.⁹ The Provincial Archives of Manitoba has also been active in preserving the labour documentation of that province. The Manitoba Federation of Labour, Winnipeg Labour Council, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Canadian Union of Public Employees, United Steelworkers of America, Printers, Garment Workers, and Machinists have all placed records in the Provincial Archives.¹⁰

In Ontario, the responsibility for labour acquisitions is shared by a number of institutions. The National Archives collects records of many national union offices in the province, but does not solicit records of local and provincial significance.

After a long period of inactivity in this field, the Archives of Ontario has fortunately begun to recognize the value of labour records. Recent acquisitions include the records of the Sudbury District General Workers Union, the papers of Mine-Mill activist Mike Solski, the records of International Association of Machinists locals from Toronto and Malton, and the Jim Tester collection.¹¹ The latest supplement to the *Union List of Manuscripts* also cites a number of local collections in the custody of the Regional Collection of the University of Western Ontario, the McMaster University Archives, and York University Archives.¹² In a province that has a significant percentage of the union membership in Canada, it is encouraging to see official acceptance of labour union records as an integral part of the province's archival heritage.

In Atlantic Canada, major archival institutions continue to document the strong labour heritage of that region. Dalhousie University Archives still acquires labour records, as its resources permit. Recent acquisitions include the records of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and of the Marine Workers Federation. The Beaton Institute in Cape Breton also continues to document industrial activity in that area through company records and its ongoing Steel Project. In New Brunswick, the Provincial Archives has acquired the Atlantic regional records of the Canadian Labour Congress. A strong programme in labour history at Memorial University maintains a lively interest in Newfoundland's labour records.

Despite the best efforts of provincial and regional archives, it is clear that much more remains to be done on the local union level. Although there is duplication between the national and local level, documentation of such issues as shop floor disputes, local union politics, and community activity is found only among local union records. Local unions lack the office staff and facilities available at the national level, so that local records are in much more danger of routine destruction. Proper respect for the concept of *communauté* by Canadian archivists places the final responsibility for local records with local institutions. Having rejected the preservation of all union records in one central repository, Canadian archivists have yet to develop a working strategy for preserving all the records of a union.

Labour archivists in Canada have not directed their efforts solely towards searching for caches of historical records stored in the damp basements of union offices, but have also experimented with strategies for improving their overall operations in the acquisition field. During the past few years, two separate universities have conducted record surveys. In May 1982, the University of British Columbia started a record survey project to examine what types of records existed in union offices across the province. As George Brandak noted: "The days of taking everything are over. The days of discussing records management with unions and developing some sort of schedule for future deposit that would bring in only what is judged worth keeping are in."¹³ The survey was a key element in the planned acquisition strategy of the Special Collections Division. The final report of that survey, Louise May's *A Guide to Labour Records and Resources in British Columbia*, was clearly more than just an acquisition strategy tool.¹⁴ Containing an extensive bibliography and a union list of archival collections already in British Columbia archives, the *Guide* also serves as an indispensable tool for researchers in British Columbia labour history. In general terms, the survey showed the wealth of material which is not in the custody of official archival repositories. It also confirmed

what many labour archivists had suspected for some time — that the bulk of remaining trade union records date from the 1940s to the present, that only seventeen per cent of union offices hold any records dating from before 1940, and that thirty-two per cent of the union offices surveyed had no records dating from earlier than 1970. This alarming disclosure highlights the lack of records management practices on the part of many smaller unions.

Jean-François Cardin and Jacques Rouillard of the University of Montreal have also completed a more limited record survey. Their *Guide des archives des unions internationales à Montréal* focussed on forty-six international union offices in Montreal.¹⁵ The intention of this guide was to provide a “snapshot” of records as they currently existed in union offices. The survey revealed a number of significant collections which are still outside of archival repositories: the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the United Electrical Workers, the International Longshoremen’s Association, and the Canadian Autoworkers. Following the survey, the University of Quebec at Montreal has approached some of these union offices about depositing their records.

These types of records surveys, supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council’s Research Tools Programme, are an important component in the attempt to cope with the larger problems of acquisition strategy. In the United States of America, the New York City Labor Records Survey points out how surveys can be useful in planning such strategies. The two-and-a-half-year project, funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, examined the records of four hundred union offices, offered records management advice to union officers, and placed the survey’s information on the Research Libraries Information Network.¹⁶ As a result, the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University made a number of additional acquisitions, doubling its existing holdings of union records.¹⁷

These record surveys are important and should be used on a cooperative basis in order to improve the use of the scarce resources available to labour archivists. As the New York experience demonstrates, however, current collections in archival repositories probably represent only part of the historic record that still survives. Proper use of surveys may enable archival institutions to argue for the resources they need to do their job properly.

Cooperation between institutions in the area of acquisitions has now in theory become commonplace, and occasionally theoretical pronouncements actually break through to the real world. When the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers was preparing for its centenary in 1988, contacts between the Southern Labor Archives at the University of Georgia, the Canadian office of the International Association of Machinists, and the National Archives of Canada produced results across Canada. In 1985 and 1986, the IAM’s national office in Canada transferred a large part of its historical records to the National Archives of Canada to complement an earlier donation of records. In addition, through articles in *The Machinist*, the IAM was able to uncover historical records among local lodges in Dartmouth, Toronto, Calgary, and Edmonton. Provincial and regional archival institutions provided a home for these collections. The original minute book

of the Pioneer Lodge of the International Association of Machinists at Stratford, Ontario, the first IAM lodge in the country, was sent to the Perth County Archives in Stratford, which reunited this minute book with later minute books already in the possession of that institution. An 1890s minute book from Winnipeg Lodge 122 was returned to its city of origin by transfer to the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.¹⁸ Much of this work was coordinated by the national office staff of the Machinists, and by liaison with the archival community provided by the National Archives of Canada. In itself, this exercise was a modest one, but it does indicate the potential for coordinated, multi-institutional efforts when the opportunity arises.

Archivists interested in working in concert with their colleagues have also attempted to build formal links between fellow archivists, researchers, and labour unions. In the summer of 1983, Rod Young, a student in the MAS programme at UBC, and George Brandak of the University of British Columbia's Special Collections Division, approached the Association of Canadian Archivists about establishing a committee for those interested in labour records. The 1984 ACA conference in Toronto witnessed the formal establishment of the Committee of Canadian Labour Archivists under the chairmanship of Rod Young. Taking as its mandate "[the forging of] an alliance among archivists, academics and trade unionists in the interests of preserving labour's archives," the committee brought together a small number of archivists.¹⁹ It began publishing a bulletin, organizing sessions at the ACA conferences, and establishing some contact with the Canadian Historical Association's Labour History Committee, and the Society of American Archivists Labor Archives Roundtable. In a poll conducted in the spring of 1986, the ACA labour committee found that almost all of its active members were professional archivists, and most of these spent only twenty-five per cent of their time on labour records. The remainder of their time was spent in the acquisition of other types of archival records.²⁰ Despite some accomplishments with very limited resources, the ACA Labour Archives Committee has yet to establish many alliances outside of its own profession. Part of this is due to the small number of people in the field of labour archives in Canada, who are scattered across the country and meet only once a year. Equally problematic is a reluctance on the part of the ACA to place itself formally in the role of linchpin between archivist, record creator, and record user. Focussing on its own immediate professional concerns, the ACA is only now giving serious thought to the role of its special interest groups in activities outside of its professional membership. As a result, the Labour Archives Committee has focussed the bulk of its energy on internal ACA bureaucratic politics in the past few years, to the detriment of its original mandate.

There are some encouraging signs, however, that archivists are making important connections outside their own professional organizations. Over the last few years, the Windsor Municipal Archives has hosted a series of one-day conferences on the subject of the Canadian Autoworkers and the City of Windsor.²¹ Drawing together individuals from the labour movement, the academic community, and Canadian archival institutions, the Windsor conferences are starting to build bridges between these separate groups. The conferences are a mix of labour history, community outreach, and archival self-promotion, and the benefits of such events are being realized by all those who attend. The Ontario Association of Archivists has also

attempted to bring together those archivists in the province who collect labour records and, although no specific projects have emerged from this forum, a sense of community is beginning to build.²²

During the past fifteen years, labour archivists have also had opportunities to observe the changing use of the records that are preserved. Judging from the writer's own experience, academics naturally continue to be a large part of the research clientele. Many of these academics are historians, but they also include political scientists and sociologists. A quick review of such specialized journals as *Labour/Le Travail* indicates a continued interest in labour history. The Canadian Historical Association's *Register of Post-Graduate Dissertations in Progress in History and Related Subjects* also identifies a healthy number of labour-related theses in progress. That publication indicates that the strength of regional studies is clear, particularly in Quebec where labour history seems to be stronger than in other regions of the country. National subjects, including studies of particular industries, unions, and labour legislation, are clearly in the minority.²³

Academic research, however, is not normally addressed to those people responsible for record creation. Gilbert Levine, research director for the Canadian Union of Public Employees, has recently remarked on the separation of academic research and the real needs of the labour movement.²⁴ Despite the growth in industrial relations research and other studies, much of that research is geared towards management concerns. Levine urged academics to consider the requirements of union officials for useful research, and to use sabbatical leave to work on practical problems rather than pure research. Archivists may also wish to consider their own professional development in terms of applied projects rather than purely archival (though useful) projects. Perhaps archivists could play a useful role within the union organization by acting as consultants on the establishment of archival programmes, by assisting in the preparation of labour education materials, or by assisting in the creation of a union history.

All history, of course, is not written by academics. In the recent past, some trade unionists have written their own history, as Eileen Sufrin's book *The Eaton's Drive* demonstrates. Jim Green's book *Against the Tide: The Story of the Canadian Seamen's Union* bears witness to the determination of CSU members to tell their side of the story. Some unions have commissioned historical works, such as the Manitoba Federation of Labour's sponsorship of Douglas Smith's *Let Us Rise*. The Canadian Autoworkers' Len James, a member of St. Catharines CAW Local 199, has produced a video history of his local for use as part of an introduction for new members of the union. In 1987, Oshawa CAW Local 122 sponsored an exhibition on the 1937 Oshawa strike.²⁵ Such union-sponsored projects are being used as part of union education programmes to teach modern union members about their own historical experience. Most recently, the 1946 Hamilton steel strike inspired Bill Freeman's play *Glory Days*, which drew heavily upon McMaster University Archives' United Steelworkers 1005 collection. In the long term, an historical appreciation by union members of their own activities will be essential to the development of ongoing archival programmes.

As labour archives programmes become more established, union officials are also coming to rely more upon their archival records for their own administrative

purposes. In the defence of the rights and benefits of its members, a union can request material ranging from membership and seniority lists, to information needed to assist an occupational health and safety study on the effects of synthetic fibres on workers, to records relating to jurisdictional rulings defining membership, or to documents relating to the control and administration of pension funds. The ability of an archives to provide useful information on all these subjects only reinforces the links between record creator and record keeper by demonstrating the immediate administrative value of an archival programme.

To summarize, the past decade has demonstrated the truth of earlier claims that archival repositories were missing a valuable link to the understanding of contemporary society because of the absence of labour union records from their holdings. Continued academic use, and expanding use by union officers and union members, suggest that increasing demands will be made upon archivists for the public use of these records.

If labour archivists have made some progress during the last ten years, there remain some issues that have not been properly addressed. Some issues are common to all modern records, and a few are specific to the labour movement in Canada. Common problems include the growth of automated records and the absence of records management systems. Specific problems result from the international nature of a number of large Canadian unions, the labour movement's current organizational changes, and some limitations in the Canadian archival system that is currently in the process of evolution.

At its 1987 annual conference, the Association of Canadian Archivists devoted the entire week to discussion of the problems and challenges of archiving the automated record. The labour movement, like all other contemporary organizations, is beginning to convert its paper-based records systems to computer-based systems. In October 1986, labour held its own two-day conference on "Computers in Unions," organized by the Canadian Labour Congress' Standing Committee on Technology.²⁶ The conference provided an opportunity for top-level union leaders to discuss the impact of computer technology in their own organizations, and enabled those struggling with the technical aspects of computerization to share knowledge.

A survey conducted by the Canadian Labour Congress of their affiliate unions revealed that ninety per cent of the respondents had automated some of their office functions. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents had been using computers for more than five years. Most applications of the new technology were for standard office functions: word processing, mailing lists, membership records, and financial reporting. Hardware and software reflected the range of products currently on the market, although a few of the larger unions, like the Canadian Union of Public Employees, had created their own in-house systems.²⁷ The Canadian Labour Congress itself has also embarked on a major attempt to automate its national office in Ottawa and its regional offices across the country.²⁸

If one estimates a ten- to fifteen-year delay between the creation of a union record and the arrival of that record in an archival institution, it is clear that this issue of automated records must be confronted by labour archivists in the very near future. It is also apparent that the variety of current computer hardware and software will create common problems for archivists dealing with modern records. The

growth of information networks linking union office computer systems will also require closer cooperation between archival institutions responsible for those records, involving coordination in acquisition as well as in selection, processing, and reference service activities. Automation concerns will certainly force this approach on archivists; but may also create the opportunity for more contact between record creator and archivist. Those designing computer systems for unions could benefit from some advice from the archival community on preservation standards for computer records.

Automation in unions will also have a significant impact upon the way in which unions conduct their traditional activities: organizing new members, collective bargaining, and communication with members and between unions. In the area of organization campaigns, for example, the Communications and Electrical Workers of Canada have left behind the traditional plant gate leaflets, open meetings and doorknocking, opting for a more technically sophisticated approach which includes a membership database, direct mailings, and phone banks. The approach is more effective given the nature of modern employees, but it is also more expensive. Cooperative organizing campaigns involving a number of unions may be an outgrowth of the costs of the new technology.²⁹ Such major shifts in methods of operation are occurring in all modern organizations. Archivists interested in the "history of the record" have an obligation to document this impact of computerization on contemporary society.

In some ways, the problem of automated records is only the most recent phase of the basic problem of control over paper records. Philip Mason has discussed the "paper revolution" in union offices in the United States, and his comments are certainly appropriate to the Canadian situation.³⁰ In Canada, the paper files of union offices are rarely controlled by systematic records-keeping practices. A few unions have confronted the "paper revolution," but have done so for particular reasons. The two unions that represent the employees of the federal government, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Professional Institute of the Public Service, both have records management systems. Because they deal with the federal government, which generates tons of paper each year and sends a good deal of it to these unions at bargaining tables, grievance hearings, and certification boards, these unions need good records systems to provide adequate service to members. Other Canadian unions with good filing systems, if not a full-scale records management system, have them because of internal pressure to serve their membership. The Canadian Actors Equity Association, for example, must keep track of each of its members individually as they move, from production company to summer theatre to major theatre, for purposes of dues payments, insurance and RRSP deductions, and the records of the national office reflect the importance to that union of tracking its members. In trying to sell the benefits of records management, archivists should bear these internal factors in mind.

Unions, for the most part, do not recognize records control as a major problem. Ironically, the success of archival programmes in the early 1970s removed the most obvious symptom of poor records management, the uncontrolled growth of paper. Instead of dealing with the fundamentals of records management, most unions (as well as other associations) simply sent larger and larger amounts of records to their archives. The unions' short-term method of coping with the "paper explosion" has

now become a long-term problem for their archival institutions. To date, archival institutions and associations have not made much progress in finding a solution, despite some well-meaning efforts. Attempts to bridge this gap between record creator and archives are being made from another quarter. David Wood, of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the only full-time records manager/archivist in the labour movement, is the driving force behind the effort of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) to explore the possibility of creating an Industrial Action Committee (IAC) for Labour Records.³¹ He is also attempting to introduce to various unions a method for organizing themselves so that they may better manage their records for administrative purposes and for the preservation of their organization's history.

A practical archival strategy for labour union records in Canada must reflect the character of the union which it serves, and even a brief look at the Canadian labour movement suggests why a decentralized approach to labour archives has evolved in Canada. Labour unions are currently represented by a number of national federations. The Canadian Labour Congress is the largest, but many Quebec workers belong to the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux*, or the *Centrale des syndicats démocratiques*. Significant numbers of other workers belong to the Confederation of Canadian Unions or the Canadian Federation of Labour.

If the national federations seem to be increasing in number, the larger structures of individual unions are also undergoing change. Over the past number of years, the percentage of Canadian workers who belong to international unions has declined and now represents about 35 per cent of unionized workers.³² This is partly due to the recent growth in the unionization of Canadian public sector workers — nurses, teachers, public servants — into national unions. The growth in strength of the national unions is evident within the Canadian Labour Congress, whose president Shirley Carr is not only the first female president but also the first president from a public service union. The decline in the influence of the international unions also results from the separation of Canadian districts from their international organizations. The United Autoworkers and the International Woodworkers are the most recent and public example of this separation, but they are not the only ones. Communication Workers, Paper Workers, Chemical Workers, Oil Workers, Brewery Workers, Railway Signalmen, Telegraph Workers, and Electrical Workers have all opted for independent Canadian organizations.³³ This trend suggests that the long-term responsibility for these records will fall to the Canadian archival system. Within the Canadianization of the old international unions, a trend towards merger of related unions is also taking place. Communication Workers have recently merged with the old International Union of Electrical Workers, and a recent Canadian Labour Relations Board decision will merge the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada. Bob White's call for the creation of a larger metalworkers union may also have major consequences for the labour movement.

The implications for archivists of these changes are substantial. Integration of major unions will force the organic expansion of labour programmes if one of the parties to the merger has an existing archival programme. Such major organizational shifts, with the consequent change of key staff and office location, are also the time when older records are most in danger of destruction.³⁴ When these changes are

taking place in a period of limited resources, archival institutions may question their commitment to a labour union when it most requires archival advice and support. Prudent management would dictate not over-extending any single commitment, but professional ethics must surely consider the fate of the record in making that decision.

The preservation of the records of the international unions in Canada poses special problems for Canadian archivists, and close ties with our American colleagues will prove fruitful in addressing this issue. On the whole, past Canadian relations with archivists and archives in the United States have been characterized by cooperation rather than competition. At the National Archives of Canada, efforts to preserve the Canadian records of the United Steelworkers of America, United Transportation Union, and the International Association of Machinists have led to limited cooperative ventures with American institutions. Canadian archivists have been arguing for some time that records created by Canadian workers should remain in Canada. Whether Canadian workers were members of national or international unions, their history was shaped by Canadian economic development, labour legislation, cultural and social trends, and government policy.

Insistence that Canadian records of international unions remain in Canada has created some conflict with American labour archivists who believe the centralization of union records leads to the best understanding of the union's historic role and reflects the international perspective of its Canadian and American membership. Within the context of Canadian archival experience, however, labour archivists are acting in a manner consistent with Canadian tradition. Given the influence of the French and British empires on the early development of the country, much of our early archival record is found in French and British archival repositories. To make these records available to Canadian researchers, the National Archives of Canada has conducted long-standing copying programmes. In many cases, the influence of the American empire on Canadian development has not had direct links of an organizational nature, but international labour unions are one case where direct organizational structure has influenced Canadian developments. While the National Archives of Canada may not open a "Washington office" in the near future, an effort of this type requires some national coordination. Identification of the labour records in American repositories which have relevance to Canada remains a crucial first step. A survey of these sources would permit the systematic copying of international union records of interest to Canadians, or the exchange of finding aids and other information on international union records.

Since labour archivists must rely upon the overall development of the Canadian archival system to accomplish their goals, it is useful to consider what aspects of the emerging system may cause problems for the preservation of labour records. Labour unions have fewer resources than either government or business to devote to their historical records, despite some attempts to lump "big labour" with big business and big government. As such, those public institutions at the municipal, provincial and federal level which support the preservation of archives in the country will continue to play a large role in the maintenance of the labour movement's archival records. In our emerging archival system, questions of tax credit for archival records, growing reliance on institutional archives, and even the emerging professionalization of archivists themselves will have an impact on future developments.

The tax credit potential of archival records as a gift to the government has not gone unnoticed among Canadian corporations. Major companies like Molson's, Eaton, and AMCA International have "donated" their historic records to public institutions in exchange for tax credits. In most institutions, archival material that is donated for tax credit purposes is given priority treatment in its arrangement and description in order to meet the deadlines of the National Archival Appraisal Board and the Cultural Properties Review Board. While one cannot deny the value of such records to the study of Canadian history (including labour history), the tax credit system does create artificial priorities for archival institutions. Labour unions are not eligible for tax credits, since they do not generate profits or pay income tax.³⁵ Archival value is no longer the sole determining factor for obtaining adequate resources to properly care for a collection once it reaches an archival institution.

While businesses in Canada are pursuing the tax advantages of archives, a few unions in English Canada are setting up their own archives programmes. The Public Service Alliance of Canada, the largest union of federal public servants, established a records management programme which has grown into an archival programme as well. The Christian Labour Association of Canada has also established an archival programme, taking advantage of a Canadian Council of Archives Backlog Reduction Grant. While unions outside of Quebec have not maintained their own archival programmes to any great extent, perhaps the existence of funding programmes through the Canadian Council of Archives may encourage a few more unions to consider this option in the future. Independent archival programmes within labour unions are unlikely to become a major trend in the future, but modest advances could be made with financial assistance to start archival programmes.³⁶

Labour unions may be forced to rely upon their own resources if public archival institutions continue to concentrate their limited resources on the records of their sponsoring government agency. In the 1970s, labour unions responded positively to the archivist's approach to place records in public institutions. In the 1980s, however, public institutions seem to stress the priority of the records of their sponsoring agency, and to devote fewer and fewer resources to the private records in their custody. In a recent evaluation of its acquisition policy, the National Archives of Canada has decided to give priority to the acquisition of federal government records. At the same time, the National Archives reiterated its commitment to a "broad and comprehensive" archival collection, but only through sharing responsibility for private sector records with other archival repositories.³⁷ Labour union archives provide a rich area in which to make a strategy of shared responsibility work. Organized on national, provincial, and local levels, labour union structure would allow archivists to develop within their jurisdictions distinct programmes which would be mutually supportive rather than competitive. Union-based archival programmes could comfortably fit into such an arrangement.

Professionalization of the archivist's work itself may be a mixed blessing for those interested in labour union records. The growth of the archival profession during the past decade through professional associations, an academic journal, and a graduate programme in archival studies, has been encouraging, but a preoccupation with the profession itself may displace some of the larger issues which sparked a widespread interest in labour records. As part of the wider development of social history, the study of working-class history was an attempt to reinterpret the tradi-

tional understanding of Canadian history and, through that historical analysis, to create a new understanding of contemporary society. Along with the loss of the "missionary zeal" of those who first sought out labour records, the professional archivist may lose an interest in larger social questions in favour of the minutiae of his own craft. If the archivist is trying to protect his or her "craft" against the tide of the information revolution, perhaps the example of nineteenth-century craftsmen who attempted to preserve their skills through craft unions will serve as a warning. Those craftsmen who narrowed their membership base did not survive, but those who joined other workers in industrial unions did manage to weather the changing times and to protect common interests. As those archivists interested in labour records must contribute to the wider interests of the archival profession, so archival professionals must maintain a common cause with those interested in the preservation of information, who recognize the value of the historical perspective to contemporary issues.

Having given a very brief overview of the last decade in the labour field, and suggested some areas for future concern, what overall direction can one see from the road we have travelled? What, for instance, would R.A. Pyne think of all this? His minute book, bearing his personal notation, is now securely preserved by the archival system. That and other accomplishments in the labour field over the past ten years should be cause for pride on the part of the archival community in Canada. A solid base has been established upon which a continuing archival programme can be built, but there is little room for complacency. There are still significant aspects of the labour movement's history which remain undocumented, and archivists now have added responsibility for the care of those records in their custody. A truly cooperative archival acquisition strategy will take at least another decade to develop, but is not beyond the capacity of Canadian archivists. The last decade has established an atmosphere of goodwill and cooperation, and it is time to mold that general understanding into shape. Priority should be given to additional surveys of historical records which still remain outside of the archival system in the various regions of the country. Using the resulting information, labour archivists should begin discussion on the proper national, provincial and local responsibilities for labour records.

Labour archivists should be active supporters of their profession, but remind their colleagues that our professional skills are not ends in themselves but only means of fulfilling our duty in the modern context. Questions of record selection, descriptive standards, and conservation must be addressed. The professional development of archivists will be crucial, as archivists learn more about modern records in their textual, visual, and automated forms. No archivist will be poorer for the development of standards for the preservation of machine readable records, or standards for the proper description of labour records. What labour archivists may contribute to the process is the assurance that such standards are meaningful and clear to their particular clientele, consisting of union officials and members as well as academic researchers.

Despite slow progress, labour archivists should continue their efforts to build a "network" joining together interested individuals and organizations. While it is encouraging that *Archivaria* can attract articles on recent labour archives developments in English Canada and French Canada, two separate articles on this single topic emphasizes the lack of communication between English- and French-speaking

archivists. This may be an area for improved exchange of information. Much of the work of the ACA's Labour Archives Committee still lies ahead, and it should continue to work towards improved links with those interested in the heritage of the labour movement.

It is certain, however, that R.A. Pyne would be puzzled by the questions of descriptive standards and MARC format. In the development of their own profession, archivists should not lose sight of the social context in which records are created. We should not retreat into a technocrat's view of the world, but should strive to keep a healthy degree of advocacy. Labour unions, like many other social organizations in the 1980s, are undergoing major tests of strength. Changing membership, deregulation of industry, technological changes, and the growth of the non-unionized workforce in the service industry will preoccupy labour leaders and demand almost all of the labour movement's resources. Resources for the preservation of historical records will be limited.

There is a shift in generations within the labour movement. Pioneers like R.A. Pyne turned to their union brothers and sisters of the 1940s to carry on their tradition. That generation, which built the union structures represented in our archival holdings, has now retired, and a new generation of union leadership is emerging. Before leaving their posts, however, that generation of unionists entrusted their records to Canadian archivists. The current challenge for the archivist is to ensure that the preservation of labour records in public institutions does not lead to the alienation of the historical tradition of the labour movement. Understanding the social reasons for preserving such records and the role that historical tradition can play in modern labour unions is important. This means a personal awareness on the part of archivists responsible for the record, but it also includes the development of an archival system that is open, flexible, and effective for all segments of Canadian society.

Notes

- * I would like to thank those colleagues who have read an earlier version of this article and offered valuable comments on my draft: John Bell, George Brandak, David Fraser, Jim Lewis, Danny Moore, John Smart, Charlotte Stewart, Nancy Stunden, and Rod Young. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the National Archives of Canada in preparing this article.
- 1 National Archives of Canada, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, MG 28 I 191, ACC: 86/0435, Winnipeg Lodge 122, Minute Book 1890-91, introduction of R.A. Pyne, 22 October 1940.
- 2 Nancy Stunden, "Labour Records and Archives: The Struggle for a Heritage," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977), pp. 73-91. See also Nancy Stunden, "Labour Archives: The Canadian Scene," *Archivum*, Vol. 27, 1980, pp. 43-52.
- 3 For a fuller description of the National Archives labour programme, see Nancy Stunden's "Canadian Labour Archives: Some Recent Acquisitions," *Labour/Le Travail* 5 (Spring 1980) pp. 149-160; Danny Moore's "Canadian Labour Archives: Some Recent Acquisitions," *Labour/Le Travail* 10 (Autumn 1982) pp. 183-193; and Peter DeLottinville's upcoming article, "Archives Report: Recent Acquisitions at the National Archives of Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989)
- 4 Peter DeLottinville, "Labour Archives and the Public Archives of Canada: The Current State of Affairs," Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Edmonton, unpublished paper, 1985.

- 5 Philip P. Mason, "Labor Archives in the United States: Achievements and Prospects," *Labor History* 23 (Fall 1982), pp. 487-497. For a general discussion of the problems of modern archives and their bulk, see F. Gerald Ham's "Archival Choices: Managing the Historical Record in an Age of Abundance," *American Archivist* 47 (Winter 1984), pp. 11-22.
- 6 These labour organizations included the Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Professional Institute of the Public Service, Canadian Autoworkers, ACTRA, National Union of Provincial Government Employees, Actors Equity, Communication Workers of Canada, United Steelworkers, and the Ontario Federation of Labour. Transfers refused totalled over 100 metres of records. The recent announcement by the federal government of the purchase of a satellite storage building for the National Archives should mean an end to this drastic situation in the next few years. The acquisition moratorium has also severely restricted the transfer of government records to the National Archives, as well as the records of private corporations and personal papers of politicians and other national figures.
- 7 For details on the UBC programme and other institutions in British Columbia, see Louise May's *A Guide to Labour Records and Resources in British Columbia* (University of British Columbia Library, 1985), "Canadian Labour Archives Annual Reports," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 5, (July 1986), and George Brandak's unpublished paper "Labour Archives: Acquisition in a Time of Restraint," Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Edmonton, 1985.
- 8 M.K. Aubrey, "Alberta Report," *ACA Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 3 (March 1986).
- 9 "Labour Archives at the Glenbow Museum," *ACA Labour Archives Bulletin* 6 (December 1986).
- 10 Nancy Stunden, "Labour Records at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 5 (July 1986).
- 11 Allan MacDonald, "Labour Archives at the Archives of Ontario," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 5, (July 1986).
- 12 Peter Yurkiw, editor, *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories: Supplement, 1981-1982*, (Ottawa, 1985)
- 13 George Brandak, "Labour Archives: Acquisition in a Time of Restraint," Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Edmonton, 1985, p. 4.
- 14 Louise May, *A Guide to Labour Records and Resources in British Columbia*, University of British Columbia Library, 1985.
- 15 Jean-François Cardin et Jacques Rouillard, *Guide des archives des Unions internationales à Montréal*, Université de Montréal, Département d'histoire, Juin 1987.
- 16 Debra Bernhardt, "National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Final Report of the New York City Labor Records Survey," March 1986. In Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett's "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987), pp. 12-47, this survey is set into a larger theoretical framework.
- 17 Society of American Archivists, Labor Archives Roundtable, *Labor Archives News* 4 (Winter 1988), p. 10.
- 18 For its first fifty years, R.A. Pyne, charter member of the IAM lodge, kept the minute book in his possession. During the fiftieth anniversary of the lodge in 1940, Pyne presented the minute book to lodge officers as a memento of the historic event. The minute book eventually made its way to the IAM National Office, where it was prominently displayed in the foyer. See *Machinists Monthly Journal*, December 1940, p. 994 and p. 996.
- 19 Association of Canadian Archivists, Labour Archives Committee Chair Files, M. McTiernan to R. Young, 2 August 1983, in possession of the author.
- 20 "Canadian Labour Archivists Questionnaire Results," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 4 (May 1986).
- 21 Mark Walsh, "Windsor Public Library — Report on Labour Archives Activities," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 5 (July 1986); "Windsor's Labour Heritage: The Autoworkers, from Ford City to the Present," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 10 (August 1988).
- 22 "Ontario Association of Archivists Conference, Labour Archives Roundtable," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 8 (September 1987).
- 23 Canadian Historical Association, *Register of Post-Graduate Dissertations in Progress in History and Related Subjects*, No. 21, 1987. From the writer's calculations, there are 35 labour theses in progress or recently completed relating to Quebec, ten for Atlantic Canada, ten for Ontario, ten for the Prairies, six for British Columbia, as well as nineteen "national" topics. Some regional studies also focus on women in the workplace or in unions, health and safety, or biographical studies.
- 24 Gilbert Levine, "Relations Between Unions and Universities in Research and Teaching: Union Expectations," *Labour/Le Travail* 21 (Spring 1988), pp. 191-195.

- 25 Len James, Canadian Autoworkers Local 199, St. Catharines, Ontario. "Searching Your Local's History," Presentation and video given at the CAW and Canadian Labour History Conference, Windsor Municipal Archives, September 1986, and David Sobel, "Birth of a Union, United Autoworkers Local 222, General Motors, Oshawa, April 1937," *Our Times*, April 1987, pp. 25-29.
- 26 Mary Kehoe, "Computers in Unions," *Canadian Labour*, December 1986.
- 27 "Computers in Unions, Summary of a Survey on Computer Use in Unions," Canadian Labour Congress Committee on Technology, October 1986.
- 28 Kevin Hayes, "The Changing Nature of Organizational Records," unpublished paper presented at the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Windsor, Ontario, June 1988.
- 29 Bill Howes, "Doorknocking and Databases: Organizing in the Eighties," *Our Times*, January 1988, pp. 14-15.
- 30 Philip P. Mason, "Labor Archives in the United States: Achievements and Prospects," *Labor History* 23 (Fall 1982), pp. 487-498.
- 31 Rod Young, "Labour Committee Chairperson's Report," *Canadian Labour Archives Bulletin* 7 (March 1987).
- 32 Labour Canada, Bureau of Labour Information, *Directory of Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1987, pp. 7-8.
- 33 Daniel Benedict, "The 1984 GM Agreement in Canada: Significance and Consequences," *Relations industrielles*, Vol. 40, no. 1, 1985, pp. 27-47.
- 34 At the time of the merger of the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour in 1956, most of the extant records of the TLC were destroyed, a major loss to the record of the trade union movement in the country.
- 35 For a fuller discussion of this point, see Nancy Stunden's "Labour Records and Archives: The Struggle for a Heritage," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977), p. 85.
- 36 In the United States, the AFL-CIO has recently opened its George Meany Memorial Archives in Silver Spring, Maryland, but the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which established its archives in the mid-1970s, has been forced to close and send its records to Cornell University. See Society of American Archivists, Labour Archives Roundtable, *Labour Archives News* 4 (Winter 1988).
- 37 National Archives of Canada, *Acquisition Evaluation Study Final Report*, Volume 1, January 1988.